

Yesterday, when you, Mr. Speaker, were proposed for the office of Speaker of the House, the right hon. leader of the opposition said that I could not speak as a member of the government because there was no government. I claim that my right hon. friend is not the judge in this matter. He is one of two hundred and forty-five and the other two hundred and forty-four have just as strong a voice in the selection of the executive as my right hon. friend. I say that this government does not want to remain in office one day or one hour, unless the parliament of Canada approves of it. As I said, we took the first occasion open to us to acquaint the House with the question before us. We are discussing the same issue on the amendment of my right hon. friend, and it is just as agreeable to me. It is important that the issue should be settled at once. Public offices must be filled and the ordinary measures of administration must be taken, and parliament being now in session, there is no reason why the normal functions of government should not be resumed and discharged immediately. The king's government must carry on—

Some hon. MEMBERS: Oh, oh.

Mr. LAPOINTE: I know the word is foreign to my hon. friends and I will correct it by saying that whoever is elected to carry on the government is entitled to fair play in parliament and in the country so long as the government does its duty. We are an elected chamber, a body of men sent here by the people of Canada. We are equal and our followers are equal. We recognize no master and we have the right to decide this issue which is placed before us in a positive way. We are here giving to the country and the world the spectacle of a parliament which is going to decide in full consciousness of mind, with moderation and coolness, what is to be done in the situation which has been created by the recent election in Canada. I appeal to my western friends who are lovers of democracy, and I ask, what step could be more democratic or more in accord with the spirit of representative parliament and representative institutions. And I add that when this vote is taken, when the issue is settled, no Canadian can deny that both government and parliament have done their duty in the matter. I hope that the discussion may be brief. We all desire the situation to be regularized, in order that we shall have a government with full, moral and political authority for the tasks, domestic, imperial and international, that lie before it.

Canadian democracy is on trial. Will this parliament be the chaos that the traditional opponents of popular causes describe it to be? Will parliamentary authority be frittered away by petty squabbles? The government believes that, with a firm determination to carry on a true national policy, we may rely on the support of those who have been elected on a platform of progress and reform wherever they are. The leader of the opposition seemed to assume this afternoon that any member of the House who had as one of his opponents a Liberal candidate should vote against this government. Sir, there may be all sorts of speculations as to what this House was elected for, but I claim that if there is one thing for which the majority of the members of the House have been elected, it is not for the purpose of putting the right hon. leader of the opposition at the head of affairs. To use the words of Mr. Asquith on a similar occasion, by a vote against this resolution parliament does not give a blank cheque to the administration to do what they please with the affairs of the country. Government will be limited entirely by the parliamentary conditions which the election has created. In legislation as well as in all important matters of administration, parliament is and will remain supreme; but above all it is important and necessary that the will of the people of Canada should be expressed in this connection, and it is for the purpose of having the parliament of Canada express the will of the people that this parliament has been summoned for the 7th day of January. By the verdict and the decision of my colleagues in this House of Commons I state that the government is willing to stand and will abide.

Mr. J. S. WOODSWORTH (Winnipeg North Centre): In this struggle for office which is taking place between the two old parties, it is perhaps well that some of us who occupy an independent position should express what our attitude must be in regard to such matters. First of all, may I say that the fact that my colleague and I representing the Labour group here are sitting on this side of the House, has no political significance whatever. We prefer to sit amid the wide spaces on this side of the House to being crowded under the galleries on the other side. That is all the significance it has. But I suggest that while the seating accommodation here has been arranged for two parties only and it thus reveals its inadequacies, there are also many other ways in which the two party system is revealing anomalies and inadequacies. Look at the situation as we face it to-night. The