

The motion for the third reading then of Bill C-193 was defeated. It was defeated by a vote of 84 to 82.

But there is dispute on the second question. The Conservative opposition says, and my hon. friend from Peace River has just now reasserted, that the vote taken last Monday night was conclusive as to the attitude of the house toward the government. We on this side of the house take a different view. We believe that the Conservative opposition is taking what I will call a mechanistic view of our constitution.

Members of the Conservative opposition are insisting that in this one vote recorded Monday night the whole attitude of the house was reflected conclusively and ultimately. They are suggesting that in this one vote the whole view on the government of all the membership was summed up. I do not think that this is accurate. I think that to endorse this view of our constitution is really to be just a little fatuous. They say this, and they say they are adducing the precedents of the centuries. But I say they have not yet adduced a precedent. What we have heard is a quotation, by an unnamed writer, a quotation from the Canada Year Book. That may be an excellent source for statistical information, but I have never before heard it quoted as a great authoritative source in the field of constitutional law and practice.

Mr. Muir (Cape Breton North and Victoria):
Bob Winters endorses it.

Miss LaMarsh: That is all the *Globe and Mail* could find, too.

Mr. Stewart: When we come to this matter of how a vote in this house shall be interpreted, there are, I suggest, two parties who are principally involved. In the first place the question of the interpretation of a vote is a question for the prime minister. The reason for this under our constitution is perfectly evident. A prime minister, holding office, has certain great and heavy responsibilities, and sir, it is for a prime minister to decide what support he must have, what co-operation he must enjoy, in the house if he is to continue to sustain his responsibilities. That is why over the years the first decision as to the significance of a vote taken in the House of Commons has been for the Prime Minister to make.

I have brought along an authority with me, sir. It is not the Canada Year Book. It is not a book endorsed by any member of the present government or even by any member

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of the shadow cabinet opposite. It is a book by Arthur Berriedale Keith, entitled "The British Cabinet System." Although the quotation I wish to put before the house is somewhat long, sir, it is so germane to the discussion before us that I hope you will bear with me. I quote from page 215 as follows:

It rests, therefore, with the government to decide what issues it shall treat as vital, and as demanding that it must resign or dissolve if it is denied support thereon. It is, however, more and more the practice for ministries to restrict the freedom of the members, by insisting on making the vote a matter of confidence.

• (4:20 p.m.)

The days are gone when the Melbourne ministry suffered repeated defeats with equanimity, and dissolved only when an actual vote of non-confidence was carried by a majority of one, after it had refrained from resignation on a defeat on the sugar duties. The coalition ministry in 1853 accepted minor defeats without serious difficulties. Lord Rosebery's ministry treated a defeat on the address in 1894 with calm, but the vote was a snap one, and though such votes discredit a ministry, or at least suggest that its members are slack in their allegiance, or the whips rather below par, still resignation is by no means essential. On this occasion the government subsequently secured the rejection of the amended address and the passage of the original version. In June, 1895, the same administration was defeated on an amendment in supply reducing the appropriation for the parliament buildings. The vote was small and the government remained in office. But when they were defeated again, a week later, on the army estimates they resigned. This second vote was also a snap vote, but appears to have been taken seriously, not on its own merits, but because it came at the end of a period of very small majorities. It was more striking, when in 1905 Mr. Balfour was defeated on an Irish issue in committee of supply, without resigning or dissolving.

Then the author goes on to discuss the position of minority governments. He says this:

The position, of course, is different when a government is distinctly a minority government, as in 1886, when Lord Salisbury advised Lord R. Churchill to make it clear that the government would not treat private members' bills as raising issues of confidence. But he did not suggest indifference to the fate of governmental proposals. On the other hand, Mr. MacDonald in 1924 announced that his government would not go out—or, we may presume, dissolve—on defeats, not on principle, but would do so if a vote of no-confidence was carried. In fact it was defeated ten times between January and August, and the defeat, which it deemed decisive, was one on a comparatively minor issue, which the Liberals were most anxious not to treat as one demanding resignation or dissolution.

There, sir, is a genuine authority. By saying that I do not wish to denigrate the statistical authority of the Canada Year Book.