

Business of the House

to preserve the rights of the people and to represent all the people in this country. I congratulate my right hon. friend upon becoming Prime Minister, but I say to him that his duty as the leader of this government, with the reshuffling of the cards that has taken place and the addition of certain members to the cabinet, is to demand at the first opportunity a vote of confidence, thus giving to hon. members the opportunity to determine the question once and for all.

I do not want to be over-critical—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Diefenbaker: I said over-critical; but I do say to my right hon. friend that in the last couple of days the government has shown an uncertainty, a lack of unity, and a failure to realize in what direction it is going except in the direction of an election. We have the right to know whether my right hon. friend and those associated with him have the confidence of this house. The people want the members of this parliament to have an opportunity to let the government know that its taxation policy is wrong, that its income tax is unjust. When I say this I speak for the farmers. The government says it has the confidence of the people. The farmers want an opportunity of having their lack of confidence in this government placed before this house, because that lack of confidence extends from one end of the country to the other.

My hon. leader says members of parliament are not mere digits to be pushed about, to be directed. Not since the end of the war was there a finer declaration of the principles of parliament and what it stands for than was contained in the words of my hon. leader this afternoon when he pointed out that, regardless of our position, we in this house have a responsibility which can be discharged only when each of us individually votes on the question of confidence or non-confidence in the government. I say to my right hon. friend that he should give the members of this house an opportunity of saying to him and to those associated with him—and I should think they would want it—whether this house has any confidence in them, before they proceed with notices of motions and resolutions calling for the expenditure of millions of dollars. On one occasion the right hon. member for Carleton expressed similar views.

Some hon. Members: Glengarry.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Glengarry has been represented so often by leaders of the opposition and prime ministers that it is easy to understand the mistake I just made. I say, sir, that the house should be given the opportunity of declaring whether or not it has confidence in this government. My right hon.

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

friend should not translate into the days of peace the conduct of parliament in the days of war, which all too often was contrary to the highest principles of constitutional government. We on this side intend to do our utmost to see that the invasions of parliamentary rights, which were pathways in the days of war, do not become permanent high-ways of peace.

Mr. Donald M. Fleming (Eglinton): Mr. Speaker, I am glad hon. members opposite are beginning to show some evidence of awakening from their normal lethargy, and I trust that this degree of awakening will extend also to the rights of this house which are placed in jeopardy by the motion now under debate. It would be a happy day indeed if we could see on the part of hon. members to your right, Mr. Speaker, some degree of concern for constitutional practices and the preservation of the rights and responsibilities of a free parliament.

Let no one underestimate the importance of the subject now under discussion. It is not a mere question of procedure for today or procedure for Monday. What is at issue here goes far deeper than that. It is procedure measured in terms of the duties and responsibilities of the executive branch of government to this house. Is the government supreme? If so, it matters little what happens here, and certainly the motion should pass. If, however, the house is supreme, then it is the house that should determine the order in which business shall be taken up; and above all things, before this government is permitted to lay any business before the house, it must establish, in the recognized constitutional manner, that it possesses the confidence of the house. Under conditions now obtaining in this house and this country the government has no right to lay before this chamber one item of government business calling for a decision without having established that it does possess the confidence of the house.

Consider exactly what it means if this motion is adopted. In the first place, it means the government has asserted that the time of this house must be rationed. It means that the government asserts its right to sidetrack the important debate on the address in favour of a measure it proposes to introduce. It means also, in effect, that the government does not owe a primary responsibility to the house. It is time this house, out of self-respect, out of a sense of responsibility for the maintenance of its constitutional position in the interests of freedom in this country, asserted its right to determine the kind of government that should occupy the seats of office; and that can be determined under present circumstances only by a vote in this house which