

officer, Mr. O'Connor, has published such a list as we have before us to-day? I do not know much of Mr. O'Connor; I have had little to do with him; but I believe, so far as I have seen anything of him, that he is an able, fair and high-minded servant of the public. I do not believe that he would be capable of doing anything wrong in making a report of this kind. Yet he has made such a report as this, and what is the result? Since yesterday batches of Orders in Council have been brought down. I do not know how many there are of them, but I think upon investigation one will find that some seven pages of Orders in Council have been brought down. To-day some more have been brought down by the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Sir George Foster) and by the Minister of Marine and Fisheries (Mr. Ballantyne); but I do not know whether there was an Order in Council brought down, although I am told that last Friday or thereabouts an Order in Council was passed giving authority to the returning officer to disregard the letter of the law, and, simply upon receipt of telegraphic communication, to make a report as to the voting in Europe. If I am wrong in this, I can be corrected; but I believe the statement is true that such an Order in Council has been passed. What was the authority of the Government for passing such an Order in Council? Was it to be found within the four corners of the electoral law passed last session? No. I am at a loss to know upon what authority the Government took it upon themselves to pass such an Order in Council unless it be that once more they have resorted to the War Measures Act passed in 1914. The War Measures Act has already covered a multitude of sins, but there is a limit to the War Measures Act. Shall we be told seriously that it is in the power of the Governor in Council to pass an order to override the positive letter of a statute passed only last session? If it be so, it is only a further proof of what I said a moment ago, namely, that we sit here to-day by direct violation of the law of the land. But I may be told that the majority which sits behind the Government is so strong, notwithstanding all the actions of the Government, that the people have ratified everything—that is, the people of all the provinces, with the single exception of Quebec. The argument would be admitted if the appeal which was made to the electorate had been made to the solid electorate of the land under the statutory law of the country. If the appeal had been so made, the Government would have had behind them the public opinion of

[Sir Wilfrid Laurier.]

the country; but the appeal was not made to the solid electorate of the country; it was made to a special electorate specially manufactured for the purpose.

And under such circumstances it is idle to tell me that the same respect must attach to the verdict of the people as otherwise would have been accorded to it. And, Sir, if the appeal was not made to the general electorate of the country, there were reasons for it, reasons which were stated on the floor of the House last session by men who are now on the Treasury benches and by men who are not far from the Treasury benches, and those reasons tell the story why this special electorate was manufactured.

The question before the House last year was conscription. We heard it said on the floor of this House that conscription could not be submitted to the people by means of a referendum. Why? Because if the policy of conscription were submitted to the people by means of a referendum it would be rejected. You have heard that, Mr. Speaker, and the old members of this House remember it very well. The statement was made in so many words that members would not vote in this House for a referendum because the referendum would be defeated by the people. But, Sir, if a referendum was to be voted down by the people, the same policy might also be voted down in a general election. This thing has happened elsewhere. In Australia, the Government was supported at the general election although in favour of a policy of conscription, which policy had been voted down in a referendum. In this country, the Government would not submit to the possibility of being defeated on such a question. Hence, ways and means had to be found in order to make sure, and amply sure, that the Government would be supported and the policy enforced, no matter what the majority might think of the policy of conscription. Again, I say, that under those circumstances there cannot be the same respect for the Act as there otherwise would have been. The Act was conceived in iniquity and was carried out in worse iniquity still. I say it, and I say it soberly in the presence of the new members of the House and of the old, that the Act by which the elections were carried was such that there was no fair play for the Opposition. With partisan enumerators, partisan returning officers, and partisan deputy returning officers, the true electorate of the country was diminished almost to the vanishing point.