

tion to abstract what consolation they may from the fact that while numerically in the minority in the chamber, they were in an actual majority in the country. I am not bringing up that question now with the idea of taking any consolation from the figures, nor do I make any complaint whatever in regard to the result. My only object in mentioning the matter now is to draw to the attention of the House as forcibly as I can the condition which actually exists in Canada to-day in respect to the representation in this chamber and to show, by the quotation of a few figures, that public opinion as it exists among the people of this country is not fairly reflected in this House to-day. I made that statement publicly about three weeks ago. It evidently received some notice from the editor of the Winnipeg Free Press, who sent me a newspaper containing an editorial upon the subject. His cure-all for the present situation, of course, is the adoption in this country of a system of proportional representation. Another suggestion is that the single transferable vote would cure the difficulty which now exists. I am not a believer in the system of proportional representation; in any country where it has been tried I think the system has proved a failure. I have heard discussions upon the question; I have read books and pamphlets dealing with it, and I am not convinced that any satisfactory change would result from the adoption of that system in Canada. It leads to all sorts of pre-election combinations, many of which are not very meritorious; it leads to great uncertainty in results, and likewise to great instability in the elected chambers in countries where proportional representation is in force. For these reasons and others I do not support that proposal, but I do submit that something must be done to remedy the inequality existing in Canada to-day.

What is the situation? From the report of the Chief Electoral Officer I take some figures, and from them I find that in the Dominion of Canada, at the general election of last September, straight Conservative candidates throughout Canada polled 1,476,000 odd votes, while straight Liberal candidates throughout Canada polled 1,361,000 odd votes. The Conservative candidates throughout Canada polled approximately 115,000 more votes than did the Liberal candidates, yet in this House the Conservative candidates have 91 representatives, while the Liberal candidates have 115 or 116. Although there was a popular majority of 115,000 in our favour, there is a difference in the representation in

this House of 24 or 25 seats, the minority having the largest representation. My friend who sent me the paper from Winnipeg remarked that the figures in western Canada are even more glaring. Straight Conservative candidates in the three prairie provinces polled 200,000 odd votes, and secured one representative in the person of the hon. member for West Calgary (Mr. Bennett). All other parties and all other combinations in the three prairie provinces polled 400,000 votes, in round figures, and secured 53 representatives. The disparity there is very glaring, and one must admit that public opinion as it exists in the three prairie provinces is not reflected in this chamber, although good democratic government insists that the will of the people be fairly represented. In the province of Quebec the figures show that 40 per cent of the electors voted for straight Conservative candidates, while our representation in this House amounts to six per cent. I know it can be urged on the other hand that if I take the figures for Nova Scotia and British Columbia, an inequality just as great will appear, but that is no answer to the charge I make. I maintain that this disparity should disappear, and it can be made to disappear if we adopt a reasonable system of representation by population. That is the principle upon which our forefathers acted when they established confederation. We have wandered far from that principle to-day, with the result that there are hon. members sitting on the government side of the House representing constituencies with a population of 80,000, and other hon. members sitting opposite representing rural constituencies containing less than 20,000 people. We have the same thing on this side of the House; a representative from the city of Toronto represents 60,000 odd people, while another from my own county of Wellington represents less than 20,000 people.

Why should there be a disparity as between the voter in urban and in rural districts? It should not exist; there is no reason for it to-day. Perhaps there was a reason in the early days, when means of communication were difficult in rural communities; when they had no telephones, no good roads, few railways, and slow mails, but that is all changed to-day. The average rural community now has means of communication equal to those of our urban centres. Therefore I say it is the duty of parliament to take notice of this situation. I believe it can be remedied and I believe it to be the duty of parliament to consider the situation with a view to finding that remedy.