

The Canadian forces dispatched overseas during 1916 numbered more than 165,000 and the aggregate of enlistments in Canada since the outbreak of war is nearly 400,000.

Then His Excellency says:

In attack as well as in defence the valour, endurance and resourcefulness of the Canadian troops have been conspicuous on every occasion when they have met the enemy, and they have splendidly upheld the highest traditions of their country.

Every word of this is true, and it is very well said. Sir, it is not a vain boast for us to say that the conduct of our young volunteers upon the battlefield has been a cause not only of wonder, but even of surprise. It is a fact well known in history, known by all the experience of wars, that the first shock of battle is always a severe ordeal for young recruits. Old generals, experienced officers, will not place upon young recruits the same reliance that they place upon veterans; but our young Canadian soldiers have shown from the first that they can fight like veterans. Every one knew that they would do well, nobody expected that they would do so well as they did from the very first. They behaved like veteran soldiers who had known nothing else but the life of a soldier, and, as was referred to a moment ago by my honourable friend in moving the address, they have on more than one occasion done things which must fill the hearts of the Canadian people with pride. In some battles they saved the day by their valour; and it is beyond doubt that at St. Julien it was they who barred the way of the Germans who were at the time not far distant from Calais.

Such has been the conduct of our soldiers, but here the question arises: The soldiers have done everything that could be done; they have done as much as we could expect from them. Have the Government, in a like way, risen to the opportunity and to the occasion? Have they accomplished what they should have accomplished? Have they fulfilled the whole duty which we had a right to expect from them? Sir, the answer to this question is found in the correspondence which was exchanged between my right honourable friend, the Prime Minister, and my honourable friend (Sir Sam Hughes) the late Minister of Militia. Whatever may be said to the contrary, I speak without any passion. If it is said that I am a partisan, I do not deny the impeachment. If anybody will castigate me for that or blame me for that, let him cast the first stone. But, Sir partisans as we

[Sir Wilfrid Laurier.]

are, I believe that we are all disposed at this time, under the tremendous responsibility which weighs upon all of us, to be fair, and to give justice to whomsoever justice is due. At all events, that is my intention, and I shall leave myself to the judgment of the House as to whether I prove true to that intention.

In the correspondence that has been exchanged the evidence is irresistible, the evidence is abundant, the evidence is positive and incontrovertible that in the council of the Government there was no unity of thought or of action, but there was jarring and friction from the first to the last moment. The cause of the difference, as exposed in the correspondence between the two ministers, was the control of the Canadian troops when they had reached England. The question was, whether those troops, when they had reached England, should continue to be under the control of the Canadian Government represented by the Minister of Militia, or whether they should be under the control of the British War Office. In other words, the question was whether the control of our troops in England should continue to be Canadian control, or whether it was to be British control. I am sorry to say that upon this question there was not that immediate decision which should have taken place; and this is the first reproach which I have to convey to the Government, that on that occasion, instead of being firm and decisive right away and making a decision either one way or the other, the thing was allowed to drag and drag and become confused until the resignation of the Minister of Militia. As to whether it should have been Canadian control as desired by the late Minister of Militia, or whether it should have been British control as desired by others in the Cabinet, I am not here to pass judgment.

I will leave that aside altogether. There may have been and probably there were strong reasons, for one view or the other, but what I assert, and upon this I place myself within the judgment of the House, and of the Canadian people, is that there should have been a decision at once. It should have been a decision for Canadian control, or for British control but there should have been no hesitation upon it. Hesitation is always fatal but hesitation is never so fatal as in war. In the correspondence which I shall refer to in a few moments I shall give chapter and verse. But I wish