

Federal Elections March 26 Events Prior to Dissolution

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was not in session, by shortening the time in which there would be no parliament through an amendment to our Elections Act to reduce the period in which the country would be without a parliament to something like four weeks. I spoke to my honorable friend, the Leader of the Opposition about that prior to the special session of last year. I should have liked to introduce such a measure at that time, but I gathered from what he said to me and from what others have said, that the introduction of any measure to amend the Elections Act would be certain to create some suspicion in the minds of some honorable members and to provoke a kind of discussion that would not be advisable.

Mr. Manion: If the right honorable gentleman will permit me to interject, I should like him to take his own responsibility for his acts and not try to put it on other people.

Mr. Mackenzie King: I am going to take full responsibility, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Manion: Then take it.

Mr. Mackenzie King: I thought I had done my honorable friend a courtesy in mentioning that I had "talked" the matter over with him before the last session and that he had given me his view that it would be unwise to attempt a measure of that kind.

Mr. Manion: The right honorable gentleman told me that he was going to bring it in at this session of Parliament. I pointed out that such a period would not give a leader time to cross this country, and my right honorable friend's reply was, "Why should a leader cross this country?" So far as bringing in such a measure last session is concerned, there was no discussion.

Mr. Mackenzie King: Possibly there may be some misunderstanding in the mind of my honorable friend as to just what our conversation was. At any rate he had mentioned to me, as one of the reasons why it would not be advisable to try to shorten the period for the election, that the leader would wish to take seven weeks, at least, in discussing issues before the electorate in the country. However, my honorable friend has made quite clear his own point of view, which is that he should have a period of something like eight weeks, because that is about the time required under the Act, to address the electorate in a period of a general election.

If that is the case, it demands consideration at once of just when a dissolution should take place which will involve a campaign of something like eight weeks, and controversy on electoral matters throughout that period of time, at a time when the country is in a state of war and Europe is in the condition which we all know it to be in to-day.

But I am not going away from what I had wished to make clear to the house, which was that I had hoped there would be a feeling of sufficient confidence in the present administration, and an evidence of sufficient unity between all parts of this country to have enabled us, at a session at this time, to introduce a number of measures and then to go to the country a little later on. Until a week or two ago—indeed, until a week ago—it was my intention that this should be the procedure. But, as honorable members know, just a week ago to-day, or yesterday, the Premier of the largest Province in this country—

Miss MacPhail: A Liberal.

Mr. Mackenzie King:—introduced in the Ontario Legislature a resolution which was directed in no uncertain terms at the government of Canada now administering its affairs. The resolution was seconded by the Leader of the Conservative Opposition in the Ontario Legislature; and when it came to a vote, the resolution was supported by all of the ministers of the Ontario government who were present in the house at the time, by some of the members of the Liberal party in Ontario, and by all of the Conservative members in the Legislature. The resolution had been preceded by some discussion in the Legislature—a discussion which had taken place, I think, for a couple of days—stating in the manner in which this government had sought to administer the affairs of the country during this period of war. I think it would have paid little or no attention to that discussion had it been confined to the leader of the government of Ontario and to the leader of the opposition of Ontario; I would have allowed it to pass, and not made further mention of the matter other than to discuss the merits of any points which might have been raised in the discussion. However, when the Ontario Legislature adopted the resolution and it was given a permanent place on the records of the Legislature, quite a different situation presented itself to this government. May I read the resolution:

"That this house has heard with interest the reports made by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition of the result of their visit to Ottawa, to discuss war measures with the national government and this house hereby enforces the statements made by the two members in question and joins with them in regretting that the federal government at Ottawa has made so little effort to prosecute Canada's duty in the war in the vigorous

manner the people of Canada desire to see."

I should have thought that, at least until this house had met and expressed its views, those who have any sense of public duty would have been content to allow their political animosity not to be given too much expression. However, it is now evident that a political campaign has begun. That being so, I ask honorable members whether it is wise to try to carry on a political campaign in the country and a political campaign in this parliament—two campaigns at one and the same time—while war is going on at the front.

People the world over will understand, I believe, what may be said on the hustings, and they will be prepared to make some allowance for extreme statements made in the course of a political campaign. They can understand political opponents speaking there in a different way than where they have the responsibility which rests upon members in this house. It is a very different thing to have such discussions introduced into the debates in this house as is inevitable once a campaign has started in the country.

Apart from that, however, may I say there are very strong reasons—and they are set forth in the speech from the throne—why it is in the public interest, in the interest of the country, and in the interest of the allied powers, if we are to have an election, as it is now perfectly evident that we must have, we should have it just as soon as possible, and have it over the earliest moment.

But I would mention another circumstance. Had I thought that it would have been in the interest of the country so to do, I would have gone to the session in order that those charged with the great responsibility of government in war time might have a direct and unquestionable mandate from the electorate. I realized that, at that time, however, that it was necessary that Canada's war effort should be gotten under way as expeditiously as possible, that the country should be changed as speedily as possible from a peace-time to a war-time organization, that all necessary military and economic measures should be taken, without delay. Once those measures were under way it was clear the situation would be entirely different. Fortunately, in the months that have elapsed since the special session, the government has been able to organize Canada's war effort and to do so very effectively. We have brought into the public service, irrespective of the parties to which they belong, key men who, I believe, enjoy the confidence of the people generally. We have formed the necessary boards to deal with the different war activities. All the work of organization with respect to the army, the navy and the air force has been admirably initiated and developed. The first Canadian Division is now in Great Britain and the British Commonwealth Air Training Scheme is under way. We have just carried through, in the course of a day or two, our Canadian war loan, so that provision is made from that source for the financial needs of the country for the next considerable period of time. In connection with economic, financial and military affairs the basic work has been successfully planned and accomplished and the officials of the permanent service are at this moment in the best position—a better position than they are, ever likely to be at any other time—to carry out further development while a political campaign is in progress.

May I give what I regard as the strongest reason for having an immediate election. The one thing that has caused me more anxiety than anything else, with regard to the question of having a general election, is what may happen at the front while an election is taking place. I have had to face, and my colleagues have had to face, the probability of a great offensive on the western front taking place in the spring. I say that if it is possible for this country to have its general elections over before the great offensive takes place, or before the worst of the fighting in Europe takes place, then it is entirely in the public interest that this should be done. There will be very heavy problems to consider at that time, "once the war begins in earnest," as people are saying; there will be tremendous problems to consider, and the government that has to deal with those problems must have to no uncertain degree the confidence and the backing of the people of this country.

Now I hope honorable members will realize that what I am proposing at the moment is not to extend my time of office, or that of my colleagues, but solely to allow the people of this country to say, as they are entitled to say, who they wish to carry on their government during this very critical time. If I were seeking to extend the time of the present administration or to extend my own time as Leader of the Government of this Dominion, then I might be open to criticism from honorable gentlemen, opposite and from opponents in different parts of the country. But when I am prepared to entrust the political future and the political future of this administration—not merely prepared but anxious that it should be entrusted—to the voice of the people of this country, no

criticism can be raised against an intent of that kind.

My colleagues and I have realized as perhaps no others could possibly begin to realize how important it is that we should begin immediately to prepare for post-war problems. Parliament should be in a position to deal not merely with the immediate problems of war, but also with those problems which will arise as soon as the war is over, and even before. Measures such as the unemployment insurance legislation, should be passed as speedily as possible. I ask honorable members: Do they believe it is going to be possible to put through these measures except by a parliament that comes fresh from the people with a mandate to carry on the government and enact such necessary measures?

So may I say that if we have to carry the grave responsibility of office in war and at a time of war such as the present, then we must be fortified by the voice of this country, expressed in no uncertain terms: If there is any group of men more capable of carrying on Canada's war effort and likely to do so more effectively, then the people should have the right to entrust them with that great obligation. We propose to leave it to the people of Canada to say whom they wish to carry on the government of Canada in this period of world war.

Mr. Manion: I certainly wish to speak. In the first place, Mr. Speaker, I should like to distinctly pointed out that there is no particular courtesy in permitting me to speak, any more than there was courtesy in permitting the Prime Minister to speak on a motion which is not debatable. I should like that distinctly understood. I should like to point out also that the custom in the parliament of Canada has always been for the government to give a copy of the speech from the throne to the Leader of the Opposition an hour or so in advance, and up to the present session, that has always been done by this government. No such courtesy was extended to-day, not even up to the time when you, Mr. Speaker, had the copy of the speech in your hands. So far as I know, no copy has been in the hands of anyone in this house except the Prime Minister and the Speaker. I merely point this out, sir, because it is a courtesy which not only offends all the parliamentary traditions of this and the British house, but also shows an unfair decision on the part of the Prime Minister to try to catch everyone in this house without preparation, by the unprecedented step he has taken to-day. Until I went into the Senate Chamber I had absolutely no hint that there was any thought of anything like this. The Prime Minister called the Parliament of Canada together to-day in the usual way. He brought members here from the four corners of Canada apparently, so far as one can judge—we do not yet know the intention—to dissolve the house to-night. That is what I understand; that is the only conclusion I can draw although in one part of his speech the right honorable gentleman said we understood what was in his mind. Well, I doubt if when he spoke last session he thoroughly understood what was in his mind, because usually when the right honorable gentleman speaks as he did at that time he leaves himself an opportunity to back out one of the rear

doors or slip out a window. That was what he did then.

The only reason why I mention this particularly, sir, is that it is so unprecedented to treat an opposition in this manner. Not only does the right honorable gentleman suggest, in the speech from the throne at a supposedly regular session of parliament, that he is going to have an immediate election, but he prepares a political speech to be delivered here this afternoon and gives no one else an opportunity of preparing any remarks in advance. As the Prime Minister was speaking I had to sit here and outline a few points I desired to make as a result of this unprecedented act. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I ask you and honorable members of the house to bear with me if my remarks are rather disjointed.

It would have been so easy, once the right honorable gentleman and his government decided on a step like this, to follow the usual courteous practice of a Prime Minister and a government. However, I might say this is not the first time that the right honorable gentleman has shown this type of discourtesy towards me since I became Leader of the Opposition. I regret that very much, because may times in the past I have said that whatever faults the right honorable gentleman might have—and I suppose I have pointed out his faults as often as anyone—that was one fault he did not have; he was usually courteous in social life and elsewhere. But he has not shown any of that courtesy in this instance. What he has done from a political point of view is to carry on what I consider unscrupulous politics at this time, by calling for an immediate election without any hint to the people, in order to gag discussion in this house and throughout the country—at all events my prepared discussion—and to attempt to get a snap decision of the people of Canada on this great question.

Mr. Mackenzie King: Will my honorable friend allow me to say one word in regard to what he suggested was done on my part in not giving him a copy of the speech from the throne? He will realize that a speech from the throne containing a declaration of an immediate appeal to the country was a document which had to be kept very secret. Otherwise, as my honorable friend knows, the information would have been on the streets of this country before it was announced in parliament. That is the sole reason why copies of the speech were not given out before His Excellency read the speech.

Mr. Manion: The right honorable gentleman merely adds insult to injury. He suggests that if he had given me a copy of the speech I would have blathered it all over the streets. As a matter of fact I have no doubt at all that the press had copies of the speech before it was read in the Senate.

Mr. Mackenzie King: I will say that no one had a copy of the speech except His Excellency, the Governor General. Mr. Manion: Let me deal briefly with the right honorable gentleman's remarks about the Ontario situation. Apparently he blames the calling of the general election on a resolution passed in the Legislature of Ontario. I should like to ask him what right the Provincial Legislature of Ontario has to dictate to the people of this country when there shall

be an election. What right has it to dictate to the federal government of Canada? Should not this House—of Commons be the body which would make that decision?

The Prime Minister has stated that the resolution was moved by Mr. Hepburn and seconded by Col. Drew. According to the press it was moved by Mr. Hepburn and seconded by one of his ministers, the Hon. Mr. McQueen. Colonel George Drew did not second it. Anyway, no matter who moved or seconded it, this is the forum before which the right honorable gentleman has to answer—not the provincial forum in Ontario. If he really wanted to call an election because of that resolution, why did he not call it? Why call the House of Commons here to deal with that question?

I have a few words to say in regard to the government's present war effort which has been referred to in the speech from the throne, as well as by the Prime Minister in his remarks on the floor of the house this afternoon. In view of the fact that long before the war this gov-

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Head-Bacon Board



Hon. J. G. Taggart, Minister of Agriculture for Saskatchewan, has been appointed Chairman of the Bacon Service Board, with L. W. Pearsall, Chief Livestock Inspection and Grading Service, Ottawa, as Secretary-Manager of the Board.

R.C.A.F. Officers in England Studying R.A.F.



Pictured leaving London for a conference with Royal Air Force officials at an unnamed point in England are (from left) Group Captain C. M. McEwen, Air Commodore G. O. Johnson and Group Captain L. F. Stevenson of the R.C.A.F. who are at present in England studying training methods of the R.A.F.

New Great Seal of Canada



Canada has a new Great Seal. It is the fourth since Confederation. Upon the death of a reigning sovereign, a new seal is made, bearing the figure and name of the succeeding sovereign. The new one, RIGHT, authorized by royal warrant by His Majesty King George VI, bears the figure of the King, robed and crowned and seated upon his throne, with orb and scepter, with the arms of Canada and the inscription: GEORGIVS VI. D.G. MAG. BRIT. HIB. ET TERR. TRANS-MAR. QUAE. IN. DIR. SUNT. BRIT. REX. F.D. IND. IMP.

Each time after the seal has been used it is locked in its box and placed in a special compartment in a vault in the office of the under-secretary of state of Canada. It was used for the first time on Jan. 25, when Hon. Ernest Lapointe, acting



secretary of state, ABOVE, impressed the parchment appointing Dr. Henry Laureys, Montreal, High Commissioner for Canada, to the Union of South Africa.

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