

much whether in the whole legislative history of what constitutes to-day the Dominion of Canada, there ever came up a question so important, so pregnant with consequences for the future, as the one which the House has now under consideration.'

Following on a proposal of this sort, which to my mind, implies on the part of the Canadian people the sacrifice of a right, of a franchise, we have had, and it seems as if we were going to have once more the spectacle of a mute majority, having only a silent impassability to oppose to the reasons and pleadings of their opponents.

Mr. Speaker, such an attitude is not dignified on the part of the Government. In a country like ours, a duty is incumbent on those who have the honour to be the representatives of the supreme authority and the depositories of power; it is not to allow of any lessening in their hands of the country's heritage and of the people's rights. It is because we are satisfied that this Bill interferes seriously with the very foundations of our political structure that we are anxious to discuss its purport, to acquaint the Canadian people with the circumstances which have prompted its introduction and point out the results which will inevitably follow its putting in force.

And if we propose, at the risk of apparently repeating the same things over and over, to set forth with a perseverance never to be discouraged the peremptory objections we have to the policy of the Government, it is with a view to drawing that serious matter to the painstaking attention of unbiased and thinking men; it is because we are anxious to show that there is a great national interest at stake, a great principle to assert.

We should certainly be guilty, we should be remiss in our duty as representatives of the country if we did not try to hold back the Government on the slope down which it is rolling with threatening results to us. And we say to the ministers: You are plunging Canada into an undertaking which is a menace to its honour, and possibly to its finances as well. You have no right to do so, you have received no mandate for that purpose, you are breaking all the pledges made to the electorate, and we will endeavour to check you by every means at our disposal under the law.

I do not intend going over once more the facts in connection with the Naval Bill. The beginnings of this legislation have been told and in detail on several occasions. The question cropped up for the first time on March 29, 1909. The whole House united in asserting that the time had come when Canada should make provision for a national navy to complete our system of defence, and carry out the views and inten-

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tions clearly expressed by the fathers of Confederation.

No dissentient voice was heard at the time demanding a contribution for the Imperial Navy. On the contrary the present Prime Minister stated at the time that a system of contribution would imply a danger, that the bonds uniting our country to the Empire might thereby be severed.

At the following session, in 1910, the then Government, in accordance with the unanimous resolution of the House, introduced the Bill providing for a Canadian naval service. But already the enthusiasm and unanimity of 1909 had vanished. The Conservative party had decided to make of that question a means of attaining power. The party divided itself into two wings, one under the command of the then leader of the Opposition, the other headed by the hon. member for Jacques-Cartier, whose absence at the present time is a source of regret to all hon. gentlemen in this House.

The hon. member for Jacques-Cartier in the summer of 1910, had been on the road to Damascus; the star of Mr. Bourassa had caused him to deviate. He strenuously opposed the Naval Bill as well as any proposal of a contribution by Canada towards the defence of the Empire, laying particular stress on the necessity of an appeal to the people.

His followers, the most devoted and most ardent of whom were the hon. members for L'Islet, Champlain and Terrebonne, registered their solemn protest against the passing of any such measure. Listen to the words uttered by my hon. friend from L'Islet (Mr. Paquet) page 4679 of Hansard, 1909-10:

This Bill is of the greatest moment from a financial standpoint and I cannot undertake to vote such large sums without first consulting my constituents. On the same grounds I am bound to refuse to acquiesce in the policy of the leader of the Conservative party. Without a mandate from the people, I should think I was failing in my duty and betraying the interests of my constituents in denying my cordial support to the policy advocated by the hon. member for Jacques-Cartier.

I am anxious to hear the hon. member after uttering such sentiments, explain the vote he gave last week. Further on he said, page 4691:

We become responsible for the foreign policy of England, without having a voice in her councils as to the framing of that policy. This legislation changes our relations with the mother country and imposes a policy which is baneful to our best interests. This doctrine of participating in the wars of the Empire is not a new doctrine; it is an Imperialistic doctrine advocated in the interest of England.