

The seventh Parliament ran to within one day of the time limit. There was in power at that time a Tory administration like the present, which was doomed, and the members of which knew it. I suppose my right hon. friend and his colleagues, being similarly situated will regard this as the precedent they should follow and will endeavour if possible to hold out, not to the last day but one, but the very last, if that is at all possible. The Thirteenth Parliament, this present Parliament, has lasted for three years and three months; it has already lasted longer than some of the other Parliaments which have assembled in Canada. The Parliament that was dissolved in 1908 lasted for three years and eleven months; the Parliament that was dissolved in 1911 had lasted for only two years and ten months.

These figures afford ground for some interesting reflections. In the first place, it will be observed that this very Parliament has already had a longer existence than the Parliament which was dissolved on July 29, 1911. The late Right Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier had the same legal rights under the constitution as my Right Hon. friend. He had a much more powerful following in Parliament. His appreciation of the spirit of the British constitution and his sense of public duty and obligation to the electorate were, however, a little higher and keener than those of my right hon. friend. He recognized the rights of the people as superior to those afforded his Government under the constitution. He believed that Government should be carried on only with the consent of the governed. He dissolved Parliament to afford to the people their constitutional right of passing upon a great issue which was an issue other than that of the elections of 1908.

It will be further observed that the existing life of this Parliament, joined to that of its predecessor, already comes within less than three months of exhausting the time limit of two consecutive Parliaments enjoying the full length of term permitted by the constitution: also that, already, it is within less than a year and three months of the duration of the preceding three Parliaments of the Liberal Administration.

When it is recalled that since 1911 the people of this country have had no opportunity to pass upon distinctly Canadian issues, and that in the interval men who fought for their country overseas have been denied all privilege of even hearing these issues discussed at a general election,

that only a fraction of the women of the country have had a voice in government though all have since been admitted to the franchise; that hundreds of thousands of citizens were disfranchised in 1917; and that practically all young men between the ages of 21 and 31 have never yet had opportunity of recording their votes with respect to matters of vital domestic concern, the injustice to the electorate, of attempting further to prolong the life of this Parliament, must be apparent to all.

If we are to have regard for the spirit of the constitution, rather than the letter, it is perfectly clear that it is the rights of the people, with respect to important national issues, which is the determining factor in deciding the length of time for which a Parliament should sit—issues upon which a ministry has been returned to power, and new issues upon which the people have a right to be consulted, and to make their will known. Clearly, the spirit of the constitution demands at the present time, both as respects the issue upon which the Government of 1917 was returned to power, and which has ceased to be an issue, and the domestic problems which have arisen in this post-war period, and which present new and far-reaching considerations requiring immediate solution, that the present Parliament should not exhaust the period of time which the legal limit permits, but that the people should be entitled without further delay to an expression of their will at the polls.

The next contention of my right honourable friend will be that Parliament is supreme; that so long as the Government is in a position to command a majority in the House of Commons, it is all-powerful, and that its rights and powers to legislate cannot be curtailed in any particular.

Here, again, may I say that no one will question the supremacy of Parliament where Parliament is duly constituted. But once more, it is to the spirit of the constitution, not to the letter of the law, that, in existing circumstances, we must look for a fair and just interpretation of the rights and duties of Parliament.

The theory of the supremacy of Parliament, as it is understood in our day, is based upon the assumption that Parliament represents the will of the people as expressed through representation effected under a franchise which preserves the people in their full right of control over Parliament. Will my right hon. friend maintain that such can be said of the existing representation in this House of Commons?

No one knows quite so well as my right hon. friend that the franchise under which the representation of the present Parliament was effected was anything but of that nature; that, as a matter of fact, it was a franchise so framed and brought into being and administered as to constitute the worst betrayal of the rights of the people which this country has ever known. Except that the nation was at war at the time, it would not have been tolerated even by those who were ready to profit by its unjust provisions, and their still more unjust manipulation at home and across the seas.

What was the ground upon which the late Sir Wilfrid, then leader of the Opposition, and the Liberals in Parliament consented to an extension of the term of Parliament for one year in 1916? It was that the rights of the people in the matter of their control over Parliament were in no particular being abridged. Sir Wilfrid made it very clear and distinct that he would not consent to an extension—and the Prime Minister had already said that he would not attempt to get an extension unless Sir Wilfrid Laurier agreed to it—if the people were being robbed of their control over Parliament one way or the other.

Here are the late Sir Wilfrid's words as expressed at that time:

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.

Well, how were the rights of the people in the matter of their control over Parliament secured at that time? One instrument was the then existing franchise, embodied in the Dominion Elections Act, 1898, under which the Government of the day, as well as its predecessors of an opposite political faith, had been returned to power. Is it conceivable that Sir Wilfrid Laurier and those who surrounded him at the time, would have agreed to the extension had they believed that during the period of that extension the people would have been robbed in so large measure of the provisions of a law specially framed to preserve them in their right of control over Parliament; that in its stead an Act would be placed on our statutes which would take away

from thousands of electors whose approval of the extension was taken for granted on grounds of patriotism at the time it was made, the political rights of citizens which they then enjoyed; and give to other thousands of women, specially favoured, political rights not previously enjoyed and withheld from all other loyal and devoted women in the country.

When the Franchise Act as it existed at the time the extension of Parliament took place, was changed, the representative character of Parliament was doomed from the very outset, and the Parliament which was returned under the different election Acts, Acts framed for war purposes, cannot be said to represent the will of the people at the present time. I think my right hon. friend must admit that the franchise under which this Parliament was returned was a franchise framed only for war purposes. The two Acts under which this particular Parliament has come into being are the War-time Elections Act and the Military Voters' Act. Under the War-time Elections Act, rights were, as I have said, taken away from large numbers of people of this country; they were disfranchised; they lost their control of Parliament. Since that time they have been taxed without any representation in Parliament one way or the other, so that there has been a direct violation of the spirit of the constitution in that regard. I will not enlarge upon the different iniquities of that measure, but amongst the Government's own supporters of the day it would never have passed except for the fact that we were in the midst of a war at that time and the War-time Elections Act was excused as a war measure for war purposes only. How can my right hon. friend contend that a Parliament returned under a measure such as that can be of a representative character at the present time?

The Military Voters' Act was a measure passed by this Parliament for the purpose, not of defeating the will of the electorate, but of giving expression to it. My right hon. friend knows, perhaps more than anyone else in this House, that that Act was used to effect the representation in this particular Parliament. I shall spare the House a recital of that disgraceful chapter in our national history, whereby advantage was taken of the Military Voters' Act to coerce, in the matter of their political rights, thousands of the young men of this country who were serving their country and the cause of freedom overseas, and