

known and defined and which has been placed before the people.

Now, Sir, will any one pretend that this Parliament to-day is representative in that sense? Let us go back to the franchise under which hon. members seated in this House to-day secured their return to Parliament. Let us examine the methods by which the representation of the people has been effected and ask ourselves the question whether that franchise was in accordance with the spirit of the constitution or was not in fact in direct violation of it. Take the War-time Elections Act—for it was under that Act that Parliament was elected. Consider the circumstances under which that measure was passed in this House.

Hon. gentlemen who were in the last Parliament will remember that Parliament had exhausted the period allotted to it by the constitution. The constitution of Canada lays it down that five years shall be the period of time for which a parliament shall sit, and the time of Parliament could not have been extended for a single day or a single hour beyond that period except by the consent of hon. members on this side of the House. Except by the unanimous resolution of both Houses of Parliament there would have been no amendment of the British North America Act extending the period of parliament for another year. If any hon. gentleman doubts that statement let him read the language of the Prime Minister (Sir Robert Borden) himself, at the time the matter was under discussion. The Prime Minister took care to point out that it would be impossible—and that he would not suggest it—to have an extension of the period of parliament except by the unanimous agreement of both Houses. What were the conditions under which unanimous agreement was arrived at? What was the condition on which the Rt. Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, who was leading the Liberal party in this House, consented to an extension? It was that Parliament in meeting another year would avoid controversial issues during the progress of the war. That consent was given on the highest grounds of patriotism and on the unequivocal understanding that in no way was Parliament parting with the right of the people to control, but rather that Parliament might take a position which throughout the country it was felt at the time was obviously desirable, namely that there should be as little in the way of party strife as was possible during the period of the war. Let me read to the

[Mr. King.]

House the words of Sir Wilfrid Laurier in giving consent to the extension and ask hon. members whether, hearing his words, they believe that the spirit of the Constitution was violated in the action that was subsequently taken by the administration. The words to which I refer may be found in Hansard in 1916, February 8, page 634. The matter had been fully discussed between the Rt. Hon. the leader of the Opposition and the Rt. Hon. the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister had given repeated assurances that the Government had no intention to do anything but simply “carry on” for the next year, as was necessary in the circumstances. Sir Wilfrid, having in mind the interests of the people, whose servant he was, and whose servant every hon. member of this House at that time was, said:

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.

Mr. Speaker, mark these words and ask yourself the question: Was the spirit of the constitution lived up to or not?

It is not proposed to override the control which the people have over parliament.

Sir, do you wonder that the leader of the Opposition of those days felt that he had been grossly deceived; felt that the House had been grossly deceived; felt that the people of the country had been grossly deceived, when, after an understanding of this nature, hon. gentlemen who occupied the treasury benches of that day undertook to change the whole franchise which was the means of entry of the people's representatives, at the people's will, into this House of Commons, and to place upon the statute books one of the most infernal pieces of legislation that have been enacted in this country? I have used a strong term but I do not think it a bit too strong. But I will not trust to my own language to express my conception of that legislation. Let me quote the language of one who until almost yesterday was a member of the present administration. My hon. friend from Halifax (Mr. A. K. Maclean) spoke during the debate upon that measure, and several other gentlemen who occupy the Treasury