

with my hon. friend. That is not what I am here for. The time of this House is too valuable to be taken up in that way.

I wish again to urge that it is quite impossible for this government to function. If they do not take the proper course and get their house in order, they cannot carry on the affairs of government and are not entitled to be given the full power of a governmental administration.

Mr. FERNAND RINFRET (St. James): I must admit at the commencement of my remarks that I approach this problem with a good deal of diffidence. After listening for a couple of days to arguments presented by legal minds, you will understand, Mr. Speaker, that a layman such as myself cannot discuss a matter of this kind without first craving the indulgence of the House as to the manner in which he treats it. At the same time, I consider it the most momentous question that has been before us this session, and I will say more. I have sat in this House for seven sessions, and I have had the great honour of sitting in the press gallery for a number of sessions, and this is the first time in my experience in this House that a question of privilege has arisen in which it could be said that all the members of this House were collectively interested. It must be a very important question when Your Honour had to admit that the House had a collective interest in it, and that every individual member was permitted to protest against such a serious situation, which affects every one of us, and through us certainly affects the whole of the people of Canada whom we represent.

We see in this House a group of members endeavouring to administer the affairs of the government, when those hon. members have not taken the oath of office, nor have they been appointed regularly to their positions as acting ministers; and yet they claim that they have the right to conduct the business of the House, and the right to exact from us the voting of the public moneys, one of the most important functions that parliament is called upon to perform. What is the situation? Can we compare it with the situation in January last when we met in the first days of the session? My hon. friends would want us and the country to believe that they are in the same predicament as the government at that time was, and that the conditions are the same as those which obtained when we met in January. On that occasion there were on the other side of the House, sitting on the treasury benches, members of parliament who had been properly sworn in, who had every right to exercise the prerogatives of ministers of the crown, and who could properly and with dig-

[Mr. Elliott.]

nity conduct the business of the House and administer the affairs of the country; yet because their membership was not complete and there were certain vacant portfolios, my hon. friends opposite claimed that that government had no right to function and should be dismissed. We find every one of those members who on so many occasions protested against what was a perfectly constitutional position, rising now to defend their own position, which is perfectly indefensible, and taking objection to our attitude on this occasion during a couple of days, when for two full months they protested against the situation which previously obtained.

We all know the result of the last federal election. There were three main groups of members elected, one group having 116 members, the government having 101; but there was a sufficient number of independent members elected to swing the majority one way or the other. The Liberal government was then in power. What was the Prime Minister to do after that election? What was he to advise His Excellency? And what took place at the time? The then Prime Minister advised His Excellency that in his opinion the proper course was not that he should retain office, was not that he should be considered as being still in power, but merely that parliament should be called at a convenient moment and the representatives of the people allowed to decide which party should administer the affairs of the country. That is what took place, and although the ministry was perfectly and regularly in order; although the members of the government had been sworn in and had taken office according to the best principles of our constitution, out of respect for the rights of the people and of public opinion they carefully refrained from entering into any act of administration until parliament had been convened to decide that issue. Yet what stand was taken then by my hon. friends opposite, these ministers without portfolio, without oaths, or without anything else that could qualify them as ministers? They claimed that every right had been violated; they claimed that the House could not function because the Prime Minister was absent from it. They claimed that there was no *via media* through which we could communicate with His Excellency and His Excellency was advised.

That was the stand my hon. friends opposite took then. What are the facts to-day? We have but a shadow government, but a temporary government, on their own admission and also on the admission of everyone else. We have but a group of men who have not been properly sworn in, who have taken no oath and who have not been properly