

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

MONDAY, Feb. 13—Continued.

Mr. SHEA—What new matter was that which we had now from the Commercial body? That was not the petition which was on the table of the Commercial Room on Saturday. The petition, however, was a very proper one, as were the hon. gentleman's observations also. But notwithstanding it was a class petition to conserve their own interests. But he might ask whether the interests of the merchants were identical with those of the people at large in this matter? Their object was to amass as speedily as possible the means to leave the country and live elsewhere. If they had had such wish there would not have been a mile of road in the colony. They objected to all taxation. Was this the first time they petitioned the house? Did we not find that Reponsible Government was opposed by the commercial body, and that some of them left the country on account of its being introduced? They had suddenly become free traders. If they had their own way the colony would not have had representative institutions to this day. When free trade with the United States was proposed, it had not more determined opponents than the commercial body. The petitioners were very respectable men. He admitted their respectability, but he must repeat that was a class petition. The petition stated that Canada pursued a protective policy—so did the United States. It said we would benefit by a free trade policy. He (Mr. Shea) agreed with the petitioners. But when free trade was proposed none were more violently opposed to it than the petitioners. They seemed now to have an extraordinary fit of alarm. Who told them, or any person else that the question of confederation would be forced through this session? Not a single word was uttered since the commencement of the session by any supporter of confederation had worked wonders. On every occasion heretofore, the hon member Mr March strongly advocated the rights of the fishermen, and now for the first time in his life he appears as the apologist of the merchants. Such a course however was unnecessary, for nothing had been said that he (Mr W) was aware of, disrepectful to that body. The hon gentleman had said that this great and important question ought not to be influenced by clamour. But he (Mr W) believed that it was the clamour of that hon member and others like him which had induced the commercial body to send that petition to this house, hon members had gone forth and made the grossest misrepresentation of what had been stated here. He (Mr W) never heard the hon. member for Placentia and St. Mary's, Mr Shea, say that he would force this matter through this session. Such a course he believed was never contemplated. The question was entirely new to this country. It had been under the consideration of the other colonies for years past, but we had never interested ourselves in it, and until the past autumn the question had never been submitted to us. It was only lately that we acquired any satisfactory information on the subject. The petition just presented to the House was entitled to all the consideration which the hon member, Mr Wyatt, asked for it. And he (Mr W) felt convinced that every petition, no matter from whom it emanated, would always meet with due consideration in that assembly. But this was avowedly a class petition, and as such should be cautiously dealt with, for unfortunately the gentlemen who had signed this petition were apt to change their opinions, and in support of what he stated, he (Mr W) had merely to refer to the action of the Commercial Society in 1863, when they passed a resolution as to advisability of paying all duties in cash and doing away with the Bond system. The resolution which was sent to the hon Receiver General was as follows:—

"That it is advisable, and recommended by this Society, that, in future, all duties be paid in cash, and that H. M. Government be informed of this Resolution, in order to take any steps they may think advisable thereon."

Shortly after this resolution was received by the Receiver General, a petition, which he (Mr W) would read, was addressed to his Excellency the Governor in Council, as follows:—

"We, the undersigned Merchants and Importers of St. John's, having been given to understand that the Commercial Society have passed the following Resolution, viz :

"That it is the opinion of the Commercial body that all duties should be payable in cash, with the view of its being sent to the Executive for action thereon, beg leave to express our dissent therefrom.

"By allowing importers to give Bond for Duties amounting to over £10 sterling (which formerly was £25) is a great accommodation to the trade, and considerable advantage to the revenue, as in case all duties were made payable in cash, the outports, with the exception of Harbour Grace (and this is a great consideration) could not possibly pay their dues in cash.

"We, therefore, humbly submit these our opinions, and trust that as the revenue has not hitherto (so far as we know) sustained any loss from the manner in which duties have been paid, according to law, there will be no alteration made, unless, on a full investigation, it be found advantageous to the country generally."

This petition was signed by Messrs. Job, Brothers & Co., and by fifty other importers, and was sufficient to show that unanimity did not prevail amongst the mercantile community upon public questions, any more than in other quarters. Now this petition was presented to the Legislature, praying for the continuance of the Bond system, and was actually signed by men who had voted for the resolution, and who were members of the Commercial Society. When he (Mr W) saw that only two years ago these gentlemen changed their opinions in so short a time as two days, this House should certainly pause, and not hastily act according to the prayer of that petition. It might be that in a day or two we should have another petition from the same gentlemen with a prayer in favor of confederation. They say that all the country wants is time, and that in the abstract they were in favor of it. But was it right to set up class against class in this matter? Was it all pure philanthropy that animates these gentlemen to scatter their supplies of hard cash?—to use the language of Mr March? Did they not hope for an ample return for the capital which they had invested here in trade? He wondered that the hon member, Mr March who was so fond of quoting Scripture had forgotten the text applicable in this case, that he did not exclaim, "Does God serve God for naught?" Did the merchants expect no return? He (Mr W) always understood that no action of a definite nature was to be taken on this question this session. There was never an intention of forcing it. Therefore this petition was unnecessary and uncalled for, as it only prayed for what the house had determined on long ago.

Mr. GLEN—You might search all over the world without finding men occupying a leading position having so much property involved as the merchants of Newfoundland, highly educated and with a perfect knowledge of our trade and resources. Last Saturday he witnessed what he never before had observed in his life, high and low mixed together to consider this great question. He thought, when men had sustained such heavy losses as our merchants had suffered last year and some years preceding they were entitled to much credit for the way in which they had acted towards the planters and fishermen. He would say now, as he had frequently said before, that there were no men in the world more liberal in giving away their substance to sustain the fishermen and trade of the country. And were those the men to be sneered at when they came to this house with such a reasonable petition on that important question? The hon. member said they went away when they realized fortunes. But if they did, did they not leave their representatives behind them? The house he (Mr. March) had been connected with for years, had £180,000 about last year, and he need not say that they sustained a loss by the year's business. And the fishermen had come to understand who were their friends, and who came forward to sustain them. Who would give the supplies a few weeks hence, for the sea fishery? He trusted in Providence smiling on the energies of the hardy men who were proceeding to the ice; and if they were successful, they would bring in abundance. The hon member said he would give time for the consideration of that question. But if he could have carried if he would have pressed it through the house. But he now found that public opinion was excited against him, and therefore he said its decision ought to be postponed until next year. But were these sentiments from the first? Mr. (Mr March) said nothing should be done hastily until the people had time to consider it. That was a solemn momentous question, and he felt grateful that that petition had come in. There never was a better feeling than now between the several classes of the community. The fishermen could not exist without the merchants, and the merchants' profits were realized from the labour of the fishermen, and both seemed to be more convinced of their mutual dependence than at any former period.

Mr. SHEA—The hon member has made a misstatement which he (Mr. Shea) would not allow to pass uncontradicted. Who authorised him to say that if he (Mr. Shea) had his way the measure would be passed this session?

Mr. MARCH—Yourself. You said you would dispose of it, and if your constituents did not like it, they might reject you at the hustings.

Mr. SHEA—The hon member did not understand the question. He (Mr. Shea) felt the responsibility of the question too much to do anything of the kind. From the very first he said it was too serious a question to be

disposed of without due consideration, and that he did not desire that it should be carried by a narrow majority. What he said was that these were his opinions on the question, and if his constituents did not like these opinions they must choose a representative whose opinions they approved, not that he would carry it without consulting them. He (Mr. Shea) would state his opinions when he went before them, fairly and openly, and would submit himself to their vote; but his opinions were his own. He did not blame the merchants for leaving the country; but he did say that their interests were not identical with those of the people of this country, who intended to remain in it and make it the home of their children. He regretted the merchants did not remain permanently, and direct their attention to those improvements which occupied the attention of merchants in other places. That question must be settled by those who were able to instruct the people on its merits. A great question like that, requiring cool and careful investigation, was not to be disposed of by clamour. It should be approached calmly and carefully. The best minds and clearest intellects in the country were required to elucidate it.

Mr. WHITWAY—This question of confederation had worked wonders. On every occasion heretofore,

the hon member Mr March strongly advocated the rights of the fishermen, and now for the first time in his life he appears as the apologist of the merchants. Such a course however was unnecessary, for nothing had been said that he (Mr W) was aware of, disrepectful to that body. The hon gentleman had said that this great and important question ought not to be influenced by clamour. But he (Mr W) believed that it was the clamour of that hon member and others like him which had induced the commercial body to send that petition to this house, hon members had gone forth and made the grossest misrepresentation of what had been stated here. He (Mr W) never heard the hon. member for Placentia and St. Mary's, Mr Shea, say that he would force this matter through this session.

Such a course he believed was never contemplated.

The question was entirely new to this country.

It had been under the consideration of the other colonies for years past, but we had never interested ourselves in it,

and until the past autumn the question had never been submitted to us.

It was only lately that we acquired

any satisfactory information on the subject.

The petition just presented to the House was entitled to all the

consideration which the hon member, Mr Wyatt, asked for it.

And he (Mr W) felt convinced that every peti-

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This petition was signed by Messrs. Job, Brothers &

Co., and by fifty other importers, and was sufficient

to show that unanimity did not prevail amongst the

mercantile community upon public questions, any more

than in other quarters. Now this petition was pre-

sented to the Legislature, praying for the continuance

of the Bond system, and was actually signed by men

who had voted for the resolution, and who were mem-

bers of the Commercial Society. When he (Mr W)

saw that only two years ago these gentlemen changed

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House should certainly pause, and not hastily act

according to the prayer of that petition. It might be

that in a day or two we should have another petition

from the same gentlemen with a prayer in favor of

confederation. They say that all the country wants is

time, and that in the abstract they were in favor of

it. But was it right to set up class against class in

this matter? Was it all pure philanthropy that ani-

mated these gentlemen to scatter their supplies of hard

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same time stated that nothing should be done without submitting it at first to the people. He was of that opinion still. The Merchants had an undoubted constitutional right to petition this House, and when it was considered how respectfully that petition was signed, he felt that it would receive every consideration to which it was entitled. It was a petition which would have no weight with the country at large. He thought that the condition of the people of this country was very similar to that of Ireland; both countries had but one branch of industry to rely upon. In Ireland Agriculture was the staple industry, and the people had to contend against the landlords, who were the most powerful and influential class. Here we were limited to the fisheries. The merchants possessed the capital, and could make what terms with the people they liked. If we could call up other pursuits to relieve our fisheries, we could create sources of employment which would render our operative population independent of the fisheries, and the consequence would be an increased measure of material prosperity. Whether Confederation would do this or not, he (Mr. Kent) was not prepared to say. It was entirely for the consideration of the people.

Mr. RORKE was not in the House when this discussion began, but he had seen the petition and considered it was a very reasonable one. It was a most momentous question, although it should have been

dealt with in the session.

He was surprised to find

hon. gentlemen opposite changing their opinions about the merchants so quickly. They consider them

ever honest good men; well truth will out, and he

was glad to hear such acknowledgment from them.

He would not detain the House at present, but he

trusted that when the matter came to be fully and

properly discussed, hon. gentlemen would approach it

in a calm and proper spirit.

Mr. PAWSEY.—The petition before the House was

undoubtedly a class petition, but it emanated from a

class whose respectability and influence necessarily

gave it great weight. Looking at all the circumstan-

ces surrounding this question, he (Mr P) could not

but regard that petition as premature. Taking up

the speeches of the delegates as published, and also

the strong expression of opinion from other hon mem-

bers of this house, could not the movers of this Petition

see that it was not the intention of the Govern-

ment to force this question through this house, this

session? The assertions of hon. members on this

point could not have been stronger. The petition, he

had no doubt, was well meant, but it was uncalled for

and unnecessary, and there had been nothing in the

speeches of hon. members of this house, to warrant

the alarm which appeared to be so universal amongst

a certain class, and of which this petition had been the result.

The hon. member, Mr. March, deprecates the

use of claptrap, and yet the hon. gentleman actually

talked of selling the country to the French Canadians.

Could there be any viler or more obnoxious claptrap

than that? Had not hon. gentlemen stated that the