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A SPICY DEBATE

When the House of Commons was in committee of the whole on Monday, 18th, considering the estimates of the Inland Revenue Department, there was a spicy debate over the superannuation of W. B. Scovil, of Kings county, inspector of weights and measures. The Hansard report, abridged, is as follows:

Mr. Domville—The hon. controller has stated that a radical change is now being brought about throughout the country in the way of inspection. I am not prepared to blame him in regard to this matter, because I think he has been advised by those whose duty it is to advise him and who come under the denomination "departmental." No doubt, in Ottawa there is an officialdom that runs the country. If anything is said in regard to these officials, the reply is made that you are attacking members of the department and seeking to ruin them and their families; and yet these men, when perhaps the Minister has not been very long in office, tell him something that he believes, in the innocence of his heart, to be correct and should be carried out. I do not blame the present Minister, because I do not think that he has looked into his matter at all. There is a power behind the throne. The officers have been carrying out this work for a great number of years, and yet now they come forward and say that they do not consider this work is needed. I repeat that I am not referring to the Minister or blaming him in any way whatever, because I think he has been badly advised, but I say that two officers in St. John cannot do the work. I am sent to this House to represent my constituents. I believe when we pay our taxes we should receive pound for pound. We find to-day that a man who never did a hand's turn is kept on at the work of inspection, and the man who did the work is put out. Is that common sense? This involves no reflection on the Minister—I absolve the Minister—he cannot know all the country, he has been in office only a very short time and he knows I have kindly feelings towards him; but I contend that his staff has acted wrongly, that his advisers are wrong, and I speak for New Brunswick when I say that in the arrangement made the Minister and the officials acted wrongly. There was a sinister motive under it. They superannuated the man who did the work, giving him next to nothing, \$250 a year, and they left in office the man who had never done a hand's turn in connection with the department. Who so advised the Minister? Could the Minister know the counties of Kent and Kings and the circumstances and conditions of the case? No. He was simply advised, and he was wrongly advised. I have nothing more to say except that the consumer should receive a pound when he buys a pound; that the government should place the buyer in a position so that when he purchases his goods he will be protected; or do away altogether with the branch of this department and save the taxpayers the expense, and let them look out for themselves. There is a great deal of force in the argument that the buyer should look out for himself. I have never had very much faith in weights and measures inspection or in the inspection of gas. They have beautiful instruments—they have a dark room and a flash-light. But the man who sells gas can always show eleven candle power if he works the matter rightly. We must consider the question whether it would not be better to abolish the whole branch. I think the hon. gentleman himself has given the best argument for its abolition, namely, that the different counties in the province do

not need inspectors, but that two officers in St. John can do the work. This, of course, would be a farce; if the work is to be carried on at all it should be carried out completely and in its entirety. Let us go back to the common sense principle and whatever the cost may be to the country, let us have the principle established on the basis of inspecting what the consumer uses. I think that the Controller of Inland Revenue (Sir Henri Joly de Lotbiniere) before he took this move might have at least consulted some of his supporters and asked them what they thought of it.

Mr. McInerney—It is quite evident to anybody that the hon. member for Kings (Mr. Domville) had a grievance against the Controller of Inland Revenue; and that grievance arises very largely, if not altogether, from the fact that a gentleman in the county of Kings, Mr. Walter B. Scovil—a very decent man, and in his time a very efficient officer—has been superannuated. Upon that fact the hon. member for Kings (Mr. Domville), has built up a grievance which has very little foundation. In order to straighten the whole matter out, if the Controller of Inland Revenue would simply answer two or three very short questions that I am going to put to him, I think that he will completely dispose of the grievance that the member for Kings (Mr. Domville) thinks he has.

Mr. Domville—I beg to interrupt the hon. member (Mr. McInerney), I made no grievance; I was talking to the question, whether we should have inspection or not.

Mr. McInerney—Then, if the hon. member (Mr. Domville) has not expressed a grievance, it is hard for one to know when the hon. gentleman has a grievance and when he is serious, and when he is in fun. But, I think it strikes the most opaque mind that the hon. gentleman from Kings (Mr. Domville) thinks he has a very serious grievance, indeed. The first question which I shall ask the hon. Controller of Inland Revenue is this: What is the age of Mr. Walter B. Scovil? The Controller of Inland Revenue—He is seventy-two.

Mr. McInerney—Then, I would ask the Controller of Inland Revenue, is it true or is it not true that Mr. Scovil has done all the work lately and that Mr. Richard, of Kent, has done none?

The Controller of Inland Revenue—Oh, no. I was going to make an answer to the hon. gentleman from Kings (Mr. Domville). I will answer my hon. friend by-and-by.

Mr. McInerney—I wish to have these questions answered now and I wish to ask the Controller of Inland Revenue further: if by the change he has made does not bring about a saving of \$800 a year?

The Controller of Inland Revenue—Yes.

Mr. Domville—We all admit that.

Mr. McInerney—Then, in the first place, we have it, that Mr. Scovil is seventy-two years of age, a very old man and should be superannuated; in the second place, that Mr. Scovil has not done the work lately, but that it has been done almost entirely by Mr. Richard; and, in the third place, that the change proposed and brought about already, I believe, by the Controller of Inland Revenue, has effected a saving of \$800 a year. Now, Mr. Chairman, I think that these three reasons afford sufficient justification for the course that the hon. Controller of Inland Revenue has taken in this matter. But, sir, we have here what the Montreal Gazette heads "A most peculiar petition;" brought into this House the other day by the hon. member for Kings (Col. Domville), and which is printed in full in the Gazette. That petition, I wish to tell the committee, is from the first to the last a tissue of statements that have no foundation whatever in fact. It represents itself as being signed by "James Domville, M. P. for the county of Kings, N. B., and several hundred others."

Mr. Domville—I rise to a question of order. The hon. member has no right to quote from a paper—will the hon. member for Kent (Mr. McInerney) sit down if he pleases. When an hon. member of this House signs a paper he places himself in the hands of the House, and the hon. member (Mr. McInerney) has no right to quote from that paper, and state the matter is without foundation in fact. He has no right to state that unless he has some better authority than a newspaper article to sanction it.

Mr. McInerney—Where is the point of order?

Mr. Domville—I wish him to withdraw that statement "without foundation in fact."

Mr. McInerney—I do not think the chairman will rule against me on that very important point of order which has been raised by the honorable gentleman from Kings (Mr. Domville). It is almost

too absurd to require a ruling. I am now quoting from the Montreal Gazette a petition which was presented to this House and signed by James Domville, M. P., and—

Mr. Domville—I rise to a point of order. Some hon. members—Order.

Mr. Domville—Has the hon. member a right to say in this House—

Some hon. members—Order.

Mr. Domville—Has the hon. gentleman a right to say that a statement made by myself as a member of this House is without foundation in fact; has he a right to say it by simply reading a newspaper? I ask you to make your ruling on that, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. McInerney—This is a petition that is signed and sent in here by James Domville, M. P., and several hundred others.

Mr. Domville—I want your ruling, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman—(Mr. Bain)—I think there is no doubt that an hon. member has the right to quote from the newspapers of the day any statement that is in public print, and which may bear on the question before the House. It would be better, perhaps, for an hon. member not to use the expression "no foundation in fact" as applied to an hon. member of this House.

Mr. McInerney—Mr. Chairman, this is a petition that is printed in the Montreal Gazette. It is not only signed by James Domville, M. P., but by several hundred others, and I do not know of any better or more polite way of saying that the thing is untrue than by saying that it has no foundation in fact. If there are any other words which would more politely express the idea I have in my mind and which would meet with the approval of the chairman and of the House I would be only too glad to use them.

Mr. Domville—The newspaper does not say that. It is you who said it.

POLITE AND PARLIAMENTARY.

Mr. McInerney—If I did say that a statement by an hon. member in his House had no foundation in fact, I do not think that that even would be unparliamentary; but I am reading from a petition published in the Montreal Gazette and signed by the hon. member of Kings (Mr. Domville), and several hundred others. Now, in this petition the hon. gentleman (Mr. Domville) alleges that Mr. Richard has done no work at all, that he has lazed around, and that Mr. Scovil has done all the work. In that statement the hon. member (Mr. Domville) is flatly denied by the hon. Controller of Inland Revenue, who says that Mr. Scovil for some time has been unable to perform his duty, and that is a fact which everyone in the province of New Brunswick knows. I would be the last man to say a single harsh word against Mr. Scovil, who is my personal friend, and who has been a very efficient officer; but that statement that Mr. Scovil has done all the work while Mr. Richard has done none of it is certainly without foundation. Imagine a man 72 years of age travelling around the country. Those who know Mr. Scovil will bear me out in the statement that he is, by reason of his infirmities, unfitted for the duties of the office. Mr. McInerney proceeded at considerable length to prove that Mr. Richard, who was accused of political partisanship, had not taken part in an election since 1878. Then he continued: I will assume that the hon. member for Kings was not perhaps acquainted with the facts when he signed this petition. I will suppose that it was manufactured in Kings county by some of the red hot partisans of the hon. gentleman, who thought that if this office were to be taken away from his party, a grievous wrong would be done to them. I acquit the hon. gentleman of signing this petition knowing that what it contained was not true; I do not believe he would be guilty of that. But if he knew that these things were not true I do not know what I would have to say about the hon. gentleman, because the statement to which I have called attention is on a par with every statement in the petition. Mr. Richard has been, I think, in the service since 1878, when he was appointed to take the place of the hon. member of Gloucester (Mr. Blanchard) low sitting in this House. He was appointed about the same time that Mr. Scovil was appointed. He is a much younger man, he has performed his duties faithfully ever since, and he has taken no active part in politics. Now, I can see no reason why Kent county should not have this position as well as the county of Kings. The county of Kings is situated at the very end of the group of counties served by this office. There are the counties of Kings, Albert, Westmorland, Kent, Northumberland, Gloucester and Restigouche. Kent is in the centre of the group, while Kings is at one end of it.

Mr. Domville—Kings has the intelligence.

Mr. McInerney—Yes, it has, and it has proved it on many occasions. Kent county has a larger population than Kings county.

Mr. Domville—No.

Mr. McInerney—Well, the hon. gentleman had better look up the census returns of 1891, and he will find that what I state is correct. On that account Kent is entitled to some consideration. I do not say that Kent should absolutely have this position, but I do say that so far as the two counties are concerned, I can see no reason why Kent should not have it and Kings should have it. One very peculiar reason which the hon. member for Kings puts forward is that Kings has been loyal to the Liberal party. That is a most peculiar statement for him to make. Was Kings loyal to the Liberal party for 1882 to 1896, when it refused to elect the hon. gentleman every time he offered, and when it elected the ex-Finance Minister (Mr. Foster) over every occasion against him? The hon. gentleman himself was a member of the old guard of Conservatives. All you have to do is to go to one of the rooms here and you will see a beautiful picture on the wall in which you will find the beaming countenance of the hon. member for Kings as one of the old guard at that time. But I find no fault with the hon. gentleman for changing his political opinion if he has a reason for doing so; I am simply discussing the statement he makes that Kings has been loyal to the Liberal party. There is thus no excuse for cavilling at the change effected by the hon. Controller, and I hope the hon. Controller will not be influenced by any declaration made to him by the hon. member for Kings, nor do I believe he will. Let the hon. member kick, he is well able to, and if he has not any just ground for kicking, he cannot do much harm to the venerable gentleman and honest man who at present fills the position of Controller of Inland Revenue.

Mr. Domville—I am somewhat amused at the hon. member for Kent (Mr. McInerney) talking about changing sides six or seven times. I think he changed six times himself. He accuses me of supporting the Liberal party to-day. Why should I not support it? What do I owe to him or anybody else? I was never tethered, like the Scotchman's cow, by the mouth, and am free to go where I like. I am responsible to the grand old county of Kings and if that grand old county had the discrimination and the good sense to send me here, why should the hon. gentleman find fault? The hon. gentleman knows that he was right ready to go with the government of the day if they would take him. When he talks about Mr. Richard not taking part in politics, I hold a letter from Mr. Ferguson, J. P. of the county of Kent who says he was a most active partisan. The petition I sent him was based on the facts, and the hon. Controller knows that when I spoke to-night, I spoke not personally of himself, but of the department under him, which was the cause of the mistake made, and I said that if he would bring down to the House the papers on which the petition was based, they would prove that in eighteen years of service Mr. Richard did little or no work. The hon. gentleman rings the changes on Mr. Scovil being seventy-two years of age. Has he not a right to be seventy-two years old? Who is going to stop him? There is not a scratch against Walter B. Scovil's name in the whole of New Brunswick. If the hon. gentleman accuses me of turning my coat, or if I accuse him of turning his coat twenty times, Walter Scovil never turned his. I appeal to Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, who, I think, knows something about him, whether if ever there was a man who did his work well, that man was not Walter B. Scovil. What point is my honorable friend trying to make? Does he want to make the point that he did not join us in time and that it is too late now. I see some of my friends over there who have, perhaps, a little more ability than ordinary men, clever fellows, and they drew the wool over his head and said to him: Hold on to us; wait until the school question is settled; it will get us into power; and we will put you in the Cabinet. And the hon. gentleman put the weights into each scale. On the one side he could not get anything and on the other he stood a chance if his party came in, and the latter had the greatest weight. My hon. friend may find some fault with my criticism, but I am simply following his lead. I am not here to fight the battle of Mr. Scovil, but the battle of principle. The hon. gentleman begged the question when he said that Kings county was at one end of the string and Kent at the other. If that be the case the string should be cut in the middle and neither should exist.

Mr. McInerney—I said that Kent was the centre of the string.

Mr. Domville—Then it should be at the other end. Now, my hon. friend claims that Kent county has 758 more population than Kings. It is not fair to bring that up against me. He knows that while I was representing Kings county, and while Kings county was supporting the government, and until that county changed its representative, its population never fell off, but when it did it is a singular fact that there was a decrease in population of over 2,000; and if we retained our normal increase we would have 6,000 more there to-day. When the hon. gentleman talked of Kings county not being loyal to the Liberal party he touches not me but my county. Kings county was loyal to that party. Whatever Kings county may have thought of me the people of that county, in their better judgment, thought that they should displace somebody who was representing them, and in whom they had not faith, and they elected me. That had nothing to do with politics. Kings county, from one end to the other, was tired of the late government, and I think it comes with very bad grace from the hon. gentleman to attack us with regard to our Liberalism. My hon. friend has charged that I turned for what I could get. Well, I never had anything out of any party.

Mr. Bennett—You have a trip to England ahead of you.

Mr. Domville—You might have a trip to Kingston ahead of you, and a free trip.

Mr. Bennett—I think the hon. gentleman will probably be going to Beauport soon—there is an asylum there.

Mr. Domville—We are all driving towards Quebec, I think. My hon. friend has made a great mistake, and I think that if he will come down to New Brunswick and contrast his own position with my position he will see that he has made a great mistake. My hon. friend has gone about in fear and trembling lest a protest should be entered against him. He got through in some way by the law courts. I, unfortunately, am in.

Mr. McInerney—I heard that you had got through yesterday.

Mr. Domville—My hon. friend makes most rash and extravagant statements. He stated that the petition which has been referred to was without any foundation, but now he admits that there are things which justify it. I do not know why the hon. gentleman should have made this attack upon me. I have never uttered a word against him. I could say a great deal against him in a political or parliamentary sense. If the hon. gentleman thinks that anything he can say against me in recrimination is going to hurt me in my county he is entirely mistaken. I can state, as I have stated before to the House and to the country, that I have the greatest pride in supporting Mr. Laurier and his policy. Let that policy be continued and it will be of incalculable benefit to the people. I do not think the hon. gentleman makes a charge against me that it is necessary to notice when he says that I have changed my mind upon political matters. I act here with many gentlemen on this side who seek to recognize public opinion, not to bamboozle the country, but to do their duty. I am sure I spoke to my hon. friend (Sir Henri Joly de Lotbiniere) in a courteous manner. I found fault with his department and, I think, justly. It is a department that should be overhauled. I am thankful to my hon. friend from Kent (Mr. McInerney) for an opportunity to show that while I have changed my opinion once he has changed his, I think six times.

Mr. McInerney—I do not intend to get into any altercations with the hon. gentleman from Kings. I do not know that any person in this House has much to gain by such a course. There are certain characters that belong to every circus, but he certainly acts as if he thought he was not in the House of Parliament. He seems to think that I brought this matter up. His memory must be failing him. It was not until he attacked the Controller of Inland Revenue that I said a word. He spoke of a certain official who had lazed around and had performed no work and he spoke of Mr. Scovil, and so forth, before I said a word. But he tries to make the House believe that I brought this matter up and made an attack upon him. I would contend making an attack upon the hon. gentleman. I have higher duties to perform in this House than that. But, if I were to take up the political record of the hon. gentleman in New Brunswick and lay it bare to gentlemen in this House who do not know it, they would not continue to associate with him either in public or in private life. His character is well known in our part of the country. He boasts because he was elected last election. No doubt the hon. gentleman thinks that he has a great deal to boast about. He has tried to be elected very frequently. When I alluded to his change of politics I

was careful to add that I had no fault to find with him for that change. I have no fault to find with any man who changes his views. The greatest answer that Disraeli ever made was to those who charged that he had not been consistent in his political views. But the honorable gentleman is always lauding the Prime Minister and stating that he is prepared to follow him in darkness and in daylight. Still, I find him, every now and again, getting his knife into some member of the administration. Is it not known that the ambition lurked in the hon. gentleman's mind that he might be a Minister of the Crown? He took a trip to Ottawa and was told by the Prime Minister that such a thing was altogether out of the question. The hon. gentleman then said: "Then let me go to England with you." He is satisfied with that—satisfied to go down Piccadilly and the Strand in a brand new uniform and doing credit and honor to Canada as well as to the mounted infantry.

Mr. Domville—Oh give us a rest.

Mr. McInerney—The corps to which the hon. gentleman belongs is very well known, no doubt; but I do not know at this moment whether the hon. gentleman belongs to cavalry or infantry. But he will be dressed in his best bib and tucker, and instead of being a Minister he will be one of the guards of the Prime Minister when he goes down Piccadilly in the great procession. Some hon. gentlemen beside me say that this is too much. No. I wish to see just such honors heaped upon the hon. gentleman. The county of Kings sent him here for a purpose. But he finds now that he cannot control the Controller of Inland Revenue by making such speeches to him, and that the Minister is prepared to do justice to any and all counties, notwithstanding the threats of the hon. member for Kings.

The debate was closed by the Controller explaining, as the despatches have already told, that the changes were made in the interest of economy, and that the Mr. Richard was retained because Kent is almost in the centre of the counties named.

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Hurrying Him Up.

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