

April 27, 1874

procure, if the progress of the investigation showed the necessity of procuring it, evidence from parties now in the interior of the country. It would save the enormous expense entailed by the bringing of witnesses from Manitoba here, and, lastly, the evidence taken before it would be taken under the sanctity of an oath. As to the necessity of such an investigation, he might urge on general grounds that it was needed to settle an important but troublesome question, and to set at rest vexatious complications which have arisen out of it. As connected with the question of amnesty, it was important to determine the extent of Riel's accountability for the rebellion. Lastly, it was due to those who believed it to be their duty to support the cause of law and order, and to defend their lives and property in the Northwest.

As to himself, he could fairly lay claim to freedom from political bias in this matter. He had never in this House endeavoured to make this Riel question a political one, nor to throw the onus on either one or the other of the great political parties in the country. He did not wish now to embarrass the Government, but simply wanted that a measure of justice should be meted out to the English natives of Manitoba, to the loyal portion of the French Métis, and to the Canadians of the country, which their loyalty and their devotion merited, and which he believed the adoption of this motion would secure. He proceeded to state that he had altered the motion from the exact wording of the notice of motion so as to comply with the rule which excluded motions involving the expenditure of money, and would now move, seconded by Mr. Bowell (Hastings North), "that the origin of the occurrences of 1869-1870 in Manitoba and these occurrences themselves, be inquired into in that Province by a Royal Commission or otherwise".

Hon. Mr. MACKENZIE said the hon. gentleman had not in any way embarrassed the Government, but it appeared to him that the motion was unnecessary. The House would find that the reference of duties to the Committee now sitting was made in the following terms: "A Committee of seven members to inquire into the causes of the difficulties in the Northwest in 1869-1870 with special reference to the amnesty promised by Sir John Young (Governor General, 1869-1872) and any other promise of amnesty which may have been made." It would be seen that the Committee of the House now existing, and carrying on their enquiries, had ample power to make such enquiries as they might deem best in the public interest. He was not himself in favour of searching very minutely into the causes of these disturbances further than might be necessary in order to promote some public object.

The hon. gentleman in his motion on the notice paper gave as one of the reasons for asking for the Commission that certain allegations had been made of the danger of similar disturbances occurring in the valley of the Saskatchewan. The government were not informed of anything, privately or officially, that could lead to the supposition that there could be any fear of a disturbance in the Northwest. It seemed to him (Hon. Mr. Mackenzie), apart from the question of order, that it was extremely inexpedient that any Commission should be appointed to investigate matters which it was best should remain uninvestigated. The existing Committee had ample power to investigate matters as they might think necessary,

and under these circumstances he would ask the hon. gentleman not to press his motion.

Hon. Mr. CAMERON (Cardwell) pointed out that the present Committee had power to investigate matters connected with the Red River troubles, and if they could not complete the investigation during the sitting of the House, it would be within the power of the Committee to apply to the House to appoint a Royal Commission. This he thought would be more expedient than taking out of the hands of the Committee that which had been referred to them.

It might be that the investigation would prove to be a lengthy one, and that the Committee would not be able to complete during the present session the inquiry which had been submitted to them. The examinations that had taken place before the Committee already were of a lengthened character, and had embraced a considerable variety of the subjects contained within the three matters referred to the Committee. The witnesses were examined for a considerable time, and now their evidence was being examined and corrected. They had found it necessary, in the case of a single witness, to occupy four days in his examination, and in the correction of his evidence afterwards. If a Royal Commission were appointed now, it would to a great extent supersede the Committee.

Fourteen or sixteen witnesses were here to be examined, and he thought, whatever might be the intention of the Government, whether it would not be necessary to have a Royal Commission would depend upon what the enquiry elicited. It would be better for the mover to withdraw his resolution and leave it to the Committee themselves if they thought it necessary to report to the House that a Royal Commission was desirable; and he had no doubt, if that were the judgment they came to, the House and the Government would be willing to act upon it. In the meantime, he thought the motion was premature.

Hon. Mr. BLAKE said that in the motion which the hon. gentleman had put upon the notice paper, he asked for a Royal Commission to inquire into the causes of the Red River disturbances of 1869-1870, and into the alleged danger of a similar disturbance occurring in the valley of the Saskatchewan. The hon. gentleman had with great wisdom omitted the latter part of his motion but he had not displayed the same wisdom in moving for a Royal Commission to inquire into the causes of the occurrences in the Northwest in 1869-1870.

A Committee had already been appointed to inquire into the matter, although he (Hon. Mr. Blake) could not see that anything beneficial would result from inquiring into the causes of these troubles. He thought it would be inconvenient after a particular subject had been referred to a Select Committee that the same subject should be referred at the same time to a Royal Commission.

Whether the Committee did or did not propose a Royal Commission, whether it was or was not capable of discharging the duty assigned to it, the House could deal with the matter when it got the Committee's report but he thought it would be manifestly inconvenient, after unanimous resolutions of the House referring this question to a Committee, to order the issue of a Commission