

tleman's assuming that to be the state of facts.

Mr. SCHLEY. I desire to ask the gentleman what political parties are in this convention?

Mr. BELT. I only know one of my own knowledge.

Mr. SCHLEY. What one?

Mr. BELT. That is the party that is ordinarily called in the newspapers, the democratic party of the State. I prefer the name of States rights.

Mr. NEBLEY. I would inquire where my friend from Kent (Mr. Chambers) stands. [Laughter.]

The PRESIDENT. The gentleman is not in order.

Mr. BELT. All I desire to say, I can say in a very few sentences. In the first place, this question of the basis of representation is one which it is difficult to discuss upon any philosophical basis at all. There can scarcely be said to be any principle involved in it. There is no precedent except the precedent of Great Britain from which we can draw any principles at all; and there it has only been confusedly and in a peculiar way, that there is any principle upon which the people can be said to be represented; it is the most arbitrary of all systems ever invented upon the face of the earth. We all know that down to the time of the passage of the Reform Bill in England, there were rotten boroughs; there were districts and counties which sent a large portion of the representatives; and there were others, as in the case of Yorkshire, which sent none at all.

So that we cannot throw ourselves back upon the only country which has ever preceded us in having representative numbers, to get any light in our present difficulties. We cannot take advantage of the British precedents at all. I hold the true doctrine to be that representation can only be satisfactorily fixed for any community by a compromise, or upon a principle which is purely arbitrary; because there is no one principle upon this subject, which has ever been applied to a free community with equal justice to all.

If I were to indicate the true theory upon which I think representatives ought to be apportioned in Maryland, I should repeat the views that I had the honor to submit the other day upon another question to the convention. This State is singularly placed. In the first place, we are split into two sections by the bay—the eastern and western shores. Here is the first division of interests. The eastern shore is as a general thing homogeneous, although I suppose there is some contrariety of interest between the western and southern portion of it. But when we come to the western shore we find a division of interest just as great as the difference between the people of Louisiana and the people of Maine.

There is the mining interest, the coal interest, the mineral interest of the west; the grain-growing interest of counties not so far west; the tobacco interest of southern Maryland. Then Baltimore has an interest as a corporation distinct from the counties; an interest as a commercial emporium, an interest in manufacture, an interest in finance.

All these separate interests in this State are jealous of one another. The theory acted upon in Maryland by our fathers in colonial times, was to give to every interest just that strength in the legislative councils as to enable it to protect itself against undue encroachment upon the part of the others. If a proposition were to be made here—I think it cannot perhaps be truthfully said of the majority report—that should undertake to strip the western shore of its political rights, I should resist it, and would stay here forever rather than consent to it. I hold myself devoted to the principle of so arranging this representative basis as to enable every section of the State to support itself in the councils of the State.

That being the proper principle to go on, regarding the sectional interests of the State, harmonizing the people and bringing them together, giving no section an undue influence over the others, we come to the next most important point which this majority report discloses; and that is the white basis. The singular theory is presented here that nobody is to be counted in the representation, except the white population, the voting population. I will not enter into all that argument gone over in the federal convention. We all know that Southern men made a very great compromise when they conceded that only three-fifths of the negroes should be represented, when the true principle was the whole population. We can only say that they did the best they could; they only yielded as a matter of compromise; the whole of them ought to have been represented. Every element which adds to the prosperity of a community ought to be represented in the councils of the State. But I will not go into that.

There is one consideration connected with the white basis which to all intents and purposes disposes of it; and it is this: The very minute that slavery is abolished in this State, *eo instanti* every negro living in the State will become one of the basis upon which we are entitled to be represented in the federal Congress. The instant you abolish slavery, the three-fifths rule holds no longer. It is abolished. It falls with the institution. There will be a re-arrangement of the representation of Maryland in the Congress of the United States, and I suppose the effect will be to give us at least one more member. The very moment you abolish slavery in Maryland, the negroes are all set free, and become entitled to representation in the federal Con-