

*Motion Respecting House Vote*

By refusing to acknowledge its defeat on an important money bill the government makes it appear as if confidence has nothing to do with the importance of the matter being voted on. It asserts that a vote of confidence shall be taken only when the government considers it can win that vote. Also, the government can decide after the vote has been taken whether it was a vote of confidence.

● (5:40 p.m.)

This is the ridiculous extent to which the Prime Minister is asking parliament to go. This is what the Prime Minister is asking his supporters to do to parliament in order to keep him at the reins for just a little longer. The question now is not simply whether we intend to vote confidence in the government or face an election. The present course, if followed, will make a mockery of parliament and responsible government. In effect we shall be saying to the government: You can do what you like when you like and the only test of confidence will be whenever you say that a matter is to be a test of confidence.

If hon. members suggest I am going too far, let them read the Prime Minister's words as they are reported on page 6922 of *Hansard* in the second paragraph of the right hand column:

We do agree, however, that the defeat on third reading of the income tax bill, while not involving automatic and obligatory resignation or dissolution, does put the issue of confidence into question and that this should be cleared up.

What he is saying is that it is not the nature of the bill which puts the issue of confidence into question. The Prime Minister tells us it is the defeat of the government which brings the matter of confidence into question. His suggestion that defeat on an important measure alone brings up the question of confidence is a simple answer to the question: What does the Prime Minister mean by a test which the government alone would apply? There is a method by which it should reach this decision. In the course of this debate a number of quotations have been put on record, some of them by the Prime Minister. I wish to illustrate the extent of the dishonesty, the deceit, which is being practised on this house by the Prime Minister in his desperate bid to hang on to office for another couple of weeks. As reported on page 6924 the Prime Minister quoted Dr. Eugene Forsey:

There are certain habits of thought or feeling which we will have to change.

[Mr. Nugent.]

The first is that any government defeat in the House of Commons necessarily means either the government's resignation or a fresh election. This is not so.

No one on this side has ever suggested it was so. Farther on the right hon. gentleman quoted the following:

We shall certainly have to get rid of the notion that every defeat in the house means a fresh election.

At the risk of being repetitive but for the sake of emphasis I wish to sum up the situation in the house today as I see it. For years and years every important money measure has been understood to involve a question of confidence. One only had to look at the faces of the ministers opposite on Monday last to realize they knew the government had been defeated on a measure which brought the question of confidence into play. Other major measures are usually regarded as matters of confidence, though there are some which are not. This is the way in which parliament has worked, the way in which we have maintained responsible government.

These are not inconsequential matters. Not only parliament and our system of government depend on our maintaining this practice. The party system as we know it in this country has developed and is sustained because of this tradition. Every party, when campaigning, sets out the major planks in its platform. The ordinary voter has only these promises or intentions to consider when trying to distinguish between one party and another. When making up his mind whether a party should continue to be given a mandate or replaced, the question foremost in his mind is whether or not the objectives which were so stressed during the campaign have been carried out in legislation. I suggest it would be the ruin of the party system as we know it today if an issue upon which the confidence of the people had been won at the hustings were to be regarded later in parliament as one on which the question of confidence did not arise. How could such a system ever work? How could anyone think that the voters would ever tolerate it? Having made an issue the basis of their confidence, what would be their reaction to a government which said: We shall decide what is to be a matter of confidence; we shall sustain ourselves in office no matter what you may have thought when you voted us in and the test in parliament shall be on whatever basis we choose?