

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

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power. To the end of its days Mr. Meighen's administration continued to avail itself in times of peace of what was known as the War Measures Act, a general law which gave to the executive powers intended for use only in time of war and with this instrument sought to carry on government more or less different to the usual manner of the Commons.

weapon, the use of which he found wholly congenial, Mr. Meighen having usurped the powers of government and having no mandate whatever from the people of Canada, continued to carry on government with the aid of an overwhelming Tory majority in the Senate. Parliament, during his short term of office became thus to all intents and purposes merely a name. Important administration which should have been the subject of special legislation were regulated by Order-in-Council under general powers given by the War Measures Act. Monies which should have been appropriated by special vote of the Commons and used only for the specific purpose carefully defined, were taken out of general votes, such as the vote for demobilization, and used for defraying expenditures incurred in an endless variety of ways. All this has been changed. Indeed, it has since not infrequently been a rebuke to me at the hands of Mr. Meighen and his friends, that before bringing down our legislative proposals we seek to ascertain the will and the wish of the House of Commons; that instead of being, as our predecessors were, an autocratic executive, we have become what in fact every ministry should be, a Committee of Parliament, deriving its powers from and being responsible to the people through their elected representatives. Our changed attitude as a government towards the membership and personnel of the House of Commons has been the first of the circumstances which has won for us the confidence and support of the great majority of its numbers, most of whom have been quick to recog-

nize that the aim underlying all our policies regardless altogether of the political labels we may wear is to give force and effect to the will of the people as it finds expression in the elected Chamber.

The Problem of our National Finances.

While from a constitutional point of view the relation of this, our first problem underlay all the rest, the task was not so difficult. Its determination lay fortunately with the will to do, in other words entirely with ourselves. It was for us to seek to govern apart from the will of the House, or to seek out that will and give it the largest possible effect. Being Liberals at heart as well as in name we chose the latter course. The second problem was a much more difficult and knotty one. Indeed, it was as difficult a problem as any with which an administration could be confronted. That was the problem of our national finances.

The Capital Cost of the War Left as a Legacy of Debt.

When we took over the administration of affairs the public debt of Canada had reached the highest point in the history of the country. Nothing of like proportions had even been dreamed of let alone conceived, in the years immediately preceding. In the main, the increase, of course, was due to the war and not a little of it was due to the manner in which the war was financed which expenditures were incurred by the government which preceded ours. Are you aware that the whole of the capital cost of the war, that is to say, so far as Canada is concerned, was left by the preceding administration as a burden to be borne in its entirety by succeeding governments? That is the legacy we inherited, which has thwarted and which will continue to thwart at every turn. Let me explain more clearly what I mean. The total cost of the war—and in the cost of the war I include the cost of demobilization—expenditure on war and demobilization account from 1914 to 1920 was met by

W. L. Mackenzie King Papers

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