

## SHELL CONTRACTS IN CANADA

Extracts from a speech delivered by the Right Honorable Sir Wilfrid Laurier, P.C., G.C.M.G., M.P., in the House of Commons on March 7th, 1916.

RIGHT HONORABLE SIR WILFRID LAURIER moved:

"That a special committee of members of this House be appointed to inquire into all purchases of shells or other munitions or goods by the Shell Committee formed by the Minister of Militia, as stated to this House by the Prime Minister on the 15th April, 1915, together with all contracts made or orders given by the said committee for any shells or other munitions or goods, with authority to the said committee to examine witnesses under oath and to require the production of any documents, books, letters or papers; and that such special committee be directed to report from time to time to this House in such manner as it may think advisable."

### CONSERVATIVE PRESS DEMANDS INVESTIGATION.

He said:—"Mr. Speaker, the reasons which have prompted me to move this motion are well known to the House—well known, I may say, even before I state them. For months past those reasons have been set forth in ever-growing emphasis by the press of the country of all political shades and colors. And, speaking of the press, I may eliminate on the present occasion the Liberal press, and confine myself, and the authority upon which I rely, entirely to the press which supports the Government, and especially those newspapers which, while strong in their devotion to the party in office, are perhaps yet stronger in their antagonism to the party out of office, I repeat—and nobody I am sure will contradict what I now say—that the press of all shades of politics mentioned, have for months past been urging that the Government should probe, and probe to the bottom, the transactions of the Shell Committee, as a duty which the Government owed not only to the country, but to itself."

### RETREAT DUE TO LACK OF MUNITIONS.

"The only cause which has prompted the attitude of the press is the conviction, early forced upon the Allied nations as the first lesson of this War, that, if they are to win, they must have without any delay whatever, three things: munitions, more munitions, and still more munitions. No one can forget the agony of suspense through which we on this side of the Atlantic passed when the sound of the first shock of battle reached our ears from across the ocean, and when day after day and week after week the bulletins told us the same sad story, that the forces of the Allies were being compelled to retreat from Belgium into France and from the borders of France far into the interior, until at last the German army had reached almost within sight of the steeples of Paris."

### ALLIES REQUIRED MUNITIONS, MORE MUNITIONS, AND STILL MORE MUNITIONS.

"We did not know then, but we know now that the

Allied nations were forced to retreat, not so much because they had to face an enemy immeasurably superior in numbers as because they were outmatched in guns, shells, shrapnel and explosives of all kinds. And when at last the day came with the cheerful news that the Allied army had taken the offensive; that they had thrown themselves upon the right wing of the German army and had forced it back in confusion from the Marne to the Aisne, great was the hope entertained by every one on this side of the Atlantic that the retrograde

movement of the German army would be compelled to continue from the Aisne to the Rhine. This hope, however was doomed to disappointment, the reason—which we did not know then but which we know now—being that the supply of ammunition had failed the Allies at the critical moment. We have since learned that amongst those victorious troops there were tears of rage in thousands of eyes because they were forced, at a moment when victory was almost within their grasp, to abandon their forward movement and were not permitted to drive back the German army from the soil of France and Belgium on to the soil of Germany."

### THE CANADIAN SHELL COMMITTEE.

"In Canada what happened? We learn now that the Government of Canada undertook to supply the Imperial authorities with shells; that the Minister of Militia was entrusted with

the task, and that he called to his aid a committee known as the Shell Committee, whose especial duty it was to provide for the prompt manufacture and delivery of munitions of war. Sir, I place myself in the judgment of every man within the sound of my voice when I say that this committee never measured up to the expectations of the Canadian people, who followed its movements carefully, and who felt that it would promptly deliver the munitions which the Imperial authorities so much needed. The Shell Committee, however, accomplished practically nothing, and great, and keen, and universal was the disappointment amongst the people."

### GOVERNMENT REMAINED DEAF.

"Up to this date attention has been paid to this matter by only two ministers, the Minister of Militia (Sir Sam Hughes), who spoke in the debate on the Address, and again some days ago in regard to the matter, and the Solicitor General (Mr. Meighen). I will refer only to the first speech of the Minister of Militia, in which he simply discarded, with a lordly wave of the hand, all the accusations brought against the Shell Committee. He ignored those charges, but to ignore charges is not to dispose of them, and although the minister has spoken, there has been no abatement in the demand for an investigation."

### SOLICITOR GENERAL DISOWNS SHELL COMMITTEE.

"The Attitude of the Solicitor General was altogether

### THE BASIS OF THE DEMAND FOR AN INVESTIGATION.

"One thing that is indisputable, and that is only too true, is: that if money has not been lost owing to the work of the Shell Committee, time has been lost, and loss of time is ten times more criminal than loss of money. We can pay for shells in money, but we have to pay for the lack of shells in blood; and I say that, owing to dereliction of duty on the part of the Shell Committee time has been lost, and, owing to that time so lost, battles have been lost, thousands of lives have been sacrificed, victories have not been carried to a final issue, the enemy has not been pursued as he retreated, and the War has thus been prolonged. It is upon those facts with their terrible consequences that, from my seat in Parliament, I to-day arraign the Shell Committee, that I hold the Government responsible, and that I ask for an investigation."—Sir Wilfrid Laurier House of Commons, March 7th, 1916.