

doubt that later on, I think it was in 1898, under the Joint High Commission, the right hon. leader of the Government attempted to get some measure of reciprocity from the United States. But there is equally no doubt that when the Joint High Commission ceased to act, the right hon. gentleman expressly made his position clear, and that in the general election of 1900, in the election of 1904, and in the election of 1908, there was no mention whatever of reciprocity by either of the parties. As a member of the Government in the first two of those elections I should be credited at least with having a general idea of the policy of the Government of which I was a member, and I do not think there would be any individual in Canada more surprised than I if I had been told in either of those elections that it was a part of the policy of the Government to seek reciprocity.

NO MANDATE FROM THE PEOPLE.

If anything was clearer than another in connection with the policy of the two political parties in those three successive general elections, it was that neither of them made any claim to advocate the policy of reciprocal trade relations with the United States.

I agree with what has been said that the Government has no mandate to make these proposals. I do not mention that point because of a desire to fill up the cup or to aggravate the argument against my hon. friends, and I furthermore say that I think oppositions very often say what can hardly be supported on grounds of reason or law in opposition to what is done by Governments on the ground that they have no mandate. But I do not think the principles which often apply, apply in this case. We have not, it is true, a system of government by delegation. Our Governments are not elected to do specific things: that is not the nature of our constitution. We are elected under a very wide system of parliamentary responsibility, and great discretion is vested in the House of Commons and in the Government, which is the executive committee of the House of Commons, in connection with the transaction of new business, business which was not discussed when they were before the electors.

DISCRETION IS VESTED.

They may do a great many things that were not discussed when they were before the electors, but they may not constitutionally or properly do everything, and I venture to say that when the fiscal policy of a country has been thoroughly canvassed and settled, discussed, debated and approved in the year 1900, discussed, debated and approved in the year 1904, discussed, debated and approved in the year 1908, there is no constitutional warrant for the members of

the Government reversing that policy radically without any consultation and practically without the knowledge of the people. There is a discretion vested in the Government, there is a discretion vested in the House of Commons.

But, Mr. Chairman, it must be remembered that the discretion that is exercisable by those who occupy important positions under our form of government is not an arbitrary personal discretion, it is a constitutional discretion which must be exercised in accordance with principles of the constitution, and the constitutional rights of the people we represent.

REVERSING WHOLE POLICY.

I want to say, not for the purpose of making another point against my hon. friends, but I want to say that I do not believe, speaking from my own experience and from the experience of many men whom I have met in various walks of life and largely members of the Liberal party, I do not believe that in the recent history of Canada anything has happened which has given to the thinking people of Canada so painful and so sudden a shock as the sudden realization that four or five gentlemen who, by reason of their ability, their years of service and their high position in their party, are in control of the affairs of the dominant political party, can suddenly, of their own motion, without discussion, without debate, without the knowledge of the country, commit the country to a radical change of fiscal policy. That is not, I am bound to say, the doctrine of constitutional government as I was taught it in the Liberal party, and I do not think that there could possibly be a more dangerous innovation.

Sir, what we are asked to do in these resolutions is to reverse the fiscal policy of the Dominion of Canada. It is interesting to note, although there has been very little discussion of that point, what is the policy which we are asked to reverse and why we are asked to reverse it. The policy was adopted in 1897 after the election, which resulted in the right hon. the present leader of the Government (Sir Wilfrid Laurier) taking office. That tariff was described by its own friends, of whom I was and am one, as having first for its most outstanding feature the British preference; second, a readjustment of duties which largely reduced the duties upon articles commonly used by the farming community, and, third, a substantial reduction in the duties on the raw materials of manufacturers. Now, it may frankly be said that the system of protection was continued by that tariff; of that there can be no possible doubt, and it must further be said quite frankly and we can say it without disturbing ourselves particularly at this distance of time—that the tariff