

Champion of Free Speech

"I am proud and happy that the question was put to me by Mr. Fripp," Sir Wilfrid went on, "all the more so because the question has been aggravated by what took place three days ago when the prime minister was refused a hearing in the city of Kitchener. He knows my sentiments upon that question. He knows them well. He knows that I am in favor of free speech. He knows that I disapprove of any interference with free speech, and I believe that Mr. Fripp himself disapproves of any interference with free speech when his friends are concerned. But I am not so sure of his sentiments when his opponents are concerned, because Mr. Fripp is one of those who, in the last parliament voted to gag the Opposition, to impose the closure and to interfere with free speech."

Gag Is Gag Anywhere

The audience broke into loud laughter and Sir Wilfrid continued:

"I disapprove of any interference with free speech, and I am sorry that the prime minister was not allowed to speak at Kitchener the other day. I want to have given to him every privilege that is due to his rank, due to the position he occupies and due also to the efforts he is making in support of a bad cause. I do not approve of any interference with free speech anywhere. The gag is the gag, whether it is applied by a turbulent crowd in public meeting or whether it is approved in parliament by the obedient majority of a cold-blooded government."

Sir Wilfrid proceeded to contest the claim that the Unionist party was entitled to style itself the "win-the-war" party.

None More Loyal Than He

"I object," he said, "to anyone in the Conservative party, claiming the privilege of alone wanting to win the war. We all want to win the war. I say that there is no one holding the position I occupy in this country—a position which is inherent to the system of Government we have, the position I occupy as leader of the Opposition—I say there is not a man in any one of the belligerent countries who has done more in his position to help his country to win the war than I have." (Applause.)

The Opposition leader reviewed efforts which he made to help the Government in its war policy from the day that war was declared. He had not done it, he said, from any love of the Government, but from love of the cause. He had given the Government every possible support to carry on the defence of the cause of liberty and civilization.

Surprised at Premier

Sir Wilfrid was surprised at the statement made by Sir Robert Borden at Sydney a few days ago that he had been lukewarm or hostile to the cause of recruiting.

"What he could have meant by that is a surprise to me," Sir Wilfrid continued. "But I take his words as I find them. He said I had not shown any zeal at all when he had appealed to me to support him in his efforts for recruiting. When did Sir Robert Borden appeal to me to help him in recruiting? I ask, when did he?"

Sir Wilfrid continued that Sir Robert had asked him to assist in connection with the national service scheme, but he had refused, and he said, for good reasons.

Bedevoiled With Partisanship

Sir Thomas Tait, who was appointed head of that commission, resigned because he found it so bedeviled with partisan interference. It was not, Sir Wilfrid said, until two days after the resignation of Sir Thomas Tait that he was asked to join the commission. He was asked to step in where Sir Thomas Tait had stepped out.

"I would not play that game," Sir Wilfrid added. "I would not join a commission in which there was so much partisanship that the chairman was forced to resign."