

*Lack of Confidence Vote*

May I say this to hon. members of this House? I cannot imagine a more intolerable situation for the government; I cannot imagine anything better calculated to destroy confidence in an administration throughout the country, than that a government should come to parliament with legislation which it is prepared to stand up and fight for, 5 p.m. and still permit the slightest doubt as to its securing from parliament what it believes to be necessary in the public interest. Failing this it should be prepared to take its appeal from parliament to the country. A Cabinet has carefully to consider all aspects of public questions before it introduces any legislation. My hon. friend says that to all intents and purposes a government measure should be the same as a private bill. Well, then, may I ask him, why have any Cabinet at all? Why not let us have a Soviet at once, because that is what it amounts to; no head whatever, no directing agency, anyone free to get up and propose any measure with just such knowledge as he may have, free to spring it on the House at any moment, and, with such eloquence as he can muster, carry it through if possible. I do not know what will happen to the legislation of the country if we proceed in that way. Government measures are not brought down lightly. They are the result of long and careful consideration. Government measures are brought down in the light of carefully matured policy, and an administration that brings down its legislation in any other way should not be entitled to expect from parliament a second opportunity once it meets with defeat on a matter which it is prepared to say to the House it regards as all important in the public interest.

There are other aspects of this question to which I would like to refer, but I think perhaps I have said enough to indicate the point of view of the administration on this resolution. I might, however, mention one or two points that I have made a note of lest it might be thought I was passing them over.

My hon. friend says that without the adoption of his resolution bad legislation might be passed to save a good administration, and good legislation defeated to save a bad administration. There is a passage that my hon. friend will recognize and remember—"By their fruits ye shall know them," and the only way you can tell whether an administration is good or bad is by what it does. I cannot well imagine a good administration bringing in bad legislation or a bad administration bringing in good legislation. I think you must judge an administration in large measure by the class of legislation which it brings in.

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

My hon. friend from Calgary West (Mr. Shaw) cited a number of instances where governments had not resigned when they were defeated. Well, that I think ought to be an answer, to all intents and purposes, to what my hon. friend has in view in this resolution. He wants the administration to have some freedom. The cases that have been cited are the exceptions which prove the rule. What my hon. friend by his resolution seeks is to lay down a general principle, not an exception. I can conceive of times where, owing to unforeseen circumstances, a thin House, or some minor phase in legislation, or for some special reason not generally understood at the time but which, once explained, is easily understood, it would be unwise for a government, if it suffered defeat under such circumstances to regard defeat as a vote of want of confidence demanding resignation or a request for a dissolution. Circumstances such as those would have to be considered each on its merits, but they should be considered, not as the rule, but as the exception to the rule, and in my opinion ought very seldom to be considered. More than that, the more slender a ministry's following, the more necessary I believe it to be that the ministry should have a full sense of its responsibility to the people's representatives and to that larger public outside the halls of parliament whom they represent.

Mr. GOOD: May I ask a question? If there were three parties of approximately equal strength, and only one of them was represented in the Cabinet, what would be the situation?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: The position to my mind is exactly the same whether there are three parties or thirty. A government that cannot bring together a group of men, no matter where they are taken from, sufficiently strong to command the confidence of those who compose a parliament has no right to exist. How is public business to be carried on in a manner which will inspire confidence in the country unless a ministry is able to say to the public: With our knowledge of affairs, acquired as only a ministry can acquire it, we believe such and such legislation necessary for the country; we think this or that measure absolutely essential to meet a situation we are face to face with to-day; we give our reasons, give them publicly on the floor of parliament, and if our reasons are not accepted, we shall appeal to those from whom our authority is derived and ask them, if they are unable to give us their support, to put someone else in our place. The