

The answer is as follows :—

Department of Justice,  
Ottawa, 19th February, 1898.

Sir,—Referring to your letter of the 31st ult., and to previous correspondence, with respect to the establishment of an Admiralty Court at Montreal, I have the honour to inform you that I have communicated with Mr. Justice Routhier on the subject with a view of ascertaining whether it would not be possible to meet the requirements of the case by holding occasional sittings at Montreal when there are cases to be tried there.

I have just received a reply from the judge, in which he states that he is very busy in Quebec as a judge of the Superior Court, and that probably he could but seldom absent himself. He considers, however, that it would be practicable for him to attend occasionally in Montreal for trying Admiralty cases, where there were many witnesses to be heard, the proceedings, of course, to be taken at Quebec as at present, and the registrar of the court to go with him to Montreal for the purposes of the trial. He suggests that this means of transacting the business might be adopted if the lawyers would previously agree with him upon a time for trial which would be convenient to all.

I would like to know if this proposal of the judge would meet the views of the Board of Trade. It appears to me that it might be tried, at all events, as an experiment for the present.

I await your reply before taking any further steps in the matter.

I have the honour to be, sir,  
Your obedient servant,  
E. L. NEWCOMBE,  
Deputy Minister of Justice.

George Hadrill, Esq.,  
Secretary Board of Trade,  
Montreal.

To that the secretary of the Board of Trade was intrusted to reply as follows :—

Office, Board of Trade,  
Montreal, May 12th, 1898.

E. L. Newcombe, Esq.,  
Deputy Minister of Justice,  
Ottawa, Ont.

Sir,—I must apologize for the delay in answering your letter of the 19th February, re Admiralty Court at Montreal, but owing to the absence from town of the member of our council who was chiefly interested in the question, the council deferred replying until his return; in the meantime the subject matter of your letter was discussed with solicitors here and with the marine interests, both underwriting and shipping.

I am now desired to express appreciation of your endeavour to meet the wishes of the council, but would point out that the proposition as submitted makes it optional with the judge to come to Montreal—practically it is to be agreement between the solicitors.

The council would state frankly that the feeling in Montreal is that we are entitled to have an Admiralty Court here as a matter of right, and it is held that litigants should not be in doubt as to whether the court could be held in Montreal or not.

The expense of taking witnesses and lawyers from Montreal to Quebec has been something enormous, and establishes an unjust discrimination against this city, the fear of such expense preventing parties from taking proceedings in protection of their rights.

Mr. QUINN.

The council therefore respectfully urges that steps be taken at the present session of Parliament to establish a branch Admiralty Court in Montreal, either under the present Admiralty judge at Quebec, which would be entirely satisfactory to this board, or in such other manner as may be deemed advisable, always provided that the principle the council seeks to have recognized is duly conserved.

I have the honour to be, sir,  
Your obedient servant.

GEO. HADRILL,  
Secretary.

Now, this is only one of the cases in which, as I contend, the interests of Montreal have not been properly regarded in connection with the administration of justice. So far as the distribution of the work among the judges is concerned, personally, I would strongly favour the system in vogue in the province of Ontario. I understand that system to require residence in the principal city of the province of nearly all the judges and their going from that city to the different districts, following what is called the circuits of the province. If this were done, we should have a sufficient number of judges in the city of Montreal, in which by far the greater part of the business of the province is done, to meet all requirements. If this were not deemed sufficient, the judges might be distributed, a certain number in Montreal and a certain number in Quebec. And in that way, no jealousy would exist between the two cities, and the province might be divided into two districts over which the judges of Montreal in one case and the judges of Quebec in the other case should preside. But, of course, we cannot legislate to that end in this Parliament. It is, therefore, necessary, I say, that the Government should communicate with the Government of the province of Quebec and try in some way to arrange the judicial districts of the province, so that all the judges shall have sufficient to do to occupy them during the year, and the public business shall be properly attended to.

Now, I listened to the right hon. leader of the House (Sir Wilfrid Laurier) with the greatest attention. He realizes the position, but the only error that he makes, as I think, is in saying that it would be useless to undertake a conference at this time. I do not think it would be at all useless. We must begin some time. Every practising barrister in the province of Quebec recognizes how necessary it is that something should be done in order to relieve the congestion that exists in the city of Montreal and in the district of Sherbrooke. We realize, too, that this will not be relieved by the mere appointment of a judge for the district of Sherbrooke; but it can be relieved by distributing the work as evenly as possible among the judges in the province. Now, if this is to be done by a rearrangement of the districts, if it is to be done by the subdivision of the province into two districts, or however it is to be done, it is a subject that must engage the attention of