

House of Commons Debates

THIRD SESSION—EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

SPEECH

OF

HON. CLIFFORD SIFTON, M.P.

ON THE

CANADIAN YUKON RAILWAY

OTTAWA, 15TH AND 16TH FEBRUARY, 1898

TUESDAY, 15th February, 1898.

The MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR. (Mr. Sifton.) Inasmuch as the administration of the Yukon district, of which so much has been said, has fallen largely to the charge of the department of which I am the head, it has been thought well that I should make some observations explanatory of the position of the Government and of the facts and circumstances leading up to the introduction of this Bill, although such explanation might possibly have come more properly, under other circumstances, from an older and more experienced member of the Government. The hon. gentleman (Sir Charles Tupper), who has just sat down, has been a long time in public life. He has told us a great many times, in the very short time I have been a member of the House, that he has been Minister of Railways and Canals, and that he has been High Commissioner. He has been at intervals Finance Minister and High Commissioner—in fact, we hardly knew, those who were not in the confidence of the Government, whether the hon. gentleman was inside or outside of the Government. Then he was for a very brief and much regretted period Premier of Canada. And now he occupies the responsible position of leader of the Opposition—at least, Mr. Speaker, he is the titular leader of the Opposition; but after the address to which we have listened to-night, coupled with

what we have heard and seen during the last month or so there remains a very serious and grave doubt as to whether he is the leader of the Opposition or whether, to use a vernacular expression, the tail wags the dog or the dog wags the tail. The hon. gentleman I hope will not take offence if I make use of an old adage, and suggest that I may be permitted to quote Philip sober against Philip drunk, and to indicate to the hon. gentleman that it requires a much more lucid and coherent explanation than he has favoured us with to-night to explain the radical change in the views he entertained in regard to the contract which is now before this House. The hon. gentleman has favoured us with several expressions of this kind since I have been in the House—that he had never in the course of his parliamentary experience seen such an exhibition as this, that or the other. Will he say if he ever, in the whole course of his parliamentary experience, saw an old and experienced leader of a party dragged in the light of day by the rag end of his party into abandoning his position upon a public question? I do not want the hon. gentleman to take offence at what I say, for the expression is only used because it is an adage and I do not coin it myself—but we heard Philip drunk to-night and now I ask the members to listen to Philip sober. The hon. leader of the Opposition was Philip sober when he was interviewed, and when he expressed his opinion in the "Mail