

Sir CHARLES HIBBERT TUPPER. My right hon. friend has interpreted one part of my argument incorrectly. I did not quarrel with the amendment of 1889 as an amendment to the general Act, but I pointed out that this general Act refers to public inquiries in general, but that when we come down to specific acts of corruption, there is necessity for a provision such as Mr. Blake introduced into his Corrupt Practices Act, and which might not be necessary in an Act dealing with public inquiries generally.

Mr. T. S. SPROULE (East Grey). There is a strong impression in the country to-day, due to the result of the commission appointed by the provincial government in Ontario, that these commissions are issued for the purpose of preventing information coming out rather than eliciting it. As regards giving the commission greater scope, so long as that will not have the effect of preventing facts coming to light, which we desire to see ventilated, the public hail the suggestion with approval, but it is the bounden duty of the government to see that the widest possible scope is given this commission for the purpose of eliciting the facts. The enlargement of the commission, therefore, cannot be too great, and no doubt it will do its work better, if it is enlarged in every direction, than if it is circumscribed, as we believe the wording of the commission does circumscribe it to-day.

Then, the public will expect that the West Huron and Brockville elections should be the first inquired into. These are the two special elections in which the corrupt practices took place over which the country is so much exercised. There are two members representing these constituencies in this House to-day, although the information brought to us clearly indicates that they are sitting here by virtue of the most corrupt scandalous political practices ever perpetrated in Canada. It is therefore desirable, in order that the fullest light should be thrown upon these practices, and that all the facts should be in possession of the electorate before the next general election, that this commission should begin at once its work in these constituencies.

The desire has been expressed that the investigation should go back further. Well, we on this side have not the least objection to the commission going back any length of time or calling before them any witnesses, politicians or others, who have taken any part whatever in the elections, either before or since 1896. But I think it is of the most vital importance that the conduct of these two elections of West Huron and Brockville, which are the ones that really gave rise to this commission, shall be the first inquired into, and that the finding of the commission should be put before the people before they are called upon to give their verdict at the next general elections. Unless that is done, the con-

clusion will inevitably be reached by the public that the government desire to prevent the facts, which were partly investigated by a committee of this House last year, being made public until after they have gone before the people.

The hon. the Minister of Railways took the position, which I thought was rather a strange one for a lawyer to take, that the law of the land never contemplated that the secrecy of the ballot should be violated, and gave in support of his argument the ruling of the court in the Haldimand election, and he followed his argument up by an appeal to us to trust to the wisdom and judgment of the commissioners who are able judges, as to the interpretation of the law. But it is a matter of vital importance to the country whether the law ever contemplated that the secrecy of the ballot should be exposed or not, and if that be the intention of the Ballot Act, let me say that the secrecy of the ballot is of very small importance in the minds of the electorate compared with the ferreting out of the frauds committed during elections and the punishment of the guilty parties. And, if necessary, the Ballot Act should be so amended that there will be no hindrance to the bringing out of the evidence and the information the people desire should be brought to light. What the people want is to have the whole truth laid before them.

And even though it may never have been contemplated that the secrecy of the ballot should be infringed, I hold that that secrecy should not be held for one moment to prevent the commissioners going behind the ballot and asking every man how he voted and expecting him to answer, if it is necessary to bring out the information that is desirable in connection with these election frauds. The country wants this information brought out, and if the commissioners fail to bring it out by reason of the failure of the government to make the scope of the commission wide enough or to amend any law that may stand in the way, the public will hold the government responsible. Another question was to allow the commissioners to be charged with the responsibility for selecting their own counsel. We have had an example of this course in the commission that has been sitting lately in the province of Ontario. That commission, I venture to say, has been a perfect farce.

Mr. COWAN. How?

Mr. SPROULE. By reason of the very limited scope given to the commissioner, and because the different political parties were not allowed to select counsel who, if they had been selected, might have brought out information which it was desirable should be made public, but which is not now brought out. There are lawyers who have been connected with these matters for months and years, and have become experts, as it were, in that line. They are in possession of a great deal of information