

*Motion Respecting House Vote*

whether or not there was to be an election. I believe that is still a good idea. This is a parliament of minorities—and we may continue to have them for some years. What I am suggesting is a good piece of machinery, and I think we should add it to the constitution of Canada; but let us add it knowing what we are doing, and let us add it with the necessary safeguards.

Several members of the government have said they read these speeches of ours made in January, 1966, and that this is just what they are doing. May I point out with respect that there are three major differences between our proposal of January, 1966, and what is happening now. The first one we have repeated several times but we do not seem to have got it into the heads of the government. We said that the announcement that a matter is not a vote of confidence, which would be decided separately, should be made before the vote is taken, not after. In other words, in any game you play the rules should be set before you start, not after the bully has lost a play or two in the game. In my view that is an essential feature in this kind of change in our constitution.

The second difference—and I point out that I will not press it as hard as I might press one or two other things—is that when I made my proposal in January, 1966, I made it with reference to things proposed by the opposition, expressions of opinion contained in amendments to the address or amendments to the budget. Actually, that was as far as I went. But the government has applied the principle of a second vote, not to an idea advanced by the opposition but to one of its own major pieces of legislation. The government cannot control what the opposition proposes; therefore I think it is appropriate for the government, if it has been beaten on an opposition idea, to have the right to another vote.

However, the government controls what it brings in. It decides what its tax measures are to be. I submit that that right should not extend to the government in such a situation. If the government thinks this is not completely fair and wants to have it both ways on this point, I think we could negotiate it. In other words, I do not regard the second point I am making as having the same importance as the first one about the announcement being made in advance.

● (8:20 p.m.)

The third difference is that in the proposal we made in January, 1966, we were [Mr. Knowles.]

proposing merely a device, an arrangement of parliamentary procedure under which a government which was defeated on a motion from the opposition could carry on and could still be the government. We were not proposing a device under which the government could bring back a measure which it had presented and which had been defeated, but that is what this government is trying to do. It is trying to use our proposal as a means of obtaining the right to carry on, and extending that to a situation which will permit the government to bring back a measure that was defeated by the House of Commons on February 19. I know the Minister of Justice said this afternoon that they are not going to bring back Bill No. C-193, but I am uneasy; I am uncertain and I shall be until this story is completed. I have heard the things the Minister of Finance has said and the things the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) has said. That is why I am uneasy on this point.

I submit, Mr. Speaker, if we were pursuing the kind of arrangement we suggested in 1966, it would be amending our constitution, but it would be doing it in a sensible way and in a way that would help to make minority parliaments work. In my view, these three things are essential: First, there has to be an announcement before a vote, not after, that it is not one of confidence; second, this proposal should apply only to changes brought forward by the opposition over which the government has no control; third, the government should have the right to carry on, but not the right to bring back, in the same session, a measure which has been defeated. Now, that was our idea, and it is one which ought to be worked into the fabric of this house. I think the distortion of it which has been made by this government is dangerous. If this motion passes, or even if it is defeated, it will be quoted. We will have added to our constitution a precedent that is just as meaningful, just as useful to the government and to the Chair as anything else that is there. From this time forward, the next time a government has been beaten on a vote, no matter how major it is, the government will be able to say, "We did it in February, 1968, and we can do it again." We will bring in another motion and we will go through this monkey business all over again. The right to do this will in effect be part of our constitution if we pass this motion. That is the main reason I am against it.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I could enlarge on these ideas but if I did I would be repeating