

THE LIBERAL POLICY ON THE BUDGET

Speech of the Rt. Hon Sir Wilfrid Laurier in the House of Commons, March 10, 1915.

Liberal Amendment to Budget Resolution.

That Mr. Speaker do not now leave the Chair, but that it be resolved:

This House is ready to provide for the exigencies of the present situation and to vote all necessary ways and means to that end, but it regrets that in the measure under consideration duties are imposed which must be oppressive on the people whilst yielding little or no revenue, and that the said measure is particularly objectionable in the fact that instead of favouring, it is placing extra barriers against Great Britain's trade with Canada, at a moment when the Mother Country is under a war strain unparalleled in history.

THE Liberal attitude on the Budget brought down by the Minister of Finance early in the present session of Parliament, indicated by a number of Liberal speakers during the debate, was summarized and completely outlined by Sir Wilfrid Laurier on March 10th, in a notable speech, the full text of which is given herewith:

"Mr. Speaker, I rise for the purpose of summarizing the arguments which have been presented on this side of the House, on the subject now before us, and to present my views upon it in as concrete a form as possible. When at the opening of hostilities in the month of August last the Government announced that it had offered the services of Canada to the Government of Great Britain, if these services should be found useful, we on this side of the House, His Majesty's loyal Opposition, the Liberal party of Canada, declared at once that to this policy we would offer no objection, but on the contrary that we would give it loyal support. To that engagement, then announced, we have been absolutely faithful. We would have deemed it contrary to our dignity and to our duty if we had at that moment, by word or deed, in any way impeded the Government in the heavy responsibility it had assumed.

"But it would be equally contrary to our dignity and to our duty were we to fail to point out most seriously, the laches and deficiencies which mar the resolution introduced by the Government, as it asserts, in consequence of the War, but, as I believe, only under colour of the War.

Responsibility in War, as in Peace.

"The attitude which we have assumed has in some quarters been animadverted upon in rather severe language. To the objections which have been urged against our course I for my part cannot pay any respect. The view represented by these objections, if it were to be adopted, would constitute a very serious stricture upon parliamentary institutions. It would mean that parliamentary institutions, while good enough in time of peace, would have

to be discarded in time of war. It would mean that the Government, which in time of peace under our system, should be kept under rigorous observation, in time of war should be given an absolutely free hand. It would mean that the Opposition, which in time of peace has the right to approve or disapprove, to oppose or to consent, would in time of war be inhibited from any criticism, even though wrong were to be rampant under our eyes. I have not so read parliamentary history. If the War with Germany had been wrong in principle, if it had been causeless or purposeless, if it had been without justification, we would have been ready to so express our opinion. For that course there are abundant precedents. There is the precedent of Charles James Fox, who in 1800 severely blamed William Pitt for rejecting the peace overtures of Bonaparte. There is the precedent in almost our own day of John Bright and Richard Cobden criticising and condemning the war of the Crimea, representing it as useless if not criminal—a judgment which, by the way, has been pronounced by history to have been absolutely correct. Here the case is different. We were of the opinion that Great Britain was supremely in the right; that she was engaged in a war the most sacred that she has ever waged. Being of that opinion, we did not hesitate to give to the Government our adherence when it proposed that Canada should bear her share in the War. To that course we have been absolutely true.

Kept Truce under Provocation.

"We went further: Not only did we give our support to the Government, but we thought it would be more in accordance with the fitness of things that we should refrain even from discussing those domestic problems which always divide a free people. In so far as I had command of my party, I gave directions that no literature coming from a source which I could control should be of a party character. That injunction has been reasonably well fulfilled, and it has been fulfilled under great provocation, because, as a matter of fact—as was stated the other day by my hon. friend the member for South Renfrew (Mr. Graham)—every week from the official bureau of the Conservative party torrents of the most controversial kind of literature have been issued. It came to such a point that in the month of December one of my friends brought me a whole batch of such literature and asked me with some indignation: "What are you going to do?" After having looked at it, I said to my friend: "It seems to me that the Conservatives are more partisan than patriotic; we will show them that we are more patriotic than partisan, and we will not change our course." We did not change our course. It would not follow, however, and certainly it was never intended by me nor by any of those who sit around me that, when we were summoned to Parliament and called upon to pass judgment, to sanction or not to sanction the measures brought down by the Government in consequence of the War, we were to abdicate our