

date, and go back to the revolution of 1688, there has never been a case where a government presented government business in the House and assumed to act as a government under a prime minister who was without a seat in either house, save in the circumstance where, during the progress of parliament, the Prime Minister for some reason or other lost his seat, and then only until the Prime Minister actually contesting a seat, was returned. May I restate, for on this I stand most firmly that since 1839, when for the first time the fulness of stature of constitutional ministries in the United Kingdom was reached, never has any government dared to address itself to a new parliament as a government while its Prime Minister was without a seat in either House. And my words apply not only to Great Britain but to Canada and to every British dominion since these have attained responsible government. Not only is this true as a matter of historic precedent and fact, but it is true as a matter of necessity, as a matter of the preservation of those rights of the people which our ancestors reached after long struggles. If a government has a right to function in parliament without a prime minister in either house, then he who stands between parliament and the crown cannot be questioned in this House, cannot be held to account, has not accepted responsibility to parliament, and the old days have returned when the king could address parliament of his own right, and not on the advice of him who above all others is responsible to parliament and the people. This is what the present ministers, who have been doubtless acting as advisers to the crown, are now assuming to do in this House of Commons. A Speech from the Throne has been read, and one of them moves in this House that this Speech from the Throne be taken into consideration on a fixed date. That is a government motion. Now I contend that this House cannot, that this House certainly ought not—and I use both phrases without qualification—take into account any Speech from the Throne which comes from an alleged government through the mouth of His Excellency when that alleged government has not a prime minister in this House or in the other House answerable to parliament.

The Prime Minister writes the Speech from the Throne. I stop not to quote the authorities now; they are numerous; the Speech from the Throne is written by him or under his direction. The Speech from the Throne comes from him to this House through the mouth of His Excellency. We are asked to consider that Speech, asked to consider it by an assumed government, with the Prime Min-

[Mr. Meighen.]

ister absent from both houses and unable to sit in either.

Let me state the case from the point of view of precedent once more. Never has a government even assumed to act since the days of constitutional government as we have it now—never, I repeat, has it assumed to act as that committee of parliament which is authorized to present a Speech from the Throne or to ask for the consideration of a Speech from the Throne when its Prime Minister was without a seat in either house. This is the position the present administration has placed itself in. I have heard it argued on their behalf—I do not know whether they will demean themselves so to argue—that the reason the gentleman who presently assumes to act as Prime Minister has not at least contested a seat is that he wished to leave things in statu quo pending a decision of the House; that because of his desire to leave things just as they were he has denied himself a seat in parliament. I do not give credence to that argument. I do not know whether that argument will be used here or not, but I know this, that when the Prime Minister, finding himself the leader of a mere minority group after the election—an election called at his own instance and held under the auspices of his own government—chose to retain the seals of Office and face parliament, then he inevitably forced himself into the position in which he has to plead this argument. Had he taken the manly stand, had he taken the constitutional stand, had he accepted the verdict of the people as he well knew that verdict to be, he would never have found himself in this position now, coming to parliament and asking parliament for its verdict. He finds himself now committing a breach of what has been an elementary rule of parliament for almost one hundred years, a rule which compels the head of the government to be within the walls of one or other of the houses of parliament, to be capable of and be in or on the way to a seat within the walls of either house before his government attempts to function in parliament.

I have proceeded, I think, far enough to establish that this claiming government has not only no right to be in office, that it in fact is not a government in the sense of being a committee of this House, but that all proceedings initiated by them in this House are null and void and a usurpation, an assertion of power which they have not; and that this parliament should repel them.