

Mr. LEMIEUX: With the Canadian Northern?

Mr. CURRIE: Well.

Item stands.

Progress reported.

On motion of the Hon. Mr. Reid, the House adjourned at 12 o'clock midnight.

Thursday, September 6, 1917.

The House met at Three o'clock, the Speaker in the Chair.

THE WAR-TIME ELECTIONS ACT.

INTRODUCTION OF THE BILL BY HON. ARTHUR MEIGHEN.

Hon. ARTHUR MEIGHEN (Secretary of State) moved for leave to introduce Bill No. 133, intituled, "The War-time Elections Act."

He said: Mr. Speaker, this Bill is in the name of the Prime Minister; it is very much to be regretted that owing to his illness he will not be here to expound its provisions. As it is not probable that he will return to the House for some little time at least, I have been asked to make the necessary explanation in his place. The Bill is of such importance that I think a departure might well be made from the usual custom of Parliament, and that I might state very fully to the House not only the scope and purpose of the Bill, but also, in very brief terms, what we deem to be its justification.

As the title would indicate, the scope of the 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. That is to say, so far as the Bill amends the Dominion Elections Act, it amends it only to cover the now apparently certain event of an election during the war or before demobilization. After that the Bill ceases to affect the Dominion Elections Act; the general law becomes the same as it was before, the same as it is today. 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; therefore we must reflect first of all on the conditions that we find ourselves in, facing, as we do, an appeal to the electorate under the wholly unprecedented circumstances of this fearful war.

The first consideration that presents itself is the absence overseas of a large sec-

tion of our male population. Some 300,000 of the foremost and bravest of our sons are abroad, engaged in the strife, the turmoil, the ordeal of war. A Military Voters' Act has been passed, the purpose of which is legally to enable those men to exercise the franchise should there be a contest in their absence. In that Act machinery is provided that goes as far as Parliament can go to make it physically possible for these men to avail themselves of the electoral privilege. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that a large number of them—nobody can say how large; it may be proportionately large, and it may not be so large as we anticipate—will not be able, no matter what machinery we have provided, to exercise that franchise. There are as well many thousands who are enlisted overseas, not in the Canadian overseas forces, but in the British forces. These men, though under the Military Voters' Act, they have, I understand, been given the right to vote, will inevitably in the main find it impossible to exercise that right. There are, besides, many thousands more who before the war were reservists in Canada—and some who were not reservists—who are to-day fighting in Europe or other continents the same battle in which we are engaged, but who are doing so as members of the Allied armies. They have not the legal right to vote; if they had it, they could not possibly exercise the franchise. An election is to be held at a time when the most deserving, the bone, sinew and virility of our country, are only partially at least enabled to take part in the contest by way of voting. There are also thousands who have fallen in battle, whose voices are stilled. There are, besides these, some thousands who are prisoners of war. Their voices also are silent; under no imaginable circumstances could they take advantage of the Military Voters' Act.

Nor can we forget what is a more potent fact still; that each and all of the men overseas are stripped of the influence which under normal circumstances they could exert among their fellows in an election contest.

That personal force, that persuasive power, that electoral influence which, particularly appertaining to men of the nature of those who are overseas, is indeed a potent factor in any contest. That great factor is eliminated. On the contrary those at home—those who should be here and those at home who should not be here, are normally left in the full enjoyment of their electoral rights and