might very properly ask that it be allowed to stand over until to-morrow for consideration. But, certainly, we are not going to have it put through without any debate whatever——

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. Certainly not.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. It may be that hon. gentlemen on the other side of the House have had an opportunity to consider this amendment—it looks very much as if they had. But, if that is the case I think it would have been only courteous to have let us see it at an earlier stage than at the last moment, when the clause is being put through. I do not think that this is the way to deal with an important question of this kind. This may be a very proper amendment, if we assume the principle on which it is based; but at least this committee is entitled to the courtesy of being allowed the time to consider it.

Mr. INGRAM. The hon. gentleman (Mr. Lamont) says that the provincial legislature could not change the amended section of this Bill if his amendment is adopted. If that be true, how comes it that the hon. member for Centre York (Mr. Campbell) says they could? He has made that statement in this House.

Mr. LAMONT. In my opinion, the legislature will have the absolute power to change it, unless this amendment is adopted. Of course, it is contended by some that the present wording of the section is sufficient to carry into effect the system now in force in the Northwest Territories. I am merely expressing my own opinion in this amendment.

Mr. BELCOURT. The hon. gentleman (Mr. Lamont) wants to remove doubts?

Mr. LAMONT. Yes.

Mr. INGRAM. Then, I think we are entitled to have the leader of the House (Sir Wilfrid Laurier) explain what effect this amendment will have?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. The question put to me by my hon. friend from East Elgin (Mr. Ingram) is a very fair one. The House is entitled to know from the government what they think of this amendment. As to the meaning of the amendment, I think my hon. friend (Mr. Lamont) has explained it so as to remove all ambiguity. As to the policy of the government, that is a question upon which we are not likely to reach a unanimous opinion. Those who favour that policy will continue to favour it, and those who are opposed to it are likely to oppose it still, notwithstanding any defence we may offer. But it is absolutely requisite that there should be no ambiguity as to the position of either side, and especially as to the position of the government. We have taken a position from the start, that, according to the constitution, when a province comes into the Dominion, if it possesses a system of separate or denominational schools, it must remain with that system of schools as it exists at the moment. And I may say here—although I do not intend to discuss that part of the question, but I may do it later on—that this is a justification of the amendment moved yesterday. When we came to consider the clause as it was first introduced, we found that it left the matter in doubt as to what was assured to the minority. But, by taking the ordinances passed in 1901, which are the law of the Northwest Territories to-day—conceding that our intention was to perpetuate the law as it exists to-day—every ambiguity is removed. We know exactly where we are. The position at the present time is that there is in the Northwest Territories a system of schools which are known as public and separate schools. This school system has been framed under the organic law passed by this parliament in 1875, which declared:

> That a majority of the ratepayers of any district or portion of the said province, or any less portion or subdivision thereof, by whatever name it is known, may establish such schools therein as they think fit, and make the necessary assessments and collection of rates therefor, and that the minority of the ratepayers therein, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, may establish separate schools therein and make the necessary assessment and collection of rates therefor.

That is the organic law. Under that organic law this system of schools was established—not at once, but by stages, the final development being in the year 1901 under the ordinances mentioned in the amendment I have proposed. Under that law as it exists to-day, the majority may establish what is called a public school. The minority in the district, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, if they are not satisfied with the treatment they receive from the majority, may establish a separate school. From the opening of the school up to half-past three o'clock the education given is absolutely secular, and absolutely under the control of the board of education of the province, in every particular—not only in the public schools but in the separate schools as well. It has been contended by my hon. friend from Labelle (Mr. Bourassa) and also by my hon. friend from Beauharnois (Mr. Bergeron) and others that in this respect the provisions of the organic law of 1875 has been departed from. That may be—I do not dispute that or consider that point at this moment. So far as religious instruction is considered I believe that the law of 1901 is in accordance with the law of 1875,—that is, that the majority of the ratepayers in a district can have such religious teachings as they see fit. So far as the secular education is concerned these schools may be called national, but so far as religious education is concerned, they may be called denominational, because trustees who represent the people of the locality are at liberty under