

C 270114

CANADA AND THE WAR

called into session. I need not repeat how the opportunity was seized by the leaders in that Assembly to play a part in Ontario at the beginning of the New Year not unlike that which had been played by the leader of the government of another province during the old year. The utterances of the leaders themselves might well have been ignored, and, so far as I am concerned, they would have been ignored, if a formal resolution of the Ontario Legislature condemning the war effort of the government of Canada, had not been passed and become a part of the records of that Assembly.

Whatever might have been thought of tactics of the kind by those of us in Canada who have become all too familiar with them, the government could not be indifferent to the manner in which, as a consequence, Canada's war effort might come to be viewed in other lands. But for the undertaking not to seek a dissolution of Parliament before Members were once again called together, these events would have led me to ask His Excellency for an immediate dissolution, without awaiting the assembling of Members. In the circumstances, I took the earliest opportunity possible to acquaint Parliament with the decision to hold an immediate election. The government's intention was announced in the Speech from the Throne. At the earliest opportunity, I made on the floor of Parliament itself a statement of the reasons which made an immediate dissolution not only desirable but imperative.

Parliament Supreme Over Government But Not Over People.

I have been told that, in that procedure, I was not paying the respect due to Parliament; that, in season and out of season, I had stressed the supremacy of Parliament, and was now deserting the convictions and doctrines which I firmly held. It is perfectly true that I have never failed to stress

10

C 270115

CANADA AND THE WAR

the supremacy of Parliament. But it has been the supremacy of Parliament over the government that I have sought to preserve, not the supremacy of Parliament over the people. The Parliament just dissolved was elected in 1935; five sessions had already been held. The fact that anyone could assume that, in the circumstances mentioned, the supremacy of Parliament might mean depriving the people of their right to an early general election, shows how far some men have drifted in their thinking from any true conception of popular government, and how close they have come to sharing the mentality of dictators.

I had hoped there might have been an opportunity to present to Parliament, in its opening days, an account of the government's conduct of the war. It was obvious, however, to any unprejudiced observer that all that had been gained by the maintenance of parliamentary and national unity was, in the new session, about to be endangered by a bitter political controversy in Parliament. That controversy, once it had begun, would not, because of the time we had at our disposal, have been carried to any conclusion on the floor of the House of Commons. It could not have been ended before there was reason to expect a spring offensive in Europe. It would have received a disproportionate attention in the lands of our allies, and in the capital of our foes. It would, inevitably, have been followed by a dissolution under conditions that would not have been understood abroad. It would have had no finality, for it would have been followed by another campaign.

People in all lands understand that in a general election exaggerated statements will be made, and extreme political attitudes taken. Such allowances for the bitterness of party strife would, however, not have been made in the case of similar statements made on the floor of Parliament.

11