

Mr. BORDEN (Halifax). If my memory serves me as far back as yesterday afternoon, I think the hon. Solicitor General wanted light from hon. gentlemen on this side who are interested in the working of the Act in Ontario. When the hon. member for East Simcoe (Mr. Bennett) was speaking, my hon. friend the Solicitor General stated frankly that he did not profess to understand the Ontario Act in the same way, for example, as he did the Quebec Act.

The SOLICITOR GENERAL. I would not profess for a moment to know as much about the Ontario law as a gentleman of the standing at the Ontario bar of the hon. member for West Simcoe.

Mr. BORDEN (Halifax). That is all my point. My learned and hon. friend the Solicitor General does not understand me, for a moment, as imputing the slightest fault to him or as imputing that he does not know everything about these provincial Acts that any one in his place would be expected to know. But what I suggest is that we are dealing with enactments of which we have but a mere summary in the very useful memorandum which the hon. gentleman has appended to this Bill, and we cannot get a very good idea of the provincial legislation from that. But the great demerit is not only that, but something further. We are not only invited to pass upon legislation which we do not understand, but to pass an Act providing that everything which these provincial legislatures shall enact in the future will be all right. My hon. friend will suggest to me, I suppose, that if the provincial legislatures alter their enactments from time to time, we have the power to correct those enactments so far as they are applicable to elections to this Parliament; and I concede that at once to be the case, but what does that amount to? It means simply that we have to keep a watch over the principal legislatures and check their enactments from time to time. That simply brings us back to the principle that we ought to deal with this matter ourselves. But even if we do adopt the provincial law, I would suggest that we should not go beyond saying that the provincial enactments, as they exist at present, and the bases on which the voters' lists are now made up in the different provinces, shall be the bases on which we shall proceed in the future. I do not see why we should pledge ourselves now to the wisdom of what any provincial legislature may pass in the future.

The SOLICITOR GENERAL. That question has been thoroughly threshed out in the discussion on the second reading, and we have adopted the principle that the basis of our franchise shall be the provincial franchise. I may, however, suggest to the hon. member for West York (Mr. Wallace), who has said that I was

Mr. BORDEN (Halifax).

rather in a humiliating position, that he must know that this is the lenten season and that to be in a humiliating position is not therefore out of place. I am not so sure, however, that when I ask, in a very humble way, I admit, for light from some of my legal friends from Ontario, it was a very bad thing after all; and if my hon. friend from Halifax, who tells us he knows nothing about this, will ask for light on any particular point on which he desires to be informed, I shall endeavour to explain it to him to the best of my ability.

Sir CHARLES HIBBERT TUPPER. I do not think the hon. Solicitor General appreciates the difficulty which has been mentioned. He attempts to meet it by saying that the principle of this Bill is the adoption of the provincial franchises, whether we understand them or not.

The SOLICITOR GENERAL. We are supposed to understand them.

Sir CHARLES HIBBERT TUPPER. That is, perhaps, a violent supposition. I think the hon. gentleman himself would have difficulty in recounting now, without reference to his memorandum, the different franchises in the different provinces. We have passed upon the principle of adopting the provincial franchises, and we now come to the very important question of the procedure, the machinery, by which this Bill can be carried out. The voters' lists come within the subject of procedure. The hon. gentleman is very kind to confess—and that is not the slightest reflection upon himself or upon any other hon. gentleman who would be in his position—that it is impossible for him to speak with assurance with regard to the working of this machinery, except as regards the province of Quebec, where, of course, his experience justifies him in taking a very strong stand and in giving the committee a great deal of useful information. But he went on to admit that he cannot speak with any assurance with regard to the working of these different laws in the other provinces. Therefore, we not only have to adopt the laws of the local legislatures with regard to the franchise, but, what is more dangerous, their different machinery for giving voters the opportunity of exercising their franchise. On that very important subject, the discussion this evening has made it apparent that we are groping in the dark. We are in the dark as to what constitutes a poll-book in the different provinces and how these lists are made up. Nothing to my mind could make more clear the mistake the Government are making, could show more clearly that it is a plunge in the dark, than the admission of the Solicitor General that he is unable to tell us how these different systems are worked and the procedure to be adopted under a system controllable by this House, we should be not