

tion, revision and final completion of voters' lists in a territory so vast and scattered as that contained in this broad country, in order to ensure the legal right to vote with the least possible degree of inconvenience to the voter, one is met with a situation of great complexity and great magnitude; and, furthermore, in endeavouring to formulate from the broadest principle down to the minutest detail a set of rules and regulations for the safe, sure and just conduct of a general election under such diverse circumstances for a population unevenly distributed over such a vast territory, at some points dense and at other points scattered, one is brought to a full realization of the imperfection of all human productions, be the effort of the individual or of the Government to achieve perfection ever so great and ever so honest.

This Bill is naturally bulky. It is designed, as I have said, to have universal operation without, or almost without, any special limitations or exceptions. When one considers the vastness of the proposal, the conclusion is rather forced upon one that while standards may be established and principles adopted, to set forth within the four corners of a measure the general scope and application of the proposal as settled and intended as a pronouncement of Government policy, yet in a matter of such great national importance and complexity and of such vital consequence, directly or indirectly, to the rights, the interests, the welfare and the convenience of the whole community,—under such circumstances the Government has a right to expect that the industry, the intelligence, and the most mature judgment of every hon. member shall be placed at its disposal in the consideration of this measure, so that, when we have reached the end of our labours, we may be able to present to the electors an election law which is the product of the combined experience and intelligence of every section of the House, and which hereafter may prove to be a model of its kind in fairness and simplicity.

It is in this spirit, Mr. Speaker, that the Government brings this Bill forward on motion for the second reading. I realize that the Bill as drafted, while it has been considered and revised, and reconsidered and again revised, and while in its present form it expresses the policy of the Government in regard to the matters set forth therein, yet in one respect I can assure the House that it bears no resemblance to the law of the Medes and Persians. The Government will not hesitate to carefully consider and, if necessary, adopt any amend-

[Mr. Guthrie.]

ment that may be offered from any quarter of the House which in the opinion of the House will render the Bill more safe, more sure and more convenient in its operation than it may be in its present form.

Now, Mr. Speaker, after this general statement as to the present position of our election law and as to the policy and attitude of the Government in regard to this Bill, may I be permitted to touch very briefly upon what one might call the history of our franchise legislation?

I desire to mention this matter chiefly on account of a paragraph which I read the other day in a Liberal newspaper, to the effect that Parliament and the country would insist upon the principle of the adoption of provincial franchises and provincial lists; and because I noticed upon the opening day of this session that my hon. friend the leader of the Opposition (Mr. Mackenzie King) dropped rather a plain intimation in the course of his remarks to the effect that the Opposition would expect the Government "to adopt provincial voters' lists in accordance with the spirit of our constitution."

Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps at this distance of time, after we have had over half a century of experience under the British North America Act,—which is the governing Act in regard both to Dominion and Provincial legislation,—it might be considered somewhat of a waste of time to attempt to justify the right of this Parliament to pass legislation for the creation of voters' lists and for the conduct of elections which pertain exclusively to the election of members to this Parliament. We all know that during the early years after Confederation a rather heated discussion was waged throughout Canada in regard to that very question.

It was very strongly and very ably urged in the early days that as Canada had been federated upon the theory and principle of a pure federation, as it was called, as opposed to a legislative union, the right was inherent in the provinces to fix the franchise and establish the voters' lists which should be used in the election of their representatives to the Federal Parliament. That question never really came before Parliament until that interesting period in our history about the year 1885, when the Conservative Administration, under the leadership of the late Sir John A. Macdonald, introduced into this House a Franchise Act based entirely upon the constitutional right of this Parliament to legislate in respect to the franchise, to voters' lists, and to rules