

the fullest confidence the verdict of the electors of Canada.

Here is the platform of the party, and in amplifying and explaining that platform a gentleman with whose utterances I am more familiar than with those of any other member of the government—the Hon. Mr. Davies—when speaking in Middleton, N.S., in fall of 1893, said that the policy of the Liberal party was to eliminate every vestige of protection from the tariff. He said the great historical battle between free trade and protection was now opening in Canada, and this is the declaration with which I was familiar and with which my friends in the lower provinces have been familiar for some years. This declaration has always been emphatic, and was just as emphatic after the announcement of the Ottawa platform as before. Now we come to the extraordinary course pursued by the government with regard to this question. Speaking in Montreal, in one of the closing days of 1895, the Hon. Mr. Laurier, as was quoted in this House the other day, said it would be the policy of the government to make raw material free, and he indicated that coal and iron, as the raw material for the manufacturers, would be admitted free under the tariff which it was proposed the Liberal party should put in force in Canada. He secured the votes of many manufacturers in Montreal and elsewhere by that statement, yet in the face of that statement of the hon. the leader of the government, and the public had a right to believe that he spoke for his party, we have the Finance Minister going to Montreal and receiving a deputation of coal men and telling them that the coal duties were to be retained in view of the change of circumstances in the United States. Here we have an extreme divergence between the statements of the leader of the government when speaking to the people, as leader of the Opposition and the statement of his Finance Minister. It is a most extraordinary spectacle to find two prominent men, the Premier and his Finance Minister, putting such diametrically opposite views before the country, and it remains to be seen within the next few weeks which of them has been speaking more correctly. Notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Fielding's statement is the later one, I am inclined to think that after all Mr. Laurier's statement is correct, and my reason for that is the extraordinary

action of the Liberal party in Nova Scotia at the present moment. Mr. Fielding makes this important declaration—and I will speak later about the propriety of his making such a declaration at all. I am now speaking of the declaration itself. We find that immediately following that declaration Mr. Murray, the gentleman that followed him in the leadership of his party in Nova Scotia, dissolved the House and issued a manifesto to the electors declaring that the object in dissolving the House before it would naturally die by efflux of time was the desire of the government to elicit a strong expression from the people of Nova Scotia in favour of the retention of the coal duty. It is a most extraordinary thing that Mr. Murray should feel it necessary to bring such strong influence to bear on the Dominion government if he believed the statement of Mr. Fielding. He will try to secure votes in Nova Scotia on the strength of Mr. Fielding's declaration, but the very fact that he finds it necessary to prematurely dissolve the House and try to snatch a verdict from the people before the government here passes on the tariff question—all indicate to me plainly that in his inner heart Mr. Murray believes it is not the intention of the Government to retain the coal duty, but simply an attempt to secure the votes of the people of Nova Scotia before the facts with regard to the tariff come to be known. It looks extremely like it, and I may say I regard the action of Mr. Fielding in making such an announcement as he has made as being very extraordinary conduct on the part of a Cabinet Minister. I understood the leader of the House to say yesterday that Mr. Fielding was authorized to make that statement. Did I understand the hon. gentleman correctly?

Hon. Sir MACKENZIE BOWELL—That is what he said.

Hon. Mr. FERGUSON—I presume by the hon. gentleman's silence now that I heard him correctly and that Mr. Fielding was authorized to make that statement.

Hon. Sir OLIVER MOWAT—The government were quite aware that that statement was to be made.

Hon. Sir MACKENZIE BOWELL—That implies that they discussed it in the Cabinet?