

# DOMINION ELECTIONS ACT

## ENFRANCHISEMENT OF WOMEN OF ALIEN BIRTH

Mr. WILLIAM D. EULER (North Waterloo) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, it is desirable that subsection two of section twenty-nine of the Dominion Elections Act be struck from the Act in its entirety.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this resolution, in its purpose, is identical with an amendment to the Dominion Elections Act of 1920, offered by myself in the session of 1920 and again offered in the session of last year. The aim of the amendment, as of the resolution to-day was to prevent the disfranchisement of many thousands of Canadian citizens. On the former occasions, the amendments failed; the government of the day voted them down. And yet they did not fail entirely, because in the session of 1920, after we who are now on this side had pointed out the injustice in connection with the bill as drafted, the Government, recognizing that we were right in part at least, itself brought down an amendment which corrected the wrong in some degree. My resolution proposes to remove the injustice entirely. In 1921 I brought the matter up again in the House, and once more after a year's thought, and reflection, and meditation, on the part of the Government, the latter decided that full justice had not been done, and while my amendment was again voted down, a supporter of the Government brought in another amendment which was carried. I commented at the time on the fact that the then government seemed to be under the impression that justice ought to be done on the instalment plan, and declared my intention to come to Parliament again in the session of 1922 for the final instalment. I did not anticipate that I should present the amendment to a Liberal Government, because we had been assured by the right hon. gentleman who is now leader of the Opposition (Mr. Meighen), as well as by some of his supporters, that we should have no election in 1921. I am not at all disappointed in being able now to present my amendment to a Government which, I hope, will give it a more sympathetic reception than it obtained from those who are now sitting "angularly opposite".

This matter was debated at a very great length in the sessions of 1920 and 1921, and for that reason I do not propose to go into it fully again; but because many members of the present Parliament were not in this House in the previous Parlia-

ment, I shall as briefly as possible again review the facts in connection with my resolution, for their information, and for the purpose of refreshing the memories of those gentlemen who were members of the House when I brought the matter up before. In the session of 1920, the then Acting Solicitor-General, who is member for South Wellington in this House, (Mr. Guthrie), introduced what is known as the Dominion Elections Act. In introducing the bill he made what I think was conceded by all of us to be a most excellent speech. What appealed to us particularly was his statement that the franchise under that act would rest primarily and largely on the fact that men and women were British subjects, and that from that citizenship would flow the right to exercise the vote. That was in striking contrast with the provisions of the War-time Elections Act, in which only certain women were given the franchise; and I for one was pleased when I heard the minister of that day state that in future there should be no unfair discrimination as to the franchise of Canadian women. We assumed, therefore, that the franchise would be based on Canadian citizenship.

But when the printed bill was placed before the House we found in it a clause which entirely debarred thousands of Canadian citizens from the vote. As the bill then stood it was utterly impossible for probably 100,000 citizens of Canada to exercise the franchise, and it left many others under a heavy disability before they were in a position to vote. That fact was drawn to the attention of the Government, and while there was a disposition, I believe, on the part of some of our political friends to think that the clause had been inserted with the intention of depriving certain Canadian women of their franchise, I have not taken that attitude. At any rate, the Government declared, through the ex-Prime Minister, that this was an error on its part, and an amendment was introduced which partially remedied the evil.

Now, that clause of the act, in my opinion, still in practice, disfranchises many thousands of people. It is to be found in section 29. The section first recites the general qualifications of a voter. It states that the franchise rests with British subjects who are so by birth or naturalization. They must have resided in Canada for at least twelve months, and two months in the constituency in which they are to vote. These are the general provisions; and then the following clause appears, to which I