

Motion Respecting House Vote

very beginning, and they know it. Now the Prime Minister has to find somebody to blame so he has been trying for the past three or four days to blame the opposition. He knows better than anyone else that the responsibility lies with his own ministers. I hope the Prime Minister has learned that never again can he afford to leave the awkward squad in charge when he goes on a holiday.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Douglas: So far as the members of this party are concerned we have made it clear from the time the Minister of Finance introduced his mini-budget that we were opposed to this measure. We opposed it in the mini-budget debate. We opposed it at every stage of the discussion of the bill. We contested it in committee last Thursday and again on Monday. The government had adequate warning that there was going to be opposition. The government narrowly averted disaster in a vote in committee by three votes. In spite of that it was the government that went ahead with third reading. It was the government who, instead of prolonging the debate on third reading, allowed it to go to a vote. These are the people who must accept the responsibility if they were caught with their trousers in a nether position. These are the people who botched and bungled the situation.

If the Prime Minister, on returning to Canada, had castigated his ministers, that would have made sense. Instead the Prime Minister endeavours to cook up the concept in Canada that there has been some deep, sinister plot on the part of the opposition groups to take advantage of this poor, defenceless, inept government. The fact is, as everyone knows, that this government has been disintegrating for weeks. The Prime Minister is the one who made the decision to try to carry on a leadership contest and parliament at one and the same time. I think this was a mistake, but it was the Prime Minister's decision. For weeks we have seen members of the cabinet absent a good part of the time. Cabinet ministers who have been here have had to say to most questions, "I will take it as notice", not being completely in touch with their departments. We have seen the economic situation in this country deteriorating steadily. The government has been so preoccupied with the leadership convention that nobody has been minding the store. This has been the situation. If the Prime Minister

[Mr. Douglas.]

wants to lay the blame for the embarrassing situation in which he now finds himself, let him put the blame where it belongs and not manufacture some sinister plot which does not exist.

The members of the house who sit to your left, Mr. Speaker, as members of Her Majesty's opposition have a right to oppose measures which they believe are not in the best interests of this country. They have a right to vote against those measures, indeed, they have the duty to vote against those measures, without having to wait and count how many government members there happen to be on the other side. It is not our responsibility to see that the government has been able to muster enough forces from the politicking for the leadership convention to make sure the government can survive. This is not our responsibility. Our responsibility is to vote as our conscience dictates irrespective of whether the government has enough troops here to sustain its own measure.

I should like to discuss, Mr. Speaker, not the relevance of the motion but the motion itself. The Prime Minister really gave no reasons at all to the house why we should vote confidence in his government. He has entirely avoided the fact that the measure about which we are talking is a measure which, in the opinion of this party, was designed to further the inequitable burden of taxation placed upon the middle and lower income groups in this country. This is the real issue. It is the measure itself that the government is asking us to support and to repudiate our vote against it last Monday night.

Let me briefly remind hon. members of what has happened with respect to the government's fiscal policy. In 1966 the Minister of Finance reimposed the personal income tax which the government had taken off just before the 1965 election. At the same time he imposed a refundable tax on corporations which was to be paid back, plus 5 per cent interest. Then in 1967 the Minister of Finance decided that he had put the brakes on too much and he had to put his foot on the accelerator. The difficulty with the Minister of Finance is that for the last three years he has had his foot on the brake at one moment, his foot on the accelerator the next moment, and now he has ended up with his foot in his mouth.

In 1967 he decided he had to put his foot on the accelerator, so what did he do? Did he cancel the tax on personal income? No, he rescinded the refundable tax on corporations.