

Motion Respecting House Vote

This was the measure before the house. I am directing my remarks at the moment, Mr. Speaker, in such a way as to indicate the importance of this bill to the government. Far from being a minor measure it was treated by hon. gentlemen opposite as a measure of the greatest importance. I might say it was so treated by the opposition parties, certainly by this opposition party.

● (11:50 a.m.)

Our principal criticism of this government has been in respect of its economic mismanagement, its fiscal mismanagement, the degree to which it has permitted our competitive position to be eroded in terms of export, the slow rate of economic growth in recent times and, particularly, the growing rate of unemployment. We have been insisting that because of this mismanagement this government has lost the confidence of the country, and that the lack of confidence has been a matter of the greatest importance in respect of the growing difficulties of the country. Indeed, it is a very central factor in the growing economic difficulties of the country. We have emphasized this point for some time, and we had an opportunity to express our point of view in a very tangible way on Monday evening.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, for several months we have taken the position that these taxes which the government has been trying to impose on the people are a very high price for the Canadian people to pay for the general lack of confidence in this government. We have taken the position that this bill would not cope with inflation; that it would add to the amount of unemployment; that it would bring on a further slowdown in our rate of growth and would therefore bring about further unemployment. Since the debate in December events certainly have confirmed my view and the view I then expressed.

I say this now only to indicate that the wrongness of the bill that was before us last December has become more and more obvious to the members of the opposition parties. So this bill was regarded by the government as a very important and basic part of its program, and was regarded by the official opposition as an essential part of the government's mistaken fiscal and economic mismanagement.

For the government to try to put any business before this house, as it tried to do on

[Mr. Stanfield.]

Monday evening following two votes, is to make a mockery of voting in this house.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: The government has chosen to try to ignore that vote. It is now asking this house to ignore that vote. It is making a mockery of the House of Commons. These are matters which relate to our constitution. They reach to the very heart and essence of our constitutional democracy. They relate to the very essence of responsible government or government responsible to parliament.

On Monday evening last the members of this house spoke on a very important matter. The government was defeated on a question which undoubtedly was one involving confidence in the government. The constitution and constitutional practice cannot be flouted. The defeat of the government on a measure of such importance must, under our constitution, be accepted by the government as an indication of a loss of the confidence of this house. This is part of our constitution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: It is part of our constitution, and the constitution cannot be flouted. I say again that neither the Prime Minister nor anybody else has cited any precedent in which a defeat on a matter of such fundamental importance has been ignored by the government and not treated as defeat on a matter of confidence. The government was defeated on Monday night by the unanimous opposition of the house; that is, by every member of the opposition voting against this measure. It was defeated because of that; and also, I guess, because of a certain amount of bungling on the other side of the house.

I say in all sincerity that we are accustomed to the bungling on the part of this government. I suggest, however, that some of the remarks which have been made by the Prime Minister are a matter of another sort. I do not enjoy attacking or criticizing any man, especially one who has enjoyed a long and distinguished public career; but I cannot explain simply in terms of strain some of the things my right hon. friend said outside the house. He has spent his time charging the opposition with everything he could think of. He has portrayed the opposition, especially the Conservative opposition, as being irresponsible in pursuing a course which he suggests would endanger the future of the country, and for taking advantage of a leadership situation in the Liberal party. My right hon.