

THE BORDEN-HUGHES CORRESPONDENCE—PARLIAMENT MUST INVESTIGATE.

THE insight into the workings of the Borden Cabinet given us through the correspondence between Sir Robert Borden and Sir Sam Hughes is at once enlightening and humiliating. It satisfies our curiosity as to how we are ruled, and makes us feel ashamed of our rulers.

On a first reading of the correspondence the principle points that impressed us particularly were, first, that the main question at issue was whether Sir Max Aitken, a favorite of Hughes and the progenitor of the watered stock idea in Canada, or Perley a favorite of Borden, should be the Canadian Overseas Minister of Militia, and second, that it was the tone of a letter and not the important question of what is best for the public interest, that was the ultimate deciding factor. Matters like the Ross Rifle; the deplorable administration of the Medical Service; the Wesley Allison Graft; Camp Borden; The Eaton Battery; rotten boots; graft in bandages, binoculars, horses, medicines; the slander of the dead Kitchener; favoritism in appointments, and positive cruelty in keeping capable soldiers like General Lessard from serving their country at the front because of Hughes' spite, were apparently all minor issues as compared with the personal affront to Sir Robert Borden, and the desire of Sir Robert to promote his friend Perley rather than the new British-Canadian Baronet Aitken. Sir Robert did not bat an eye-lash while millions of the peoples' money was being wasted, while serious blunders were being committed affecting the whole morale of the Canadian overseas forces, while the joyous carnival of profiteering by party friends at the public expense went on, but the moment Sir Sam became impertinent he bridled up and got real angry. It is a curious page in our political history. The peep we get behind the Cabinet scenes certainly does not give assurance that the Government or its head, is one of commanding strength such as is necessary in these strenuous times.

Sir Robert made three great mistakes in regard to Hughes. First in taking him into the Cabinet, second in tolerating him as long as he had, and third in the manner of dismissing him.

For a long time there has been a growing feeling in the country that the Premier is weak and vacillating not only in the handling of his colleagues but in his treatment of large public matters, and this feeling has been greatly intensified by the now famous correspondence.

Parliament Must Investigate.

Undoubtedly Parliament will have to deal with some phases of it. For instance Hughes in his letters says that for the first ten months of the War all the equipment, shoes, supplies, armament, and in short everything provided by Canada was set aside by the British authorities. To quote Sir Sam's own words, "I spoke to you (Sir Robert), at the time about the rejection of all overshoes and supplies of every description, and proved to you that the excuses of the British War Office were totally without foundation. You

have my memorandum at the time proving the utter falsity of their bogus excuses regarding wagons, etc."

These statements are too grave to be allowed to pass without investigation of the most searching character. If they are true, it will be obvious that there has been bungling and mal-administration resulting in enormous financial loss to the people of Canada. Time and again in these columns we asserted practically what is now charged by Sir Sam, and as often as we made the assertion, we were told, on the authority of the Militia Department that there was no truth in what we said, but now the man who ought to know what happened, supplies confirmation of our information. But the question is not one between our veracity and that of the Government; it is whether or not it is a fact that millions upon millions of money have been spent in sending to England unsuitable supplies or at all events, supplies which were not used by our soldiers. If that charge be established the Borden government is absolutely unfitted to administer the affairs of this country.

Was the Second Contingent Held Up?

Another serious allegation made by Sir Sam is to the effect that the Second Contingent was held up for four months through squabbling in the Cabinet over the purchase of motor trucks. Again we quote Sir Sam's exact words:—

"As you are aware it took us four months in the midst of this great War to fight through the principles of purchasing for the Second Contingent these trucks at the lowest wholesale price, instead of allowing large commissions to local agents who would have nothing whatever to do with securing the order."

"You know yourself (Sir Robert) how by technicalities the 2nd division was held up for four months through little petty haggling on the question of motor trucks, etc. and etc."

Surely this cannot be true! If it is, could there be any stronger evidence of gross Governmental incapacity. At a time when the Empire was crying out for more and more soldiers to go to the Front, the Government of Canada, according to Sir Sam Hughes, spent months in settling a piffing question, comparatively speaking, as to the manner and terms of purchasing motor trucks. Parliament cannot afford to overlook this. A most rigid investigation must be made.

Did Ministers Violate their Obligations?

An equally serious statement made by the ex-Minister of Militia is that the Post Office Department, the Railway Department and the Public Works Department had improperly made purchases without the necessary Order-in-Council, and that some boats had been purchased and other large expenditures incurred without the Premier knowing anything about them, and also without the knowledge of Council.

Here is more work for Parliament. The Statutes and constitutional practice clearly define what Ministers can do individually, and what they must