

SPEECH DELIVERED BY

SIR WILFRID LAURIER

TUESDAY, MARCH 7th, 1911.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER (Prime Minister). Mr. Chairman, it is now a full month and more since my hon. friend the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fitch) laid upon the table of this House the agreement which he and my hon. friend and colleague the Minister of Customs (Mr. Pater-son) had concluded with the President of the United States, for the improvement of the commercial relations which have long existed between us and our neighbours. From that date to this that agreement has been reviewed, discussed and canvassed, in the press of the country, in meetings of public bodies, and in parliament; and unless I greatly misapprehend the trend of public opinion, indeed I fail to read bright the signs of the times, I think I can venture the assertion that the policy which is therein involved has met with the approbation, nay, with the enthusiastic approbation, of a majority of the Canadian people.

Some hon. MEMBERS. Oh, oh Hear, hear.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. Against this statement of mine I understand that I hear some protest. I shall not stop, Mr. Chairman, to discuss the merits of the respective opinions on that point which we on this side and our friends on the other side of the House entertain. No word of mine, I am sure, would change their views, and I know full well that they will persevere in their views until the evening of the next polling day. I am perfectly aware that the policy has not been universally accepted, that it has met in some quarters, and I may say rather unexpected quarters, rather stubborn opposition. It is a well known fact that at present an organization has been created in the cities of Montreal and Toronto for the purpose of fighting this agreement. To this I have no objection to take, those who do this are perfectly within their rights. Neither will I underestimate the importance of such a movement, and still less the importance of the men who have placed themselves at the head of it. But even whilst fully recognizing the importance of that movement, I do not think there is any serious cause for alarm. General Grant in his Memoirs narrates that during the Mexican war he was

in the army of the United States as a young lieutenant. He was riding towards the front in company with a friend, when all of a sudden they heard in front of them a most unearthly howling of wolves. His friend asked him how many he thought there were in the pack, and not wishing to exaggerate he said he thought there must be at least 20. His friend smiled and said nothing. In a few minutes they came in sight of the wolves and there were just two, which had made all that noise. General Grant observes that he thought of this incident in after life, when he heard the noise made by some disappointed men, and he adds they were always more numerous before they were counted. I believe that what is true of the United States is also true of this country. Of the objections that we have heard to this agreement some there are which seem to me to lack singularity in force or oppositeness; others on the contrary are worthy of consideration, not from any inherent strength, but from the circumstances that they are inspired by a strange misconception as to what would be the result and the consequence of the agreement which is now before us. The wonder to me is that there should be any objections at all. Who can deny that we have now reached a stage in our relations with our neighbours which all parties in this House have been seeking for the last 40 years? Who can deny that if, 40 years ago, in the early days of this confederation, if 30 years ago, or 20 years ago, or even 14 years ago, when we took office, it had been possible to obtain such an abatement in the American tariff as is embodied in this agreement there should have been universal rejoicing in this country. The fact, Sir, cannot be denied, the evidence of it is to be found in this that the two parties into which the people of this country are divided, apart on all other questions, were always agreed in the opinion that the relations which existed between us and our neighbours were a blot on our common civilization. There is further proof in this that these two parties in succession, were a good deal of shoe leather travelling from Ottawa to Washington in order to obtain, if possible, an improvement in these relations. Still better evidence is to be found in this that when Sir John