

Liberal party thought this system was the best. After all, the franchise is a question of education; it is a question which interests the people themselves directly, and we thought it better to leave it directly in the hands of the people through their provincial legislatures. We fought the Dominion Franchise Bill night and day. True, we did not defeat the Bill; but our tactics resulted in the embodiment of important amendments which otherwise we could not have obtained. We compelled Sir John MacDonald to accept many of our proposals. While the list is too long to name them all, let me say that by our attitude we obtained the right to appeal from the decisions of the revising officers, and that alone was worth all the fight we made for it.

There was obstruction in 1896, and what was the occasion of that? The Government of that day undertook to deal with the Manitoba school question, which had been for six long years before them, and had been debated and debated again. The Government did not dare to give a decision on the question until at last in 1896, in the dying days of a moribund parliament, it introduced a measure for the purpose of giving satisfaction to the minority; in which there was not enough to give justice to the minority, but in which there was enough and more than enough to irritate the majority and to make them feel that a grievous wrong had been perpetrated on them. We fought that measure and we obtained what we were asking for. We were asking that that measure should be referred to the people. It was in the dying days of a moribund parliament, and justice demanded that the people should pronounce upon it. If the resolution which my right hon. friend the Prime Minister has to-day introduced had been in existence then, Parliament would have been gagged, and that great wrong would have been inflicted not only on the people of one province but upon the whole people of the Dominion, with consequences which it would be impossible to estimate. These are some of the reasons which make me say that the position taken by the Prime Minister to-day, and which he says he is taking on behalf of parliamentary government, is opposed to the very essence of a fair system of parliamentary government.

There was obstruction again in 1908, and what was the occasion? The Government of which I was the head had introduced an election measure providing for voters' lists for British Columbia, Manitoba, and the unorganized portions of Ontario; and the minority, the Conservative party, took issue with us. I am bound to say that the appeal they made to us impressed me. I thought there was fairness in some of the points taken by the Opposition of the day, and the consequence was that, having consulted my colleagues, we offered a compromise, which was accepted. The obstruction on that occasion, as we know, came from the Conservative party. I found no fault with it; I never whined. I thought it consistent with my dignity as a man and as the head of the Government, feeling we might be to some extent in the wrong, to hold out the olive branch to the other side and to end the difficulty by compromise. After all, is not that better than closure?