

Essex spoke in the line, a little bit, of the First Minister. He followed in his line when he charged the Local Government—and he repeated the old story in reference to the views that I took when I was a member of the Local Government—as to the relation I should desire to exist between the Government of the Dominion and the Government of the Province. I said that I desired the relations between the two Governments to be relations of neutrality. I desire it still. I heartily regret that circumstances have ever risen which make any other relations to exist between the Government of the Dominion and the Government of any Province, than relations of neutrality. But I never said, I never thought, I never suggested, that the relations between the Government of a Province and the Government of the Dominion ought to be those of a neutrality which should, in the slightest degree, compromise or interfere with the relations of the individuals who compose that Government as electors of the Province, to interfere with their liberty to vindicate the rights of their Province or to vindicate their politics. Why, at the very time I said so I was the First Minister of Ontario. And when I was a member of this House for the west riding of Durham, opposing the hon. gentleman, does he suppose that I purposed to sentence myself to neutrality as a representative of the west riding of Durham, when I declared that I thought the Local Government of Ontario, as a Local Government, ought to be neutral? Surely no. I intended to reserve, I did reserve, I was reserving, my full rights as an elector of Ontario, as a representative of a constituency of Ontario in the House of Commons, to act according to what my views of the interests of this country required in that capacity. Well, as Prime Minister of the Government of Ontario, I purposed to pursue a course of neutrality as far as the Dominion Government was concerned.

Mr. PATTERSON (Essex). What about coercion of the local officials?

Mr. BLAKE. I am going to touch coercion, which the hon. gentleman did not touch, but the First Minister did. I am going to touch it, and if the hon. gentleman will allow me I will deal with only one thing at a time. Now, the hon. gentleman declared—and here also he followed the lead of the First Minister—that the members of the Local Government whom, with that fresh instance of fair play, of moderate conduct, of the absence of vituperative epithets which he recommends to us, he called my satellites, have been engaged in the contest in Ontario. I suppose they were, I hope they were. As free men of Canada, as electors of the Province of Ontario, they had not merely the right, but the duty, to stand upon a platform and address to the people of Ontario their views as to what the interests of Canada were, although it happened to be the hon. gentleman's constituency which they invaded. But to call them my satellites is to call them by a name wholly inappropriate and wholly inaccurate. They are the members of a very strong Government, which, in despite of all the opposition of the hon. gentleman and his supporters, has succeeded in retaining the confidence of the people of Ontario for a period of fourteen or fifteen years. They are the satellites of no man, they are the trusted rulers of the Province of Ontario, to whom this power has been confided for that long period by the will of its people. Now, the First Minister has said that the members of the Local Government, from the Prime Minister to the last of them, threatened to coerce their officers to vote and work for the Opposition in the recent contest, and the observations of the member for North Essex (Mr. Patterson) appeared to be in the same direction. I am not the vindicator or the defender of the Local Government, but I suppose it will be agreed by every member of this House that the honor and standing of the Local Government are subjects of concern to all the population of Canada. All I demand

is, in the interest of justice and fair play, that charges so grave as these should not be uttered wholesale, without definition, without specification, without proof. If the hon. gentleman shall show that the Government of Ontario has, as he has charged them this night with doing, coerced and threatened its employés, its officers, into taking a course contrary to their conscience and wishes, politically, I shall join that hon. gentleman in condemning that Government; but I call upon him, as he has made this statement, to give particulars and to give proof. The hon. gentleman is excellent at wholesale and general charges, he is a master at enveloping a people, a party, a Government, a population, in one mass of declamatory invective and charge. Oftentime he has charged us in like terms. But let him now come down to particulars in reference to those whom he charges, and give them an opportunity to answer, and let us see whether he has this night done them justice. I agree with the hon. member for North Essex, who said that if there were persons appointed who ought not to have been appointed, some specification ought to be given, and as this charge has been made against the Local Government, I trust the hon. gentleman will agree with me that, here also, some specification should be given, and I shall answer the hon. gentleman's demands for specifications as to the returning officers very soon. Now, Sir, the First Minister said that it was necessary to make a change in the appointment of returning officers, because the local officers who, by law, held this appointment, were under the control of a hostile Government. I do not at all pretend that it is an infallible guarantee of the fitness for the office of returning officer, or for any other trust, of a man, that he should hold the situation of a sheriff or a registrar; but I do say that no better plan has been devised, nor can any better plan be devised, for securing, upon the whole, upon the mass, good appointments, than that the persons who are appointed to these responsible offices should, during good behavior, also be returning officers. They are officials of a quasi-judicial character; they are men who are appointed practically for life; they are appointed to offices which require some training, which require them to live in the community, and which require them, if they value at all what most of us value highly, the esteem and respect of those amongst whom they live, require them so to behave in the discharge of those duties as that they shall retain that esteem and respect. The hon. gentleman says, however, it was necessary to depart from this rule because these persons were no longer servants of this Government, but were servants of other Governments, and in order to secure impartiality, in order to secure right appointments, we must take the office into our own hands, and we found that injustice was done us when we did not do so. Now, I appeal to the fair play and candor of the hon. gentlemen who have watched the conduct of elections, as far as the returning officers were concerned, for a great many years past, to say in how many cases there has been misconduct by sheriffs or registrars when they held, by law, that office in the old days. There are other cases, there may be a case or two, I do not say there is not; I do not remember one at the moment, but it is quite possible. Considering the question broadly, I ask where are the cases? I say we had a guarantee in the standing of those men, and in the fact that they held their office as returning officers not by the gift of the Government, but by the law of the land, that they were so appointed and known, and every one was aware that they held that office to act fairly and impartially between both parties, which was the best guarantee we could possess. With what does the hon. gentleman replace that system? He gives the appointments in many cases to partisans of his own party. This is a very serious question. It is a question which comes before us, after what has been said, directly upon this motion, but it is one which must obviously inte-