

which we realize is owing to hon. members with respect to every question that comes before them is something which will be continued throughout its tenure of office.

The resolution which my hon. friend has introduced is perhaps as important as any which can be brought forward in this House, inasmuch as it has to do with what is really the corner stone of our constitutional structure—I mean the responsibility of the ministry to parliament. Our present constitution and parliamentary practice are not the result of any sudden arrangement effected without mature and deliberate consideration: they come to us with all their attendant features as perhaps the greatest inheritance which the peoples of British descent hold. Britain has been rightly called the Mother of Parliaments, and at Westminster, as nowhere else in the world, there has been worked out a parliamentary practice which tends to preserve liberty and freedom as no other parliamentary practice even begins to do. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I think we should approach any change—I use the term “any change” advisedly—in parliamentary practice with the utmost caution. Customs which have stood the test of years, which have been found in different parliamentary assemblies to be of advantage, not for five or ten or twenty years, but for a hundred years or more, are customs which must have much to support them, and we should move carefully and very slowly in any effort to alter them, or to substitute something in their stead.

May I submit, Mr. Speaker, that this of all times is a period in the world's history when we should be particularly careful about adopting innovations? It is an age of unrest in many parts of the world, and customs and practices which have been found to serve mankind well have been thrown overboard in some quarters of the globe. With what result? In those countries where men have dealt lightly with their accepted constitutions and methods of procedure, we find today not orderly development but in some cases chaos in an extreme form. One has but to contrast the conditions as they exist today in some of the legislative bodies in Europe with what they were before the recent war to appreciate why great caution and great care is needed in accepting any proposals which make for a radical change in parliamentary procedure.

It might be expected, as the hon. member for Calgary West (Mr. Shaw) has just said, that the government would be the first to welcome this resolution. And possibly a government that has the very slender majority which this government has might be expected

to be among the first to desire to accept it. The resolution reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, a defeat of a government measure should not be considered as a sufficient reason for the resignation of the government, unless followed by a vote of lack of confidence.

When one considers that the present administration has behind it a majority of possibly but one or two over that of the other parties in the House, one might readily assume that the government would welcome any kind of change which would justify it, in case of the defeat of some measure before the House, in holding on to office and refusing to go to the country. Were we to give our support to this resolution, the first criticism that would be levelled against us would be that we had accepted it because we had at last found some means whereby we could retain office in the face of an adverse vote. That, Mr. Speaker, would be a most unfortunate situation, it seems to me, for the country to permit any government to get itself into.

My hon. friend who has introduced the resolution spoke about autocracy and democracy. He said that our present system of cabinet government lends itself to autocracy on the part of Cabinets. May I ask my hon. friend: what is the one check by parliament on possible autocracy by a Cabinet other than that when a government brings in a measure, and is defeated, the government must regard itself as no longer possessing the confidence of the House? My hon. friend is helping autocracy rather than furthering democracy in government when he leaves it open to an administration, once it has been shown by the votes of the members of the House that it no longer enjoys their confidence, still to retain office. It gives an autocratic government a second chance for its life. To my way of thinking, in these days when we wish to have democratic principles prevail in matters of government, the very first chance to put an autocratic government out of power, is the chance to seize; it should never be let go by. That is the position we take in regard to this resolution.

The reason that the practice has prevailed in British government that a ministry must be supported by the people's representatives, or otherwise go back to the people, is that such a practice is the most effective in keeping a ministry true to those principles which are the ones the people wish to have regarded in legislation.

Now, may I say to my hon. friend that I fear his resolution, well intended as it is, would have an effect entirely different to that which he believes it would have? It is in