

After Recess.

Mr. MARTIN. Mr. Speaker, I shall not detain the House for any length of time with the few observations I have to make on this Bill. It is true that we had a somewhat similar measure before the House last session and some discussion upon it. It is also true that the Government made a great deal of noise about the great improvement they proposed to make in the Franchise Act, and we were led to believe we would have a Bill not exactly of the mongrel character of the measure now before the House. No doubt there were some serious objections to the old franchise law; it was perhaps cumbersome and expensive, but at the same time there was a great deal in that Act which commended itself to the better judgment of our people. It was a Bill that applied to the whole Dominion and gave a uniform franchise to all, in accordance with the principle laid down in the British North America Act. In that way, Sir, it was an Act worthy of a progressive country such as Canada is to-day. I do not think that the mongrel character of the franchise which will prevail under this Bill now submitted to us by the Government, will commend itself to the electors of this Dominion. We will have in this Parliament, one franchise for Quebec, another for Ontario, another for New Brunswick, and so on, and in the case of the province in which I have the honour to represent a constituency, I do not think this Bill is applicable at all. In the first place, we have not in the province of Prince Edward Island any system of registration. True, there was a system of registration in force in that province over twenty years ago, and according to section 5, subsection "c" of this Bill, if an election for the Dominion House were to be held there now, the lists that would be used would be the lists prepared over twenty years ago. Section 5, subsection "c" says:

(c.) The voters' lists shall be those prepared for the several polling divisions so established and which on the day next preceding the day fixed for the nomination of candidates for such Dominion election were in force or were last in force under the laws of that province for the purposes of provincial elections.

Now, if an election were held in Prince Edward Island under this Bill, as it stands, the lists to be used if they could be used at all would be lists that were prepared pre-vious to the year 1879, because the registration Act in Prince Edward Island was repealed, if my memory serves me right, in that year, and if there was a revision at all, it must have taken place in some year before 1879. I think that is a very serious oversight in the Bill, so far as it affects the province from which I have the honour to come. I do not know by what means the Government propose to overcome that difficulty. They may get

their friends in the local government of Prince Edward Island to introduce a Registration Act; but the province for its own purposes does very well without a Registration Act, and I do not think it would be fair for this House or this Government to impose upon that province the burden and expense of preparing a system of registration and voters' lists for the purpose of holding Dominion elections. That is one insuperable objection which will cause me to vote against this Bill. In place of being a step forward, I think it is a retrograde step. Under the old Franchise Act we had a uniform franchise from one end of the Dominion to the other; but now we adopt a system of franchises which may hold in a province to-day, but which may be changed entirely at the next session of the legislature; and the effect of the operation of the Bill will be that the candidates for this Parliament will not know exactly under what franchise they may have to run their election. I do not think that is a condition of things which hon. members of this House will support. I am willing to admit that there is very serious objection to the Franchise Act now in force, on account of its expensiveness. The expenses in connection with it come under three heads: First, the expense to the Dominion Government; second, the expense to the candidate; and third, the expense to the elector, as well as his trouble in getting his name put on the voters' list. How does this Bill propose to get rid of these expenses? The Bill does not propose to lessen the expense of the candidate in any way. He has to take the same care in revising the lists under the proposed Bill as he does under the law at present. Then, the expense of the Federal Government is to be thrown upon the local governments. If hon. gentlemen opposite propose to do that, I think they might very well have proceeded one step further. They might have said, While you are revising the voters' lists for the municipalities and for the province, you might as well add a third column for the Dominion list under a franchise adopted by this Parliament, which would have the great merit of uniformity. For instance, I understand that in Ontario there are two lists made up, one list for the municipalities, which is put in one column, and another list for the local legislature, which is put in another column. Why not, while you are about it, add a third column, containing the names of those who are qualified to vote in Dominion elections, under a uniform qualification all over the Dominion? It may require a little more machinery in the Bill than it has at present, but it is not an impossible task. This would give you uniformity. Perhaps the objection may be raised that the Federal Parliament cannot compel the local governments to perform that work; but under the provisions of this Bill the Federal Parliament compels the local government to do