

Parliament over matters connected with the franchise.

And further on in the same speech:

We adhere to the principle that this House, and the electors who return members to this House, ought not to be under the control, as regards the exercise of their franchise, of the officers of any other Government or Legislature whatever in the country.

So that, from these statements taken from the speech of Sir John Thompson in this House when he introduced a new measure in 1894, we may conclude, I think, that he had seen and appreciated the development that had been going on in Canada and perceived that a uniform system was the correct system, and that there was not much use in holding out on the old principles. He was prepared to surrender one of them at least. However, the Act did not go through, and until 1898 we had no other franchise Act in this country, but the Act of 1885.

We all know that the Liberal party was in power in 1908, when they brought in a Franchise Bill and declared it to be founded on the principle they had so long advocated in this House and in the country, namely, the true federal theory or principle. They made many declarations to that effect, but I purpose to show that in the course of time they practically abandoned that theory. I happened to be a member of that party on one occasion during the session of 1908, when we absolutely negatived such a principle. When Alexander Mackenzie came into power he passed a Franchise Act in 1874, and it was the first Franchise Act passed after Confederation, he absolutely adopted the provincial franchise, without any qualifications or any conditions. He absolutely adopted the provincial voters' lists, and likewise without qualifications or exceptions. When the Laurier administration passed their first Franchise Act in 1898, if my memory serves me rightly in regard to its sections, it said by section 5: "We will adopt the provincial voters' lists"; and by sections 6, 7, and 8, "We will vary them and make certain voters' lists to suit ourselves." Then by subsequent sections it was decided to hand over these lists when made to the control of an officer of this Government. We said by that Act: "Here they will stay, and here they will be printed, and we will control them." That was not the McKenzie Act of 1874 by any manner of means. Then by section 10 it was decided to adopt the provincial franchise, but by section 11 the Government said: "We will not adopt the provincial disqualifications." Practically they adopted it in so far as it suited them, and where it did not suit them

[Mr. Guthrie.]

they did not adopt it. However, I maintain that they had the absolute constitutional right to do so if they saw fit. This Parliament was not bound by any provincial Franchise Act and there was no custom in this country at that time that made it proper that we should accept or adopt provincial franchises. Certainly the Liberal Government did not adopt them. We passed amendment after amendment to the Act of 1898, but the decisive reasons for amendment arose in 1908. Mr. Speaker, I may be giving a little inside history, but I do not suppose it will hurt any one. I am not doing this by way of recrimination, nor yet by way of exultation, but solely for the purpose of justifying what the Liberal party did and what I supported them in doing in 1908. You remember, Sir, that there was a time when every provincial legislature in this country was controlled by a Liberal government; that was when the Act of 1898 was passed. From one end of the country to the other we had provincial Liberal governments. But there was a time when these administrations began to disappear one by one. Now, the election of 1900 was carried by the Liberal Government under the Election Act of 1898 practically unamended. Prior to 1904 we had only very slight amendments. But by 1904 one Richard McBride got into power in British Columbia, and a man named Roblin in Manitoba; and in January of 1905 one Sir James Whitney, obtained the reins of government in Ontario. That created rather an awkward situation at Ottawa. It made us look around to see what we could do. We had the constitutional right to legislate in regard to elections, and we were prepared to exercise it. We could survey the scene from the Atlantic to the Pacific to see where legislation or amendment was necessary. Looking out upon the province of Alberta, we did not foresee much difficulty. There lived in the land of Alberta a man named Sifton. I do not know whether the House has heard of this name, but I think the Liberal administration at Ottawa had every confidence that so long as a man by that name had control of the Government of Alberta no iniquity would be permitted in the voters' lists of that province.

Mr. W. H. WHITE: If the minister will pardon me I should like to correct him. No man named Sifton had charge of the Government of Alberta at the time of which he speaks.

Hon. Mr. GUTHRIE: I should have said Rutherford, and Sifton subsequently. Well,