

in favor of it. The hon. First Minister now proposes that there must be a petition signed by two-thirds to prevail against it. It is, therefore, necessary that the voice of every elector, resident or non-resident, in a division must be pronounced. The hon. Minister of Finance spoke of the necessity of something more than a bare majority; but we all know that a bare majority of the votes cast is a very different thing from the majority of all the electors on the roll, which is provided for here. In how many elections is an absolute majority polled? We know that the majorities given are only relative majorities; we know that an absolute majority of all the electors is a very decisive majority—a greater majority than you usually find in a Parliamentary contest.

Mr. WOOD (Brockville). This only applies to polling sub-divisions.

Mr. BLAKE. I am speaking of the general effect of a majority such as we understand it, as compared with a majority of all who can poll; and I say that if it is the case in an electoral division that you do not poll an absolute majority of all the voters on the roll, one side or the other, to demand that you must obtain two-thirds of the voters on the roll, in order to prevent the issue of a license, is to demand practically the abrogation of the clause.

Mr. WHITE (Cardwell). The hon. gentleman who has just sat down says that the effect of one-third of the electors being required to sign a petition for a license and two-thirds being required to prevent it, would be to require the whole electoral vote to express itself, in order to affect the Act. But, as I understand it, the petition of one-third is required for the first granting of the license; the vote of the two-thirds, or whatever fraction may be determined upon, is a continuous power, and may be exercised at any time afterwards, when, I understand, the petition of one-third is not required. It is only required in the first instance; and after that the Commissioners still have to make their enquiry. That being the case, it seems to me that it stands to reason that a majority of two-thirds should be required to prevent a license being renewed; and instead of this provision being an anomaly, it is the legitimate conclusion of the other provision. For my part, I have no hesitation in saying that I think the principle of the petition is an unfortunate one, although I know it may be necessary in some cases. One case occurred in the city of Montreal, in which a person sought for a license for a saloon in the residential part of the city, in the vicinity of most of the churches. The whole community in that neighborhood were against the granting of the license; but notwithstanding that, the Commissioners granted the license, and the place was looked upon as a decided nuisance in the neighborhood. The sense of the people was urged by an overwhelming majority, which was considerably more than two-thirds—aye, than three-fourths, or even five-sixths of the entire residents in that sub-division. It seems to me, therefore, that if a place is of such a character, that it fairly becomes a nuisance to a locality, there can be no difficulty whatever in obtaining the signatures of two-thirds. If we make it a mere majority, it will place a man who has a license at the mercy of any majority that may be obtained at any time for any reason. It has been stated that the argument has been used as to the effect of politics in connection with the matter. One of these objections—in fact the only objection, so far as I am concerned—to the Crooks Act in Ontario, is that it has been used in some localities for political objects, and has been administered in a political sense. It would be very unfortunate if, in passing a law which will, I think, free the licensing system altogether from that kind of political influence, we were to leave in a clause of this kind which required no preliminary proceedings, no notice to be given, no holding of a poll of any kind, nothing in

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fact which is equivalent to a reasonable and serious expression of opinion on the part of the majority, but which simply gives to any one person the power of going round a sub-division, and by arguments used behind the back of the man against whom the petition is urged, inducing the majority to sign it. Just imagine a contested election going on—take the very case we had last year—when we had the General Elections for this Parliament in June, and those for the Local Houses of Ontario, in the February following, when political feeling ran very high. In a polling sub-division where there was a majority of one side or the other in politics—it makes no difference which, in a matter of this kind—if a tavern keeper held political opinions opposed to those of the majority, he would be placed under this section, entirely at the mercy of that majority. The local canvasser could tell him: "If you do not vote with us, we will get a majority to petition against you." There is no process provided for any serious action of the people, no responsibility except the signing of a petition declaring a particular place as not required. It need not declare that no taverns are wanted in that particular sub-division, but simply that this particular house is not required, that this particular individual should not get a license. It would be most unfortunate if, in passing a measure, which, we hope, will have the effect of removing the licensing system from the political arena, we were to leave in a clause placing this question in a worse position than that in which it stands under the Crooks Act. A two-thirds majority is more difficult to obtain. That might, at least, be said to be a clear expression of the opinions of the people and would, at any rate, lessen very much, if not remove altogether, the objection I have just urged to the adoption of the system itself. Personally, I have no hesitation in saying I would prefer to see this local option made by the process of voting instead of by petition. I think the amendment of which the hon. member for Rouville has given notice would be infinitely better than the process of petitioning; but residing as I do, in Montreal, and knowing the particular difficulties that the west end of that city has labored under in connection with this matter, I am quite in favor of some plan, whatever that plan may be, whereby a decided majority—say two-thirds—of a particular locality could prevent the imposition down there of a tavern of any kind when the majority are opposed to having one in their midst. For that reason, I am in favor of some process of local option being adopted by which a two-thirds majority would be required, if the amendment of the hon. member for Rouville be not accepted.

Mr. WOOD (Brockville). I am in favor of prohibition upon a large scale; but I believe the result of all prohibitory legislation, when confined to small localities, has invariably been followed by bad results. The effect of this section would be that in a sub-division, where the temperance sentiment was very strong, the best hotel in the place—a hotel erected at very large expense for the accommodation of the public—would be closed; while in other adjoining sub-divisions, in which the temperance sentiment did not prevail to the same extent, smaller hotels which, perhaps, ought to be closed, would be allowed to continue their business and not receive the benefit of this section. For that reason I am opposed to the clause, although believing, as I said before, in prohibition as applied to countries.

Mr. AUGER. I do not understand the logic of hon. gentlemen opposite. They are opposed to this system of petitioning against the sale of liquor. They are willing to give the man who wants to sell liquor the right to petition and to make his petition valid on his obtaining only a third of the voters to sign it, while they are opposed to allowing a majority of the temperance men among the electors of a division to make their petition good, on obtaining the sup-