

the province of Alberta.—Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

On section 12—distribution of seats.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. The wording of this clause would seem to indicate that in its original drafting it was proposed to entrust the delimitation of these ridings or divisions to some other body than parliament—some independent body. I call the attention of the right hon. gentleman to the wording of the section. Those words have no office or meaning in the section as it stands at present, but they would have an office and meaning if they were part of a section which entrusted delimitation of the ridings to some independent body, as seems to have been contemplated in the first instance. I am not concerned at the moment with the question which has been considerably debated in this committee, namely, as to whether or not there is discrimination between the northern part of the province of Alberta and the southern portion. The first question to be considered is the question whether or not this parliament has before it the necessary material for the purpose of making that division. The right hon. gentleman and his colleagues in 1899, as has already been pointed out by hon. gentlemen on this side, thought that where certain counties in Ontario had to be divided into a certain number of ridings, the reasonable and proper course would be to entrust the division to an independent commission. The provisions of the Bill, which was brought down to the House at that time, have already been referred to, but it is not out of place perhaps that I should refer to them again. The Bill which was introduced into this House, by the First Minister, in 1899, provided that the counties of Brant, Elgin, Kent, Lambton, North Ontario, Oxford, Perth, should each be divided into two electoral districts each of which shall return one member and the counties of Huron, Bruce, Grey, Middlesex, Simcoe, Wellington and York should each be divided into three electoral districts, each of which shall return one member, and the second section was as follows:—

Where, under the foregoing provisions, any county or city is to be divided into more than one electoral district, such division shall be made by a board of commissioners, consisting of at least three persons, being judges of the Supreme Court of Judicature for Ontario, who, for that purpose, shall be appointed by letters patent under the great seal, and who shall divide each such county or city into the number of electoral districts which this Act assigned to it.

Very cogent reasons and arguments were adduced by the right hon. gentleman and his colleagues and supporters on that occasion in favour of the principle thus embodied in that Bill; and if that principle was a good one to be acted upon at that time, there is tenfold more reason for adhering

to that policy and principle in the present circumstances. I am not quite sure, after having read the debate upon this clause with some considerable care, that I yet fully appreciate the principle upon which the government does profess to act. The eventual basis must, I suppose, be the basis of population, and regard must be had, in the eastern part of Canada at least, to local divisions.

So far as the west is concerned we are not very much troubled by the consideration of local divisions, because there are not in the western part of Canada municipalities, there is no division into counties, no such divisions as those to which the Prime Minister attached importance when he brought down the Bill for redistribution in 1903. With all due regard to local divisions, and to natural boundaries, wherever they exist, the basis must be a basis of population. When you attempt to proceed upon a basis of population in making this distribution what are you to look to? The conditions in this province and in the province of Saskatchewan as well are absolutely different from those which prevailed in the province of Ontario at that time, but the difference is one which forcibly accentuates, in my opinion, the necessity of having these boundaries delimited by some tribunal which can make a proper investigation for that purpose. In Ontario you had not an enormous movement of population, you had not a tremendous immigration coming into the country and disturbing that basis which was afforded by the census of 1901. I have understood from the remarks of the Prime Minister on this question that we are to some extent to proceed upon the basis of population as ascertained by the census of 1901. It must be obvious to the right hon. gentleman, as well as to every member in the House that that basis is an absolutely insufficient basis. It is a basis which is not acted upon in any other part of this Bill, it is a basis which is not acted upon, and cannot be acted upon, when we proceed to make a per capita allowance to the two provinces. The census of 1901 assigned to the province of Alberta a population in the vicinity of 70,000 souls. The basis upon which the government is proceeding to-day, in dealing with that province, assigns to it a population of not less than 250,000 souls. Looking at all available material which is before the committee as to population we must at once conclude that there are no such material as existed in the case of the province of Ontario to which I have alluded. Even in that case it was thought right by the Prime Minister and his colleagues not to interfere by delimiting the ridings in this parliament, but to entrust the duty of dividing the counties to an absolutely independent body which should proceed upon certain principles mentioned in the Bill to which I have referred. It has been said that