

the rights of those people who believe in religious education are concerned, this is much more dangerous than if the suggestion I had made were accepted. Why? Because there might be at any time an important group of people throughout the provinces opposed to religious instruction in the public schools, although ready to leave it in the separate schools, and they could not obtain from the local legislature the removal of this amendment now proposed by the hon. member for Saskatchewan (Mr. Lamont), nor could the federal parliament remove it because we are precluded from doing so by imperial legislation. That will be settled for all time. However, if hon. gentlemen from the Northwest are ready to accept it, I have no objection to offer. But it seems to me very strange that this parliament, which is so much frightened by the accusation of interfering with provincial rights, are not giving the minority in the Northwest such rights as are within our purview and the purview of clause 93 of the British North America Act. Instead of giving the minority everywhere the right to have their own schools, you are making a provision by this clause which will interfere with the public school system of the whole province. I am ready to accept it, but the danger is that if you should have a large class of people in either province opposed to religious instruction, the provincial government might not be able to resist the pressure and might abolish the system, so far as public schools are concerned; and this parliament might not feel disposed to pass such kind of remedial legislation as would be the only means by which the minority would be given its rights.

Mr. LAMONT. If I understand my hon. friend's argument aright, it is this, that the amendment I propose is dangerous for this reason, that if in the new provinces there should happen to be a majority not in favor of religious instruction in the schools, the legislature would be put in a position to abolish that in the public schools, and his suggestion would allow public schools to be changed into separate schools. Well, if that would be the result it would be a premium on the establishment of separate schools.

Mr. BOURASSA. I undoubtedly acknowledge that. The right we are entitled to in the Northwest is the right to separate schools. It might be argued, as it has been by my hon. friend from Western Assiniboia (Mr. Scott) that people who do not want religious instruction are not obliged to have it by this clause. But you might have a large portion of people, disseminated throughout districts where the majority impose religious instruction in the public schools, and who, being opposed to it, would join hands with those people and try to create an agitation so that the legislature would abolish religious instruction in the public schools every where. The only way to cover this point would be by adopting such a pro-

Mr. BOURASSA.

vision as I will suggest, no doubt uselessly, but to show that my intention has never been to impose schools of such a character as the hon. member for Saskatchewan (Mr. Lamont) has intimated. Suppose the government, instead of adopting the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Saskatchewan, would adopt the following:

And if the board of any public school district so elects any public school therein shall have and enjoy all the rights and privileges for the time being appertaining either to Protestant or Roman Catholic separate schools, as the case may be, organized and carried on as mentioned in the next following subsection.

This would leave undoubtedly the right for the local legislature to regulate secular teaching in the separate schools just as they have it now. To my mind that is wrong. I admit that the local government should have control so far as the qualification of teachers is concerned, but it is wrong for the government to interfere in the question of religious instruction and decide what kind shall be given through secular education. But let us leave that aside. The amendment I propose would leave the system as it is to-day. Instead of interfering with that system you would simply give the right to those who want to have a public school conducted as are separate schools, to have in those public schools the same privileges as pertain to separate schools. As a matter of fact both schools are conducted in the same way at present. This would allow the majority in every district where they want religious instruction in the schools to have those schools carried on just as they would be under the separate school legislation, and leave their management entirely in the hands of the legislatures of the provinces. And this would, at the same time, cover the objection which I made, and which has been acknowledged at last by the government as well as by my hon. friend from the Northwest, and prevent any dangerous agitation in the future in those provinces with the object of having the local legislatures do away with religious instruction in the public school as they might if the amendment of the hon. member for Saskatchewan be adopted.

Mr. LAMONT. Would the effect of the hon. gentleman's suggestion not be that every school in the province which wanted religious instruction would have to become a separate school?

Mr. BOURASSA. Only in case when the legislature would abolish religious instruction in public schools. Suppose there would be such an agitation as might cause the local legislature to do away with religious instruction in the public schools, the right would still remain to all people who had organized public schools to have them carried on as separate schools are carried on under these ordinances.

Mr. LAMONT. That suggestion would leave it in the hands of the trustees to turn public schools into separate schools.