

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. The rumours we had were as to the precautions taken by one of the gentlemen.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. The hon. gentleman also spoke of the Quebec bridge. Upon this point I have only this to say, that I do not think the time is fitting or opportune to discuss the Quebec bridge today. We all deplore the disaster. The blame and the responsibility must rest on somebody. If the government is to blame, we shall have to take the responsibility. I am not prepared to say that we are; but at the present time this subject is being investigated, and so long as we have not the report of the investigation I do not think it is fair to lay the blame on this one or that one.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. What I ventured to ask was whether or not the plans had been approved by order in council, as provided by the Act of 1903.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. As to that I cannot say, but I presume that the law has been observed. I have simply to say to my hon. friend that whether the plans which were approved by myself and my colleagues were faulty or not, it would be very difficult for anybody in the Council Chamber to pass upon a matter of that kind. We had to act on the report of the engineers, and we had always the advice of good and competent engineers. I have only one other remark to make on this point, and that is with reference to the article of the Scientific American, in which we are blamed for a lack of funds. With reference to that I have only to say that the article is based on the evidence of Mr. Cooper, and that evidence has since been contradicted by Mr. Cooper himself. However, the matter is under investigation, the report will be laid on the table at an early date, and then will be the time to discuss the whole subject and discuss it fully.

At six o'clock, House took recess.

After Recess.

House resumed at eight o'clock.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. My hon. friend the leader of the opposition, in the course of his address, brought within the scope of his observations many topics which are not to be found inside the four corners of His Excellency's speech. Of this of course I make no complaint. The hon. gentleman was quite within his rights. He travelled very far afield indeed; but there is one subject of which he never spoke, and yet of which we have heard a good deal of late, both from himself and his supporters. The year 1907 has seen many important events. It has seen, for instance, the construction of the new platform for the new Conservative party. I have read that platform with some care. And I must say in all candour to my

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hon. friend that, in my humble judgment, it is a remarkable structure. It is not remarkable, however, for the quality which one would look for in such a document or in such a structure, but rather for the very reverse. It is remarkable, not for its solidity, but for its elasticity. It was built, not of oak, but of India rubber. Its planks are not the ordinary boards, but nameless, shapeless things, intended to contract or expand according to time, place and circumstances. Having read that platform with some care, I do not think I am at all unduly severe if I say that, in my humble judgment, almost every proposition advanced in it is coupled with a qualification—coupled with an 'if' or a 'but,' which makes it susceptible of a double interpretation. Every idea is combated by the succeeding one. Every step forward is followed by a step backward. And in the task of expounding it, of explaining what it means, my hon. friend reminded me very much of a caged squirrel, always in motion, but always revolving in a circle and accomplishing nothing.

Some surprise has been expressed because the party were not called together in convention to discuss the political situation, to exchange views, to give advice as to what should be the policy of the party from a Conservative standpoint. For weeks, nay for months, the press of the party was full of the suggestion, and that the suggestion was taken into consideration in the inner circle seems to be beyond doubt. We have heard the rumbling echoes of discord and thunder within the inner party circle. Of course we do not pretend to be in the secrets of the party, but there are some secrets which are as public as stage whispers, and one can easily understand that it would have been quite natural for the party to have wished to be allowed a voice in the framing of their policy. It cannot be expected that the party would be so lukewarm as to be indifferent to the attitude of its leader on public questions. But my hon. friend the leader of the opposition (Mr. R. L. Borden)—who is in correspondence with his followers in every part of the Dominion, who received expressions of the opinions prevailing in the east, west and centre—knew very well that if he were to draw the party together in council, if he were to bring my hon. friend from South York (Mr. W. F. Maclean), and my hon. friend from West Toronto (Mr. Osler) together on a question of the ownership of public utilities, if he were to bring together my hon. friend from Brantford (Mr. Cockshutt) and some of my hon. friends, whom I see opposite me, coming from the western provinces, on a question of protection, he would have anything but a harmonious deliberative assembly. He would have an assembly in which all the demons of discord would be let loose and which would become a veritable pandemonium. So my hon.