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Volume 3, Number 2, Spring 1974

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad3\\_2art04](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad3_2art04)

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### Publisher(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

### ISSN

0044-5851 (print)

1712-7432 (digital)

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### Cite this article

McLaughlin, K. M. (1974). W.S. Fielding and the Liberal Party in Nova Scotia, 1891-1896. *Acadiensis*, 3(2), 65–79.

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## W. S. Fielding and the Liberal Party in Nova Scotia, 1891 - 1896

Sir Richard Cartwright, Knight Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, inveterate politician, ardent proponent of the policy of Unrestricted Reciprocity with the United States, was utterly despondent on learning the results of the election of 1891. Macdonald and the Conservatives remained on the benches of the Government side of the House. The National Policy so despised by Cartwright was still the law of the land. Victory had eluded the Liberals again. What so infuriated Cartwright was that Macdonald and the Conservatives had won their greatest support where Cartwright thought they ought to have been weakest — in the Maritime provinces. “The shreds and patches” of the nation, he fumed, had kept Sir John in power.<sup>1</sup>

Since Confederation Nova Scotians had been a puzzling enigma to the leaders of the Liberal party. Their special pleading in 1876 had moved Sir Richard Cartwright not to grant a significant increase in the tariff.<sup>2</sup> Yet Nova Scotians voted overwhelmingly against the Liberal party in the elections of 1878, 1882 and 1887.<sup>3</sup> Before the election in 1891, Nova Scotian Liberals assured their colleagues that the party would do well. Nova Scotia’s Attorney-General, J. W. Longley, was quite confident of success. He believed that popular opinion supported the party’s tariff policy and he had obtained money from the United States to finance the campaign, while the Conservatives had less money than in previous elections. Even Sir Charles Tupper’s return to Nova Scotia at the special behest of Sir John A. Macdonald was not unduly alarming to Longley, who believed that Tupper’s influence would

1 Cartwright’s denunciation of the Maritime Provinces was chosen by J.M. Beck as the title for his chapter on the 1891 election, “Did the ‘Shreds and Patches’ Really Save Sir John?”, in *Pendulum of Power* (Scarborough, 1968).

2 R.J. Cartwright, *Reminiscences* (Toronto, 1912), p. 158.

3 J.M. Beck, “The Democratic Process at Work in Canadian General Elections”, in J.C. Courtney, ed., *Voting in Canada* (Scarborough, 1967), pp. 14-15.

not change more than twenty votes throughout the province.<sup>4</sup> When the Liberals failed to carry the province, indeed, when they were routed sixteen to five, Longley was rightly “ashamed and humiliated”. He could not explain the defeat. He told Laurier: “we were badly beaten, but it was because we could not help it. In no part of the Dominion of Canada were greater exertions put forth and greater efforts made by leaders and rank and file of the Liberal party and yet we were beaten”.<sup>5</sup>

After the 1891 debacle, analyses of the reasons for the Liberal failure in the Maritime provinces came from several sources. In New Brunswick John Gillies emphasized that the “loyalty cry” had been used by the Conservatives with great effect. He told Laurier: “It really surprised me in the end that we had any voters left, the Farrer business, all the Wiman talk, all that Sir Richard Cartwright had said in Boston, everything that I had written which could be used was twisted . . . out of shape”. Moreover, the loyalty issue was compounded by a second factor. Liberals did not create the impression that they would be successful. Since the party had been so long out of office and lacked control over patronage, many voters hesitated before committing themselves to the Liberal cause. Gillies reported that he “was unable to assure our waiting friends that we could go in and provide them with havens of rest, ‘we have tried so often without success’, they said, what is the use of trying any more? So many of them went to the enemy or stood [sic] away from the polls. I believe that this was the most potent cause of our defeat”.<sup>6</sup> In Arichat, Nova Scotia George Mitchell, a long time Liberal supporter, also believed that the defeat of the Liberal party was due to the impression that the Conservatives, especially under Tupper’s leadership, inspired confidence. “Could we have established the impression that the Government would be defeated”, he wrote to Laurier, “the results would have been different. This we could not do. The Liberals have repeatedly, during former campaigns, assured the people a change of government, hence every reference to its defeat during the recent campaign was received, even by our friends, with smiling incredulity”. Nova Scotians had “a firm conviction that Sir John could not be defeated”.<sup>7</sup> J. S. Willison, the editor-in-chief of the *Toronto Globe*, shared Mitchell’s view. It was quite simple; “Nova Scotia has never failed to give a majority to a government in power and I don’t suppose it ever will”. The Liberals lost the election mainly because “the Tory press and speakers had convinced the people that the Government was going to carry Ontario and Quebec, particularly Ontario”.<sup>8</sup>

4 J.W. Longley to Wilfrid Laurier, 10 February 1891, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, Public Archives of Canada [hereinafter PAC].

5 Longley to Laurier, 10 March 1891, Laurier Papers.

6 John Gillies to Wilfrid Laurier, 7 March 1891, Laurier Papers.

7 George Mitchell to Wilfred Laurier, 23 March 1891, Laurier Papers.

8 J.S. Willison to Wilfrid Laurier, 5 April 1891, Laurier Papers.

Within two years the federal Liberal party in Nova Scotia began to rebuild under the leadership of Premier William Stevens Fielding. In 1891 the leading Nova Scotian federal Member, Alfred Gilpin Jones, who had sat in the Dominion Parliament since Confederation, went down to defeat<sup>9</sup> Laurier clearly recognized the need for a Nova Scotian spokesman in the caucus at Ottawa, if the party were ever to hope of success in future elections. He confided to Premier Fielding shortly after the 1891 election that "nothing at this moment could cheer me so much as the re-appearance of Jones in Parliament . . . he has special information of purely Maritime matters which no one with us has to the same degree".<sup>10</sup> But Jones' influence within the province was already on the wane. A new leader would have to be found and Laurier increasingly looked to Premier W. S. Fielding, whose popularity in provincial politics seemed unbounded. Although the Liberal party was unable to elect more than a handful of members to the federal Parliament, the provincial Liberal party had been returned in 1890 with an overwhelming majority.<sup>11</sup> Premier Fielding's name was also well known outside of the province as a result of his "secessionist campaign" in 1886, his participation in the Inter-Provincial Conference at Quebec in 1887, and his earlier role as the Nova Scotian correspondent for the *Toronto Globe*.

The beginning of Fielding's rise to prominence in federal politics was evident at the National Liberal Convention of 1893. Early in 1892 Laurier had requested all party members to consider the possibility of a general party convention. Laurier also asked whether a modification of an extreme or advanced position on unrestricted reciprocity was desirable.<sup>12</sup> The replies to Laurier's queries indicated that many Liberals feared that a convention would only exacerbate regional divisions. L.H. Davies, the senior spokesman for the Maritime Provinces, distrusted and disliked Richard Cartwright.<sup>13</sup> C. R. Devlin, the Roman Catholic Member for Ottawa county, Quebec, opposed any recognition by the convention of the Greenway Government,<sup>14</sup> and there was a general apprehension about the role of Honoré Mercier at such a meeting. It was the old veteran of Canadian politics, James Young, a Member of Canada's first Parliament in 1867 and still active in both the federal and provincial parties in Ontario, who sensed the great importance of this convention for the Maritime provinces. A successful meeting, he pre-

9 A.G. Jones was first elected to the House of Commons for Halifax in 1867. Although defeated in 1872, he was re-elected in 1874.

10 Cited in D.C. Harvey, "Fielding's Call to Ottawa", *Dalhousie Reviews*, 28 (1948-49), p. 372.

11 In 1890 Fielding's Liberals held twenty-eight seats; the Conservatives ten.

12 J. Gillies to Wilfrid Laurier, 21 November 1892, Laurier Papers.

13 After the 1891 debacle, Davies complained bitterly about Cartwright's denunciation of the Maritimes as a "boodle colony". Cartwright's insinuations, Davies said, were "treasured up" by the Conservatives and "used with terrible effect against us at the right time". L.H. Davies to Wilfrid Laurier, 27 March 1891, Laurier Papers.

14 See C.R. Devlin to Wilfrid Laurier, 1 January 1894, Laurier Papers.

dicted, would help to create "a belief that we are going to win at the next contest. The effect of this on the smaller provinces would be great and immediate".<sup>15</sup>

The National Liberal Convention expressed the tacit recognition that the party's greatest strength was found in the successful provincial administrations. At the opening of the Convention Laurier astutely asked Sir Oliver Mowat, Premier of Ontario since 1872, to act as Chairman. Fielding, Blair, Premier of New Brunswick, Clifford Sifton, Attorney-General of Manitoba, and Fred Peters, Premier of Prince Edward Island, were elected as Vice-Chairmen. Of the representatives from Nova Scotia neither A. G. Jones nor L. G. Power, the leading Nova Scotian Liberal in the Senate, were given the prominence and recognition of Premier Fielding.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Sir Richard Cartwright's much feared dominance within the party on questions of trade and finance was abruptly ended when Fielding was elected Chairman of the vitally important Resolutions Committee. Laurier wanted a young, able and respected man as Chairman of Resolutions; someone not tainted with the policies of the past. Fielding's committee brought forth a set of recommendations which called for closer relations with Great Britain, a reduction in the rate of tariffs (while defending the concept of incidental protection), and increased trade with the United States.<sup>17</sup> The commitment to closer relations with the Mother Country in the tariff resolutions and Sir Oliver Mowat's "loyalist" remarks at the opening of the Conference would reassure many Nova Scotians. At the same time a general lessening of tariff duties had long been a Nova Scotian demand. The 1893 Conference therefore bode well for the future success of the party in the province.

Fielding's distinguished performance as a Vice-Chairman of the Convention and particularly as Chairman of the Resolutions Committee also enhanced his prestige in Nova Scotia. On his return from Ottawa, he addressed a series of rallies in the Maritime provinces. L. H. Davies who accompanied the Premier remarked that Fielding's "cool, calm incisive way of placing the issues" had made a very favourable impression and noted: "his popularity is unbounded".<sup>18</sup> In October 1894, Davies began a concerted effort to convince both Blair and Fielding to enter Dominion politics. He reported to Laurier that he had tried to persuade them "in view of the persistent rumours about a federal election to make arrangements so that they might reasonably enter into the contest and run in one of the counties". Both Fielding and Blair remained non-committal, although Blair thought that he might be able

15 J.A. Young to Wilfrid Laurier, 2 May 1893, Laurier Papers.

16 National Liberal Convention of 1893, *Official Report* (Ottawa, 1893).

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

18 L.H. Davies to Wilfrid Laurier, 27 September 1893, Laurier Papers. Davies also emphasized to Laurier that the Conservative press could no longer use the old shibboleth of Sir Richard Cartwright's prominence within the party.

to contest a federal seat if the elections did not take place until the summer of 1895. Davies was optimistic that Fielding would also come around. If the federal election did not take place until 1895, he gleefully told Laurier, "with Fielding in Nova Scotia and Blair in New Brunswick and the hard times pressing upon people, a falling revenue . . . I think we should not fear the result".<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps Davies was too optimistic, for despite the apparent agreement on trade and tariff policies at the 1893 National Convention many members of the Liberal party in Ontario were anxious to seek a special reduction of the duty on coal. Laurier was receptive to this step as a means to gain support both in the rural areas of the province and in the manufacturing centres. Yet a reduction or an elimination of the duty on coal would further alienate Nova Scotia from the Liberal party. In December, 1894, Laurier queried Fielding about the effect in Nova Scotia of an attack on the coal duty, which he planned to make in Montreal. Fielding was critical of such a shortsighted policy and remonstrated to Laurier that the Liberal party must consider more than just the interests of Ontario and Quebec. He sent Laurier a clipping of a speech on the coal question which he had recently given and added: "You will see that I was careful to take a ground which our party can afford to stand on in all sections of the Dominion. I think it would not be a good policy to single out the coal duty for attack. If the item is to be discussed, it seems to me that the policy of reciprocity in coal . . . ought to be satisfactory to our western friends".<sup>20</sup>

Fielding strenuously sought to prevent the Ontario leaders from committing the Liberal party to a specific reduction in the duty on coal and thus renewing the anti-Ontario prejudices long felt by Nova Scotians. What particularly troubled Fielding was the impression, easily made, that "success of the Liberal party in Dominion affairs would mean Provincial bankruptcy in Nova Scotia", since royalties on coal were, next to the Dominion subsidy, the largest item in the provincial revenue.<sup>21</sup> The Liberal party in Nova Scotia would be willing to accept a reduction of the coal duty only as a *quid pro quo* for measures lowering the tariff on items which, as Fielding suggested, many in Ontario might not be so willing to give. Fielding did not send his strictures on tariff policy solely to Laurier. In December, 1895, and again in January, 1896, he criticized the editor of the *Toronto Globe* for departing from the general principle of tariff reform and mentioning the coal duty. At the time of Sir Charles Tupper's by-election in Cape Breton in February 1896, Fielding reasserted the importance of coal mining in Nova Scotia. He explained to John Willison that "if we had to stand on the platform declaring particularly for free coal . . . we could not put a candidate in the field in Cape Breton

19 *Ibid.*, 13 October 1894.

20 Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 374.

21 W.S. Fielding to Wilfrid Laurier, 25 March 1895, Laurier Papers.

at all” and that “the coal interest is so important that it enlists the sympathy of our people generally”.<sup>22</sup>

It was the untimely death of the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir John Thompson, at Windsor Castle on December 12, 1894, that brought Fielding more actively into federal politics. Although Thompson had been regarded by many as the Conservative leader in Nova Scotia, his constituency, Antigonish, had been traditionally Liberal. Fielding pointed out to Laurier that “The fact that Sir John Thompson has long represented it has marked it before the Dominion as a Conservative constituency, although in reality it is not. If we can make a bold dash and capture it the result should be a great strength to us everywhere”.<sup>23</sup> But Antigonish was also a predominately Roman Catholic riding in the diocese of Bishop John Cameron, whose Conservative sympathies were notorious. Moreover, the Conservatives nominated Joseph Chisholm a distinguished Antigonish lawyer, a former editor of the leading Roman Catholic journal, the *Antigonish Casket*, a prominent member of the Nova Scotia bar, a partner in the firm of Borden, Ritchie, Parker and Chisholm and, not least of all, the brother-in-law of Sir John Thompson. The Liberals would need an exceptional candidate if they hoped to carry Antigonish. Not surprisingly the nominee, Colin F. McIsaac, came from Fielding’s cabinet. Recognized as the representative of the Roman Catholic interests in the provincial government, he was the provincial member for Antigonish.

McIsaac’s major problem was that the decision of the Conservative Government to act on behalf of the Roman Catholic minority in Manitoba had won a good deal of support for the Conservative party in Antigonish.<sup>24</sup> His plight was made particularly difficult by the inability of the Liberal caucus in Ottawa to agree on a policy on the Manitoba school question.<sup>25</sup> Roman Catholic priests, who were McIsaac’s close personal friends and who had “Liberal sympathies”, warned him that many Catholics in Nova Scotia were anxious that justice be done for the minority in Manitoba. McIsaac desperately appealed to Laurier for help and warned that if the Liberals could not go “at least as far as the government will go in the school question the results will be most disastrous”. A compromise secular school system would be unacceptable, he asserted, “for that would not be restoring to them [the Roman Catholics] their rights. You have to make up your mind . . . to give them in Manitoba at least as much as the Tories will give”.<sup>26</sup> When no reply came from the beleaguered Laurier, McIsaac pledged himself, personally, to support remedial legislation regardless of party ties. The crisis of the moment

22 W.S. Fielding to J.S. Willison, 23 January 1896, J.S. Willison Papers, PAC.

23 W.S. Fielding to Wilfrid Laurier, 5 January 1895, Laurier Papers.

24 C.F. McIsaac to Wilfrid Laurier, 4 March 1895, Laurier Papers.

25 The divisions in the Liberal caucus are vividly portrayed in the diary entries by J.D. Charlton on 12, 13, 15, 16, 18 July 1895 in the J.D. Charlton Papers, University of Toronto Archives.

26 C.F. McIsaac to Wilfrid Laurier, 4 March 1895, Laurier Papers.

passed when McIsaac successfully carried the seat, but the Antigonish by-election served notice to the Liberal party that it would have to define a policy on the Manitoba question.

Almost immediately after the Antigonish by-election, the Liberal party in Nova Scotia began preparations for the forthcoming general election. Laurier did not want to take J. W. Longley, Fielding's Attorney-General, into the Cabinet, for Longley, who was waging a campaign for a seat in the Cabinet,<sup>27</sup> was tainted by his association with unrestricted reciprocity in the 1891 campaign, and A. G. Jones, the former Liberal leader, was still dithering. Therefore, Laurier, who had been indirectly encouraging Fielding to enter federal politics for some time, now urgently tried to persuade the Premier to come in. He offered Fielding any portfolio in the Cabinet and suggested that he need not even contest a seat in the election.<sup>28</sup> The Liberal party's inability to adopt a policy on the Manitoba School Question heightened Laurier's resolve to win a commitment from Fielding, for Laurier was particularly worried that:

The Government are going to make a strong bid to capture that Roman Catholic vote, by introducing remedial legislation, that is to say setting aside the school law of Manitoba, and substituting a law of their own. That they will capture the Roman Catholic vote is not at all certain, for I know for a certainty that the most intelligent and far seeing among the Roman Catholics — both clergy and laity — dread the action of the government as likely to conduce not to the re-establishment of separate schools in Manitoba, but to an abolition of separate schools in all the provinces.<sup>29</sup>

The importance which Laurier and Joseph Israel Tarte, the chief Liberal organizer in Quebec, accorded to Fielding is evident in the spate of telegrams sent to implore Fielding to appear at two crucial by-elections in Quebec, one in Montreal Centre and the other at Jacques Cartier. Terribly frightened about the effects of the school question in Quebec, Laurier personally appealed to Fielding, stating: "What you are wanted for, is to give prestige of your name and position to candidate and cause. By all means be here for meeting of Monday next [December 23]. Do that for the cause and for me".<sup>30</sup>

After privately consulting leading members of the provincial party to determine the effect of his departure on Nova Scotian politics, at the end of November 1895 Fielding cautiously agreed to accept a cabinet post should the Liberals form the next government. He confided to Laurier that he would prefer to contest a constituency in the election and that he would schedule

27 J.W. Longley to W. Laurier, 30 August 1895, Laurier Papers.

28 W. Laurier to W.S. Fielding, 5 November 1895, Laurier Papers.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Quoted in Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 379.



an early session of the Provincial Legislature in order to be free for the Dominion campaign.<sup>31</sup> Fielding also agreed to appear with the Liberal leader in Montreal in December. Events in Nova Scotia, however, quickly forced Fielding to reconsider his role in the forthcoming election. Sir Charles Tupper returned to Canada in December and accepted the leadership of the Conservative party. In February he was back in Nova Scotia to contest a by-election in Cape Breton in order to enter the House of Commons. A candidate to oppose Tupper had to be found if the Liberals were to be a credible alternative in the federal election. Yet Cape Breton was an almost impossible seat for them. It combined coal and Catholics. Even Fielding conceded that "our friends generally realize that . . . there may be no strong probability of defeating Sir Charles Tupper".<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, it was to the Fielding Government that the Liberals turned. George H. Murray,<sup>33</sup> a member of Fielding's cabinet without portfolio and a native of Cape Breton, was nominated to contest Cape Breton and Fielding became involved directly in the by-election. For some time the Premier had been attempting to woo the business and industrial interests of Nova Scotia to the Liberal party and to encourage the industrial development of the province. Most recently, his government had passed legislation to assist a syndicate headed by Henry M. Whitney, President of the Dominion Coal Company, to introduce Nova Scotian coal into the New England market,<sup>34</sup> and Fielding sought to draw a favourable statement from Whitney in support of the Liberal tariff policy.<sup>35</sup> Although he clearly recognized his indebtedness to Fielding's Liberal government, Whitney wisely avoided taking sides in the Cape Breton contest. But he publicly assured Fielding that, if the Liberal policy of expansion of the markets for coal was successful, Nova Scotia would "start on a career of prosperity which it has never dreamed of", and he expressed his doubts that any political party could seriously propose to lessen the protection which Canada accorded to the coal industry.<sup>36</sup> Although Whitney privately assured Sir Charles Tupper of his "hearty co-operation in the general election",<sup>37</sup> Fielding could hardly have asked for more.

31 W.S. Fielding to Wilfrid Laurier, 25 November 1895, Laurier Papers.

32 W.S. Fielding to J.S. Willison, 23 January 1896, Willison Papers.

33 Murray would become Premier of Nova Scotia upon Fielding's departure for Ottawa.

34 See Carman Miller's review of C.B. Fergusson's *W.S. Fielding in Acadiensis*, Vol. I, No. 2 (Spring, 1972), pp. 92-93.

35 Fielding cabled Whitney in Boston asking him for a statement of his position in the Cape Breton by-election. Whitney's reply on 25 January 1896 was published in both Halifax dailies on 29 January.

36 *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 January 1896.

37 Later in April when it was obvious that the federal election was imminent Sir Charles Tupper wrote to thank Whitney for the wish which he had expressed that Sir Charles should continue to represent Cape Breton County. Tupper to Whitney, 23 April 1896, Sir Charles Tupper Papers, PAC.

There was no doubt that Tupper could carry Cape Breton, and his majority was remarkably similar to the majority received by the Conservative candidate in 1891. Moreover, the Manitoba School Question, which had threatened Liberal success in Antigonish, now reappeared in an even more ominous fashion. On Sunday, January 26, the intervention by several Roman Catholic priests in support of the Conservative Government's remedial policy was reported. A correspondent to the nearby *New Glasgow Eastern Chronicle* explained the implications of this action for the Liberal party: "Speaking to a prominent Liberal today, I find that hope, which ran high before yesterday has been somewhat dashed by the blazing utterances of nearly all the Priests yesterday in favor of Sir Charles Tupper and the denunciation of the Liberals. In the country districts largely inhabited by Scotch Catholics, loss is expected".<sup>38</sup> Individual actions of the Priests were worrisome, but more foreboding was an apparent Pastoral Letter from the Bishop of Antigonish, His Lordship, Bishop John Cameron. On February 4 the *Halifax Morning Chronicle* reprinted the letter, which Bishop Cameron was reported to have circulated to all of the Roman Catholic priests in Cape Breton. The letter warned that "a great wrong had been done for the last five years to the Catholic minority of Manitoba, a wrong . . . jeopardizing the salvation of countless souls". The Liberal party was held responsible: "Men who are loud in their praise of liberty, justice and religion are found arrayed against remedial legislation, the only means under the constitution of adjusting the wrong". Bishop Cameron's *animus* was directed against those "hell-inspired hypocritical Catholics . . . who will vote against justice being done to their co-religionists, and who, to add insult to injury, will move for a commission of investigation instead of remedial legislation — a commission pronounced to be the hollowest sham by the most competent of living judges on the subject".<sup>39</sup>

On February 6 the *Antigonish Casket* carried a denial from Bishop Cameron that he had circulated a Pastoral Letter. The editor of the *Casket* added: "What the *Chronicle's* correspondent calls a 'Pastoral Letter' is a garbled extract from a private letter marked as such".<sup>40</sup> When Murray claimed at a Liberal party meeting in Halifax that his defeat was caused by the actions of the clergy,<sup>41</sup> the *Antigonish Casket* pointedly challenged the Liberals to explain how the Manitoba School Question could possibly be prevented from "playing a part in a contest where each party presents a candidate in full accord with their respective policies".<sup>42</sup> With both Sir Charles and Sir

38 *New Glasgow Eastern Chronicle*, 30 January 1896.

39 *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 4 February 1896.

40 *Antigonish Casket*, 6 February 1896.

41 Murray declared: "This aggressive canvas conducted by clergymen had a most surprising and telling effect. *It was practically impossible to meet the issue* in large and scattered country districts". [Italics added]. Cited in *Antigonish Casket*, 20 February 1896.

42 *Ibid.*

Charles Hibbert Tupper representing Nova Scotian constituencies and A. R. Dickey from Cumberland the Minister of Justice responsible for the Remedial Bill, the position of the Conservative party in Nova Scotia was clear and forthright. Sir Charles Tupper's commitment to restore the rights of the Roman Catholic minority was without cavil and Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper scorned the attempts of the Orange Lodge in Pictou to force him to vote against remedial legislation.<sup>43</sup> The same could not be said for the Liberal candidates. In Pictou the Orangemen were able to wring a pledge of violent opposition to separate schools from the two Liberal candidates.<sup>44</sup> The party in Nova Scotia seemed to face an insoluble quandary. They looked once more to Premier W. S. Fielding to lead them out.

It had long been Fielding's personal opinion that it was a pity that the school question was being used by both parties for political purposes. He felt that it ought to have been a religious rather than a political question and "dealt with as a non partizan [sic] matter on which men were at liberty to differ".<sup>45</sup> Laurier had agreed with Fielding, but he soon discovered that it was not in the interests of the Liberal party either in Manitoba or in Ontario to adopt such a stand.<sup>46</sup> In Nova Scotia, however, the Manitoba School Question was a distinct liability for the Liberals. As Senator L. G. Power informed Laurier: "In this Province there are seven or eight counties where our chances of winning apart from the school question are good, but where we are almost certain to lose if it can be made to appear that those who wish that relief shall be given to the Catholics of Manitoba will be more likely to attain their end by voting for the Tory candidates. Yarmouth, Digby, Antigonish, Richmond, Inverness, and Guysborough we now stand to win".<sup>47</sup> The Yarmouth *Herald* candidly observed that "like Hamlet's ghost, this school question will not down . . . the question is now in all the provinces. Sides are taken on it and it has become the dominant political issue".<sup>48</sup>

On March 3 Sir Charles Tupper introduced a motion in the Dominion Parliament for the second reading of the Remedial Bill. On March 9 Premier Fielding addressed the Hants County Liberal Association at Windsor. His

43 C.H. Tupper to Acadia Loyal Orange Lodge, number forty-five, 6 April 1896, C.H. Tupper Papers, PAC.

44 William J. MacKenzie confidently predicted to the Grand Master of the Orange Lodge of British North America that Tupper had destroyed his chances for re-election, but that the Orangemen had "enough influence to pledge the Liberal candidates on the question". William J. MacKenzie to N.C. Wallace, 30 March 1896, N.C. Wallace Papers, Public Archives of Ontario.

45 W.S. Fielding to Wilfrid Laurier, 5 January 1896, Laurier Papers.

46 The Liberal leaders in Manitoba refused any suggestion of compromise at the same time as J.D. Charlton and Sir Richard Cartwright in Ontario were reminding Laurier that there was a strong Protestant vote in Ontario that had to be kept in mind. On October 12, 1895, David Mills warned Laurier that these men were trying to create a "Protestant party". D. Mills to Laurier, 12 October 1895, Laurier Papers.

47 Senator L.G. Power to Laurier, 4 March 1896, Laurier Papers.

48 Yarmouth *Herald*, 4 February 1896.

speech, which came to be referred to as the "Windsor Speech", completely shifted the emphasis of the Nova Scotian press from a consideration of the Remedial Bill to a debate on the "attitude of Nova Scotians" toward the school question, and more particularly to the local compromise on Catholic schools which had been accepted within the province.<sup>49</sup> His strategy was to direct public opinion away from the justice of the demands of the Manitoba minority and to appeal to the latent provincial rights sentiment within the province. Constitutional guarantees to the minority, he argued, were both inconsequential and unnecessary.

The *Casket*, Bishop Cameron's official organ, criticized the Premier's Windsor Speech in an editorial on March 12. He replied in a letter to the editor, captioned as a *Statement from Premier Fielding*, printed in the issues of March 19 and March 26. He also reprinted his letter in the *Morning Chronicle*, charging that the editor of the *Casket* had discriminated against him by dividing his letter into two parts. Fielding was seeking to enlarge his audience and to make a more general appeal to Roman Catholic Liberals, who were already sensitive about Bishop John Cameron's Conservative sympathies. On March 28, the *Chronicle* launched its own attack on the "authority" of the editor of the *Casket* to speak for Roman Catholic opinion, and on April 4 it struck out again. But on April 2 the *Casket* declared it was non-partisan and, under the heading *Fielding's dilemma*, challenged the Premier to try to reconcile the Roman Catholic minority's right for justice with the Liberal party's opposition to the remedial bill.

Fielding had taken it upon himself to act as the apologist for the policy of the Liberal party. His position on the school question, developed through his series of statements in the Antigonish *Casket*, was based on an appeal to the innate Nova Scotian belief in the superiority of their own school system, which had been achieved without interferences from Ottawa. He played on the long felt uneasiness in Nova Scotia toward federal interference — an appeal which had served both Fielding and the Liberal party well in the past. Fielding completely overlooked the fact that separate schools in Manitoba were designed as much to preserve the French culture as they were the Roman Catholic religion. Moreover, the school system in Nova Scotia had evolved not so much as a result of Maritime tolerance, but rather as the response to a fairly static population pattern already balanced along religious lines, with Roman Catholics dominant in some counties and Protestants in others. The tremendous immigration into Manitoba in the 1890's had fore-ordained such a system to failure. With a certain amount of disingenuousness, however, Fielding cited a comment by Archbishop Cornelius O'Brien of

49 The Windsor speech very quickly became a major campaign document. On 10 March the Yarmouth *Herald* printed it as a special supplement, combining the Premier's speech at Windsor with Wilfrid Laurier's address in the House of Commons in opposition to the Conservative Remedial Bill.

Halifax that “the Nova Scotian school system was perfectly satisfactory to his people, and if a similar arrangement could be made in Manitoba, . . . it would be a satisfactory solution to the difficulty”. What Fielding did not add was that Roman Catholics in Nova Scotia were only satisfied insofar as they had a *de facto* separate school system. Instead, Fielding remarked that he could see no reason why, “if the matter is approached in the spirit that has characterized Mr. Laurier’s treatment of it, the same good results cannot be brought about in the Province of Manitoba”. The issue, Fielding claimed, was not Catholic schools; it was merely the policies of the two parties — the one offered conciliation, the other coercion.<sup>50</sup>

The importance of Fielding’s intervention in the campaign was considerable, for the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the province was committed to the support of Sir Charles Tupper’s remedial policy. Archbishop Cornelius O’Brien of Halifax confided to Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper that he “hoped the Government would be sustained”, and assured him that “I shall not confine my actions merely to hoping, but I shall endeavour to help what I believe to be the right cause”.<sup>51</sup> In an open letter published in the *Antigonish Casket* on May 21, Archbishop O’Brien emphasized that the issue was not simply whether or not there shall be separate schools, “but whether the constitution shall be observed”. There was an undoubted injustice being done to the Roman Catholic minority, the Archbishop declared, and “it is a hollow pretense to talk of investigating it”.<sup>52</sup> Although Archbishop O’Brien did not refer to the Liberal party by name, his letter was a definite attempt to win support for the Conservative party.

Bishop John Cameron of Antigonish was considerably less discrete than his episcopal colleague in Halifax. Cameron’s ire had been aroused by Fielding’s letters and the Liberal party’s attack on the editor of his diocesan paper. Cameron’s Highland Scot’s temper was enraged. He issued a stern warning in a highly partisan pastoral letter to his flock, directing all of the Roman Catholics in his diocese to vote for the Conservative candidate:

The question of Remedial Legislation is a purely religious question in itself, and the fact that it has been dragged into party politics does not make it lose one iota of its essentially religious character. To deny, then, that a Bishop, as a successor of the Apostles, has, in such a circumstance, the inherent right to distribute the bread of the work of God to his people, is opposed to all Catholic teaching. Now, after a thorough study of the Manitoba school question from the point of view of the Holy Gospel, and of the relative attitudes of the Federal Government and Opposition including the Liberal candidate for this County in respect to this question,

50 Halifax *Morning Chronicle*, 9 March 1896.

51 Archbishop C. O’Brien to Sir C.H. Tupper, 30 April 1896, C.H. Tupper Papers.

52 Antigonish *Casket*, 21 May 1896.

I am officially in a position to declare, and I hereby declare, that it is the plain conscientious duty of every Catholic elector to vote for the Conservative candidate; and this declaration no Catholic in this Diocese, be he priest or layman, has a right to dispute. The Remedial Bill can only be passed as a Government measure, and hence the necessity for the Government to have a clear majority over all opponents.<sup>53</sup>

There is little doubt that Premier Fielding's participation in the campaign had stung Bishop Cameron into action. No Nova Scotian politician other than Fielding could have challenged Bishop Cameron's journal to such a heated and protracted debate without fearing the loss of many Roman Catholic supporters within the province. Under Fielding's leadership the Liberal party in Nova Scotia had come a long way since Colin McIsaac's desparate and despairing plea to Laurier in the Spring of 1895.

The Manitoba School Question served a valuable purpose in Nova Scotian politics. It emphasized an apparent difference in approach and attitude on a major government policy between the Liberal and Conservative parties. Fielding thus challenged directly the long predominance in Nova Scotia of Sir Charles Tupper, who was personally responsible for attempting to press remedial legislation through the Dominion Parliament. On the eve of the election, one of the leading Liberal candidates, Benjamin Russell, a distinguished jurist and noted Methodist layman, announced that the recent general *Mandament* issued by the Roman Catholic Bishops of Quebec had opened a clear road to the solution of the school question. The Bishop's *Mandemant* had been avowedly non-partisan, asking merely that the electorate in Quebec choose only candidates who are sincerely resolved "to promote with all their influence, and to support in Parliament, a measure which can bring an effective end to the wrongs suffered by the minority of Manitoba".<sup>54</sup> Russell announced that: "If I were a candidate in the province of Quebec I would have no hesitation whatever in accepting the pledge proposed. I am certainly in favour of granting to the minority in Manitoba whatever rights they are entitled to under the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council".<sup>55</sup> Russell's pledge and Fielding's lengthy discussion of the school question both in the *Halifax Morning Chronicle* and in the *Antigonish Casket* did much to neutralize Bishop Cameron's polemical pastoral letter.

A secondary but no less significant result of Fielding's personal intervention

53 Bishop Cameron's directive was sent to Laurier along with a further statement from the Bishop asking directly for votes for Joseph A. Chisholm. Laurier Papers, n.d., Vol. 12, pp. 5170-71.

54 *La Presse*, 18 Mai 1896 [Translated].

55 Russell's comments, printed on 19 June 1896 immediately before the election, were given special prominence on the front page of the *Halifax Morning Chronicle* under the heading, "Benjamin Russell on the Manitoba School Question".

in the campaign was that the dominant Liberal journal, the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, was free to emphasize the revised Liberal trade and tariff policies. The Liberal press made extensive use of the slate of resolutions adopted at the National Liberal Convention in 1893. Although Conservatives attempted to resurrect the bogey of Sir Richard Cartwright, their arguments no longer had the same effect. Mid-way through the campaign the *Halifax Morning Chronicle* began printing lists of prominent Nova Scotians who were abandoning the Conservative party's trade policy.<sup>56</sup> Typical of the new mood was an interview in the *Chronicle* given by A. S. MacMechan, then a young Professor at Dalhousie, who candidly admitted that in the previous election he had voted in support of the Conservative party because he believed that their policy was the safer one. "I could not endorse the unrestricted reciprocity policy which looked to me like permitting the trade policy of Canada to be shaped by a party outside of Canada". But now he argued that "Whatever danger may have existed from the radical trade policy cannot be alleged against the present position of the Liberals". Freer trade, lighter taxation and closer economic relations with both the United States and Great Britain seemed especially suited to Nova Scotia's historic interests. Businessmen such as Scarfe, the former Mayor of Dartmouth, joined MacMechan in support of the revised tariff policy.<sup>57</sup>

Although urgently implored several times by both Laurier and L. H. Davies, Fielding refused to contest a seat. Turning down offers of nomination both from Annapolis and Hants, Fielding remained curiously unwilling to cast his lot unreservedly with the federal party.<sup>58</sup> But, lest Laurier and Davies blame a poor showing in Nova Scotia on him, Premier Fielding travelled more widely than ever on behalf of the federal party. Indeed, the fact that Fielding did not contest a seat and thereby limit his influence to a single constituency provided an overall unity to the Liberal campaign in Nova Scotia that it otherwise would have lacked. In the final week of the campaign Premier Fielding made a remarkably accurate prediction of the electoral results in Nova Scotia. Halifax, Hants, Kings, Digby, Yarmouth, Shelburne-Queens, Antigonish, Guysboro and Inverness he correctly predicted would be won by the Liberals.<sup>59</sup> Only in Annapolis, where Attorney-General J. W. Longley lost, did Fielding err in his forecast. The Liberals thus carried 10 out of the 20 Nova Scotia seats.

The election of 1896 marked the end of an era in Nova Scotia. Sir Charles

56 See K.M. McLaughlin, "The Canadian General Election of 1896 in Nova Scotia" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1967), pp. 133-134.

57 *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 May 1896. See also, K.M. McLaughlin, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

58 D.C. Harvey has attempted to explain in great detail Fielding's relationship with Laurier at this time in order to "dissipate the mist" surrounding Fielding's decision to join Laurier's cabinet. See Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

59 W.S. Fielding to J.S. Willison, 15 June 1896, Willison Papers.

Tupper had returned to his native province as the new Prime Minister of Canada and had expected an easy victory in 1896, particularly since five years earlier he had carried Nova Scotia by an overwhelming majority for the National Policy. But support for the Conservative party did not come as unanimously as it had in 1891. Sir Charles Tupper and the Conservatives were met by a new and confident Liberal party. By challenging Bishop Cameron's journal to a lengthy and discursive debate on the school question, Premier Fielding effectively divided Roman Catholic loyalties in a province where nearly half of the constituencies had a large Roman Catholic population.<sup>60</sup> The centralism of the Conservative party, which had always made Nova Scotians restive, was raised in the debate on the school question and the Liberal party seemed to provide an alternative acceptable to both Protestant and Roman Catholic Nova Scotians alike. Moreover, Fielding had replaced Sir Richard Cartwright and his attitude of condescension and hostility toward Nova Scotia with one of faith and confidence about Nova Scotia's interests within confederation. This was perhaps Fielding's greatest contribution. Without this sense of confidence the hegemony of the Tupper might never have been broken.

60 As part of a large study of voting behaviour in the election of 1896, particularly to discover if there was any correlation between religious affiliation and voting behaviour, I have examined every constituency in Canada for which comparative statistics are available. The Nova Scotian constituencies which returned Liberal candidates, such as Antigonish, reveal an absolutely random voting pattern within Roman Catholic polling divisions, indicating no clear party affiliation. Curiously, in Antigonish where Bishop Cameron issued his stern pastoral warning, Roman Catholic voting behaviour appears more perfectly random than in any other constituency in Canada.