

MONSTER MASS MEETING.

The Squires-Gibbs-Woodford Case Freely Discussed.

Resolutions Demand Vice-Regal Action — Demonstration at Government House — Pelting Rain Could Not Dampen Popular Enthusiasm — 1000 Voters in Procession.

Despite the continual downpour of rain some 1,500 citizens representative of the artisan, mechanic and laboring classes of St. John's assembled in the Star Hall last night for the purpose of discussing the situation arising out of the Woodford affidavit, and passing a series of resolutions requesting His Excellency the Governor to take action in the matter. The hall was filled to overflowing and many could not gain admission. Mr. W. J. O'Neill, in opening the meeting, requested the audience to appoint a chairman and secretary. The choice of chairman fell to Mr. John Cadwell, who was proposed by Mr. P. Whittle and seconded by Mr. Duffey. Mr. Jonas Barter was selected as secretary, being proposed by Mr. M. Murphy and seconded by Mr. Quigley. The audience showed their approval of the selection by prolonged clapping and shouts of enthusiasm. Mr. Cadwell, upon taking the chair, thanked the assembly for the honor conferred on him, and in outlining the object of the meeting said, "This is not a political meeting, it is not a sectarian, or a partizan meeting. It was called for the sole purpose of bringing citizens together to take action on the charges made against two of our public men, Hon. R. A. Squires and Hon. M. P. Gibbs. It is not our desire to injure these men. We just wish to ask His Excellency to appoint a commission so that if not guilty of the charges they may be vindicated. The charges made are very serious and it is not desirable that any man so charged should fill an Executive position without giving a satisfactory answer to them. The resolutions will be read to you; they call on His Excellency not to open the Legislature before this serious matter is settled up. Some time ago I was in a position where efforts were being made to clean up the political life of the country and my colleagues were pledged to this, and it is only fair that I should continue my efforts."

The following resolutions were then read by the Secretary:

RESOLUTIONS.

Whereas in January a petition was presented to the Supreme Court against the return of Mr. William Woodford as member of the House of Assembly for the Electoral District of Harbor Main, alleging that

the said Mr. Woodford had been guilty of corrupt and illegal practices;

And Whereas when the case came up for hearing the Hon. M. P. Gibbs, Counsel for the petitioner, asked that the case be withdrawn;

And Whereas the said Mr. Gibbs was advised by their Lordships that a motion for withdrawal could not be entertained until certain preliminary requirements were complied with, which requirements included the filing of affidavits by all the parties to the petition, and their solicitors, showing whether or not any collusion or agreement existed;

And Whereas the petitioner, Richard Kelly, Mr. Barron, partner of the said Mr. Gibbs, Mr. Kelly's solicitor, Messrs. Howley and Higgins, Solicitors for Mr. Woodford and subsequently Mr. Woodford himself accordingly filed affidavits;

And Whereas Mr. Gibbs filed no affidavit;

And Whereas Mr. Woodford in his affidavit made the statement that he had entered into an arrangement with Hon. Richard A. Squires, Prime Minister of Newfoundland, and Hon. Michael P. Gibbs, a Solicitor of the Court, on March 17th whereby the petition against him was to be withdrawn on certain specific conditions, namely (1) his appointment to a position in the Civil Service after the close of the coming session of the Legislature at an annual salary of \$2,000 a year with an additional allowance of \$500 in lieu of perquisites, and that the said salary was to commence as from the first day of April of the present year, but that on the 19th day of March, the day following the promised withdrawal, three months' salary was to be paid him in advance, and (2) his resignation as Member for the District of Harbour Main, which latter condition was duly complied with by the said William Woodford;

And Whereas the charges made by the said Mr. William Woodford, recently a member of the Executive Council of this Dominion against the Hon. R. A. Squires, the present Prime Minister, and the Hon. M. P. Gibbs, a former member of the Executive Council, and at the present time a member of the Legislative Council, is so far as the public is concerned uncontradicted and unchallenged, and

therefore constitutes a charge against the Prime Minister and a Legislative Council of a serious offence against the law, and a transgression against public morals, to the detriment of authority and the violation of rudimentary principles of public order and public honour;

Be It Therefore Resolved by the citizens of St. John's, assembled in response to public notice, that protest be made against the opening of the Legislature under a Prime Minister who stands charged with so serious an offence, until the charge is disproved in as clear and explicit a manner as it has been made, that is to say by solemn affidavit;

Moreover that until the said charges are satisfactorily disproved the said Richard A. Squires is not in the opinion of this meeting of citizens, a fit or proper person to act as a Minister of the Crown, nor the said Michael P. Gibbs a fit or proper person to occupy a non-elective seat in the Legislative Council;

Be It Further Resolved that a deputation from this meeting of citizens be appointed to proceed to Government House and to present a copy of these resolutions to His Excellency the Governor, Sir C. Alexander Harris, and respectfully to request that the terms of the foregoing resolution be carried into effect, thereby avoiding what may otherwise, in the opinion of this meeting and of all law-abiding citizens to whom the honour of His Excellency's advisers constitutes, by its representative character, the honour of the Dominion, bring the Government and citizenship of Newfoundland into disrepute, dishonour and disgrace.

After the resolution had been read, Mr. K. R. Prowse moved that a paragraph be embodied asking that all appointments made by the Government since their assuming office be suspended. The meeting did not approve of the motion, the object being to deal with the Squires-Gibbs case.

Mr. P. J. Shea, is moving the adoption of the resolutions, said that it was only proper that no slur should be cast upon us as a people. On the whole we are very patient, but in this case patience has gone too far; when our representatives are bought and sold like cattle at a public sale, we are justified in the protest we are making. If we can not get men who are honest, well then we will have to try the suffragettes and put them to represent us in the House of Assembly. The adoption of the resolution was seconded by Mr. Burt, and passed by a standing vote amid thunderous applause.

It was also moved and seconded that copies of the resolutions be presented to Sir M. P. Cashin, leader of the Opposition, and Hon. W. F. Coaker, Minister of Marine and Fisheries.

A delegation consisting of J. Cadwell, Jas. P. Crotty, Wm. J. O'Neill, H. Lilly, John Burt, Harvey Shaw, Walter Lawlor, P. Whittle, M. Murphy, John Quigley, J. Vaughan, A. Stone, was appointed to present the resolutions to the Governor, and the motion, that the whole audience should march to the Government House and that the delegation should call on Sir Michael Cashin and Hon. W. F. Coaker was unanimously carried. The Chairman announced that the delegation would leave the Hall at 9 o'clock, call on His Excellency, read the resolutions and state the sentiment of the meeting to him. An amendment to the resolutions, proposed by Mr. K. R. Prowse "That all appointments made since the last election be suspended until the charges made are proved, was objected to by Mr. Shea, who said that it was going too far. The motion of Mr. Prowse received no support. The delegation and some hundreds of the audience walked in all the downpour of rain to the Vice Regal residence. Arriving at the door, the delegation was ushered into His Excellency's presence. Mr. Cadwell upon greeting His Excellency said, "we are

a delegation selected by some 1500 citizens of St. John's, to present to you a set of resolutions arising out of charges alleged in a sworn affidavit, made by Mr. Wm. Woodford against the Prime Minister and the Hon. M. P. Gibbs and also to ask you on behalf of these citizens to do your best to bring about a better condition of political affairs than exists at present." Mr. Jonas Barter then read the resolutions, after receiving which His Excellency said "Mr. Barter, Gentlemen, I have thought about this matter this past three weeks and I am quite prepared to deal with it and at once. I endorse the idea of a public meeting calling attention to the allegations made. As regards the idea of purity of public life nobody holds it stronger than I do. Newfoundland has long had responsible Government and its Governor must be guided by the Ministers elected by the people and if I were to make a breach of the constitution nobody would condemn me more than you. I am sorry to say intricacy is too much in evidence in the public life of the Colony. After the best of consideration I am on the point of arranging a Royal Commission consisting of the Chief Justice, Justice Kent and a senior member of the Legislature, who will get at the facts as set forth in your resolutions. In reading the resolution I note you ask me to hold up the session of the Legislature until these charges are disposed of. I don't think it right to do so. Now I ask you, do you consider it fair to hold up the business of the country until such time as these alleged charges are proved or disproved. I may say The Prime Minister has emphatically denied the allegations. As far as I know there is no power that can prevent a duly elected member from taking his seat. It would be necessary to have something very much more serious than these charges before I could do that."

As regards your complaint of the gentlemen not fit to hold a position in the Legislature it is not for the Crown to interfere with the Upper House. It is for the Legislature itself to act. Under the constitution a Governor must not interfere unless he can be assured of other ministers to take the place of any removed from office. It is indeed gentlemen a pleasure to meet citizens who are in favor of purity of public life. I may say further in regard to the affidavit there was a chance that it would go before the courts, but I find it could not be brought about within a reasonable time, and failing this I think the set of charges should be made on the floors of the Assembly. I have consulted with my Ministers and a Royal Commission will be appointed immediately."

Mr. Crotty, replying, said, we do not condemn the Prime Minister and Hon. Mr. Gibbs; we but ask for an enquiry into this deplorable state of affairs. There has been, as far as the public is aware, no reply to the Woodford affidavit. We condemn the idea of these men not answering the sworn allegations made against them.

His Excellency here re-read the resolutions, and reiterating his former statements, said also, "in a Crown Colony I might intervene, but under the constitution I must be guided by the advice of my ministers, and could only intervene if sure the charges were true."

Mr. Whittle asked His Excellency if Mr. Squires was at present Crown adviser. His Excellency replied "yes." Mr. Whittle: "I am sure the citizens whom we represent, object to Mr. Squires being an adviser to your Excellency." The Governor replied: "That is what a good many people may think, but being duly elected, and until the charges are proven it is not for me to condemn." Mr. Whittle: "If I were charged with a crime I would not have the privilege of appointing my own judges." Mr. Crotty called His Excellency's attention to a precedent for the dis-

missal of a minister. The Governor in reply, admitted that he may dismiss his ministers for certain reasons, but in this case the denial of the allegations has been absolute and if the commission finds the facts are as represented, he will act.

Mr. Barter explained that Messrs. Squires and Gibbs are charged on oath with offences and are in a sense on remand, therefore they should not be allowed to keep their positions.

Mr. O'Neill then asked if it would not be proper to have Messrs. Squires and Gibbs make their denial on oath, before taking their seats. His Excellency in replying, said, "I sympathize with you, but there is a responsibility to the people at large and until I find out the facts I cannot act, and as I said before, the constitution must be guarded particularly, and the enquiry by the commission is the best method I know of. The terms of the enquiry were settled this evening, the Chief Justice presiding, and it is at his discretion whether it will be held publicly or not. The investigation will proceed immediately. Mr. Cadwell then thanked His Excellency for the splendid reception accorded the delegation which then withdrew.

After cheers for His Majesty and His Excellency, the deputation after briefly explaining the nature of the interview to the many who had waited outside in the storm, proceeded to the residence of Sir M. P. Cashin where all were invited indoors. Mr. Cadwell explained that as Leader of the Opposition, Sir Michael was looked to for action in espousing the cause endorsed by the public meeting and expressed in the resolutions which Secretary Barter then read.

In reply, Sir Michael promised to give due consideration and support to the idea, and approved the democratic stand taken by the citizens, which was worthy of commendation. He promised to bring the resolutions before the Opposition, and hoped the desire of the public would be realized. He thanked Mr. Cadwell and the deputation for the visit, after which they withdrew.

In view of the lateness of the hour and state of the weather, the idea of waiting on Hon. W. F. Coaker, who is also to be presented with a copy of the resolutions, was deferred till this morning.

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