

[Translation.]

Sir Robert Borden and the province of Quebec.

The Gazette announced recently that Sir Robert Borden desired to give our province its just share of representation in his cabinet, but that he was prevented from doing so because of the fact that the French-Canadians had at the election of 1917 rejected all his candidates. In the same way Senator L'Espérance had during the last session stated in the Upper House that if the French-Canadians were without representation in the ministry the fault lay at the door of their chiefs, who had been invited to join it.

We must not allow such a story to propagate itself, for its sole purpose is to exonerate from all blame in that connection Sir Robert Borden, whom we regard as personally and solely responsible for the isolation of the province of Quebec. It was he who desired to bring about that isolation, and he systematically pursued it.

At the elections of 1911 Sir Robert Borden found himself powerless to obtain a majority, unless he succeeded in dividing the province of Quebec. It was this which he succeeded in doing through his alliance with Mr. Bourassa and the support of the pseudo-nationalists.

In 1917 Sir Robert Borden had no hope of successfully repeating his double game. It was clear that our province was going to drive out the Nationalist Conservatives, who had odiously deceived it.

The chief of the Conservative party could no longer count on the same support in the other provinces, for his ministry had suffered in public opinion through the outbreak of numerous scandals, which had led to the resignation of Sir Sam Hughes and of Robert Rogers. The West also formed a solid block against him, who had sacrificed their interests on the question of reciprocity.

Sir Robert Borden returned from Europe in May, 1917, filled with sombre presentiments. He knew that the Opposition would not agree to a second prolongation of the life of the present Parliament, and he realized that his days were numbered. He had not till then thought of uniting all the forces of the country for the more effective carrying on of the war. He had governed by and for his party which thought first of its own fortune, and after that of the war. That state of mind showed itself clearly when in 1915 a Toronto newspaper suggested the formation of a union government. The idea was received with a burst of derisive laughter by all the Tory press. That was the frame of mind of the party and of its chief up to the moment when power seemed to be slipping from their hands, after three years of war.

What was the military situation at that time? Canada had already equipped and sent to the front 400,000 soldiers. The United States had just entered the lists, and opened to the allies their immense reservoir of men. Their riches were enormous, and had increased by gigantic strides during the war. They had already 100,000 men under arms, and they could call up others more quickly than was possible for us, and as many of them as they wished. To make an effort equal in proportion to ours, the Americans would have to raise an army of 5,000,000. We were to be henceforth allies. There was no longer any frontier line between them and us. Our cause was a common one. It was the same transports—for the most part

English—which would carry over the American as well as our own Canadian soldiers.

Canada, which had never up to that time had recourse to compulsory service, had less reason than ever to resort to such a system.

These were the conditions existing at the moment of Sir Robert Borden's return to the country. The election was imminent. What new tactics was he going to employ to maintain himself in power? He told us that he desired to create a union government in the country, that he might assist the allies to win the war; but, before asking Sir Wilfrid Laurier to join him, he entered the House and announced that he was going to lay before it a Bill for conscription, to secure the enrolment of 100,000 new recruits. It was after that that he knocked at the door of the chief of the Opposition, Sir Robert Borden knew perfectly well that the preliminary condition which he had just proposed would inevitably evoke from Sir Wilfrid Laurier a negative answer, for he knew his opinion, which had been expressed publicly in the Commons, and which reflected public sentiment in the province of Quebec, which was unanimous in its opposition to conscription. The manoeuvre was intended to place his adversaries on one of the two horns of a dilemma. Either Sir Wilfrid Laurier would consent to enter the Cabinet, something beyond the range of possibility, and Sir Robert Borden would be assured of an easy return to office. Or Sir Wilfrid would refuse the offer, and Sir Robert would make an appeal to the English provinces against our province, and unchain against her all the passions of race and religion, and, in case of need, there was to be a so-called War-time Elections Act, which would create for him an assured majority.

Such was the programme which Sir Robert Borden brought back from Europe, after having for a long time deliberated upon the chances which this combination offered him. He was aware, as we have said, that Quebec was unanimously hostile to conscription. His alliance with Mr. Bourassa in 1911 was founded on the knowledge that he had acquired in Drummond and Arthabaska that the French-Canadians were radically and unalterably opposed to every form of militarism which would attach them to the imperial war chariot. When he formulated his hope of the sacred union in the country and invited Sir Wilfrid Laurier to take his place by his side, that they might give their united support to the Conscription Bill, his duplicity was clearly revealed. If he had been in good faith, and if he had desired that the minds and energies of the entire country should be devoted to the victorious pursuit of the war, he would not have begun with a declaration of policy which had exactly the contrary effect. In that case his first thought would have been to invite Sir Wilfrid Laurier to study with him the measures to be taken and the programme to be adopted for the creation of that union in the country and in the Government. In first declaring for conscription, Sir Robert said clearly, in so many words, that he did not wish to share power with Sir Wilfrid Laurier, whose prestige would have too easily eclipsed his own.

To avoid sharing power with another, Sir Robert did not hesitate to place the two races in violent antagonism, to create the false impression that Canada was not unanimously in favour of the Allies, and to have his faithful henchmen cover the province of Quebec with ignominy and insult. He fooled her in 1911, under the guise of nationalism. He openly flouted her in 1917: