

having them hanging over our heads as a mockery?

The Bill before the House is a fit sequel to six years of maladministration, to six years of iniquitous legislation; the end befits the beginning; it tallies with the task and befits also those who have shaped the future of the country since October 1911. We have seen so far every kind of legislation more or less proper, every kind of breach of power and of faulty administration of public affairs; we have witnessed so far the Opposition availing itself of its right to criticise both the legislation and the administration; but the previous governments in power were at least courageous enough to allow free discussion and to refrain from gagging the Opposition. Henceforth, how would the representatives of the people be able to air their grievances with regard to this measure? We consider that this Bill is the most iniquitous piece of legislations which has ever been placed before the House; and yet, they are attempting to thwart freedom of speech and they would not let this section stand. I would like to state to the House the reasons why we oppose this legislation, hoping that at least some newspapers whose correspondents are still in the press gallery would make them known to the country. We are called upon to make sacrifices of all kinds; we have already recruited more than 420,000 men; we have given large sums of money; and hon. ministers tell us the Government are willing to give the last man and the last dollar in order to bring the war to a successful issue.

The Opposition never stood in the way. We have been threatened with bankruptcy. We are willing to accept our share of responsibility, even as to the financial bankruptcy of the country. To win the war, shall I be told that with such a war debt as has been piling up, with such a debt as we have been saddled with in the performance of our duty, as representatives of the whole nation, as members of Parliament; shall I be told that there is the least reason to bring up during the last days of a dying Parliament a measure which will put upon the shoulders of our people an indebtedness the end of which we might never see?

I would not like to weary the House by quoting figures, but I have always been told that the per capita debt of a nation was the surest test to ascertain its prosperity. Without going back into ancient history, I may say that when the Conservative party went out of office in 1896, our per capita debt was \$47.50. It was generally considered then, that the time was ripe for a change,

because we were on the threshold of bankruptcy. To-day, with the known public debt for civil government and war expenditure, with the additional capital expenditure to be incurred under this Bill, our liabilities will reach, in round numbers, the enormous amount of two billion and one hundred million dollars. If we can rely on statistics, with a population of about seven million, the per capita debt of every man, woman and child in Canada amounts to \$300. If in 1896, the country was considered to be on the verge of bankruptcy with a per capita debt of \$47.80, I ask you, Sir, where we stand to-day, with a per capita debt of \$300. But I shall go further and say that if in order to maintain our participation in the war, we had been told that it was necessary to pile up the enormous debt of two billion one hundred million dollars, we on this side of the House would have willingly voted all the money that the Government might have asked for.

The Liberal party, through their leader and his most trusted lieutenants have pledged their whole support to the Government on all war measures and promised to vote all the money needed for the prosecution of the war to a successful issue, but we never agreed to support this Bill and we cannot do so, because it is a measure clearly intended to help Mackenzie and Mann the Canadian Northern Railway company and the big interests whose influence is felt to be behind this legislation. Sir, in spite of all the ability displayed by the Minister of Finance, in spite of his resourcefulness and his wide experience in handling all kinds of business and financial propositions, this House and the country realize that an occult power is holding the Government by the throat and will stop at nothing to put in our statutes the Bill now under discussion.

I will go further yet. I say that the Government who pretend to be ready to do every thing for the empire and for the war and that the ministers who, one after another, have stated in this House that they were willing to face bankruptcy, and to pull out the last rail and the last tie of our railways in order to win the war, I say that the Government in spite of all these loyal statements, are by this very Bill, draining the resources of the country at such a pace that we will be crippled to the point of being unable not only to recuperate after the war, but even to continue our participation in this struggle. The honourable gentlemen are continually talking about sacrifices, about contributions, about living a life of