

Some of them are of an important character, and some are of no importance at all; and they depend, as he himself had to admit, upon the circumstances in which they occurred as well as upon the merits. I will say at once that this was no ordinary occasion of the defeat of a government. The right hon. gentleman has endeavoured to make light of the indication of the feeling of the country afforded by the by-elections. He has done so on many occasions before; and the attitude he has taken is this—that as long as he was not deprived of the support of his friends in the House, he considered that he was entitled to retain office, notwithstanding any amount of by-elections or other indications of a change of popular feeling. In that he takes up what I believe to be an entirely unconstitutional position. It is common for us to say, and it is true constitutionally, that the Minister of the Crown in this country is selected and appointed because he is the man who commands a majority in the House of Commons. But what does that mean? It means that the command of the majority of the House represents the feeling of the country. The moment the House of Commons get out of touch and harmony with the country then that plea for retaining office dissolves; and the right hon. Gentleman has no right to entrench himself behind the confidence and support of his friends here after it is known to all mankind and to himself, as well as to any of them, that he has lost the confidence of the country.

I think that is a sound position. It does not follow, it should not follow, that because a government is able to secure the 9 p.m. passage of a vote of confidence in parliament, it should therefore retain office.

In conclusion, I wish to say that there is nothing particularly new in this resolution. It merely asserts what is the parliamentary practice at the moment; but apparently it seeks to make rigid this practice, and to establish it as a permanent and fixed parliamentary rule, instead of practice. I think it would be a great misfortune for parliament to adopt this resolution.

Mr. H. A. FORTIER (Labelle) (Translation): Mr. Speaker, I have but a few words to add to the present debate. This resolution is of the utmost importance. Its aim, indeed, is to amend a parliamentary practice by introducing means of lessening or removing altogether the responsibility of the government. I am entirely opposed to this resolution. I do not need, Sir, to invoke principles which are well known to the members of this House. The government must have the confidence of parliament and especially of the House of Commons. The government cannot conduct the public affairs of the country the moment confidence is withdrawn from it. The means which are at the disposal of the House to signify to the government that it no more enjoys that confidence, are as follows: First, a motion of non-confidence; secondly, the rejection of legislation brought down by the government and

on which the government insists, and, lastly the adoption by this House of legislation, against the will and consent of the government. These are the recognized principles of parliamentary practice and procedure. What does this resolution contain? We are told that the rejection of a government motion should not be considered sufficient to bring about the resignation of the Cabinet, unless it is followed by a vote of non-confidence. It is therefore evident that, if this resolution was adopted, we should be departing from principles established for ever so long in our parliamentary practice and by which it is recognized that, if a government bill is thrown out by the House, the government must retire. Therefore, I contend that this resolution should certainly not be adopted.

Some members who spoke on this resolution have stated that times have changed, that we should adopt new methods to meet the present needs, and they alluded to the existence of three parties in this House: the Government, the Opposition and the third party, the Progressives. They contend that owing to this third party our parliamentary procedure should be modified and that a new constitution should be given us. I answer: No.

It is not only in this country that different parties exist in parliament. The British House, for ever so long, has been divided into many parties. Yet, did they think it proper to amend parliamentary practice and procedure? No more in England than here was it thought proper to change the existing state of things to suit more than two parties, and following in the footsteps of England, Canada will not undertake this innovation and destroy those ancient customs that we have cherished for centuries and that we must preciously maintain in our country.

Moreover, it was argued that if we introduced in our parliamentary practice the change proposed in this resolution, it would help the members to initiate resolutions and give, so to speak, new life to the administration of this country. Are the members, Sir, of the opposition—in fact of any opposition whatever—deprived of the opportunity of discussing and opposing the measures brought down in this House? I contend that they have that privilege much more so than the partisans of the government, for it is much easier to criticize than to praise a sound measure. Those who form part of the opposition can certainly not contend that they are deprived of the right to consider and discuss any proposed legislation. Under