

rights and privileges of the people of Canada in the expression of their vote. The provision of the section of which I speak is:

(1) Every military elector shall be qualified and entitled to vote at a general election.

(2) If he can state the electoral district wherein he last continuously resided during at least.....months of the year immediately preceding his appointment, enlistment, enrolment or calling out on active service, or so particularly specify a place or places within an electoral district whereat during such period of time he so resided that such electoral district can therefrom be ascertained, he shall be deemed an elector of the electoral district so stated or to be ascertained, and his vote shall be applied thereto.

(3) If he cannot, because of non-residence or otherwise, so state or specify, he shall be deemed an elector of, and his vote shall be applied to, such electoral district as he may indicate.

I can only characterize such a provision as a deliberate outrage on the right of expression of opinion by the people of the country. It creates a possibility of the massing of an unknown or untold number of votes, strictly under law, in any constituency against any candidate. To place such a power in the hands of a government which has necessarily the whole direction and control of the operation of this measure is certainly an attack upon the rights of the people such as we have seldom seen, even at the hands of this Government.

Mr. E. M. MACDONALD: Mr. Speaker, it will be recalled that the Prime Minister some months ago, shortly after the opening of the session, declared most emphatically that it was not possible for the votes of the soldiers who are in France to be taken in a general election, and this statement was made in such a definite and positive manner, without any reservation at all, that I think it is due to the House that, before this Bill passes the second reading, the Prime Minister should say to the House what change has occurred in the meantime which enables the votes to be taken when apparently it was not possible to take them before.

Then again I think it is in order that the minister should inform us what understanding, if any, has been had with the British authorities in France as to the taking of the vote in the way proposed in the Bill. I assume that, in view of the fact that it has been clearly shown that the control and direction of overseas forces while on the soil of Great Britain is vested in the Canadian military authorities as represented by the overseas Minister of Militia, there can be no

[Mr. Oliver.]

doubt about the capacity of having these votes recorded in Great Britain or in any other part of the world, within the Empire, where they may be. But as regards France, the statement of the Prime Minister was so definite and positive on the subject that I think some explanation is due to the House and the public as to what change has taken place in the meantime. I quite agree with the hon. member for St. John that, while the men who are overseas have a right to the franchise of this country and should be given an opportunity of exercising that franchise, and while we should all endeavour in this House to prepare and put through a reasonable Bill which would be absolutely fair to all parties, ensuring the honesty of the vote and the certainty of its proper recording, it is a novel principle to say that a person who was not a resident of Canada, who had no interest whatever in our internal affairs or conditions, and no knowledge in fact of what is best for Canada as a whole, or for any part of it, merely because he had the franchise in some other part of the Empire, or in the United States, where, if he chose, he could exercise that franchise, should be entitled to vote as a Canadian soldier in a Canadian election. There are numerous cases of men who have never been in Canada, who have been transferred to Canadian forces. At one stage a large number of soldiers were transferred to the Canadian forces—men who had never been in Canada and who, I suppose, never expected to be here. The question as to whether or not such could exercise the franchise intelligently in regard to Canadian affairs is not arguable, leaving aside the question as to whether they could determine whether the individual candidate might or might not be a proper person to represent a constituency in Parliament. To say that a person who had never been in Canada should be permitted to determine as against the votes of the people of a certain locality, who live here, and whose interests are here, and who ought to be the persons to say who should represent them in Parliament, seems to me a very unreasonable proposition. There are other matters of detail in connection with the Bill, but, as the minister intimated that he would hear suggestions, I presume we might discuss very frankly in committee these points which are entirely apart from the principle that a soldier should have the right to exercise his franchise. I think we should hear from my hon. friend on that point.