

bad principles. The second cause is centralisation, and the great number of public officials whom the Government have under their control. These Government agents, and the candidates to public offices, prefer their personal interest to public interest, which causes the French electorate to lose that character of independence which is so necessary to give a sound judgment on the measures and policy of a Government. On that question I will take the liberty of quoting Pontalis, the author of a work on electoral laws and habits. This distinguished writer, after having studied the position in which France happens to be, and after having shown the difficulty of electing candidates who are hostile to the Government, gives the cause and reason of that state of things. He says:

"On this ground, the contest is so unequal and so perilous that at first sight it seems impossible to attempt it. The moment it is the Government who are openly fighting the electoral battles, they have in their hands a marvellous weapon which ensures victory to all the candidates in favor of whom they use it—it is the weapon of centralisation. In the face of universal suffrage, which is deprived of the most elementary means of education and deprived of training, to a certain extent, centralisation is the instrument which puts almost the whole country under the dependency of the Government. 'I have too much power. I suffer from it, and France is suffering from it with me,' said, one day, from the tribune, a great citizen, General Cavaignac, who felt preoccupied with the authority which he held in the Republic. Of course, from time to time we hear about decentralisation, but up to this day this decentralisation has only resulted in increasing, in each Department, the powers of the wardens to whom the Ministers confer a part of their powers; it has only resulted in tightening the centralisation of all the Commoas of the Empire, by fixing it in place, so as to render its power more irresistible."

And further on this author adds:

"At the first call made in favor of the Government candidate, whoever fills a public office, no matter how low nor how high his functions may be, no matter how foreign to political parties these functions may be, by their nature, has his post assigned to him to cut the way to all candidatures. The passing of all routes is thus stopped * * *"

Such is the unfortunate state of things which prevails in France. If the electorate has lost its independence, if the bad causes can always succeed, if the Conservative party is always beaten in France, of late years, at all the elections which have taken place, this is due, as that author says, to centralisation and to the fact that the municipal authorities have been deprived of the powers which they formerly had; it is because the powers of the commons have been concentrated into the hands of Government officers. Is it to be desired that this state of things should be sought to be established here? No, Mr. Chairman; and it seems to me that we ought to reflect seriously before inaugurating here a state of things which has produced such deplorable results in other countries. Unfortunately, in the country of which I have just spoken, the Conservative party, before 1879, did something towards establishing that policy of centralisation, and to-day they are reaping the fruits of what they have sown; they are going from defeat to defeat; and this result is the disastrous consequence of a policy which they themselves have tried to inaugurate. The Radicals of 1879 have continued that policy of centralisation, by depriving the Provinces of privileges which they had enjoyed until then. In 1800 they substituted to the directories of the Departments the wardens who are appointed by the Government. These corrupt men said: In order to maintain ourselves in power we must necessarily corrupt the people by the exercise of patronage; we must cover up the country with public officials. The great number of Government agents and candidates to public offices will deprive the electorate from its independent character, and then it will be easier for us to escape from a condemnation. Unfortunately, they have succeeded. Unfortunately, to-day, it does not seem possible that good principles may prevail again in that country, where the source of legislation has been defiled by the corruption of the electorate. And we know what impurities have run out of that source, especially since 1871. Mr. Chairman, I oppose this measure because I think it is a dangerous weapon in the hands of a

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Government. I will readily believe that the Ministers will not use that weapon, that they will not take advantage of the arbitrary powers which are put into their hands by this legislation; but the men who are to-day on the Treasury benches may be superseded, sooner or later, by men who might be fanatical and unjust, and it is then that we will see the disastrous consequences of the legislation which we are about to adopt. These men may use this weapon to tyrannise over our population, to paralyse public opinion and to prevent any resistance against abuse of powers. This is a state of things which we ought to avoid. These are misfortunes from which we should guard our country. And if there is one thing under constitutional rule which we should be anxious to keep, it is the independence of our electorate, which should be free from all undue influence on the part of the Government. I have heard several times here the Conservatives of Ontario denouncing the Mowat Government for having endeavored to establish administrative centralisation, this same kind of centralisation whose principle is consecrated in the measure we are now considering. The Mowat Government was denounced for having deprived the municipal authorities of the power of granting licenses to liquor dealers, and for having conferred that power on Government agents. It has been stated that great injustice had been the result, and that the Mowat Government used that power to promote the interest of their party. Well, if these men wish to be logical, since they condemn administrative centralisation in Ontario, they ought, for the same reason, to oppose, in this House, a measure which has the same defect. Besides, this centralisation was condemned by the First Minister himself in 1883, in connection with the license law, which enacts that the majority of the commissioners will be completely independent from any governmental influence. One is the warden of the county and the other is an officer of the Local Government. Well, Mr. Chairman, if it is dangerous to leave the granting of licenses in the hands of Government agents it is ten times more dangerous to charge them with the duty of preparing the voters' lists. As I said at the beginning of my speech, if we desire to see this Confederation of ours remain great and prosperous, we must remain faithful to the federative system; and it is by being faithful to this idea that we will avoid all causes of uneasiness and discontent. It seems to me that a part of the centralising character of this measure might have been removed from it, by having the voters' lists prepared by the secretary-treasurers of the municipalities. I may be told that the Dominion Government have no control over the municipal officers. Neither had they, in 1883, when they decided to appoint the wardens as commissioners, and left the granting of licenses in the hands of the latter. It is just, and it is in the interest of society, not to deprive the people, for that reason, from all control over the preparation of the voters' lists. The preparation of these lists should be left to the secretary-treasurers, and then the lists should be revised by a superior authority. If we take this course we will have a law about similar to that which exists in England, where the lists are prepared by officers who are absolutely independent of the Government. It is the officers of the local authorities who prepare these lists, and these lists are revised, not by Government agents, but by revisers who are appointed by judges. Besides, this is the principle which is followed by all countries whose electoral laws we have been studying, and it is that principle which I would like to have carried out in the legislation with which we are dealing to-day.

Mr. McINTYRE. Before the vote is taken on this section I wish to say a few words in reference to the manner in which it is going to affect the franchise in Prince Edward Island. As is well known to hon. members on both sides of this House, we have in Prince Edward Island two