

*Lack of Confidence Vote*

question of whether or not the government should resign would depend upon the importance of the resolution and a great many other considerations; it could be properly decided only upon a full consideration of all the attending facts.

The constitutional position, I think, was well put by the Hon. Mr. Balfour in the statement quoted by the hon. member for Calgary West, and I would like briefly to refer to it again. Mr. Balfour was Prime Minister of Great Britain at the time, with a parliamentary majority of seventy. His government was defeated on a vote which had some relation to Irish issues, and the opposition naturally called upon him to resign. He made a review of the constitutional history of the question, and after referring to the precedents he concluded as follows:

Now I think it is evident from this brief, and perhaps too rapid, survey of recent constitutional history that the only divisions which, taken by themselves, and in isolation from the general circumstances of the time, from the feeling of the Parties in the House, from the question of union in the cabinet—the only parliamentary issues which, taken in isolation from these attendant circumstances, have always been regarded as conclusive are those in which there has been a trial of strength between the parties with all the circumstances of notice and other attendant incidents required to make it clear that the issue to be decided is one of "confidence" or "no confidence". A case which I have just alluded to in another connection shows how rigidly this rule has been drawn; because, while it is the ordinary view—and I think, broadly speaking, the sound view—that a hostile vote on the Address is regarded as a vote of censure and is supposed to be fatal to the government, I have just reminded the House that such a hostile vote was actually given in 1904 on the Address, and all that the then leader of the House and the then Prime Minister did was to reintroduce the Address in a somewhat abbreviated form.

The substance of the remarks of the Hon. Mr. Balfour which I have just quoted to the House means that only under exceptional circumstances, where the issue has been clear-cut between the parties, is the resignation of a government contemplated under obtaining British parliamentary practice, and that is what this resolution in its former part asserts, namely:

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.

All the authority which my hon. friend from Calgary West (Mr. Shaw) quoted this afternoon was in support of that position, which I say is the prevailing parliamentary practice.

The resolution, however, goes on to say, "unless followed by a vote of lack of confidence." Clearly that is the parliamentary practice to-day. It could not be otherwise. If a government is defeated upon a measure

[Mr. A. K. Maclean.]

and declines to resign, there is only one method by which its opponents can force the issue, and that is by immediately moving a vote of want of confidence. That is what happened in the case which Mr. Balfour was discussing in 1905. Some hon. gentleman put on the order paper a notice of motion of want of confidence in the government, after its defeat. Mr. Balfour, however, anticipated that by moving the adjournment of the debate after he had made the statement from which I have just quoted; it was the same thing, of course. I again say that when a government meets with an adverse vote in parliament, if it does not of its own volition resign, if it does not itself regard the circumstances as of sufficient importance to justify its immediate resignation, and if the contrary view obtains among its opponents, it is the duty of those opposing the government immediately to move a vote of want of confidence. So, therefore, I say that this resolution is merely declaratory of what is the present sound parliamentary practice in this country and Great Britain. I further say that it would be a great mistake on our part to attempt to make an inflexible rule regarding such matters. Parliamentary practice, as every hon. gentleman knows, is a growth, a development, and I think we shall best meet the needs of our time and of the future by allowing the practice of our parliament to grow and develop in the future as it has in the past.

I agree with the hon. gentlemen who have enunciated the proposition that after all it is the government, the executive of this country that is best able to judge how it should interpret an adverse vote in parliament. But this resolution, in effect, says that if a government after an adverse vote secures a vote of confidence, it should not resign. That is not sound parliamentary practice. Mr. Campbell-Bannerman in that same debate took the position that because a government happens to have a parliamentary majority, it does not follow that it should retain office. It is quite obvious that selfish interests, personal interests, might induce members of parliament to disregard what was obviously a public opinion adverse to the government in office. But if this were the rigid and inflexible rule it would be very difficult to say whether an administration was acting improperly if, after having secured a vote of confidence from parliament, it should still retain office. Mr. Campbell-Bannerman replied to Mr. Balfour in the debate from which I have quoted, and discussing the precedents referred to by him, he said in part: