

Hon. Mr. Huntington said if the people of his constituency had felt that they had suffered from blunders, whether of Volunteers or Regulars, he would have felt it his duty to bring the matter before this House. The fact that the honourable member for Welland had said that his constituents, who were on the spot, demanded the evidence was sufficient to induce him to vote for the motion.

Hon. Mr. Smith said that the publicity in the ordinary Courts had a salutary effect. Here was an offence—a servant of the Government—tried by a secret tribunal, and will the people never be permitted to know anything about it? If the Government had said it was inexpedient he would have acquiesced, but he could not admit the broad ground that the people should not know the result of such investigations.

Dr. Parker said it was sufficient reason for the motion that there was a Court of Enquiry and a report made. It tended to injure the volunteer service for officers to be retained in the service who were incompetent.

Mr. Blake said the object of the motion was simply to place the House in possession of certain information. When that was obtained, it would then be for a member of the House, if it warranted further discussion to bring the matter before the House, and ask the House to deal with it, but this was merely a preliminary motion, and it did not necessarily follow that when the papers were brought down the honourable member for Monk would ask the House to take further action on it. He agreed that if the Government stated on their responsibility that they had examined the evidence, and the circumstances were such as to render it improper to make that evidence public, a very strong case would have to be made out to induce the House to insist upon the papers in the face of such a statement; but no such statement had been made by the Minister of Militia. He said he had not read the evidence, but that nevertheless the Government must resist the motion. He (Mr. Blake) thought that no case had been made out for the Government adopting this course.

Mr. Campbell was of opinion that as a general rule, when in an application for papers the Government declared to the House that in their opinion the public interests would be injured by the production of the papers, the demand should not be insisted on. The enquiry in this instance had been made in the ordinary way; the matter was placed

[Mr. Cartwright (Lennox)]

in the hands of gentlemen whom he must consider to have been competent to judge of the conduct of the officer complained of. It was competent for those who now complained that the report was unsatisfactory to have gone to the Court of Enquiry, and there made the complaints they were now making. If they did not do so, they were precluded from questioning the report now, if they did not, he thought they should forever hold their peace. But suppose the papers were produced, what then? Was this House going to assume the prerogative or powers of a Court of Appeal? He thought the House would be stepping beyond its province to do any such thing.

Mr. McDougall said the ground taken by the Government, as announced by the Minister of Militia, was that no sufficient case had been made out for the interference of the House. It was not expedient in the interest of the Militia service, and in the interest of the country, that this House, on the mere statement of honourable members that people were dissatisfied with the finding of the Court of Enquiry, should call upon the Government to bring down the evidence on which that finding was based. The member for Westmoreland (Mr. Smith) had mainly confined his argument to the point of secrecy, and had held that the very fact of its having been a secret enquiry furnished a reason why the House should drag the proceedings into daylight and spread them before the country. He (Mr. McDougall) thought there was no force in such an argument. It had been found expedient to hold enquiries of this kind with closed doors, for the purpose, among others, as he understood, to get the fullest possible information on the subject of enquiry. A person, under such circumstances, would state more clearly and fully what he knew, when his evidence affected an individual with whom perhaps he is in close relations than he would in open court, where he knew his statements would go into the newspapers next morning.

Mr. Huntington adverted to the position taken by the member for Guysboro (Mr. Campbell), that when Government stated explicitly that it was not in the interest of the public service that certain papers should be produced, it was the duty of the House to accept that statement. He (Mr. Huntington) granted that position, and if the Minister of Militia would state that the publication of these papers would be detrimental to the public service there could be no doubt the House should refrain from demanding them.