

the Government in regard to railway building in this country. I beg to move the adjournment of the House.

Motion to adjourn negatived.

#### ELECTORAL FRANCHISE ACT.

House resumed adjourned debate on the proposed motion of Mr. Fitzpatrick for the second reading of Bill (No. 16) to repeal the Electoral Franchise Act and to further amend the Dominion Elections Act.

Mr. BOURASSA. (Translation.) Mr. Speaker, I do not pretend to be able to throw much new light on the question now under consideration, but I deem it my duty to make known to the House the sentiment prevailing in the province of Quebec with regard to the Franchise Act.

The Bill introduced by the hon. Solicitor General (Mr. Fitzpatrick) to repeal the Franchise Act of 1885 is admittedly the most popular measure that has ever been devised by the present Government. I may say that it is the most important legislation that has ever engaged the attention of Parliament, provided we do not consider the intrinsic value of a legislation only from the standpoint of the public expenditures involved. For one not to admit that a law amending the franchise is one of the most momentous measures, both from a political and a social standpoint, which a Parliament can debate and place on the Statute-book, would be ignoring the most essential mechanism of our parliamentary system and institutions. In fact, the right of suffrage is at the very basis of our parliamentary institutions, as it determines which is the class of citizens who will have the right of making their voice heard and their will obeyed, through their representatives, in the councils of the nation, and as it gives those who rank among the electors of the country a portion of the national sovereignty.

The precursors of the French revolution saw, or fancied they saw, in manhood suffrage a remedy for all the evils the old society was heir to, and a barrier against abuses and corruption of every description. I do not intend here and now to controvert the principles advanced by Rousseau and by his adepts of all shades, amongst whom we find to-day although, perhaps, they may not be aware of it, the hon. leader of the Opposition, and several other hon. gentlemen opposite. But facts are stubborn things, and the records of one hundred years have already given the lie to and shown the utter fallacy of the theories advocated by the philosophers of the eighteenth century, and they show that those brilliant Utopias, when actually applied, can only lead peoples to the failure of liberty. Now, those reformers of 1789 who were in earnest, found in the conditions of the times, a plea and even a ground in support of their system, which

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cannot be invoked in the present state of things.

Let us review, for one moment, the political and social position of France, at the end of the eighteenth century. What are the facts? Royalty was now holding an absolute sway; the public lands, wealth and offices were being monopolized by a few members of the nobility and by a few powerful officers, the privileges of whom increased in the inverse ratio of their charges; the lower nobility were being crushed down and impoverished for the benefit of the *grande*s of the court; the liberties of the communes and of the provinces, no longer the powerful bodies they were in the middle ages, were now being gradually and systematically taken away from them. It is easy to understand how right-minded men, anxious to better the condition of the people, as also ambitious men impatient to emerge from their obscurity and to sway in their turn, have sought in universal suffrage the surest means of drowning the privileged classes in the mass. Now, it had never occurred to some of them, while it was part of the scheme of others that, by conferring indiscriminately on all citizens the right of vote, without having prepared them beforehand to exercise the great powers of the franchise with which they were invested and without even being initiated into the knowledge of its prerogatives, they were merely handing over the government of the commonwealth into the hands of millions of sovereigns who no longer knew how to govern their own commune. Since then, the good sense of the nation has grown sounder and wild democracy itself has been baptized by the church, to use the expression of a celebrated monk of our times. But in the very cause of the danger, in popular suffrage itself, an antidote has been found against its extreme consequences. The majority of civilized nations in Europe, taught by the grievous crises attending the delivery of political liberty in France, have treaded with more prudence and caution in the footsteps of the French people. And now it may be said that, while England has taught the world the science of self-government, France has stirred up in the breasts of men the instinct of democratical liberty. May the true and noble tendencies of the two great nations that gave birth to our people, ever harmonize in this land of ours and be reflected in our laws and our institutions. Now, should our political and social position warrant us in sharing the blind optimism of the levelling philosophers of the eighteenth century, and in promulgating, in the matter of suffrage, absolute equality? Far from it. We are actually enjoying as large an amount of individual and corporative freedom as may be desirable, nor are there to be found in any portion of the country those abnormal agglomerations of *proletaires* crushed down by a few privileged citizens. On