

*Motion Respecting House Vote*

It is my intention now to deal with the central issue in the controversy that is engaging the attention of the house, namely the purpose and implications of the motion which is before us and the result that will flow from its adoption. I want to do this because I believe the public has not been completely informed with regard to the central issue. I consider that this motion, if approved, will convey to the executive, the cabinet, complete and absolute power over parliament. I will show how over the years the power of the Commons has been gradually diminished and how the rights and privileges of members have been steadily eroded in the course of the period in which I have had the pleasure and honour of being a member of this house.

The process of restricting the authority of the house began seriously with the election of the present government in 1963. Steps were soon taken to effect alterations in the rules, with the object of restricting debate and increasing the power of the executive. Prior to 1963 in this evolving institution the practice and custom of the house was to set up a rules and procedure committee under the chairmanship of the Speaker to consider modifications of the rules. In the period from 1952 to 1963, or in the period between 1952 and 1962 which is the period with which I am familiar, that was the method followed under the Speakers of that day. The committee on which the various parties were represented reported to the house only those changes in the rules for which there was unanimous agreement. Quite a number of changes were made, but I shall not take the time of the house tonight to recount these. In 1964 the Liberal government rejected that method and substituted the government's proposals for changes in the rules. Instead of having an all-party agreement the government insisted on having a majority vote on the changes which it considered to be best for the house and, despite strenuous objections, imposed the present rules.

Those recent changes imposed by this government have had serious consequences. The consideration of the main estimates has been limited to 30 days. Experience over the last three years has shown how advantageous that has been to the government. The estimates of many departments have not been considered at all by the house but have been put through automatically by the guillotine method on the thirtieth day. This has curtailed in a very marked manner the freedom of members to discuss proposed expenditures and has

enlarged unduly the power of the executive. The second recent change in the rules is the method of closure of debate under the title of allocation of time. This practice ruthlessly limits freedom of members and gives enormous power to the executive.

These limitations of members' rights and these additions to the control and influence of the executive have altered the nature of parliament and have reduced its effectiveness under the specious argument of modernizing the rules and getting on with the business. Many members have been misled into shackling parliament and transferring power from the house to the executive. The motion which is now before the house and which appears on the order paper will complete the process of making the executive supreme, because now the executive will control the votes of the House of Commons. This constitutes absolute power. Up to this time votes in the Commons have been considered to be of great importance. They have imposed a restraint on the government and frequently have been a threat to the continuance of the government. Faced with the possibility of an adverse vote successive governments frequently have modified measures which have been placed before the house. In some instances they have withdrawn them. That fear will now be removed. An adverse vote may be circumvented by the introduction of a motion of confidence with the implication of all the dire effects of a general election, unless the members bow to the government.

How effective that threat is may soon be shown in this house. Already some critics of the government have indicated their intention to either vote for this motion or abstain. This ensures the government of a majority. If it works on this basis it will work in the future and will be utilized in the future. The method which now is about to be established by the government will effectively and inevitably weaken seriously the authority of parliament. The Prime Minister and members of the cabinet will have a power equal to those of any dictator. The main strength of the House of Commons has been its control over taxation. The rejection by the house of Bill No. C-193 on Monday, February 19 was an excellent example of the exercise of that control. The Commons refused to impose on the people the extra taxation proposed by the government.

Parliament had its origin in the summoning of representatives of the people to approve of taxation in order to provide revenue for the