

IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN INFORMATION.

MUST RETAIN SELF RESPECT.

But it must be remembered that the reason we adhere to a political party is that party in general represents the principles that we think out to be applied to the government of the country; and when one's party is led to apply principles which are of fundamental and far-reaching importance, affecting the whole national structure, and one feels that he cannot conscientiously adopt or follow those principles, then, Mr. Chairman, his party allegiance is necessarily dissolved, and if he desires to retain his own self-respect, it becomes absolutely necessary for him to decline to follow that of which he does not approve. That is the position in which I find myself to-day; and, however painful the process may be, I take the only course which I can take and retain my self-respect.

Getting away from that for a moment, let me say a word or two in regard to the conduct of the debate by the Government. I think the House has a little fault to find, justifiably, with my hon. friends who have charge of the debate for the Government. There has never been, since 1879, so important an alteration in the tariff as proposed in these resolutions; and when alterations of an extensive character are made, it has always been customary to make very thorough and complete inquiries of the most expert and detailed character. Otherwise it is impossible that those who are acting should really know what they are doing. When other countries undertake work of this kind, such inquiries are made. I wonder if the House is aware of the fact that when the last German revision of their tariff was made, 20,000 experts were employed for the purpose of collecting and collating information for the benefit of the Government and for the benefit of the parliamentary body which subsequently had to act upon their report.

FULL INFORMATION NEEDED.

In England the Board of Trade experts act. Here we have generally had a collection of detailed information which was available when the debate came on in the House, and which the ministers in charge gave for the benefit of the members of the House. Now, I think we should have had the information which is necessary for the discussion of this question given us by the Government. I think we should have had a full and clear statement as to the effects of this treaty upon our relations with the favoured nations. Members of the Opposition have, by questioning, elicited from our hon. friends a good deal of information; but I venture the opinion that there is not a single member of this House outside of the Government who now knows whether he is in possession of the whole information or not. Then,

we should have had, I think, some comparative statements of prices. This whole question relates to markets and to prices. It would have been a comparatively small matter for a body of experts employed by the Government to have got for us a comparative list of the prices of the principal commodities, in the United States, in Canada, and in the other countries concerned. But we have not received it.

DID NOT ARGUE MERITS.

Neither have we the information, unless we dig it out of the blue books for ourselves, a great labour, and sometimes with the liability to make mistakes, as we have had evidence once or twice in the debate already, with regard to the production of the various commodities by the countries concerned. Generally this has been done, and generally some member of the Government has made it his business properly to place before the House the case for the Government for the proposals that are made. My hon. friend the Minister of Finance never speaks except with that ability and cleverness which we all admire, and it was quite as much in evidence in the address that he gave us in introducing these resolutions as it ever was in this House. But I do not think my hon. friend would claim that in that address he undertook to argue the merits of these proposals in detail. Neither did my hon. friend the Minister of Customs. If the committee desires to know just what I mean by this criticism, let them look at the speech which the Finance Minister delivered on the Grand Trunk Pacific resolutions, or at the speeches which my hon. friend the Minister of Customs has often delivered in this House in the budget debates, and they will see the kind of a case which our hon. friends can make when they desire to do it and have the material. I would conclude that either our hon. friends in the Government have not made the investigation and do not possess the facts, or else that the facts do not bear out the contention which they put forward.

RECIPROCITY HAD BEEN ABANDONED.

Before going into this question of prices, I desire to say that I dissent altogether from the proposition that everybody in Canada has been in favour of reciprocity with the United States for the last forty years. I do not know of any warrant at all for the statement that both the parties, or that one of the parties, for the last forty years has been in favour of reciprocity. There can be no doubt that the Liberal party was in favour of reciprocity twenty years ago; there can be no doubt that in the platform of 1893 there was what might be called a look at reciprocity; and there can be no