

Therefore, so far as the merits of the question are concerned, I could not for one moment entertain the idea of having this petition considered on its merits, and say that the hon. member who was here a moment ago—and who I think should be out of this House while we are discussing his case—should have the question decided in his favour or against him, and that we should establish the right of his constituency to be represented in this House by Mr. Joe or Mr. John or Mr. Dick because of the action of one deputy returning officer out of two hundred, more or less.

On the other hand I do not think we should lay down the principle that any Canadian citizen should be denied access to this House with a petition for the redress of any grievance he may consider he has, whether he is right or wrong. I will admit there is not much logic in that statement, but if we examine the development of parliamentary government we must admit that there are many nonsenses connected with it which we must tolerate and accept as being among the guarantees of the liberty of the subject. Therefore, Sir, I am prepared to vote for the reception of this petition, just as I am prepared to vote for throwing it out of the purview of this parliament, because at present there is a judicial tribunal constituted under the laws of Canada to consider all the circumstances of the election.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Oh, oh.

Mr. BOURASSA: Hon. gentlemen may laugh, but I have seen many cases in which both parties were interested, in which the same spirit evinced to-day has shown itself in one way or another. Precedents are in vogue; principles are laid down, but it is certain that either through a judicial tribunal or through this House, any party looks after its own interests. It is just as well to admit that fact frankly as to conceal it hypocritically. But there are a few principles of law and government stronger and more enduring than the small and passing interests of any party or group of men. One of such, to which I have adhered all my life and to which I will always be true, is the principle that any citizen has a right to appeal to the parliament of Canada for the redress of any grievance. I will never go back on that. I have imbibed it in my study of parliamentary institutions, and no concern of friendship or of personal or collective advantage will make me depart from it.

On the other hand, considering the political conditions of our time and country, I think parliament was right in deciding that all

matters connected with electoral contests should be left to the decision of tribunals made up of supposedly impartial judges. When it comes to the merits of the question at issue, therefore, I consider that we have no moral right to decide upon the proper representative for this or any other constituency which may find itself in similar circumstances, because we have charged tribunals in every province of Canada to deal with these matters. These tribunals exercise the authority of parliament, under an act of parliament, which authority was, as a matter of fact, exercised by the old parliaments of Canada and England for many years. When it was found that such abuses of power, of partisanship and of passing majorities were occurring, parliament unanimously decided to leave to impartial tribunals the decision in matters of law as well as in matters of fact connected with the election of members of parliament. Upon these two principles I have acted, thought and fought during the twenty-five years I have been in the active public life of my country, and to them I remain true to-day.

To sum up these somewhat rambling remarks, I stand for the reception of this petition, because I would not deny to any fellow-citizen the right to petition this parliament. On the other hand, since the whole of this question has been debated in this House—quite improperly, I think—I stand for its reference to the proper tribunal instituted by this parliament to deal with all matters of this kind.

Sir GEORGE PERLEY (Argenteuil): I have listened most carefully to the speeches in connection with this most important subject, Mr. Speaker, and I must say that in my opinion the debate has shown that the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) made a mistake in the way he brought this subject before the House.

Mr. MACDONALD (Antigonish): He did not bring it before the House.

Sir GEORGE PERLEY: He brought in a motion this afternoon.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I made no motion, but merely rose to a point of order to avoid discussion until the proper moment.

Sir GEORGE PERLEY: The Prime Minister made a mistake in raising this point of order at this time. My reason for that statement is that the speeches have nearly all been on the merits of the case, and it seems to me that the remarks of the Prime Minister should have been made before the committee,