

Act, cumbersome and expensive as it is, is yet capable of such amendment as will commend it to the House and to the country. It possessed the security of uniformity and impartiality, which this Bill does not. And, as to its impartiality, I challenge any hon. member, from Victoria to Yarmouth, in Nova Scotia, to say that the revising barrister, or the revising judge, did not act fairly and honestly from the first revision in 1886 down to the last. I am within the hearing of every member from my province in this House, and I challenge any one of them to contradict this statement. Then why disturb the judicial feature that our present revision possesses, and transfer and hand it over to parties in too many cases absolutely unacquainted with judicial procedure, and complete strangers to the most elementary rules of evidence? The Dominion Franchise Act had, therefore, the transcendent merits of uniformity and impartiality, and the cumbersome and expensive part of it could easily be removed by a well-considered amendment in this Parliament. I believe that, by adopting the amendment moved by my hon. friend (Mr. Powell), we will be moving in the direction of perfecting the present Dominion Act. Now, Sir, as to manhood suffrage. I am a strong believer in it, hedged in and safeguarded by a rigid and careful system of registration under the control of the federal authority. We have this principle admitted in the province of Ontario; we have it in the North-west Territories; we have it in Manitoba; we have it in New Brunswick; we have it in Prince Edward Island, practically, and in the remaining provinces of Nova Scotia and Quebec, the property qualification for voters is so low that it almost approaches manhood suffrage. We have all over the Dominion manhood suffrage practically, and, in my opinion, it would be well for this House to face the question now and at once. I believe, Sir, that manhood suffrage, carried out under a stringent and vigilant system of registration, would fill every want in this country. I believe, Sir, that we should have that registration under the directing eye of the Parliament of Canada, conducted before sworn officers of the federal Government, and if we had that, I submit, that such a system would commend itself to the Canadian people. I, therefore, Mr. Speaker, oppose this Bill, because it is contrary to the spirit of the British North America Act, I oppose it because this Parliament having once become seized of its own franchise, it is a retrograde step to go back to the provincial franchise, I oppose this Bill further, because it leads at once to the decentralization of the federal authority, and I believe, Sir, that in the federal authority alone should lie the right to regulate the franchise under which the members of the House of Commons of Canada should be elected. I oppose it because of its want of

Mr. GILLIES.

uniformity; I oppose it because it hands over to the provinces a power which this Parliament should exercise; I oppose it because it forces upon the provinces a burthen which we have no right to lay upon them; and I oppose it further upon the broad principle that every legislative body should have the framing of the rules and conditions under which persons seeking admission would be admitted to its councils and deliberations.

Mr. ROSS ROBERTSON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to occupy the time of the House for just a few minutes to state my position with regard to the amendment which has been proposed this evening. I have read it over very carefully, and have tried to bring my mind in line with its suggestions. I cannot, however, see that it provides for the elimination of our old-time friend the revising barrister. I am in full sympathy with the idea enunciated by my hon. friend from Westmoreland (Mr. Powell) in favour of a uniform federal franchise, if that idea can be worked out without the help of the revising barrister, and without incurring the enormous expense entailed upon the country and upon individual candidates by the present Franchise Act. I am not in love with the proposed Act brought down by the Government. In fact, I am Tory enough to think that the present Dominion law is about as close to universal suffrage as this country ever should go. The Liberals in Ontario have gone to the other extreme; but if they are satisfied, I do not think, in view of the recent elections in Ontario, that Conservatives have much cause to complain. The old Franchise Act, with its revising officers and its expensiveness, is bad for the country, and is of no good for either party. I do not like the Government's proposed Act; but bad as it is, it is better than the system proposed by the amendment, and unless it can be made clear to me that this amendment does not contemplate the retention of our old friend the revising officer, I shall have to vote against it.

Mr. DAVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise simply to call attention to a point that has not yet been brought before the House respecting the strong objection there is to having the basis of the franchise for this House fixed by the local bodies. The right hon. gentleman who leads the House, and who, with the hon. Solicitor General, made the two principal speeches that have been made in support of this Bill, made a very elaborate argument to show that because the states of the Union fixed the franchise for the House of Representatives, therefore the provinces of confederation of Canada should fix the franchise for this Parliament. My hon. friend from Westmoreland (Mr. Powell), however, pointed out what by some accident escaped the attention of the right hon. leader of the House. The right hon. leader of the House said: