

Contradictory interpretations have been given to the law, not in different parts of the province only, but in districts of the same county.. It has been the instrument of abuses, and the occasion of irregularities and uncertainty, and the mischief, if the law continue unchanged, will increase—not diminish.

The description, in the first section, of the qualification of the new electors, as those who “*shall have been assessed for and paid in the year next preceding such election,*” has given rise to infinite contrarieties.

The assessment and payment have been required to be both in the same year ; and the payments have been admitted, although made recently before the election.

The term “*the year next preceding,*” has been liable to many constructions—as twelve months before the election—or the year before that in which the election was holden—or the assessment year in each county. The latter meaning leading to additional embarrassments, from the differences between the assessment and the ordinary year. The reception of receipts, as evidence of qualification, has been, it is believed, the fruitful source of fraud—and certainly of irregularity and contrariety. This part of the law, from the abuses charged upon it, against which it seems impossible effectually to guard, should be repealed, whether other alterations may be made. In such event the franchise would depend alone on the assessment rolls ; and then would arise the dangers that were designed to be guarded against, by the introduction of the receipts. Individuals improperly or inadvertently left out of the assessment, or not returned as having paid, would be excluded from their franchise without redress. It would be necessary that the assessment rolls should be returned at some certain and fixed period, annually ; and be under such custody as would preclude alteration. Neither of these objects is of easy attainment. The existence of the two different assessments—the county and the poor rates, and in some counties of a semi-annual poor rate—makes it difficult to convert the assessment rolls conveniently into a franchise roll ; and this is augmented by the necessity of distributing the assessment rolls into new arrangements to correspond with the electoral districts.

But in addition to all other defects, are two of a radical character,—the liability of the appointment of assessors being made under party bias, or temporary local agitation for the purpose of affecting the assessment with a partial and party tendency ; and of the appointment of collectors under the same influences, and for the same object. That this danger is not imaginary, has already been made manifest ; and were the assessment returns to be conclusive, the evil would grow into great magnitude.

There are other details in the law that have led to embarrassment, but the committee deem it unnecessary to extend the particulars further.

Convinced of the necessity of amending the law of last year, the committee have deliberated on the changes that might be hoped satisfactorily to effect that object ; but they have not succeeded in devising amendments to this system which would not leave some of the mischiefs unredressed, and open occasion for new embarrassments : the committee therefore report, that they have been unable to frame any plan for reducing the rate-paying franchise into a simple, uniform and practically working system ; and they recommend *in lieu of that franchise*, that the house should substitute a franchise based on *universal suffrage*, qualified by residence. They would retain the real property qualification, because it is valued by a large body of the people ;—because also, it is useful to keep as unimpaired as possible, the distinction of freeholders, so well known in our provincial law, and to which classification a most numerous and respectable body of our people belong ;—and because the retention of this qualification for voters, will give greater freedom in applying the condition of residence to the more general franchise.

They recommend restraining the universal suffrage, by a residence of considerable duration in the respective counties or townships, previous to each election, to prevent the mischief that might result from an influx of new electors, having no fixed stake, local or provincial, and no interest in the county or township ; and by which the real sense of the constituency might be set aside.

The committee would also guard against the introduction, under the universal franchise,
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