

SIR WILFRID LAURIER AT TORONTO.

Quotations from Speech before Liberal Club Federation of Ontario at Toronto, May 21, 1915.

The Pride of Liberalism

"Under our system of government parties owe their existence and receive their inspiration from traditions, and in those traditions they endeavor to find a solution for all the problems which are recurring and again recurring in the life of the people. We Liberals pride ourselves to find the source of power and our inspiration and all our traditions in that long list of statesmen who in the mother country have brought British institutions to their present standard of excellence.

The Change in Three Weeks

"To-day is the 21st of May, but the call for this meeting goes back to some three weeks ago. The atmosphere in Canada to-day, the 21st day of May, is not exactly the same as it was three weeks ago. At that time—three weeks ago—the atmosphere was charged with notions that we were on the eve of a pending election. Evidences there were, niether few nor slight, which went to show the Government had determined to dissolve Parliament within the present month of May. We had not, it is true, any formal declaration from those who have the power to speak, but it is well known that printers had been at work for days preparing literature, cartoons and posters of the most partisan character ready for distribution the moment the signal was given.

"It is known that on the first day of this month tons of ballots were shipped from Canada to Great Britain to give our soldiers at the front an opportunity to vote according to a law passed by Parliament, and that a gentleman from the city of Vancouver was sent with them in order to do the preliminary work. Still more significant, the Ministerial press was clamoring for immediate action, and, most significant of all, a gentleman high in the ranks of the party told us in a speech delivered in Montreal, which had the ring and tone of a manifesto, that the public opinion of Canada, thunder-strong, was demanding an immediate appeal to the people.

People Against an Election

"These words, that the voice of the people was demanding an appeal to the people, fell upon the people themselves with something of an astonished reception. There were no signs at that time that public opinion was excited in any way about an election, and the voice of public opinion, instead of being thunder-strong, was absolutely silent. But the moment this evidence of the intention of the Government was launched public opinion was thunder-strong—protesting that an election under existing circumstances would be a national crime.

"We do not know what has taken place in the councils of those who are the advisers of his Royal Highness, but we know there has been no dissolution.

Liberal Record Speaks for Itself

"Then it was attempted to show that we had by our action in Parliament opposed the War policy of the Government. I need not tell you what we had done in order to refute that slander.

"Our record is there. From the day that war was declared, I—speaking with whatever authority has been placed in me by the Liberals of Canada for the last 25 years or more—I, speaking with that authority, declared that not only would we not offer any opposition to the policy of assisting Great Britain in the tremendous struggle in which she was then entering, but that we would support that policy with all our hearts, our strength, our votes.

"I look forward with confidence to the judgment, not only of those here assembled, but of the whole people of Canada, that we have been true to the statement and the pledge which, in the name of the Liberal party, I then made."

Protested Increase Taxes

"It is true, when it came to the ways and means of raising the necessary revenue to carry on the War we dissented from their position. We could not agree to the fiscal measure which they proposed in order to levy the revenue. And why did we not agree? Because we were only too convinced, we were only too sure that the measure was ill-conceived, not calculated to bring in revenue, but rather to be oppressive upon the people. We put our objection, we put our protest, but we did not carry our objection farther than putting a protest before the people, leaving the responsibility to those upon whom responsibility must rest.

The Opposition in Great Britain

"Our conduct in that respect has been compared in the press of the Government with that of the Unionist Opposition in Great Britain. I challenge the comparison, I welcome it, and I am ready to leave it to the judgment of Canada. It is to the credit of the Unionist Opposition in Great Britain that, so far as they could they supported the policy of the Government. They joined with the Government in order to carry on the tremendous task which is now imposed upon the Government of Mr. Asquith.

"Does it mean that the Opposition were dumb? Does it mean they were not critical? Does it mean they were simply recording clocks to the will of the Government of Mr. Asquith? No. Don't you know that the Opposition would not support the policy of the Chancellor of the Exchequer upon a certain measure? Mr. Lloyd George, in his speech which has become famous, declared there was an enemy more dangerous to Britain than the German army. That enemy was the liquor traffic, and he stated he would introduce measures in order to limit, or, if possible, extinguish, that traffic, but immediately, as you know, the Unionist Opposition came out in opposition to the policy of Mr. Lloyd George.

British Precedent in Parliament

"On the 5th of May the newspapers of this country reported the speech which Mr. Lloyd George delivered, only hinting a policy of new taxation upon wine, beer and spirits. Immediately Mr. Austen Chamberlain, the financial critic of the Opposition, declared that he would oppose these taxes. In other words, he did not favor the policy of Mr. Lloyd