

MR. DAVIES (P.E.I.)—The hon. gentleman (Mr. Coatsworth) must have lived through life without reading English history at all. If any expedition is to be fitted out at any moment in England, cost what it may, the Chancellor of the Exchequer comes to Parliament and asks a credit, and he gets it.

MR. COATSWORTH—That is a different thing.

MR. DAVIES (P.E.I.)—Where is the difference? The principle is the same, and I believe it is more necessary to enforce that principle in this country than in any country in the world enjoying representative institutions. There has been growing up, is growing up daily, and consolidating itself in the minds of the members, the idea that the Government, as such, can spend public money.

An hon. MEMBER—Not at all.

MR. DAVIES (P.E.I.)—Yes. There is the idea that the Government can spend the public money, that in some way or other they have authority to draw it out of the treasury, and that they can get Parliament to ratify it afterwards. I am raising my voice, in unison with my hon. friends, in a solemn protest against such a principle and such a policy, which, if adopted, will destroy representative institutions altogether. I am not questioning for one moment that this money ought to be voted, and that some of it may be voted. I am avoiding that branch of the subject altogether. I am saying that the Government should be censured for a high-handed, indefensible act, in incurring a liability of one or two millions of dollars when Parliament was in session, without taking Parliament into their confidence, and asking the permission and authority of Parliament to spend the money. I say that if Parliament passes this conduct by without recording its disapproval and censure of it, Parliament will be adopting a course that will destroy its own influence and independence. In fact, it will destroy the right and necessity of its own existence at all. We might as well have a Government to carry on the affairs of the country during the whole life of a Parliament, and simply call us together in one session to ratify what they have done. Parliamentary government is made a farce by such conduct. The very key of parliamentary government is the control that the representatives of the people have over the expenditure of public money. Give up that key, and your power and usefulness are alike gone. The Government of England, strong as it is, backed up as it is by an enormous majority, possessing as it seems to do the confidence of the people, would not have dared, even in the late European crisis, to spend a sum of money similar to this unless there was a statutory or parliamentary authority for the expenditure; and if they had done so, not an hour

would have been lost by them in coming down and asking the approval of Parliament and getting a bill of indemnity. This is a much more important matter than some hon. gentlemen seem to imagine. The very question put by the hon. member for Toronto shows how little he appreciates its gravity. As long as we are a Parliament, let us insist that the Government, who are after all only a committee of this House, shall not dare to spend a dollar of public money, unless they have statutory or parliamentary authority for doing so. I repeat that if the hon. gentleman had come down in the first days of the session and said that there was a national crisis impending, that the Government required a vote of \$5,000,000, and that it was not in the public interest that the manner in which the money was to be spent should be discussed, he would have got the money without five minutes discussion.

MR. DICKEY—I am quite sure we would, in the state of feeling that then existed.

MR. DAVIES (P.E.I.)—I say that the House is the best judge, and the only judge of when it is in the public interest to discuss a matter, and when it is not. If the House chooses to vote the money without discussion, nobody can say a word against it. All the Government is bound to do is to advise that it is not in the public interest to discuss the question. If the House acquiesces, well and good. But in this case, I say that the Government have blundered in a matter of great and grave importance; and unless their conduct is rebuked now, it will establish a precedent which may result most injuriously in the working of our public institutions in the years to come. Therefore, I enter my serious and strong protest in condemnation of what they have done.

MR. DICKEY—I can assure the hon. gentleman that no one in the House has a greater abhorrence of bureaucratic government than I have, and I am entirely with him in that view of the case. I think the discussion is a useful one; but surely we cannot be far apart on the question of elementary constitutional principles. I concede at once the principles laid down by the hon. member for Bowbell (Mr. Mills) as being the correct and sound parliamentary principles, and I would expect the hon. member for Queen's (Mr. Davies) at once to concede that there are occasions when the Government may act without the authority of Parliament, assuming and expecting the ratification of Parliament afterwards.

MR. DAVIES (P.E.I.)—If Parliament is not sitting.

MR. DICKEY—We will limit it to that for the present. Supposing the country were invaded, are the Government to go to Parliament and get a vote before they can move a man?

MR. DAVIES (P.E.I.)—No, I do not say anything of the kind.

MR. DICKEY—It is of great usefulness that we should agree on constitutional principle. The application of those principles to the case in hand is of course another matter. All I say is this, that having regard to the state of feeling that existed last year, the Government were justified in taking action, and taking prompt and immediate action, without reference to Parliament. It was so advised by its military advisers; it took that action; and the consequence is the resolution now before the House. As I remember—I am speaking subject to correction—the Northwest rebellion took place during the sitting of Parliament; troops were hurried to the Northwest; large engagements were made with the Hudson's Bay Company; and enormous expenses were incurred.

MR. LAURIER—And Parliament was constantly informed, from day to day.

MR. DICKEY—No vote was taken.

MR. LAURIER—Votes were taken immediately.

MR. DICKEY—I am speaking subject to correction; I have not looked at the record; but as far as my memory goes, no vote was taken for the contract with the Hudson's Bay Company for supplies to the troops. That was done by the Government acting with a view to the safety of the nation. That was the view taken of the action of the Government in this case. When they gave this order, having regard to the enormous imperial interests involved, it was considered best to act in the way they did; but I would not wish the committee to suppose that their action was in any sense in derogation of any of the constitutional principles laid down by hon. gentlemen opposite.

MR. LAURIER—The defence just set up by my hon. friend the Minister of Justice is the best evidence of the truth of the position which has been taken by my friends to the right and to the left of me. My hon. friend the Minister of Justice does not only deny the correctness of the proposition that no money is to be spent except on the previous appropriation by Parliament; but he says that in this case there is an exception to be had to the rule, because at the time Parliament was called to meet, in the first days of January, when there was to some extent a cloud of war hanging over us, it would have been inadvisable or unwise to call public attention to the fact that Canada was under the necessity of providing an armament and making provision for the contingency of war. The proposition which lies behind this assertion is that it would have been unwise to call the attention of the various nations, and above all of the nation with which we might have been at war, to our proposed course.

MR. DICKEY—To discuss it in detail.