

a serious matter, and if we do not take it seriously we are just not rising to our responsibilities as members of parliament.

The second thing I want to say is this. We have here I think a riddle as to when a tax is not a tax. The minister has been saying again and again that there is no tax. I want to read him something he himself said in this house on February 24, in answer to a question asked by me. I had asked him what figures could be given showing what was the progress of the taxes or the proposed taxes up to date, and the minister said, as recorded at page 1593 of *Hansard*:

No, I cannot give any figures.

Then he adds this, and this is what I draw your attention to, Mr. Chairman.

It is probably a little early yet in any event for there to have been any real results which could be shown. A good many of those who were affected by the taxes—

It is difficult for the minister, of course, to say "proposed taxes"; but I will not press that point. To continue:

—have made representations to us that orders have been cancelled and that their volume will be substantially reduced.

I read that just in order to make this point. For the minister to say there is no tax I think would sound funny to people whose business had already, when he used those words, been substantially affected and, in some cases, perhaps closed up by these particular taxes which were no taxes. Therefore it seems to me that it is no use whatever for the minister to try to escape in that way.

The second thing I want to say is this. I can imagine circumstances in which the difficulty of the government was so great, the emergency so unexpected, the time for action so little, that we would have said, "Well, it was a terrible thing to do; it was a terrible breach of the constitution, but still they did have this situation facing them. It was unexpected; they had to act, so we will try to deal leniently with them." Were any of those elements present in this case? I submit, not a single one. The situation had been facing the government for months. The minister told us candidly they had begun considering the dearth of United States exchange, which was the reason for the whole business, away back in July or August. Therefore I say there was no earthly reason why parliament could not have been in session at the time this action was taken, if proper foresight had been exercised.

That is all I wish to say about the constitutional issue, except to say that the serious words used on this side of the house might

have sounded too serious ten, twenty or thirty years ago, though incidentally no one would have dreamed of doing this sort of thing at that time. If it had been done, however, people might have said, "Oh, well, what does it matter? We are living in an orderly world, and no one will ever think of doing it again." As the hon. member for Vancouver-Burrard has said, if ever there was a time when people like ourselves should be guarding, as one might say, the sacred fires of the constitution, it is today.

I now want to talk about the resolution itself, and I want to say in advance, speaking for myself, that I believe my friends and colleagues recognize that here we have a mess; here we have a difficult situation, and that somehow or other we have to conserve our United States exchange. I am not going to take time now to remind the committee, as I have tried to do on other occasions, that this situation is due to grievous errors on the part of the government. I am not going over that again tonight. I think I would agree that measures to conserve exchange are necessary; but it seems to me this resolution is the most unholy hodge-podge. I cannot understand in which direction it is going. It seems to be a composite of three or four things not inconsistent, perhaps, but at any rate strangely assorted. It seems that the minister has not yet made up his mind what this resolution is. It appears to be all kinds of things, "everything by turns and nothing long". It has been in effect for four months. It has been changed beyond recognition. Speaking in the house a couple of weeks ago, the minister candidly told us they had found that certain of the taxes would be so onerous and so injurious to certain businesses that they had made changes; and, as I say, it has been changed beyond all recognition.

Well, now, I want to ask what this resolution is, anyway. Is it one to discourage United States importations? Sometimes that is what it seems to be. Let me read a sentence on that from what the minister said in this house on December 16, at page 336 of *Hansard*, speaking of the special excise taxes:

Their first and primary purpose is to discourage the sort of expenditure which adds to our imports from the United States.

That is the first thing. From that we may take it that this is a measure to discourage United States importations; but that is not the whole story. The second thing we find it to be is a measure to offset advantages which Canadian manufacturers might gain by reason