

TO THE Free and Independent Electors of West Durham.

GENTLEMEN,—

The Government, which but a brief space since was craving a longer trial before judgment, has punitively dissolved parliament and precipitated a general election.

For what reason? Because it felt that it would be weaker next year than it is to-day, and that its only chance of victory lay in a surprise. But it has not ventured to appeal to the constituency of 1878. It has packed the jury.

By an iniquitous measure it has concentrated in a few districts large numbers of liberal voters in order to weaken the effective Reform strength in many ridings, to impair the prospects of election of leading Liberals, and, in passing, to turn a minority of the people into a majority in parliament.

For these purposes it has disregarded the county bounds, disturbed the electoral districts, and violated long-standing associations of friendship, business, and convenience throughout the greater part of Ontario.

But even that was not enough! Repealing the law which makes sheriffs and registrars the returning-officers, it has taken power to appoint where it has taken power to appoint where it pleases its own nominees to do its work, and to re-enact the scenes of ten years ago, when men defeated at the polls in Muskoka and West Peterboro were made into members of parliament by the will of these officials.

Such acts are subversive of those principles of justice, equality, and fair play on which our constitution rests, and which give a moral sanction to the laws.

They show that Government, notwithstanding all it boasts, feels itself beaten in a fair fight; and so attempts foul play.

We are appealing to all good men, without distinction of party, to rebuke this gross abuse of power; and to show its authors that although they may exchange townships and cut up counties as they like, the votes of the electors on whom the supporters of iniquities like these.

We are calling not only for an enthusiastic, vigorous, and organized effort on the part of Reformers, but also for the support of many, heretofore indifferent or hostile, who will yet yet decline to become accomplices in this transaction. Our call is answered! Such a spirit has been aroused among the people as large as I have not seen before—such a spirit as warrants the belief that the attempt will fail of its base purpose, and will recoil with just severity on the heads of the concoctors and supporters of the plot.

On what do the Government ask a renewal of your confidence?

On a record of broken pledges and of added burdens.

They promised that they would not increase the rate of taxation; they have enormously increased it.

They denuded the former scale of expenditure; they have largely raised it.

They declaimed against the additions which were made to the public charge in order to carry out a policy and engagements settled under their own former rule, and left by them as legacies to their successors in 1878. They have greatly added to that charge, and have, as far as in them lay, ensured the recurrence of a period of severe financial and distress.

They boast of an increased revenue; due, so far as they are concerned, to increased taxation only.

They boast of an enlarged prosperity; due not to them, but to the general revival of trade throughout the world, to large products at home, and high prices abroad.

They pride themselves on their Pacific railway contract. I condemn that bargain as improper, being made in secret, without public tender, contrary to the existing policy of the people and of parliament, and opposed to the provisions of the law. I condemn it as extravagant since the enterprise will cost us sixty million dollars and twenty-five million acres of the choicest lands, while the road is to belong to the company which will realize the cost of its part of the work out of its land and money subsidies.

I condemn it as outrageous, in conferring on the country a practical monopoly, for twenty years, of the trade of our Northwest territories, and large privileges and exemptions very valuable to the public.

I condemn it as indefensible, being consummated in the face of a tender to perform the same obligations for three million dollars less money, for the same million acres less land, without the monopoly of trade, without the exemptions from taxation, and on other conditions much more favorable than those of the contract.

I condemn it as premature, since the true policy was to provide for the rapid completion of the line from Thunder Bay for the immediate construction of railways through the prairie, and by securing the early development and settlement of the Northwest to give value to our lands and a traffic for the road before contracting for the completion of the eastern and western ends.

The progress of the Northwest is due to the work we did and propose to do.

The difficulties and drawback which exist, very serious now and far more serious in the future, are due to the obnoxious terms of the contract.

One short year has vindicated our policy. Who can doubt that, had it been adopted, we could to-day make a bargain for the undertaking infinitely better than those to which we are now committed? The Government and parliament declined to give you an opportunity of deciding on the question. We have now to ask the popular judgment on the men who refused that opportunity and consummated that contract.

You know well that I do not approve of needless restrictions on our liberty of exchanging what we have for what we want, and do not see that any substantial application of the restrictive principle has been or can be, made in favor of

the great interests of the mechanic, the laborer, the farmer, the lumberman, the shipbuilder, or the fisherman. But you know also that I have fully recognized the fact that we are obliged to raise yearly a great sum, made greater by the obligations imposed on us by this Government; and that we must continue to provide this yearly sum mainly by import duties, laid to a great extent on goods similar to those on which can be manufactured here; and that it results as necessary incident of our settled fiscal system that there must be a large, and, as I believe, in the view of moderate protectionists, an ample advantage to the home manufacturer.

Our adversaries wish to present to you an issue as between the present tariff and absolute free trade.

This is not the true issue! Free trade is, as I have repeatedly explained, for us impossible; and the issue is whether the present tariff is perfect or defective and unjust.

I believe it to be in some important respects defective and unjust.

We expressed our views last session in four motions, which declare that articles of such prime necessity as fuel and breadstuffs should be free of duty; that duties should be so adjusted as to relieve the consumer from some part of the enormous extra price he is now liable to pay to a few refiners; that the exorbitant and unequal duties on the lower grades of cottons and woollens should be so changed as to make them fairer to the masses, who now pay on the cheap-out goods taxes about twice as great in proportion as those which the rich pay on the finest goods; and that the duties on such materials as iron, which is in universal use, should be reduced, so as to enable the home manufacturer, to whom it is a raw material, to produce a cheaper article, for the benefit of his home consumer, and the encouragement of his foreign trade.

I believe that by changes of the character I have indicated monopoly and extravagant prices would be checked, a greater measure of fair play and justice to all classes would be secured, and the burden of taxation would be better adjusted to the capacity of the people who are to pay.

Depend upon it, a day will come when by sharp and bitter experience we shall learn the truth; and many who now applaud will then condemn these particular incidents of the tariff.

But I believe that one brief experience has already convinced many former supporters of the need of amendment; and that a majority of the intelligent electors are in favor of such modifications in the direction I have pointed out as may be made with a due regard to the legitimate interests of all concerned.

I challenge the Northwest land policy of the government, which has in various forms given facilities for speculation, whereby great areas of the choicest lands are falling into the hands of middlemen, who will hold them till they exact from the immigrant large profits, thus at once retarding the development of the country and lessening the prosperity of the settler.

Our motto is, "The land for the settler, the price for the public!"

The report of the civil service commission shows that the existing system has resulted in bad appointments, extravagant salaries, the retention of unfit officers, the discouragement of many deserving men, and great injury to the public. It shows that the true remedy is the abolition of political patronage, the substitution of appointments by merit, and the reorganization of the system.

Agreeing in the main with these views, I believe that the new act, which proceeds on other lines, will not remedy the admitted evils.

Provision is needed to prevent improper practices in connection with tenders and contracts for public works; but the Government has thwarted such legislation.

Those who have not forgotten the events of 1872 will know the reason why.

Our provincial rights are amongst the chief jewels of our constitution; and on their preservation rest the prosperity and the permanence of the confederation.

Of these the most valuable—that indeed on which all else depends—is the right of effective local legislation on local affairs.

This right has been grievously infringed by the disallowance of the streams act, which dealt with a subject purely local, and in no wise conflicted with Dominion interests.

Its disallowance on the ground that in the opinion of the federal cabinet it was not a proper act, creates a dangerous precedent, and asserts a power destructive of the autonomy of the province.

The majority of the late parliament sanctioned, while we denounced that disallowance.

It is now for the people to decide whether they will abandon or regain their threatened liberties.

The respective governments some years ago submitted the boundary question to the judgment of a commission of eminent, able and impartial men. The fact was communicated to and discussed in parliament, and although several sessions elapsed, no adverse motion was proposed. On the contrary, parliament without dissent voted the money necessary to carry on the reference, and thus adopted the policy.

It was the received opinion that the natural, reasonable, and customary mode of settling an international question by arbitration would not be thereafter questioned.

The award was made in 1878; the present government in 1879 declined to state its policy on the question; in 1880 it promoted the appointment of a partisan committee of enquiry; in 1881 it brought Manitoba into the controversy by its mode of enlarging her eastern limits; then it announced the opinion that Ontario did not comprise even the old settlements in the neighborhood of Fort William; and at length, in 1882, it took courage to declare to parliament that the award should be disregarded in order to a struggle to contract, if possible, within those narrow bounds the limits of our province.

The majority in the late parliament has sanctioned, while we have condemned this action. It is for the people to decide whether the reference and award shall be repudiated or respected.

The Senate is constituted on the principle of appointment for life by the administration of the day, thus creating a legislative body responsible to no one, without provision to secure effective federal representation, or the necessary degree of harmony between the two chambers.

I think this plan defective, and out of keeping with the true principles of popular government as at this time developed.

Some would favor the abolition of the senate; but we must not forget that on this subject the other provinces are differently circumstanced from Ontario; and that the senate was established as a part of the federal system in the professed interest of the smaller provinces.

I do not propose that the provinces should be deprived of the right, which many value, of federal representation, in the present proportions, in a chamber; but I would advocate the reduction of its numbers and the election by the people of its members. Our own experience in Old Canada gives proof of the wisdom of this plan.

I am in favor of a true national policy and of every measure tending to the real progress of our country and the fulfilment of its great destiny.

The other day I gave, by my heart and voice for the assertion of our right, as members of the empire, to express our views on the subject of Ireland, a truly Imperial question, beyond our legislative competence indeed, but in which, notwithstanding, we have from many points of view a most substantial interest; and I congratulate you on the action to which parliament agreed.

It is a main ingredient in our national progress that we should secure a larger trade and freer access to the markets of the world.

Our efforts in this direction have hitherto been abortive.

I believe that a fuller freedom to manage for ourselves this part of our own affairs would give a better prospect of success; and as advocates of a truly national policy, we have recorded these views in a motion, which was defeated in parliament, but for which I ask a verdict at the polls.

Gentlemen, the occasion is a grave one.

To the people is now remitted the opportunity of judging of the conduct of its rulers and of settling the lines on which public affairs shall be conducted for five years at any rate, and mayhap for a much longer time.

I hope to be able, before the close of the election, to explain at greater length my opinion on public affairs; but I have thought it right, at the earliest moment, to state frankly my views on some important questions as fully as is compatible with the limits of an address.

I cannot expect every one, even of my own supporters, to concur entirely in every sentiment I express.

Men's minds are not so constituted that one can hope to secure such absolute and complete assent.

It is on a large, general, and comprehensive view that we must act. If in the main you differ from me, it is your duty to reject me as unsuited for your service; and I shall accept your decision with unfeigned respect and unabated friendship.

But if in the main you value the principles and approve the policy I have announced; if you are prepared to condemn the fraud which would cheat our people of a fair representation, the wrong which would deprive us of our provincial rights, the injustice which would repudiate an international award, the crime which has placed our future in the North-West in the hands of a great monopoly; the additions, in breach of solemn pledge, to taxation, expenditure, and public charge; the schemes which substitute for the good of the masses and for fair taxation, the aggrandizement of a few and the rich and the oppression of the many and the poor; if you are prepared to give your voice for freedom and justice, for retrenchment and reform, for fair play and equal rights, for real progress and true national development—then I ask for support, and will do what in me lies to justify your decision.

And in the hope and belief that such will be your verdict,

I am, Gentlemen, Your faithful servant, EDWARD BLAKE.

Toronto, May 22 1882.

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