

Motion Respecting House Vote

That is the government which has been defeated.

—has three choices. It can, if it chooses, interpret the passing of the amendment as a want of confidence and can act accordingly. Second, it can accept the amendment as reflecting the views of the majority of members in the House of Commons. Third, it can if it chooses—

And this is the pertinent point on this particular occasion:

—submit on its own initiative a motion of confidence to ascertain whether the house wants a dissolution.

This is what we are doing. I assume therefore that hon. gentlemen will accept the correctness of our procedure in this matter.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: The hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka, who I mentioned a moment or two ago, said as reported on page 446 of *Hansard* for January 31, 1966:

It should be a normal and accepted practice that parliament should have the right to amend or reject legislation proposed by the government, or any other official act, without the risk of a general election.

Mr. Aiken: But it is not an accepted practice. I merely proposed that it should be.

Mr. Pearson: I should like to summarize. We believe, Mr. Speaker, on this side that we had no obligation to resign or ask for dissolution on Monday night.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pearson: We believe, Mr. Speaker, that we had every right to carry on the business of government after Monday night's vote, as indeed we are carrying it on today and were not allowed to carry it on Wednesday or Thursday.

We believe that the position taken by the official opposition that no parliamentary business was possible until there was a change in government by resignation or dissolution was untenable, and they have admitted that themselves today.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Pearson: It is too bad it was not admitted last Wednesday. We believe we have every right to introduce a specific motion of confidence, which we are doing, and to ask for the verdict of parliament on that motion, which will determine the fate of this government. And parliament will decide after the case for and against confidence has been put.

[Mr. Pearson.]

We are not, as the Leader of the Opposition said on Wednesday night outside the house, if the press reports him accurately, setting aside the rules and conventions of parliament to suit our convenience. On the contrary, this motion is evidence that we are operating within the rules of parliament. If this motion carries, we carry on with our program of legislation because we shall have been authorized by this House of Commons so to do. If this motion is defeated—

An hon. Member: You will ask for another vote.

Mr. Pearson: —that decision, of course, leads to a general election. I ask, Mr. Speaker, is this the time, are these the circumstances, is this a situation in which a general election would help our country—

Mr. Woolliams: It certainly would.

Mr. Pearson: —as it faces immediately, not next month or next year, but as it faces immediately grave financial and constitutional problems which affect our future as a united and stable confederation. That is the question which this House of Commons must decide, and I hope it will decide quickly.

• (11:40 a.m.)

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Prime Minister for some time, and after listening to him came to a number of conclusions. The first was that he was completely unable to cite any precedent where a government under our parliamentary system had suffered such a crushing defeat on a matter of such fundamental importance to government policy as this government suffered on Monday night yet continued to try to do business with the House of Commons.

The second conclusion I came to, and I say this with some regret, is that the right hon. gentleman seems to be taking quite a different line outside the house than he appears to have been prepared to take within the house in the past few days. We agree, of course, that the government could choose to consider even a minor defeat to be decisive. That is not the question. The question is, can the government choose to ignore a major defeat on a major matter of policy? We say that according to constitutional practice this government has no right to place business before us or to place this motion before the house. We have not waived this stand in any respect—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.