

THE LIBERAL POSITION ON THE NAVY.

On March 13th, 1916, in the course of a debate on the Canadian Naval Service, Sir Robert Borden referred to a secret communication which he alleged had been shown to the Leader of the Opposition, Sir Wilfrid Laurier. He gave the impression that this communication contained grounds for believing that an emergency existed, and that with a knowledge of its contents the Liberal Leader and the Canadian Senate were lacking in patriotism when they refused to enact, without reference to the people, the emergency contribution of \$35,000,000 asked for by the Government in the session of 1912-13.

If, as Sir Robert Borden would have the public believe, he and his Government had secret knowledge of the dangers which threatened the Empire at that time, how does the Government defend its position in having failed to ask Parliament to vote the monies needed in accordance with the suggestion made to the Government by Sir George Ross, the Leader of the Liberal Party in the Senate at the time the Senate added to the Bill the Government introduced a clause that it should not go into effect until approved by the people. Here are the words of Sir George Ross which set forth the exact position of the Senate and of the Liberal Party with reference to the Contribution Bill proposed by the Government:

"Now that leads me to consider my first objection to this Bill, namely that it is unnecessary as under the Laurier Act of 1910, all that is proposed to be done under the Bill before us and much more can be done for the defence of the Empire. In the first place the Naval Bill provides for a contribution of only thirty-five millions (35,000,000), a very generous contribution which we would cheerfully vote if no other consideration were involved. UNDER THE LAURIER ACT OF 1910, NOW IN FORCE, ANY NUMBER OF MILLIONS COULD BE CONTRIBUTED BY PARLIAMENT IF SO DISPOSED. WHY THEN HARASS PARLIAMENT WITH A BILL WHICH IS NOT REQUIRED FOR EMERGENCY PURPOSES AND WHICH IS NOT AS EFFECTIVE AS THE ACT OF 1910. If the hon. gentlemen are sincere in their efforts to meet an emergency, let them withdraw the Bill now before us, and submit to the House a supplementary estimate for ten or fifteen millions for the speedy construction of battle-ships, wherever they can be built, and then, from year to year, ask Parliament for such additional sums as may be necessary for their completion, according to the practice of parliament in regard to all larger appropriations. . . . We stand now where the House of Commons stood then (in 1909), and we consider ourselves bound by that resolution. I DO NOT KNOW THAT A SINGLE SENATOR WOULD OBJECT IF IT WAS PROPOSED, IN THE REGULAR AND PARLIAMENTARY WAY, TO DO THAT. May I say more, the Bill provides that this money shall be applied in the construction of a certain number of ships. That could be done under the Act of 1910. I am informed that it is the intention to construct three battleships under this Bill. If hon. gentlemen or the government of the day wanted four or five, they could build them wherever they pleased under the Act of 1910.

"IF THERE BE AN EMERGENCY HON. GENTLEMEN CAN MEET IT WITHOUT THIS BILL JUST AS WELL AS WITH IT. IF THIS BILL SHOULD BE REJECTED BY THE SENATE, NEXT DAY THEY CAN BRING DOWN A SUPPLY BILL APPROPRIATING EVERY DOLLAR WHICH THIS EMERGENCY BILL PROVIDES, AND MUCH MORE; AND WE WHO SUPPORTED THE ACT OF 1910, AND BELIEVE IN IT, WOULD BE BOUND TO SUPPORT ANY REASONABLE GRANT SO PROVIDED. I do not say any extravagant grant. All that is necessary is the permission of His

Royal Highness, concurrence in Committee of Supply, and presentation of the Bill to the Senate. What does the admiralty say on that question?"

With this direct pledge before him and his Government, what ground has Sir Robert Borden left to stand on, if, as he pretends, the Government had knowledge of an emergency in 1913 and refused to bring in a Bill to meet that purpose under an Act that was already upon the statutes?

Either the Prime Minister did not believe in an emergency and was trying to deceive the Canadian people when he said that an emergency existed, or he did believe in an emergency and, notwithstanding the constitutional means presented to him of meeting it effectively with the unanimous consent of Parliament, referred to sacrifice Canada's honor and Imperial interests in the most terrible of situations, rather than sacrifice his alliance with the Nationalists and risk the loss of their political support. Which alternative does the Prime Minister prefer?

THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION.

"If this Government will conduct the affairs of the country fairly and honestly, along proper lines, and with the highest ideals in view, they will receive from the Opposition the utmost possible consideration at this time. If on the other hand they disregard these ideals; if they sink to lower levels; if they are guilty of mistakes or acts of malfeasance, they may expect criticism; they will receive it, and have no right to complain of it.

"Let me suggest to them a very ready way of relieving themselves of a good deal of criticism. Let them abolish the patronage system in the Militia Department in regard to war expenditures; for it is the case only a Conservative can sell supplies to the Militia Department. The people of this country will find their ideals rudely shattered if that continues to be the practice of the honorable gentlemen opposite. After all a time will come when these men who have the patronage will not be able to expect from other men, actuated by the highest ideals the highest form of sacrifice in this war. My honorable friends, who are so sensitive to criticism, can settle that difficulty by simply declaring that they will do as is done in Great Britain; that they will tell the party heelers and the men who want to control the distribution of favors in this, that or the other constituency, that the nation is in too serious a position for them to potter with dealings of that kind. Let honorable gentlemen take this opportunity of doing away with that system forever in Canada."

(Mr. E. M. Macdonald, Pictou, N.S., House of Commons, Jan. 24th, 1916.)

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