

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 26, 1968

The house met at 2.30 p.m.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

MOTION RESPECTING HOUSE VOTE ON BILL C-193

The house resumed, from Friday, February 23, consideration of the motion of the Prime Minister:

That this house does not regard its vote on February 19th in connection with third reading of Bill C-193, which had carried in all previous stages, as a vote of non-confidence in the government.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, I dealt with this motion in my introductory remarks on Friday and pointed out, as had previous opposition speakers, that this is not an ordinary matter. The question which came before the house on Friday is a major matter, because the whole economic and financial program of the government was at stake on the vote in question. I also said in my introductory remarks that not only has the opposition for some time been pointing out that the government has been under serious attack as far as its economic and financial program is concerned but—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Speaker: Could we have order, please?

Mr. Woolliams: —that this certainly has been the position of the governor of the Bank of Canada. I quoted in support of my argument *The Economist* of September 30. I now come to grips with the problem itself. We say this is a major and vital matter in respect of which the government was defeated. What is our position? I think it would be well to repeat our leader's position in this regard, our party's position and the position of the official opposition.

This is our position. We agree, of course, that the government could choose to consider a defeat on a minor matter as not involving a question of confidence. That is not the question. The question is, can the government choose to ignore a major defeat on a vital matter of policy? We say that according to constitutional practice this government has no

right to place business or a motion before the house. We have not altered this stand in any respect. That is the stand we take; that is the stand of our leader; that is the stand of our party, and it is the stand I take this afternoon.

I am going to quote some authorities in this respect, and hope to be able to effectively answer the arguments of the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister consider the vote on Monday evening would have been any different if he had been in the House of Commons and had said "This is a vote of confidence"? Do mere words make the situation different? If the bill itself goes to a major and vital part of the economic and financial program of the Liberal government, does it make any difference whether it is called a vote of confidence, or is it in fact a vote of confidence when it affects the major financial policy of this government? Do mere words make the situation any different?

Would the leader of the Cr ditistes have voted for the tax increase if the Prime Minister had been here and had stood in his place and told us just before the vote on Monday that it was a vote of confidence? I suggest that the leader of the Cr ditistes would have voted against the tax increase on Monday night because he was against it; he was against the economic and financial program of this government.

Let us just see what the Prime Minister had to say in this regard. Let us examine the authorities about which we have heard so much not only from the Prime Minister but from other Liberals. The Prime Minister quoted Professor Jennings as follows:

What the government will treat as a matter of sufficient importance to demand resignation or dissolution is, primarily, a question for the government.

If it is always a matter for the government as to whether a question is vital or major, the government—and this they have done—could perpetuate their right to govern this country forever. That is the point involved.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.