

is now treading new and unbroken ground and its position is very difficult, very much more difficult than any previous Government in Canada has had to face. On the whole I am not prepared to say that it has not in almost all matters done fairly well. Therefore, although I intend to vote for the amendment, it is not with a view of showing any disregard to what the Government has done or of manifesting any particular dissatisfaction with it. Although I must admit that I am not satisfied with all that the Government has done, still dissatisfaction with its course will not be my reason for the vote I shall give on this question. I have always maintained that there should be no general election until our soldiers had returned and been a sufficient time in Canada to thoroughly grasp or to reasonably well understand the political situation. However, the war is over, our soldiers have returned, and I believe they have been back in this country a sufficient time to enable them to grasp the political situation if they are ever going to do so. We were told last evening—or at least the Minister of the Interior and the member for Frontenac (Mr. Edwards) seemed to argue—that the last general election was like any other general election: That there was the one big issue before us, as there is upon almost all other like occasions, but that in addition the general political issues as at other general elections were fought out. With that view I cannot for one moment agree. There was no contest in my own constituency, but I did my share in trying to support my hon. friend from Saltcoats (Mr. MacNutt) in his constituency.

I took the ground taken by him and which I heard taken everywhere. We threw aside everything else for the time being and we said: "This is a war election; we are supporting and are prepared to support the Government during the war and for any time thereafter necessary for demobilization."

While the hon. Minister of the Interior took the ground that he did last night, I want to read an extract from a speech he made September 6, 1917, when introducing the War-time Elections Act. It will be found at page 5415 of Hansard for that year. He said:

As the title would indicate, the scope of the Bill,—that is the War-time Elections Bill—so far as the period of its operation is concerned, is limited indeed. Its provisions are to operate only during the period of the present war and of demobilization thereafter.

Hon. Mr. W. L. MACKENZIE KING:
Hear, hear.

[Mr. Thomson.]

Mr. LEVI THOMSON: That was distinctly laid down in the introduction of the Bill. That is a little different from what we heard last night.

The necessity for the Bill arises out of the precipitation of an election in time of war. But for that becoming inevitable, there would be no justification for the measure;

There would have been no justification for the measure which was introduced but for the fact that we had to have an election in war time.

My hon. friend stated that the provisions of that Act were to operate only during that period. As a matter of fact, the provisions of the War-time Elections Act are still operating; that is, we represent our constituencies in this House by virtue of the elections held under that Act. I do not think for a moment that had that Act never been passed it would have made any material difference in the returns. Perhaps some of my hon. friends may not agree with me, but I believe the results would have been practically the same, and I am confident that there would be a much more satisfied feeling throughout the country had it never been introduced. You are aware what the hon. member for Frontenac said last evening on this subject. I have not his exact words, but I give you the gist of what he said as reported at page 5572 of Hansard of 1917:

That the pending election will be entirely different from any other election ever held in this country.

That is not what I heard from him last night; on the contrary, he said they were just the same. In 1917 he said clearly:

The only issue is the conduct of the war.

Those two hon. gentlemen were quite clear in 1917 as they were quite clear last night, but their utterances are remarkably different; in fact, there is not much resemblance between the utterances of two and a half years ago and those of last night. I believe they were right in the statements they made in regard to that measure, I believe they expressed their own intentions at that time; but their intentions are entirely different now, and I believe my hon. friends are wrong in the contradictory statements which they made last night.

In view of this, while, as I say, there are two sides to this as to every question, it seems to me that the only proper course for us to take is to support the amendment. I realize that there is something in what has been said in regard to re-distribution, and I would be very glad to see a re-distribution