

discussion on the general arrangement of the schedule or to take them up one by one.

Mr. W. F. MACLEAN. The rumour is general that the government proposed to submit this to a commission of judges.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. There are so many rumours to which my hon. friend, with his newspaper and otherwise, gives credit, that I take them all with a grain of salt, and that is the safest course to follow. My attention was called to this question by my hon. friend the leader of the opposition, who asked whether it would not be advisable to leave the preparation of the schedules to the judges. I expressed no opinion then, but thought that it would be far preferable that we should have them presented to the House. I think they will be found, on the whole, eminently satisfactory and that there will be no necessity to refer them to the judges. Some exception may be taken here and there, but if there be differences of opinion, I am confident they will not be such that they cannot be reconciled in this very chamber. The schedules have been gone into with very great care, and, as far as I can see, taking the geographical condition and population and the condition of things generally, they could not be much improved, if at all.

Mr. FOSTER. I do not think it would be better to take them up one by one. The House would like to know the basis upon which the schedules were arranged. It is very important probably one of the most important matters presented by the Bill. It provides for the distribution of constituencies which shall elect the first house of representatives for each of these provinces. Every one knows that the first house will have most important functions confided to it; so that it is of the utmost importance that the basis of representation shall be fair and reasonable, and it would be very desirable to have it so arranged by the government that it would appeal to the fair mindedness and reasonable appreciation of both sides of the House. Now, the government must have come to this through a certain medium. They have made up their representative districts from data which I imagine have been very carefully compiled, and I would like to have a most thorough explanation of the basis upon which they have presumed to recommend the electoral districts which they have defined in this Bill, and representations of which they have drawn upon the map. This side of the House is willing to accept a fair arrangement, but it is not, even at this late period of the session, willing to accept any other arrangement than one which will commend itself to its good judgment after a thorough explanation. I imagine that my right hon. friend, or whatever member of the government has this matter in charge, will give us the fullest possible explanation as to the principles on which the representation is

based and as to the way the government have proceeded in applying those principles, and their reasons for applying them in this way.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. There were many things to be considered in the preparation of the schedule for the distribution of seats. First of all, we had to consider the existing conditions. There is a legislature to-day in the Territories which are to be covered by those two provinces, and there are thirty-five constituencies in the two provinces—twenty in Saskatchewan and fifteen in Alberta.

Mr. FOSTER. Perhaps the First Minister will confine himself now to the province of Alberta.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. Yes. We give twenty-five constituencies to each of the two provinces. Therefore it was obvious from the first that we had to provide for ten more constituencies in Alberta. The next guiding principle was the population, the object being to equalize as much as possible the existing population among these twenty-five constituencies. However, it is not possible, in a new country like this, to consider the question of population alone. Geographical conditions also have to be considered. To illustrate, population is more thickly settled along the lines of railway than it is in the outlying districts to the north and perhaps also to the south. Therefore it was not possible to apply the same degree of geographical extension in all the constituencies. Some had to be large and some small. But the prime object was as far as possible to give equality of numbers in the different electoral districts.

Mr. FOSTER. How equality of numbers?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. Taking the unit of population. My hon. friend who will speak after me will give more particulars than I can give on this point. I confine myself at present only to the more salient points. Then there are some far outlying districts which are new and in which the population may be below the unit of representation, but which must be represented. In these cases we have to choose between two things—either annexing them to other districts, or giving them separate representation. I admit at once that the suggestion that would at once occur to one's mind under some circumstances would be to join such districts to existing districts, but you have this difficulty to contend with, that the distances are so great in that country that you might make a district of such magnitude that it would be impossible for any human being to cover it within any reasonable time. It is to be expected, when an election takes place, that candidates should visit the different sections of their constituencies and put themselves into communication with their electors; but if these sparsely settled