

*Lack of Confidence Vote*

ment may not be defeated except at such time as is indicated in the act.

Hon. C. A. STEWART (Minister of the Interior): I had hoped that some other members on the opposition side would have spoken to the motion. It is not a new one to me. It is one that we had under consideration in the legislature of Alberta some years ago, although in a form somewhat modified as compared to the resolution presented here to-day. The motion considered in the Alberta legislature provided that on all matters except those pertaining to finance the government were not to consider themselves defeated unless on a vote of want of confidence. On that occasion the motion was defeated. Subsequently it came up in the House under a new government, and the motion was carried, the premier, the attorney general and the minister of agriculture refusing to vote. That in itself is an innovation. Formerly it was the duty of every member in the legislature to record his vote. That is not now compulsory if the member does not feel it incumbent upon him to vote. That, however, is not what I particularly wish to speak of to-night. What I want to point out especially is that if we are to have constitutional government in Canada—and I think we are all agreed that we want constitutional government in this country, and that we want to preserve that government in its entirety—we should be taking a rather grave step if we supported a resolution of this character.

It is not, nor would the government so look upon it, a serious thing to have hon. gentlemen opposite vote against a policy or a principle introduced by the administration. That would not be considered a serious matter at all. But the resolution clearly points to another aspect of the question, namely, the affording of full freedom—because, after all, that is what is behind the resolution—for the supporters of the government to vote against a government policy. And in no other way could the government be defeated. Now, a great deal has been said by my Progressive friends with respect to caucus and the evils of caucus. But under responsible government we shall always have to have a caucus; and, indeed, my hon. friends themselves resort to the caucus for the purpose of discussing matters of importance to them as a party in this House. And they will always have to do that. Any party that wishes to present a united front upon matters that are of importance to the House and to the country will of necessity have to get together and discuss them. Therefore hon. members of the Progressive party pursue, as the old parties have

[Mr. C. A. Stewart.]

pursued throughout the years, the system of calling their members together in caucus. After all the government of the day are the responsible source from which must emanate the agenda that is to be submitted to parliament for consideration; and no one will go the length of saying that in caucus all members of the party agree with the agenda submitted by the government to them. I think my hon. friends of both parties opposite will concede that matters submitted by their leaders are not always acceptable to all the members of the party to which they owe allegiance. But what is agreed to by the majority—and usually the great majority—of the members of the party in caucus is ultimately, so far as the government is concerned, the legislation submitted to the House for discussion. All I have to say, after some twelve or fourteen years of experience in public life, is that unless we are to have a somewhat chaotic condition, we must have unity of parties. Not always can we have our own way about different matters, but acting in unison we shall make the greatest progress with legislation and in the interests of the general welfare of the people. The resolution, as I see it, would to a large extent undermine the stability of government.

An hon. MEMBER: No.

Mr. STEWART (Argenteuil): That is inevitable. It is an utter impossibility for anything else to ensue from such a resolution. But suppose a government measure were defeated. The resolution distinctly declares that this must not be regarded of necessity as a defeat of the administration. Why, it puts the government at the mercy, perhaps, of a very few of its own members. This government has a majority of only two or three, and such a resolution might place it in such a position where it would find itself in the hands of two or three of its following upon any occasion. Now, that does not tend to stability. My hon. friends make the statement that we have a new order of things; that we have in this House three parties who have a right to be heard.

Mr. IRVINE: Four.

Mr. STEWART (Argenteuil): Well, it does not matter whether three or six. There is no difficulty about any party being heard. If a government is to be allowed to continue in office after having lost the confidence of the members of the House of Commons, who are the people's representatives, besides having lost the confidence of the men who are elected to support it, then in my opinion it is