

Hon. gentlemen have spoken of decentralization in connection with the exercise of the suffrage; they said that it was desirable to give the provinces the right of determining the franchise on which the members of this House should be elected. They have also contended that the Act of 1885 interfered with provincial autonomy. When the Dominion Parliament adopted the present system under which members of this House are elected, it did not in the least interfere with the powers of the provincial legislatures. This House, on the contrary, under the British North America Act of 1867, enjoys the right and privilege of legislating on that matter. The Government of Canada has the right to superintend and control and regulate the preparation of the electoral lists on which the members of this House are elected; it has the unquestionable right of determining its own franchise and to make provisions as to who shall have a right to vote at the election of members of this House.

It is, therefore, out of question to controvert the right of this Parliament to enact a franchise of its own, and it cannot be said that when this legislation was adopted, the rights of the provinces were interfered with. I agree that the machinery of that law is too expensive and that it is necessary to find the means of removing that objectionable feature of that system.

I did not rise, Sir, in order to answer the hon. member for Maskinongé, who is not quite satisfied with this Bill, but only to give expression to my views on the measure introduced by the hon. Solicitor General, and before I resume my seat, let me say here that I cannot support this Bill, because in my opinion it is contrary to the dignity, to the prerogatives and even to the interests of the members of this House. By enacting such legislation, we would find ourselves at the mercy of the local legislatures, which is against the dignity of the Dominion Parliament.

The **MINISTER OF FINANCE** (Mr. Fielding). I do not rise for the purpose of discussing the general question, but simply to remove a misconception which seems to exist on the other side of the House with regard to the provincial law of Nova Scotia regulating the franchise, and which has been given expression to by at least three hon. members on the opposite side. The hon. leader of the Opposition thus spoke on this point, as reported in "Hansard," page 2339, Daily edition:

I need not at this moment go into the evidences that existed in regard to that point, further than to say that it was found that the right and power of the local legislatures to select a franchise, which was afterwards used by the Dominion, was in some cases certainly grossly abused; and so generally was that abuse pursued, that in the province of Nova Scotia the legislature absolutely passed a franchise Act after the general elections to have an effect

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upon the Dominion elections, although they never intended to use it and never did use it, for their own elections, and they repealed the Act before the general elections came on, showing they had absolutely the power to control the representation of this Parliament, by adopting a policy which they did not exercise themselves and never intended to exercise. One such illustration is sufficient to prove the absolute necessity of this Parliament, if it was going to occupy an independent position in the estimation of the country and the world adopting a franchise of its own. That led to the passage of the Act of 1885, &c.

I do not desire to contradict this statement, very general in its terms, and which may possibly refer to something I have not under my hand, but I would be obliged to the hon. gentleman, if he would intimate what Act of the Nova Scotia legislature he had in his mind, because I find that his statement has been made the basis of numerous remarks on the part of hon. gentlemen opposite. Would the hon. gentleman tell the House what particular Act it is to which he referred, or the time when that Act was passed?

Sir CHARLES TUPPER. At this moment I am not able to lay my hands on the Act, but it was an Act that was passed a long time ago. I have it in my recollection, and it has been cited over and over again on the floor of this House. I shall look it up, and give the hon. gentleman, at some future period, the precise information.

The **MINISTER OF FINANCE**. I have no recollection of any Act of the kind. I had the honour of being Prime Minister of that province for twelve years, and a member of its Government and legislature for fourteen years, and nothing of the kind ever occurred during that period. I have no recollection of any Act being passed during all these years by the Nova Scotia legislature which had any relation whatever to the Dominion franchise or the Dominion lists. I know of no Act passed during that period which would warrant the statement of the hon. gentleman. If something of the kind occurred in earlier years, it has escaped my memory, and if the hon. gentleman has any recollection of such an Act, of course, I do not presume to contradict him.

Sir CHARLES TUPPER. My recollection is, that the Act was introduced by Mr. Martin I. Wilkins.

The **MINISTER OF FINANCE**. That would carry us back a very long time ago, and would hardly be a justification for the Dominion Franchise Act, which was only passed in 1885. Another point made was, that this disfranchising Act of Nova Scotia was passed by a Liberal government. It may be no harm to remind hon. gentlemen that in 1871, when that Act was passed, parties in Nova Scotia were not divided on the lines of Liberal and Conservative. Before confederation, and for several years afterwards, the parties in Nova Scotia were