

Mr. F. B. McCormick was appointed Collector of Customs in Pelee Island, not only against the wishes, but in spite of the very strong remonstrances of the people of that district. That feeling of dissatisfaction developed into a very strong opposition to the parties who secured his appointment, and the Government who were responsible for it,—a feeling which manifested itself at the very first opportunity at the polls. At the elections in June last, for the Province of Ontario, the first Liberal majority was recorded on that Island in favour of Mr. Balfour, M.P.P., a result which was said to be due largely to the dissatisfaction felt by the people with this appointment. And, Sir, the significance of that vote cannot be mistaken, for I have only to point out that Pelee Island previous to that contest, had always given a majority for the Conservative candidates and the Conservative party. At one election the entire vote of the Island, with the exception of one vote, went for the Conservative party. Coming down to the recent contest, the unexpected dissolution of Parliament, the sudden appeal to the country, and the midnight attack which hon. gentlemen opposite made upon the voters of Canada, the Conservative party found this Pelee Island matter unsettled, and the election had not proceeded very far when the party in that riding became alarmed at the news received. Unrestricted reciprocity was not only a powerful and potent factor in that contest, there as elsewhere, but the news came from all parts of the Island that unless Mr. F. B. McCormick was removed, instead of that Island going solidly Conservative, the candidate who now has the honour to address this House would practically sweep the Island. It was at this exciting and critical period of the contest that an act unworthy of the Government, and unworthy of the politicians in that riding, was committed. The people were made to believe that Mr. McCormick would be removed from his situation. Letters were shown throughout the Island, one purporting to be from the late First Minister, promising that Mr. McCormick would be at once and permanently removed and a person satisfactory to the people appointed in his place. Other letters to the same effect were also circulated, and the word given to the people that, if they would only support the Government candidate, a change would be made which would be satisfactory to them. I want to direct the attention of this House and the country to the extraordinary action of the Minister of Customs on that occasion. I say his action was extraordinary, and it will be his duty to explain it to the House and to the country. We find—at least, I believe I have evidence to prove it—that hon. gentleman, during a political contest, telegraphing from one part of Ontario to a party who had nothing to do with the office, that a collector had been appointed for Pelee Island. Pelee Island is an outport of Amherstburg, but the Minister of Customs telegraphed to the collector at Windsor:

“Inform J. H. C. Atkinson that he has been appointed Collector of Customs at Pelee Island.”

That message was sent about the 20th February, when the election contest was at fever heat. Mr. Atkinson was a prominent man on the Island and was taking a prominent part in the contest. He was a pronounced advocate of unrestricted reciprocity; and we had the spectacle of the Minister of Customs wiring to the Collector of Customs at

Windsor, who had nothing to do with Pelee Island, to inform J. H. C. Atkinson, with whom I presume the Minister of Customs had had no previous correspondence, that he was appointed collector of Pelee Island. I do not think the Minister of Customs could delegate authority by wire, and whatever was done should have been done through the Collector of Customs at Amherstburg. We find that the Collector at Windsor telephoned to Pelee Island, for there is a telephone between the two places, informing Mr. Atkinson that he was appointed Collector of Customs there, and on the strength of that telephone message, the office was handed over to him. I endeavoured to elicit some information from the Minister of Customs in regard to this matter by a question which I put on the Notice paper, and, while I do not intend to differ with the hon. gentleman on a question of fact, I will require him to explain his apparent contradictions. I asked:

“What is the name of the present sub-collector on Pelee Island? At what date was he appointed? Has he continuously discharged the duties of that office since the date of his appointment? Was any other person appointed sub-collector at that outport, or in any way instructed to discharge the duties of that office during the present year? If so, what is his name, the date of his appointment, and the amount of his salary, and is he still in the employ of the Government?”

“Mr. BOWELL. The name of the present sub-collector on Pelee Island is F. B. McCormick. He was appointed on the 1st December, 1888. Mr. McCormick has not been continuously discharging the duties of that office since the date of his appointment. No other person has been appointed sub-collector at that outport. Mr. J. H. C. Atkinson was requested to perform the duties of sub-collector on Pelee Island during the absence of Mr. McCormick, who had been ordered to report for duty at Windsor.”

“On the 28th of April, 1891, Mr. McCormick was instructed to resume his duties as sub-collector on Pelee Island, and Mr. Atkinson to be paid for the time he had acted as sub-collector, at the rate of \$400 per annum.”

The hon. Minister states that no other appointment had been made. I will ask that hon. gentleman to explain his telegram, of which I have a copy. The people of Pelee Island were assured that a change would be made; they were assured of it by these letters which I have and this telegram which I will read, and I desire to know by what authority this office was handed over. The Minister of Customs sent a telegram, not dated from Ottawa, but I suppose during his campaign tour through the country. This is a copy of the telephone message which was received:

“February 21, 1891.

“J. H. C. ATKINSON.

“The Minister of Customs has ordered me to inform you that you are appointed Customs Officer at Pelee Island in place of F. B. McCormick.

(Sd.) “MILES COWAN,
“Windsor.”

Mr. Atkinson remarks upon that:

“I telephoned answer to Cowan accepting office. I also wrote to him and also the hon. Minister of Customs by the next mail leaving the Island, accepting the office.”

Here is a copy of the reply:

“OTTAWA, 26th February, 1891.

“J. H. C. ATKINSON, Esq.,
“Pelee Island.

“SIR,—The hon. the Minister of Customs is absent from Ottawa, but your letter of the 21st instant will be brought under his notice.

“Your obedient servant,

(Sd.) “E. L. SANDERS,

“Private Secretary.”