

Mr. BIRD: I do not know whether I understand the question aright, but it seems to express what I am contending for—that we should have the right to free expression of opinion. We are the court of final appeal on all questions.

Mr. L. H. MARTELL (Hants): Mr. Speaker, to my mind the attitude taken by the right hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) is in accordance with all precedents of parliamentary government in the British Empire. If I were on the opposite side of the House and opposing the government, I should regard it as in the best interests of the country, and would consider that I had been given ample opportunity to express my views, if the defeat of a government bill or resolution was regarded by the administration as a vote of want of confidence. If the government cannot carry its legislation through, if the majority of the members of the House are opposed to a government bill or resolution, then that is a matter of want of confidence; that has been the practice in every country where British parliamentary usages have prevailed.

So that I claim that in spite of the present condition of things, in spite of the different groups in this country, it behooves us to consider well before we alter anything which is in accord with British parliamentary institutions. I do not believe it is in the best interests of this country for my hon. friends opposite to get up and move all sorts of academic resolutions, or to have them try and defeat government measures without taking the necessary consequences. If the right hon. gentleman who leads the government cannot command a majority of the members of the House, then I think that in accordance with British parliamentary institutions and British practice it is his duty to resign and go to the country and let the people decide. We are sick and tired of hearing academic questions discussed. We want realities, and my hon. friend and his friends opposite would be well advised to advocate something that is in accord with British parliamentary institutions and with parliamentary practice in this country, instead of constantly bringing up precedents which exist only as a figment of their own imagination.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

After Recess

The House resumed at eight o'clock.

Right Hon. ARTHUR MEIGHEN (Leader of the Opposition): I am opposed, Mr.

Speaker, to the resolution of the hon. member for Calgary East (Mr. Irvine). At the same time I really do not apprehend that if the resolution were to pass we would immediately be precipitated into a condition of chaos, or anything resembling the unfortunate plight of Russia to-day. I am disposed to think the resolution might pass without anything more disastrous happening than the declaration of a mistaken principle, a principle that the experience of years has shown not to be to the advantage of democracy. I do not think Canada is liable to be plunged into chaos because of such an assertion as this obtaining the approval of parliament. Indeed, even had one of the amendments to the Address or both been passed, and the government consequently suffered defeat, I was really inclined to doubt—and as the nights and days have passed since that time, my doubts have been intensified—whether this Dominion would as a consequence be smouldering in the fires of revolution or even of despair, such as the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) threatened us with the other night. My reasons for opposing the resolution are by no means of so startling or determined a character as that. The resolution in its words says:

That, in the opinion of this House, a defeat of a government measure should not be considered as a sufficient reason for the resignation of the government unless followed by a vote of lack of confidence.

Now, Mr. Speaker, even should the resolution pass, I really do not think even any difference in the present practice would then obtain. The government is at liberty to resign any minute. The government is ultimately the sole judge of what shall be sufficient or insufficient cause for its continuance or discontinuance in office; nor does the hon. member for Calgary suggest that a government in this regard should be finally restrained at all. In answer to the very pertinent inquiry of the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. McQuarrie) the mover said: "No, I would not suggest the rights of a government to resign should be abbreviated. I am quite prepared that these rights shall remain just as ample as they are to-day." Even should the resolution, as it is understood by its sponsor, carry, a government could then take any vote of the House as a vote of want of confidence and retire. Its liberty of action in that regard would not be restrained in the least.

Then I am asked: What would be the consequence of the resolution carrying? Well, it would simply be a declaration by the House that the government would be wrong—even though it had quite a constitutional right—it would be wrong in exercising liberty of ac-