

Motion Respecting House Vote

Mr. Stanfield: That is still our view, and we are still confident we are right. We are prepared to let the only forum in which this matter can be judged eventually, namely the electorate, the people, settle the question.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: Two days ago, Mr. Speaker, you said you were not in a position to settle questions of constitutional law; that you had no authority to do so. What does the right hon. gentleman challenge me to do? Obstruct the business of the house to prevent this motion coming before hon. members? We are content, as I say, to leave it to the judgment of the electorate.

The government was twice defeated on Monday night. It was defeated first on a matter involving the very essence of its financial program. Everybody in the house with the exception of some hon. members opposite voted against the measure. Mr. Speaker, if any member of that front bench, including the Prime Minister, had been asked before that vote was taken whether or not it was a vote of confidence, every one of those hon. gentlemen would have said without any hesitation: "Certainly it is".

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Stanfield: Not only did they believe this before the vote was taken, but you could see in their faces after the vote had been taken that they knew it was a vote of confidence.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Starr: Including the Clerk of the House.

Mr. Stanfield: I see in his place the government house leader who, more than anyone else, is responsible on the other side for this particular act of bungling.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Stanfield: Perhaps the hon. gentlemen will listen to what I have to say. All this week the Prime Minister has tried to give the people of Canada the impression that it was a snap vote, that it came without warning and that sort of thing. Mr. Speaker, these proposals were opposed during the budget debate which took place before the end of the year. The measure was opposed in committee by the opposition parties. Indeed, the only real filibuster I have seen conducted since I have been here was conducted by ministers of the crown last Monday when this bill was in

committee, to try to keep the discussion going until the whip could inform them that there were enough of their supporters present to carry the thing.

Furthermore, why was this bill dealt with on Monday at all? It was dealt with on Monday because the acting leader of the house told our house leader and myself last week that before we could get on with supplementary estimates we had to dispose of this income tax bill.

Mr. Starr: What happens to the supplementary estimates now?

Mr. Stanfield: We were told it had to be dealt with before we could move on to supplementary estimates and that we could proceed with supplementary estimates after the bill had been disposed of. The bill came up on Thursday but it was not completed because—and I say this without offence; I am very sincere about this—it was not completed because the Minister of Finance had to visit a very fine part of Canada in connection with other affairs which have nothing to do with this house. I am not making anything of this; he had every right to do that, but because of this the house went on to other business on Friday. Why did we go back to the tax bill on Monday? It was because the government intended that the bill be dealt with on Monday and disposed of before we could move on to anything else.

This is the situation in which the Prime Minister talks about a snap vote, trickery and so on. The measure came before the house because the government intended that it should, and every member on the other side knew it was to be dealt with before we proceeded to consider supplementary estimates.

Thus the carrying of this measure was regarded as a matter of the greatest importance to the government. It was an urgent matter which had to be dealt with before we could get on with other business. It was not a minor measure. It was the principal fiscal measure in the government's budget presented to the house last December, involving the raising of individual and corporate income taxes. It was the central part of the government's fiscal and economic program, a program of management or mismanagement, whatever your point of view happens to be, intended to raise more money from the Canadian taxpayers and to slow down the economy, to fight inflation by creating more slack in the economy and by creating more unemployment.