

VOTERS AND VOTING-POWER.

Only those owners who are in or entitled to the actual possession of lands within the given territorial limits and who are on the assessment roll are to vote, and any particular parcel of land is to be represented only once in any voting. Homesteaders and pre-emptors are to be allowed to vote if they are on the assessment roll and if they otherwise fulfil the conditions required (17 (2-a)). The Minister of Lands is to be entitled to be represented by proxy and to vote for such lands as are owned by the Crown in the right of the Province and as the Lieutenant-Governor in Council signifies his willingness to include in the limits of the corporation (17 (2-c)). Likewise the Dominion Government is to be entitled to represent any lands which it is willing to have included and taxed for its proportionate share of the cost of the project (17 (2-b)). Corporations are to be allowed to vote by representative, and absentee land-owners by proxy (17 (d-e)).

It will be seen from the above that the Bill aims at including within the limits of any public irrigation corporation every parcel of land that would be benefited by the water-supply system, and at giving every owner of such land, whether it be the Crown, a public or private corporation, or an absentee owner, a voice in the management of the affairs of such corporation. There should be no "skips" either of lands which can be supplied with advantage from the system or in the representation of such lands at elections.

Frequently Indian reserves lie in the very heart of a valley that could be served in an ideal manner with a common irrigation system. In other cases unoccupied lands owned by the Crown in the right of the Province should be included in the limits of any corporation that is formed. The Crown, in either case, will be benefited just as would any private individual owning similar lands, and it is aimed to provide, in the sections referred to above, that, with the consent of the Lieutenant-Governor in Council, such lands may be included in any public irrigation corporation, and, if so included, that the Minister of Lands may represent them, either in person or by proxy, in any elections of such corporation.

The usual qualification that voters must be British subjects is not included in the proposed Bill. Chinese, Japanese, or other Asiatics, and Indians are, however, excluded from voting (17). Several important considerations for this variation from the "Municipal Act" were urged by parties interested in irrigation enterprises in and around Vernon. The same reasons were given to support proxy-voting rather than the scheme of absentee-voting incorporated into last year's Bill.

Those reasons are, briefly, as follows: The questions to be decided in the voting are purely of an economic nature; they concern primarily the securing of a water-supply for certain lands; any one sufficiently interested to buy land should be allowed to have a voice upon questions relating to the delivery of water upon it. The Province needs to encourage the settlement of its agricultural lands. The men who are most willing to go upon the soil and develop it are often aliens. If we were to shut this class out from voting it would often leave the balance of power in the hands of a few owners of large tracts, which, as has been shown, is not a promising situation for the establishment of a public irrigation corporation.

Under the Bill the number of votes which any owner is to be entitled to cast will increase with the increased amount of land owned, but not in direct ratio (19). This arrangement protects both the large and the small owners, especially as 60 per cent. of the votes validly cast will be required to carry the election for the creation of the corporation. A similar provision to this is adopted in the "Water Act, 1905" (s. 96); the "Local Government Act, 1903" (s. 71), of the Province of Victoria, Australia; and in the "Water Act, 1912," of the Union of South Africa (ss. 53 and 85 (2)), only in the latter case the number of votes is allotted according to acreage instead of assessed valuation. The acreage basis was deemed inapplicable here owing to the desirability of including non-irrigable lands within the corporate limits and taxing them. This point is taken up more fully under the head of "Taxation for Revenue Purposes."