

*Lack of Confidence Vote*

agreeable to a definite political platform, and second, there is a very definite and clear responsibility of the Cabinet for its actions to the wishes of a majority of the House of Commons. There was a time, indeed not so many years ago, when the Cabinet was something less of an executive body than it is now, more particularly confining itself then to administrative functions. The Cabinet in these latter days has become the very main-spring of government. Upon its efficient functioning largely depend the welfare, prosperity and contentment of our people. There is no doubt that in the exercise of every power and in the performance of every duty, the Cabinet is amenable and answerable to parliament. The Cabinet must admit, as it does admit, its responsibility to parliament for every administrative act and every legislative proposal. It similarly follows, that lacking the confidence of the membership of a parliament, the Cabinet must, of necessity, resign or ask for a dissolution of parliament. What is the accepted constitutional principle or practice in connection with these matters? It has sometimes been urged that when a ministry suffers a defeat in supply or on any other subject, it should forthwith resign or request a dissolution of parliament. There are a number of instances in which that view has been accepted. There are other cases in which that view has not been accepted. It is a singular fact that Canadian parliamentary records are particularly barren of incidents which might illustrate the problem at present before us; but on the other hand, the English practice has many instances, indeed, many of which are very illuminating, and I propose to take just a few moments of the time of the House for the purpose of giving some of the illustrations which have occurred, perhaps within the last hundred and fifty years, indicating the constitutional principle and its variation from time to time.

In the year 1741, Sir Robert Walpole declared that his excise scheme was of the greatest importance and indispensable for meeting the particular exigencies of the time. Despite the defeat of his scheme, he did not resign.

William Pitt took office in December, 1783. From that time until the month of March following, his government was in a minority some thirteen or fourteen times. Some of the votes passed against his government were as follows. One was an address for an administration having the confidence of the House and of the public. Another was a resolution asking for the removal of the ministers. A government bill, the East India bill, was de-

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feated, and a resolution was presented by the House to His Majesty, asking that the services of that ministry be discontinued. Despite all these resolutions in that period of some two or three months, Pitt did not resign.

About the year 1828, Lord Liverpool's government was decisively beaten on the question of continuing the property tax, a defeat on a proposal to supply some £12,000,000 of revenue. There was no resignation in that case, and no attempt to force a resignation of the government. The same government opposed the repeal of the Test and Corporation Act, which was considered a matter of state policy and a very vital reform. The resolution carried, but the government did not resign.

The Earl Grey administration was defeated on two occasions in the year 1831, first on a motion to reduce the membership of the House, and second, on a question of an adjournment. Earl Grey advised dissolution, not only that, but he secured it. But reputable historians point to the fact that if Earl Grey had not been so impulsive, the House would have agreed to an Address to the King against dissolution.

Sir Robert Peel suffered many defeats during the term of his office, beginning in 1834. Might I point to a very interesting incident? There was moved to the Address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, in the year 1835, an amendment expressing the regret of the House that more progress had not been made in certain important reforms. The amendment was carried, but Sir Robert Peel informed the House that he did not intend to resign. His government was, however, on numerous occasions, subsequently defeated, and he ultimately resigned.

Melbourne's administration began in 1835, and during the six years of its history, it was defeated in the House of Commons some fifty-eight different times. It did not resign until 1841, when Sir Robert Peel moved a vote of want of confidence, which was carried.

Lord Derby, in 1852, having an admitted minority in the House, quoted Sir Robert Peel in these words:

I hold there is nothing unconstitutional in the post I fill and in the fulfilment of my duty to persevere in the discharge of those duties to which my Sovereign has called me in defiance of the majority that is against me upon any abstract question, and in the defiance of any declaration of the House of Commons that I ought to bring forward a particular question and settle it in a particular manner. I shall perform my duty until the House shall, by its vote, refuse its sanction to some measure of importance which I think necessary to submit to its consideration.