

*Vacancy in Halifax County*

Halifax than I am. So I do not see why the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Isnor) has to defer to the opinions of his party officials in Ottawa as to whether weather conditions in his own home town are suitable for a by-election.

Mr. GRAYDON: Have you people over there ever been in Grey North?

Mr. MACKENZIE: We used to win it before you ever did.

Mr. GRAYDON: But we won it the last two times; that is the important point.

Mr. MACKENZIE: Where were you in Cartier?

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. The hon. member for Vancouver-Burrard has the floor.

Mr. MERRITT: The hon. member for Halifax went on to give two other reasons why it was not necessary for the people of Halifax to be properly represented in this house. For instance, he said:

As for the riding itself, it was one of the two dual member constituencies in Canada and was therefore represented at Ottawa. Mr. Isnor was willing to shoulder the added responsibility for an interim period.

I wonder if he realized that the interim period would be a minimum of seven months, and I wonder when the new constitutional procedure was introduced under which the surviving member for a dual member constituency could appoint himself to the vacant seat and consider that constituency properly represented in this house. Then the hon. member went on to give the people of Halifax this reassurance:

In the meantime, he said, his party still had a majority and was not afraid of a snap vote in the Commons turning out the government.

That is not a very good reason for not holding a by-election. Once more, as we have done so often from this side of the house, I should like to repeat something the cabinet seems to have forgotten. This parliament is not run for the benefit of the cabinet. We do not elect members here only to ensure that the government retains a slim majority; in fact the people of Canada sometimes elect members to reduce still further a slim majority, and there is every reason for us to suspect that this would be the result if the government decided to hold this by-election. Those are the only three reasons given by any responsible person in the government party, officials or otherwise, as to why we should not hold the Halifax by-election now. Sixty days from now it is hardly likely there will be winter conditions in Halifax. I know that even

[Mr. Merritt.]

though I have been there only once in my life, so that reason will not help the government any longer.

I should like to refer also to what was said by the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) when he was leader of the opposition, in 1920 and 1934. As reported at pages 29 and 30 of *Hansard* for March 1, 1920, speaking of the East Elgin by-election, he said:

So I say, Mr. Speaker, that having regard for parliamentary government in the matter of representation, if you look at the laws under which this parliament has been returned, for if you look at the way in which those laws have been administered, you will find that there has been a complete demoralization of the whole business of parliamentary representation as contrasted with what it should have been were we anxious to preserve intact our political institutions.

I agree with every word the right hon. gentleman said on that occasion. I have just quoted what was said by the hon. member for Halifax, which shows that he is committing the very sin against which his leader warned so long ago, namely, advocating a course which does not enhance our parliamentary institutions but rather tends to destroy them. My leader made reference to the actual time lags in connection with the by-elections we have had during the last six months. I do not think anyone in the house could have failed to notice that where the government thought they had a chance they jumped in very quickly, but where they thought they were likely to fail and where in fact they did fail they waited as long as possible before bringing on the by-election. In most cases, in the constituencies in which they failed, four to six months elapsed between the time the vacancy occurred and the time the election was held, while in the constituencies where they succeeded the time was never more than two months. That speaks for itself, and I should have thought the government would realize that this delay in itself is an admission that they are unlikely to hold the seat, so that the longer the delay, the worse it will be for them. Of course that is entirely up to the government, but here again I should like to quote what was said by the Prime Minister on January 29, 1934, as reported at page 18 of *Hansard* for that year:

The Prime Minister has power to say that representation should be given, but up to this time, the constituency of South Oxford has been denied that representation. So the evidence from every side goes to prove that not only has the government lost the confidence of the country but it has lost confidence in itself.

I would not be at all surprised if it turned out that the Prime Minister was a good prophet, and that in the case of Halifax he is