

Motion Respecting House Vote

crown. Over the centuries parliament gradually gained full control of the finances of the state, reduced the power of absolute monarchs, destroyed the belief in the divine right of kings, established responsible government and vested in the executive or cabinet certain limited authority. In Canada today we have been witnessing the gradual but steady increase in the power of the executive, now culminating in the attempt of the executive to grasp absolute power. In the future no government, no matter how incompetent, how extravagant or how autocratic will be replaced during its five year term of office unless by its voluntary action or by a revolt of government members. So long as the executive can assemble sufficient bodies to provide a majority for a vote of confidence a government will be able to continue in office and impose whatever taxation it desires, indulge in whatever extravagances it fancies and pass whatever legislation it considers suitable for its purposes.

No vote in the House of Commons will have any meaning except as a recorded opinion. No member in the future will feel especially required to cast a vote. What urgency will be attached to voting; what importance will it have. Absenteeism will flourish as never before. Debates will deteriorate. Why bother attacking a government bill or moving amendments or gathering in members to vote on second reading or in the committee stage or on third reading when the whole process can be nullified by executive action? Not even the time honoured votes on the speech from the throne will have any validity. If an adverse vote occurred on that occasion the executive would argue that it was just a mistake, that the program should be seen in detail and that the house would surely want to reconsider the matter rather than have an immediate election. Consequently a new motion of confidence would be introduced.

• (9:20 p.m.)

What about the well known non-confidence motions on supply? They will be meaningless from now on. If they are adverse, the government will not resign but will argue that the house was merely expressing criticism of some parts of the government's program or its administration, and that the proper course would be to have another vote rather than a general election. The votes on the budget, always heretofore considered as crucial and vital to the government's policy, will no longer have any meaning whatsoever.

• **Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear.

[Mr. Churchill.]

Mr. Churchill: We had a startling example of that just last week. If there is an adverse vote on the budget the government will bring in another motion, members will rethink the problem and have a second chance to decide whether they really did want an immediate election or were merely intending to express some dissatisfaction with part of the government's proposals.

The motion now before us, as has been pointed out by other speakers, is an attempt to introduce into the parliamentary system an element of the republican system in practice in the United States. There the executive, separate and apart from Congress, puts forward legislative matters but does not resign if those items are not passed; nor can the executive be voted out of office. The Canadian executive, as part of parliament, is responsible to parliament and heretofore has been subject to dismissal by parliament. Now, under the proposed new arrangement, the executive will no longer be in any danger of dismissal.

This motion strikes at the heart of the parliamentary system. It is subversive of our constitutional practice. It is destructive of our system of government. It is a dictatorial measure aimed at reducing parliament to the status of a debating society. Its object is to place absolute power in the hands of the executive. This motion also endangers the freedom of the citizen in that it destroys the power of the member of parliament. If I am wrong with regard to the seriousness of this situation, I am not the only one in the country who is wrong and I intend to produce a few pieces of evidence along that line.

In the *Toronto Telegram* of Tuesday, February 20, I read these words in reference to the suggestion that a want of confidence vote might be asked for:

This is wrong. A vote of confidence should not be allowed. This becomes an issue of the supremacy of parliament, and parliament has already expressed its opinion.

Parliament is greater than any government or party.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Churchill: The *Montreal Gazette* of February 22 contains these words:

It has come close—

Referring to the government.

—to placing itself in contempt of parliament. In the brief sitting yesterday the government found rushing upon it, like a tide, the fundamental issues of parliamentary democracy. If the house does not have full and final control over money bills, it has full and final control over nothing.