

HON. RUDOLPHE LEMEIX AT MONTREAL

Excerpts from Speech before Montreal Reform Club, May 1, 1915

"The Old Chief."

"LET me say at once that proud as I was in June, 1896, to serve under Laurier, Prime Minister of Canada, prouder am I in this year, 1915, to serve under Laurier, His Majesty's opposition's revered leader.

"In that long interval of nearly twenty years, many of Canada's gifted sons have passed away, some of them claimed by death, some others rejected by popular suffrage. Still stands erect in his seat with his genial face, his sunny smile, his streaming white locks, the Old Chief whose eloquence remains unsurpassed, whose statesmanship has earned him the envied title of 'Nestor of the Empire'.

"May I preface my remarks by congratulating you, gentlemen of the Reform Club, not only because of your unswerving fidelity to our great leader, but above all to the cause, the principles, the ideals, which he so fully personifies.

Liberalism is Power.

"After the defeat of 1911, many there were who despaired of the future of the Liberal party. Office is not the goal of Liberalism. By divine right Toryism lays claim—and a perpetual one at that—to office. Reform is of the essence of Liberalism. The history of Great Britain, the history of Canada, will teach you that all great reforms have been carried out by the unceasing toil and labor of a Liberal opposition against autocratic Tory rule. The extension of electoral franchise to the masses in England, the granting of responsible government in Canada—to point to only two great landmarks in the history of the Liberal party—were the result of many long years of agitation against well entrenched interests.

"With such victories to its credit, may one not say that Liberalism, even though in opposition, is power?

Why an Election?

"Sir, if it is true that coming events cast their shadows before them, a dissolution of Parliament is near at hand. I refuse to believe it; I scorn the very suggestion of it. Why an election? The British Empire is actually engaged in the most momentous conflict the history of the world has ever recorded. The very existence of that Empire is at stake. Canada is part of the Empire and she is pouring men and money, thus sharing in the prosecution of the titanic struggle. The minds of the people are concentrated on the battlefields of Europe, on the movements of the Allied armies. The all absorbing question is whether British ideals of liberty and justice shall maintain their sway or be replaced by Prussian militarism. Why an election?

Liberals Do Their Duty Only.

"Whilst the Liberal party were ready—and cheerfully so—to grant the 100 millions required for war purposes, and to provide for ways and means towards carrying on the ordinary business of the country, the Government have found it expedient to raise the Tariff, to reduce the British Preference, and to abnormally increase the expenditure in spite of a huge deficit. These were controversial questions and we did not break the truce by criticizing them. We did our duty purely and simply.

Bullets, Not Ballots.

"And now, when this Parliament does not legally expire before October, 1916, when both parties in Great Britain have agreed that there would be no election until the War is over, when from all the overseas dominions came the same announcement, we in Canada are invited to forget the huge struggle raging on the Continent—in such a noble part—to plunge into an acrimonious party conflict! I refuse to believe it.

"Speaking not as a Liberal, but as a Canadian, I say that an election to-day is no more necessary than it was in November last.

"This is a time for recruiting so as to fill the awful gaps made by the enemy in the ranks of our regiments.

"Think of the irony of things—to issue writs for an election, when all our energies should be bent towards organizing the assistance of Canada to the Mother Country.

"We need bullets not ballots, officers at the front not returning officers!

"I cannot speak for the Conservatives, but as a Liberal, I say that the prosecution of this War and our participation in it is of too supreme importance to be used in any degrading argument against a large, respectable and loyal section of the body politic.

Sir Wilfrid's Imperialism.

"Again we will be told—indeed it is already printed—that 'Laurier now as ever never cared a whit for the Empire.' The imperialism of Laurier, which is that of Asquith, Grey, Haldane, Harcourt and Lloyd George, has been aptly defined by himself at a memorable Imperial Conference: 'Imperial unity based upon local autonomy.'

"That conception of Imperialism is far more practical than that of the formalists and the doctrinaires who dream of centralization, forgetting that in the words of Burke the hold of Britain on the Dominions 'is the close affection which grows from common names, from kindred blood, from similar privileges and equal protection. These are the ties which, although light as air, are strong as links of iron'."