

returned to power, and which has ceased to be an issue, and the domestic problems which have arisen in this post-war period, and which present new and far-reaching considerations requiring immediate solution, that the present Parliament should not exhaust the period of time which the legal limit permits, but that the people should be entitled without further delay to an expression of their will at the polls.

The next contention of my right honourable friend will be that Parliament is supreme; that so long as the Government is in a position to command a majority in the House of Commons, it is all-powerful, and that its rights and powers to legislate cannot be curtailed in any particular.

Here, again, may I say that no one will question the supremacy of Parliament where Parliament is duly constituted. But once more, it is to the spirit of the constitution, not to the letter of the law, that, in existing circumstances, we must look for a fair and just interpretation of the rights and duties of Parliament.

The theory of the supremacy of Parliament, as it is understood in our day, is based upon the assumption that Parliament represents the will of the people as expressed through representation effected under a franchise which preserves the people in their full right of control over Parliament. Will my right hon. friend maintain that such can be said of the existing representation in this House of Commons? No one knows quite so well as my right hon. friend that the franchise under which the representation of the present Parliament was effected was anything but of that nature; that, as a matter of fact, it was a franchise so framed and brought into being and administered as to constitute the worst betrayal of the rights of the people which this country has ever known. Except that the nation was at war at the time, it would not have been tolerated even by those who were ready to profit by its unjust provisions, and their still more unjust manipulation at home and across the seas.

What was the ground upon which the late Sir Wilfrid, then leader of the Opposition, and the Liberals in Parliament consented to an extension of the term of Parliament for one year in 1916? It was that the rights of the people in the matter of their control over Parliament were in no particular being abridged. Sir Wilfrid made it very clear and distinct that he would not consent to an extension—and the Prime Minister had already said that he

would not attempt to get an extension unless Sir Wilfrid Laurier agreed to it—if the people were being robbed of their control over Parliament one way or the other.

Here are the late Sir Wilfrid's words as expressed at that time:

I would observe, first of all, that it is not proposed here to alter the principle of the constitution. It is not proposed to override the control which the people have over Parliament. It is simply proposed to suspend for the time being the operation of the constitution. If it were proposed to make away altogether with that principle which is embodied in the constitution, certainly I would oppose such an attempt with all my might. But no such thing is proposed. This measure simply proposes that the constitution shall be suspended for twelve months, at the expiration of which time it will resume its full force.

Well, how were the rights of the people in the matter of their control over Parliament secured at that time? One instrument was the then existing franchise, embodied in the Dominion Elections Act, 1898, under which the Government of the day, as well as its predecessors of an opposite political faith, had been returned to power. Is it conceivable that Sir Wilfrid Laurier and those who surrounded him at the time, would have agreed to the extension had they believed that during the period of that extension the people would have been robbed in so large measure of the provisions of a law specially framed to preserve them in their right of control over Parliament; that in its stead an Act would be placed on our statutes which would take away from thousands of electors whose approval of the extension was taken for granted on grounds of patriotism at the time it was made, the political rights of citizens which they then enjoyed; and give to other thousands of women, specially favoured, political rights not previously enjoyed and withheld from all other loyal and devoted women in the country.

When the Franchise Act as it existed at the time the extension of Parliament took place, was changed, the representative character of Parliament was doomed from the very outset, and the Parliament which was returned under the different election Acts, Acts framed for war purposes, cannot be said to represent the will of the people at the present time. I think my right hon. friend must admit that the franchise under which this Parliament was returned was a franchise framed only for war purposes. The two Acts under which this particular Parliament has come into being are the War-time Elections Act and the Military Voters' Act. Under the War-time Elec-

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]