

*House of Commons Act*

Have hon. members ever asked themselves, whenever a non-confidence motion as we call it is moved, generally by an opposition party, whether we are playing our role? We express confidence or non-confidence in the government but what about the other bills? What about the other bills where it is suggested that the question of confidence is also involved? Indeed when a minister's bill is rejected, the minister is assumed to have lost the confidence of the House as is the government and assuredly our colleagues opposite would be the first ones in such a case to rise and demand that the government resign and call an election. I have already said it. As parliamentarians we know how to impose unacceptable restraints. What is the true meaning of a non-confidence motion if everything we do here is related to non-confidence or confidence issues?

Now our entire concept and understanding of our own work as elected representatives to a legislative body are warped. We become locked into an impossible situation and it is no wonder, Mr. Speaker, that our constituents often cannot understand how we have managed to get ourselves into such a predicament. I am speaking of course in a general sense. It will surely take some time before we do agree to reconsider this way of thinking but perhaps it is time to start something. A parliamentary reform has been announced. You can be assured, Mr. Speaker, that the issue of confidence in the government will not be reconsidered. Perhaps it is too soon to do that as well. The hon. members on the parliamentary committee will debate the statistics or the figures and what their responsibilities ought to be. It will be suggested that the number of members be reduced. My colleague from Miramichi made an interesting statement: let us stop playing musical chairs.

You know, Mr. Speaker, never was I more embarrassed than I was two years ago, I think, when my party—I say that without false modesty—had taken a few members off the committee under the pretence that they were against a bill. I know that the system was so much different over there, and I do not necessarily advocate that system. One can imagine such a situation in the American Congress where the chairman would tell a member of the foreign affairs committee: “You know, you do not agree with me so you will have to be taken off the committee and replaced by someone else.” But what are we, Mr. Speaker? Are we supposed to play our role as parliamentarians, as elected members, or simply sanction or legitimize, if you want—it is legitimate, be careful now, I am not saying that it is not legitimate, the government is elected of course and this House gives it its confidence and every four years it must undergo the electoral test, but in the day-to-day life, constantly legitimizing measures which are not necessarily in full accordance with what we think our role ought to be as elected members for a given region. And I am not saying that the government must fall, quite the contrary. I am simply saying that we should be able to play our role as elected members in a democratic way, and should the time

come when the government feels that perhaps it does not have the full confidence of the House because it has been defeated on a clause or on some sort of amendment or even on a bill, then the House, either the government itself or the opposition, may ask the House if the government still has its confidence.

If it has, then it can go on governing according to the wishes of the House as a legislative body. Therein lies the difference between the executive and the legislative levels. Why did we have to go through all this? To go back to Bill C-273, let us say that considerable progress has been made. When I was first elected to the House, there was not even a committee on management and members' services. We had no official spokesmen to voice our aspirations and our rights as parliamentarians to management except through the Speaker. We found ourselves in the most awkward situation of having to go and beg the government for a few dollars to buy a typewriter for instance, or to obtain the kind of services we deemed important and essential to help us fulfil our duties and obligations to the electorate. Incredible! Do we or do we not have a sense of responsibility? In other legislatures or legislative assemblies, the system is different. For example, there is the quaestorial system. I know that my colleague opposite who sponsored this bill is aware of this system which is used in the French National Assembly. However, in France, members of the National Assembly elect their own administrators in proportion to the parties represented. Does this mean that these administrators throw open the coffers, spend wastefully and do not take their own responsibilities? Not at all. Just like the other members, they are accountable for their administration and if they do not perform properly, they are either rejected by their colleagues or denounced by the newspapers and the general public. If we are responsible enough to ask our voters to elect us, to sit in this House, to rise day after day, to vote on decisions which are very important for the future of our country—there were 30 votes yesterday—I believe that we are responsible enough to administer our own affairs.

I do not have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that, in my opinion, there was no need for the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) to take such an initiative this afternoon. It is incredible that we should even be discussing this. All the members should unanimously rise to take in hand their own destiny as legislators. However, I am not saying that the government is to blame. I am not saying that the government has not managed the House well; that has nothing to do with it. I simply say that we should show a minimum of respect for the difference between the legislative function, for which we are here, and the executive function, which has of course a purpose and which operates on a different level. Mr. Speaker, we should at least be the masters of our own destiny in this House. This is why I approve the initiative of the hon. member for Edmonton West and why I hope that we shall put an end once and for all in a few months, when we undertake parliamentary reform, to something which is anachronistic, and I am