

The Address—Mr. Baldwin

true that in a system of this kind practices and customs are followed, there is no doubt that under unique sets of circumstances new precedents can be created. Surely we can carve out new rules and customs which can be followed by future parliaments in unique circumstances such as those which exist today. I refer, of course, to the fact that for the fourth time in five elections the people of this country have returned the political parties of this country in such a way that no party holds an over-all majority.

It is not for us to say whether that is wise or unwise. It is the view of our masters, those people who voted on November 8, 1965, and during the course of preceding elections, that the members of this house with a minority government should attempt to carry on.

● (12:20 p.m.)

I think they have sent them back with a clear mandate, with specific terms of reference not to come back to the people for another election until this parliament has run at least a substantial part of its normal life. This is my view. I believe this view was expressed by the people of this country. I know that during the course of the election campaign up in my constituency I frequently heard the candidate for the government party say that majority government was the main issue, and this was the central issue around which the last election was called. The candidate for the government party said this at all the joint meetings wherein I was associated with him in addressing people, and I have no doubt that other hon. members had the same experience.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, it was certainly a matter that was thoroughly canvassed and discussed. It was, I think, the announced reason for calling the election. The Prime Minister said he was going to seek a new mandate, and his contention was that he required a majority government. No other reason can be assigned to the calling of the last election. Certainly the government was in no danger of defeat before September 8, 1965; the members of the smaller parties had from time to time given the government their support.

This is quite right; this is their privilege. But as I remarked once before, when we saw situations such as there were for example in 1963, when the New Democratic party abstained from a vote and the government was not defeated; when we saw from time to time the other minority parties giving their sup-

port to the government, I think one can say "With enemies like this, why do you need more friends?"

So it is with regard to majority government. I found, from going around my constituency and western Canada, that what the people said to me about majority government being an issue was obviously different from what they had said to the Prime Minister. What they said to me was "Well, for heaven's sake, Jed, if majority government is an issue, don't let the Liberals come back with a majority". This was their view, and a very sensible one it was.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, the result is that we are here with a minority government and we must live with the situation. Therefore I think we must review and re-assess our position. For this reason I suggest that when the right hon. Prime Minister last Friday said he would regard a defeat of the government on the amendment which was before the house as sufficient cause and adequate reason for him to resign and seek a new election—he did not express it in precisely those words but the meaning was quite plain—in taking that position he is proceeding in open defiance of the wishes of the people of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Baldwin: There are various courses open to the Prime Minister. I am not going to suggest the number of combinations of situations which way arise. Naturally it is predicated on the form of an amendment; it is predicated on whether or not the government quite sincerely believes that it is proceeding on a deep and fundamental principle where its failure to secure its own way on the particular issue will lead to a very bad situation in the country.

It may well be that circumstances could arise where a government, not merely because its will was thwarted, not merely because it was not getting its own way, would be justified in following the course that the Prime Minister suggested. But if we are going to follow the time-honoured practices of the past despite the fact that the conditions of the present are entirely different, then I think, as I said before, that the government is proceeding in open defiance of the views of the people of Canada.

There are a number of combinations which could arise. Certainly there is no reason why the government could not bend, could not conform, could not mould its views to the wishes as expressed in this house by a