

to March 29th, so that this discreditable law was never used, and stands as a monument to the character and policy of the present Government. It is mild language to say that the Act is a disgrace to the Statute book, is opposed to all the avowed principles and professions of the Liberal party, and is in itself sufficient cause to defeat the Government.

Another of the offences in constitution-tampering committed by these men, is in employing the referendum to dodge Government responsibility on the temperance question. A more striking example of political cowardice must be sought in vain. Ontario having power to alter its constitution, could adopt the referendum as a new feature in our system for obtaining the verdict of the electorate on measures passed by the Legislature. True, it would be a radical departure from the British model of responsible government we have, but Ontario could if it wished, discard the present system, and try another. Did the Ministers propose such a thing? No, they selected one question on which they proposed to shirk distinct pledges, and passed it on to the people to decide by means of a referendum. They invoked the referendum—just as they employed the Act prolonging the life of the House, to suit a particular contingency, and tide over a difficulty peculiar to the present Government, and in no respect justifying the evasion of the plain constitutional manner of proceeding. It is a natural sequence that although the referendum vote carried by a large majority nothing was ever done by the Government for the temperance people who had been deluded.

### **Governing Without a Majority**

Another violation of the intent of the constitution was the clinging to office after the general election with a majority of one (and sometimes none at all), according as seats were vacated or having become vacant were kept vacant to suit the exigencies. In Great Britain a Ministry so situated would not hold office a single hour, but by manipulating the date of bye-elections the Ross Government has been enabled to evade the consequences of being in a minority. The voting through of the Sault guarantee by members who were interested in the outcome of the measure, although their votes were openly challenged in the House, was another departure from sound British principle, and would not be tolerated in that country by any set of men. The Liberal party in Great Britain would not dream of proceeding in such a way during a political emergency.

Yet another unconstitutional proceeding was the delay in holding the bye-election in North Renfrew, where, by the death of the Liberal member in June, 1902, there existed a vacancy which the ministers were afraid they could not fill by a supporter of their own. In consequence the constituency was left without representation for 18 months. When the election was finally forced on by an agitation throughout the Province, the seat was lost to the Liberal party.

The most recent and not the least flagrant violation of the constitution was the summoning of the Legislature to prevent the trial of certain election petitions which had been adjourned. The fate of the Government hung upon these trials, and they could not be proceeded with during the sitting of the House. By preventing the trial from proceeding the Government were thus enabled to tide over the session of 1904, to press forward the important and unjustifiable legislation regarding the Sault, and to continue administering the affairs of the Province, although their very existence as a Government was gravely in doubt.