

PERSONAL EXPLANATION—MR. BOURASSA.

Mr. HENRI BOURASSA (Labelle). Before the Orders of the Day are called, I rise to a question of personal explanation. A rumour has been going through the newspapers that I had refused to appear before the Public Accounts Committee to give explanation as to expenditures in connection with my secretaryship on the Joint High Commission. I did not mind much these rumours. I always remember the words that I heard upon one occasion used by Lord Herschell, that even if he were accused by the newspapers of having murdered his father, hanged his mother, poisoned his children and drowned his wife, he would not take the trouble to correct the report. However, some of my friends told me that I had better give some explanation of the circumstances.

The facts are very simple, and they are these. Not being a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I was not present at the meeting at which the matter was brought up; but, in the evening papers I read that some member of the committee, I believe the hon. member for Bothwell (Mr. Clancy), proposed that the hon. member for North Norfolk (Mr. Charlton), who was one of the commissioners, and the hon. member for Labelle (Mr. Bourassa), who was one of the joint secretaries, should appear before the committee. The hon. ex-Minister of Finance (Mr. Foster) said that it would be proper to call the hon. member for Labelle, and not the hon. member for North Norfolk—at least, it is what I read in the newspapers. Of course, I was a little surprised at that, especially as the commissioners are accountable to the government of this country and to parliament for their expenditure, whilst I am not, not on account of my position in itself, but on account of the dispositions that were adopted at that time by the commission itself. But, I do not mind that. I received, in the evening, a very courteous letter from the president of the committee asking me to appear at the next meeting, Monday, the 9th of April. As I was called out of Ottawa upon special business on that day, I replied in what I thought to be a courteous letter to the president of the committee, not refusing to appear, but simply explaining the facts that I am going to put before the House now.

When it was decided that a commission would be organized between representatives of the British government and representatives of the American government in May, 1898, it was decided that each government should defray the expenses of its own commissioners, and that any joint expenses incurred by order of the Joint High Commission, and so certified, should be paid in equal moieties by the two governments, British and American. At the first sitting

of the commission in Quebec, on the 27th of August, Mr. Chandler Anderson, on the part of the United States, Mr. W. C. Cartwright, and myself, on the part of Great Britain, were named as joint secretaries of the Joint High Commission. Therefore, the expenditures of the joint secretaries who were appointed by the same nomination and under the same authority, came under the disposition of the expenses to be incurred by the commission itself, and to be divided up into equal moieties between the two governments. During the whole time that I occupied the position of joint secretary under the same nomination and under the same conditions as the other British secretary and the American secretary, I never thought, for a moment, that I had anything to do with the government or with the parliament of Canada as far as my expenses were concerned. Advances were made to me by the treasurer, for the time being, of the Canadian government, Mr. Joseph Pope, and of course, I kept an account. I kept, at least, an account of my expenses, but I did not keep any special account, or any details or vouchers. I kept also an account of the amounts I received. Some time this winter I met the Auditor General, Mr. McDougall, who asked me if I had any details. I said no, I had no details, that I always expected that the commission would settle that itself, and that I would be in the same position as the other joint secretaries. However, I sent to the Auditor General a certificate of the money that I had expended and I returned \$1.10 that was left over of the money that I had received.

After I had seen a statement of what had taken place in the committee in the newspapers, and after I had received the letter from Mr. Fraser, I sent him a letter explaining these facts, not stating that I refused to appear before the committee, but simply stating the facts as to my position and as to the position of the members of the commission. On Monday following, the 9th, I was absent, and I understand that the president of the committee was absent also, and that there was a good deal of talk to the effect that I had refused to appear before the committee, which was not the case. Another meeting of the committee was called. I was still absent, and as the president of the committee did not have my letter to read before the committee, some members of the committee concluded that I had refused to appear and was defying the committee. On Friday, the 20th of April, I received notice to attend the committee ten minutes before the opening of the meeting. As I had received no answer to my previous letter, I was very much surprised, thinking, as I still think, that the committee was composed of gentlemen. For that day I did not go to the committee because I thought I was entitled to an answer to my letter. Upon meeting the hon. member for