

the provision in 1901 and which had been passed seven years before to have such religious instruction as they think best. If they do not want religious instruction, they are bound to have it. What is the character of the religious instruction they may have? That is a question altogether for themselves to decide. If they are Roman Catholics, I apprehend that the religious instruction will be according to the Roman Catholic religion. If they are Protestants the religious instruction will be according to the Protestant creed, and if they are Roman Catholics, it will be according to the Roman Catholic creed; or both classes can dispense with religious education altogether. There is a further provision to the effect that in these schools, if the parents desire that their children should have no religious instruction, then they can withdraw them during the half hour devoted to such instruction. We can agree upon this point, I am sure, whether we sit on one side of the House or the other, whether we approve or disapprove of separate schools, we can at all events agree that it is not a bad thing in itself that opportunity should be given for religious instruction at a certain hour, if the parents so desire it. This is now the law in the Northwest Territories, it has been the law for nearly fourteen years, or more; I venture to think it has been the law since 1885, and this is the law which it is now sought to perpetuate by this amendment. My hon. friend from East Grey (Mr. Sproule) stated a moment ago: This is another concession, you are giving something more to the Roman Catholic minority than they have at present. The hon. gentleman is mistaken. If this amendment is passed the minority will be in the same position as it was, the majority also will have what they now have, and have had for the last twenty years.

Mr. SPROULE. I said that according to my reading of that ordinance that was the real condition that existed in the Territories now, and would be in the future, and I was corrected by an hon. gentleman on the other side who said that this amended clause 16 did away with that right.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. Who made that answer to my hon. friend?

Mr. SPROULE. I think it was the Minister of Justice, but I would not be sure.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. Now, Sir, the reason of this amended clause is simply this: It is the result of insufficient drafting of the second clause. I want to be clear upon that point, I do not want to sail under false colours, the position we take should be well understood; let it be well understood by friends and foes. We have taken this position, whether wrong or right, I believe it is right, at all events, I am deeply convinced it is right, though we have taken it against the judgment of the hon. member

for Labelle (Mr. Bourassa), we have taken it against the judgment of the hon. member for Beauharnois (Mr. Bergeron), we have taken it against the judgment of a good many people in this country. We think it is our duty to perpetuate the system of schools which exists to-day in the Northwest Territories. Let me call attention to what would be the result of this amendment. The clause as it now stands reads:

Nothing in any such law shall prejudicially affect any right or privilege in respect of separate schools which any class of persons have at the date of the passing of this Act.

That is to say, the right of the minority to have separate schools, that feature is perpetuated in this amendment. But the right of the majority or of the minority which exists to-day under the ordinance of 1901, chapters 29 and 30, of having religious instruction of half an hour a day, is not perpetuated. But under the amendment which has been moved by my hon. friend from Saskatchewan the new clause will read as follows:

Nothing in any such law shall prejudicially affect any right or privilege with respect to separate schools which any class of persons have at the date of the passing of this Act, under the terms of chapters 29 and 30 of the ordinances of the Northwest Territories passed in 1901, or with respect to religious instruction in any public or separate school as provided for by the said ordinances.

That is to say, that by this amendment the minority will have the right, if they are not satisfied with the management of their schools, to have separate schools of their own, and the majority will have the right also; under all circumstances, to this half hour of religious instruction. Now let me put a concrete case before the House. Here is a school district, for instance, which is composed of Protestants, they have their own religious instruction. There are amongst them five or six Roman Catholics. While the Protestants have their religious instructions, the Catholics want their religious instruction also, and whether they shall have it is at the option of the school trustees. If they do not get satisfaction from the school trustees, they can secede and organize a separate school. Let us take a concrete case. Here is a school district where there is a majority of Roman Catholics. There are a few Protestant families, and they all go to the same school. If the religious instruction which is given by the Roman Catholic trustees is not satisfactory to the Protestants, they can organize a separate school. Now we know that whatever may be the conscientious scruples we have upon these matters, at all events my co-religionists have them, we know that in these new territories there are many districts where there are schools in which pupils of all denominations attend, and somehow they manage to get along fairly well. Sometimes it happens that they do not,