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## FREE FOOD.

THE announcement by Sir Wilfrid Laurier at the Federation of Liberal Clubs' Banquet, at Hamilton on the night of November 26th, that the time had come for the abolition of all Customs duties on the food of the people, marks the beginning of a new epoch in Liberalism in Canada. The policy of "free food" as set forth is in accord with Liberal tradition and practice in both Britain and Canada. This great boon was obtained for the people of the British Isles three-quarters of a century ago. When the next appeal is made, it will be for the people of the Dominion, if it is not conceded to them before, to say whether they wish it then.

The Liberal policy with respect to the Tariff may be summed up in the words, stability and revenue, with constant regard to the welfare of the people as a whole. When the Liberal party came into power in 1896, its first work was that of Tariff revision. It sought to give to Canadian consumers relief from excessive taxation, and in doing so, it was guided by two main considerations, a regard for existing conditions and investments, and for Canada's relations with the Mother country. The British preference was an outstanding feature of the general revision effected. During the fifteen years of Liberal Administration, which witnessed these changes at its beginning, Canada prospered as at no time previously in her history. Near the close of the fifteen years, opportunity and necessity seemed to unite in making desirable a further change. The Laurier Government then proposed certain changes in the tariff, which, without injuring a single Canadian industry, or in any way proving prejudicial to Britain, would have secured wider markets to Canadian producers and a very material reduction of taxes on food to consumers. Mr. Borden and his friends fought against this change and for the retention of the taxes on food. Events have followed in rapid succession to justify the wisdom and foresight of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. The Americans have altered their tariff to suit themselves, without regard to the needs of the Dominion, and as a consequence Canadian consumers are being made to suffer as never before. The high cost of living which had become a noticeable factor when the Liberal administration attempted its tariff revision, has under the Borden regime made itself felt more than ever. Meanwhile a depression in trade and industry recalling the last years of the previous Conservative Administration seems to be returning, and to the excessive hardships

imposed by the high cost of living, there promises to be added for thousands of families the ills of unemployment. The Government meanwhile, indifferent to all this, is increasing the burden by wasteful extravagance in expenditures, at a time when it should aim at economy in both outlays and taxation.

But the problem is more than a mere financial one. It has social consequences of the most far-reaching kind. The high cost of living is making itself adversely felt in a multitude of ways. No class in the community has escaped some privation in consequence of it. To the mass of men and women, the ever increasing cost of the barest necessities of life is coming to mean the difference between the realization and the denial of the possibilities of human happiness. Struggle as they may, hundreds of hard-working men and women are unable to earn enough for a decent subsistence. Were this condition likely to be temporary in its effect, it might be endured under protest, but the cruelty of the situation lies in what it involves of sacrifice not for the present only, but for the future as well. It is impossible for men and women to meet the demands that arise from day to day, and at the same time make adequate provision for the future. Nothing can be put aside to provide against possible illness or accident, or towards securing a certain competence for old age. Members of families, where the bread-winner is taken away, instead of becoming beneficiary legatees are being saddled with legacies of debt. Everything that prudence and foresight demand is being sacrificed to make ends meet. All this is wrong, and the people are very properly demanding some action which will afford immediate relief.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier has expressed the one obvious duty. While the Liberal party must continue its endeavour to secure wider markets for producers, it must also seek wider markets for consumers. Food is the first essential of life. It is in the prices of food that of all commodities the rate of increase has been greatest, and it is through this increase that the higher cost of living has made itself most keenly felt. The country can stand a reduction in its revenues without embarrassment to a single object of national concern. The people have a right to demand that huge surpluses and caution in expenditure should be made a means of escape from an increasing burden of taxation. With added emphasis, necessity and opportunity are once more demanding that whatever else may be considered, the time has come when taxation must be withdrawn from the peoples' food.

"Europe is an armed camp. Its leading nations spend from a third to a half of their revenues in munitions of war. . . . I don't believe any one of them contemplates aggression. They are only distrustful, and because they dare not join hands and work together for good—this is what they call 'The European Concert.' Sir, it is not a concert but a furnace, and yet it is into this furnace that the Government would lead us. If I speak strongly on this subject it is because I believe in the principle of Liberalism; the principle of autonomy and self-government; the only policy which will ever be accepted by the Canadian people.—Sir Wilfrid Laurier, at Hamilton, Nov. 26th, 1913.