

truly constitutional manner, of petition to the Legislature. I have no hesitation in saying that when the government brought forward the measure, they did it with the full knowledge, and under the clear conviction, that they were taking a step which would naturally arouse great hostility throughout the country. They felt they were taking a step which endangered the popularity of the government and which would naturally tend to arouse to a large extent in all probability the opposition of many people in reference to the law. They brought forward the measure, however, through the conscientious conviction that the government of the country could no longer refuse to take a step which had been so long declared necessary for the public welfare. I confess I was prepared to find this table flooded with petitions from every county in the province, especially in connection with the great difficulties that have been found in the transition from the old law to the new—in fact, I was prepared to find an amount of hostility exhibited on the part of the people of this country which I am happy to say has not been the case. No people are better acquainted with the right which they have to approach this House by petition, or with the influence which their wishes have over the minds of their representatives. And yet in reference to a measure which has not yet had an opportunity of being fully understood—a measure fraught with very great difficulty in its introduction,—I am proud to find that the voice of the people in opposition to it has been very small. From the county of Antigonish there has come a number of petitions, signed by 635 persons in all, against the School bill.—I am happy to know that that county stands almost alone in the amount of hostility exhibited to this measure—King's only bearing it company. The county of Queen's sends several petitions with 383 signatures. I am glad to find, whilst a great deal of difficulty has been experienced in Yarmouth, in putting the act into operation, yet it has exhibited the most patriotic and enlightened spirit in connection with this measure. Only 36 persons in that county have asked for its repeal. The county of Colchester, it is gratifying to find, only sends 63. The results in that county have been eminently satisfactory—the law having there been brought more extensively into operation than in any other county. The county of King's has sent in a number of petitions, and I regret to be obliged to say that some of them are not couched in the most courteous language in reference to this measure. However, there are only 470 persons who petition from that county for the repeal of this enactment, leaving an overwhelming majority of the intelligent electors, as far as petitions go, in favor of its provisions. From Inverness there are two petitions, one of 37, and the other of 38, 75 persons in all. From Annapolis there is but one petition, signed by 133. In Cumberland, I am happy to find, 77 petitioners have only approached the House. Although great difficulties have been experienced in that county, I am gratified to see that the most intelligent persons of both parties have been united in the most patriotic manner to advance this great step in advance. Digby only sends 79 petitioners. And the total in the whole Province is only TWO THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED and SIXTY-THREE petitioners, which is small indeed, when you reflect that the num-

ber of electors must be between 50 and 60,000 at least. You must remember, too, that these petitions come up at a time when this bill has not had an opportunity of demonstrating the value it possesses—when the public mind has been excited to a greater degree than it will be excited again—that it is founded on a principle most obnoxious to the people. And yet, under all these disadvantages, after the house has been in session some three weeks, and full opportunity given to the people to express their opinion to as great an extent as they could wish, we find the result as I have stated it to you.

The house is aware that one of the provisions of the bill which has been the subject of discussion is that which constitutes the executive council the council of public instruction. Gentlemen opposite opposed that clause of the bill, although they did not attach any very great importance to it, but even if they had, it was a point on which the government entertained so strong an opinion that it would have been exceedingly difficult for them to yield. Now, we have had the law in operation for some six months, and I have yet to learn that a single substantial argument can be raised before this house and country, proving that the objections to a council of public instruction, as constituted under the bill, are well founded. As a member of the executive council I have the greatest reluctance to occupy such a position. It is one that, whilst it is impossible that a government can make it subservient in the slightest degree to its own popularity, necessarily brings down a great deal of odium in connection with the operation of the law. The government introduced that clause in the act, believing that it would be impossible to find any council that would be as well adapted efficiently to work the bill; and I have no hesitation in saying that the experience we have had, during the past six months, confirms us in the position we have taken in reference to this matter. It is well known that if there is one subject in reference to which the government in England feel bound to assume a full share of responsibility it is in connection with the question of education; and it was only at the last session of Commons that the minister of public instruction was challenged in his place, and held responsible to the parliament, in reference to a great question touching the education of the people, and obliged to vacate his position. So watchful are the people in that enlightened country and so determined are they that the government shall not be in a position to hold power and evade responsibility in relation to this delicate question by throwing the odium upon any board or section of persons that are not responsible to the people. There is not a member of the present government that would not be delighted if it were in accordance with what he considers his duty to the people, to avoid the responsibility he takes upon himself in the council of public instruction. If I were to go from the treasury to the opposition benches, I would wish to have the security for myself and children that I would feel when the high functions of the council of public instruction were discharged by a body of gentlemen who were directly responsible to the parliament and country in connection with duties of so onerous and delicate a character. In New Brunswick the council of public instruction is