

THE WAR CONTRACT 'SCANDALS.

THE outstanding feature of the session of Parliament which closed on April 15, was the probe of the Public Accounts Committee into contracts for war supplies.

Astounding Disclosures Every Day.

Astounding disclosures of carefully planned grafting in war contracts of all kinds came practically every day the committee sat, and it was proved beyond the possibility of question that in every case the grafters were aided, abetted and protected by the infamous system of party patronage as it has been practised by the Nationalist-Conservative government since 1911. So strong was the proof of graft and so clear the proof that the Government and the party were responsible, that Sir Robert Borden, on the last day of the session, was forced to admit publicly from his place in the House that the case had been proven; was forced in self-defence to practically "read out" of the party two Conservative members, Mr. Foster of King's and Mr. Garland of Carleton; and was forced to proclaim that he was taking steps to ensure that the \$100,000,000 voted for war purposes at this session would be spent more carefully than was the \$50,000,000 voted at the special war session last August.

Borden Admits Government Incapacity.

And, finally, Sir Robert Borden admitted his own inability and the incapacity of his Ministers to properly handle the business of the country. He admitted this by announcing that he had decided to turn the whole business of War Supplies over to one "capable" business man or three "capable" business men. What he himself and his colleagues are unable to do, he expects "capable" business to do—and knows they can do it.

Bandages and Field Dressings.

First, there was the proof of graft in the purchase of bandages and field dressings for the wounded soldiers. In this case a young drug clerk, an employee of the drug company controlled by W. F. Garland, Conservative member for Carleton, was introduced to the department by Mr. Garland and his profits in a couple of months amounted to \$9,000 in spite of the fact that the supplies could have been bought direct from the manufacturers at the same price as Powell was paying. Speaking of Garland's action, Sir Robert Borden said "I cannot give my sanction to conduct of that character", an admission that meant nothing but that he did not believe that the profit was to go to Powell. The mere fact that some \$6,000 of the money has been given back to the Government does not alter the case. It was forced back by the disclosures in the committee.

Traffic in Binoculars.

Then came the proof of the infamous trafficking in binoculars for the officers, proof that party heelers who knew nothing of binoculars were given contracts, that reputable dealers were refused contracts because they were not on the patronage list, that prices beyond anything ever known in the trade were paid for good glasses and that hundreds of

inferior and utterly useless glasses were accepted, allowed to pass inspection and were paid for at the highest prices. It was proved that glasses costing \$15 in New York were accepted at \$62, while Toronto experts specially engaged by the Minister of Militia were passing the glasses and were receiving from the department a fee equal to 10% of the purchase price.

Bicycles, Horses and Drugs.

Then it was proved that bicycles for the soldiers were bought at prices ranging about 30% higher than the regular trade price, and that firms that were willing to sell equally good bicycles at 30% less were refused a chance to do business.

Then there was the absolute proof of the infamous horse-buying transactions in King's County, under the supervision of A. DeWitt Foster, the Conservative member. Fancy prices were paid for absolutely useless horses, the spavined, knee-sprung, heaved and decrepit old nags of the whole county, some so old that they were refused as too old in the days of the South African war. But worse than this was the proof that there was no record of the horses purchased or the amounts paid for them, and no receipts to show how or where the money had gone. It was this evidence which forced Sir Robert Borden to say "I am bound to say that his (Mr. Foster's) explanation, if it could be called an explanation, of his failure to supervise the expenditure of money, must be regarded as far from satisfactory."

Again there were painful disclosures of utterly unreasonable profits made in supplying drugs for the soldiers at Valcartier, the contractor being a Quebec lady, the sister of the Deputy Speaker of the House. The evidence of an independent and qualified druggist, familiar with trade prices, showed that the prices paid were in many cases out of all reason, in most cases the profit being over 100 per cent, while there were items showing profits of 200, 300 and even 1,200 per cent.

Investigation Justified Liberal Attitude.

The results of the investigations of the Committee have thoroughly justified the patriotic and statesmanlike attitude adopted by Sir Wilfrid Laurier in behalf of the Liberal Opposition at the outset of the session. The Liberal Leader announced that the Opposition would vote without question or delay every dollar of money the Government might ask for the purposes of the War, but he expressly reserved the right to investigate and criticise the spending of the money so voted. His stand was that the Opposition would be remiss in its duty to the country if it did otherwise. The sickening disclosures of the past two months have been the best proof of the absolute need of such an investigation, and are sad commentary on the attitude of Conservative members who actually complained in the House that by insisting on these investigations, the Liberals were "breaking the truce" and showing disloyalty. It is to the Liberals who forced the investigations that the country owes every cent that may be saved in the future if the infamous traffic in war contract "blood money" is stopped.