

Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen - Speech on the Address

February 15, 1921

(Revised Hansard p. 33).

The fact is both the spirit and the letter of the constitution of this country may be defined thus: The term is five years; the usual practice is four years; the Government is entitled to hold office during that term, provided it maintains the confidence of the representatives of the people as reflected in the parliament elected. In the history of this country or any other that I have any knowledge of the only departure from such a practice has been on occasions where some ~~overwhelmingly~~ overwhelmingly important issue has arisen, where a departure of policy of major consequence is proposed by the Administration, and when, as a result, it is desirable that the will of the people as to that departure be known.

If a big issue does arise, if it is clear-cut and unmistakable, if it goes to the very fundamentals of public policy, then there is justification for a government laying down the reins of office which the people have entrusted to them, even before the full maturity of its term. But until that does arise, and in that form, while a government maintains the confidence of Parliament, ~~it~~ it is recreant to its duty to depart from office and abandon the trust reposed in it and be stampeded by the voice of a party press or a party leader, whoever ~~he~~ he may be.