

Motion Respecting House Vote

will not apologize for that—but we will take no more.

My hon. friends opposite are asking the house to swallow itself, to declare that what was clearly a vote of confidence was not a vote of confidence. I do not know what the house will say on a vote, but I say that whatever the house may say the vote on Monday night was a vote of confidence on a fundamental matter and that every hon. member opposite knew it was a vote of confidence on a fundamental matter.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Nielsen: They still know it.

Mr. Stanfield: Whatever the outcome may be on this vote when it comes, it will not change the constitution of this country and it will not be allowed to change constitutional practice. Whatever happens, the government was defeated; the government is finished. The government is trying to hang on to power. As I say, Mr. Speaker, the electorate will be the final judge. The electorate sooner or later, and I am a very patient man—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Stanfield: —will have an opportunity to express its views. I do not think there is any doubt as to the verdict it will pass on this government, particularly on the behaviour of the government this week.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, in introducing this motion of confidence the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) has done what every good debater does, namely, when one has a weak case one tries to switch the grounds of the argument. The Prime Minister has spent all his time this morning arguing the government's right to introduce a motion of confidence and he spent no time at all giving the house reasons why it should vote confidence in the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

• (12:20 p.m.)

Mr. Douglas: As I said in the house on Wednesday afternoon, we in this party have never denied the government's legal and constitutional right to ask for a vote of confidence. The Prime Minister took a lot of time quoting my friend the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), and myself with respect to the things we said in 1966. We stand by what we said. We suggested then that, particularly when there is a

[Mr. Stanfield.]

minority government, members should have complete freedom as to how they vote. They should have a right to vote on amendments to the budget and in the speech from the throne debate so as to get an expression of opinion without necessarily voting no confidence in the government.

We made it clear that at any time the government could say that a particular measure was a vote of no confidence, and the government's right now or at any time, to ask for a vote of confidence is beyond dispute. We do challenge their moral right to ask for a vote of confidence because, as I pointed out, the vote last Monday night was not an expression of opinion but a vote on a specific piece of legislation having to do with the fundamental right to impose taxes, which is the very basis of democratic government.

Did any member on the government side think that the vote on Monday night was not a vote of confidence? Did the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp), who was piloting Bill No. C-193, get up at any time and say that the government would not consider the defeat of the bill as being a vote of no confidence? Did the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Winters), who was Acting Prime Minister, get up and say on behalf of the government that they did not consider the vote one of confidence or no confidence? Did the constitutional expert, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Trudeau), rise in his place to give us the benefit of his vast knowledge? The minister has just gone to enlarge that knowledge. Did he get up and assure the house that even if we defeated Bill No. C-193 we were not voting no confidence in the government? Of course these ministers did not. The government knew that it was a vote of confidence and that defeat of the measure would be a vote of no confidence. Therefore we contend that while they have the constitutional and legal right to come before the house and ask for a vote of confidence, they certainly have no moral right to do so. The house expressed its lack of confidence in the government last Monday night.

The Prime Minister has made much of the fact that if the opposition parties had agreed to proceed with this confidence motion on Wednesday we could have saved a great deal of time. In the first place I would point out that if the Prime Minister was so anxious to save time we could have proceeded with this motion on Tuesday. It is true that he only got back from Jamaica an hour or two before the house opened, but surely there are some people on the treasury benches capable of drafting a confidence motion. After their display of