

tion was held in Victoria Hall on October 10 and the report to which I refer appeared in the Montreal Gazette of October 11. A voice from the gallery asked the distinguished gentleman the question:

Are you a Meighen Conservative or a Patenaude Conservative?

And what do you suppose my hon. friend answered? He said:

I am a Conservative upholding Conservative principles and call no man master.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

Mr. MACDONALD (Antigonish-Guysborough): Hon. gentlemen opposite are applauding because their confere was so successful in evading an important question. Now that my hon. friend comes to the House and undertakes to lift the veil from the situation in Quebec he is just as enigmatic as he was at that meeting: we do not know whether he is for Patenaude or for Meighen. The real issue before the House, however, is the question as to whether the proper constitutional practice has been followed by this government in regard to the situation that was created by the general election. That is the point which is raised directly by the amendment moved by the leader of the opposition, and that is the point I want to discuss. I want to face it frankly and fairly and I want the House to realize that what we are considering here is simply the question whether or not the proper constitutional course was pursued by this government in the circumstances in which it found itself after the election. What does my right hon. friend opposite say? He has a resolution in which he makes certain assertions. The first two paragraphs I pass over for the time being, but the third paragraph makes the statement that his party had the largest popular vote and that it has now substantially the largest number of members of any party in the present House. The right hon. gentleman supplemented that statement on Friday last when he declared that we should have resigned immediately after the election and that we had no right to carry on. Let me submit to the House the authorities on the question of a government's continuing in office after an election. Assuming that there was a party in existence to whom could be committed the task of carrying on the government in a parliament constituted like ours—and there was no such situation—this is what Todd's Parliamentary Government in England, at page 130, has to say on the point:

The verdict of the country having been pronounced against ministers at a general election, it is, nevertheless, competent for them to remain in office until the new parliament has met, and given a definitive

[Mr. E. M. Macdonald.]

and final decision upon their merits; for the House of Commons is the legitimate organ of the people, whose opinions cannot be constitutionally ascertained except through their representatives in parliament. It is necessary, however, and according to precedent, that in such circumstances the new parliament should be called together without delay.

There the constitutional rule is clearly laid down. My right hon. friend himself speaking on this matter the other day said:

To their coming (the government) and facing parliament there can be no legal objection.

That is to be found on page 14 of Hansard. But he said:

But there is a constitutional objection.

Now, if we are legally here I would like to see any hon. gentleman on the other side produce evidence of where there is any constitutional authority which nullifies our legal right. Mark you, there is no statute regulating this procedure either here or in England. I want to give you another quotation on that point. Keith, on Responsible Government in the Dominions, says:

There is no fixed rule in the colonies, just as there is hardly yet one in England, as to whether a ministry should resign when a general election turns against them, or wait the meeting of the House.

There are two definite, positive authorities. There is no statute upon the subject, as I have said; we have to go by precedents and we have to go by authority. We are in this position and having our heritage from the Motherland we can say with Tennyson that we are:

A land of settled government,  
A land of just and old renown,  
Where freedom slowly broadens down  
From precedent to precedent.

That is how parliamentary government has developed in Great Britain, and how it has developed here. The rule which I have quoted from two authorities, a rule which cannot be questioned, indicates that in a situation such as we had to face after October 29, we took the proper constitutional course. We called parliament together at the very earliest possible moment, and I want to give the House the situation in regard to that. It was thought at first that we should meet on December 10, but then it was ascertained that the return of the writs could not possibly be made by that time. On December 10 the return came from Springfield; from Yukon on December 11; from Bagot on December 17; from Peace River on December 23, and from North Huron December 28. So that less than two weeks after the last return came to the proper authorities this House is in session. We have not hung on to power or attempted to deal with this situation in any way contrary to