

UNEARTHING THE WAR CONTRACT SCANDALS.

STRIVING to make the best of a bad business, a business so bad in fact that it has gravely injured the standing of the whole Nationalist-Conservative party in Canada, the Borden Government and its obedient Tory newspapers have attempted to minimize the importance of the revelations before the Public Accounts Committee. They have not only deliberately falsified the sworn evidence in order to make it appear that the middleman graft was small and unimportant—they have gone so far as to take credit to themselves for the uncovering of the putrid proof of deliberate robbery of the money of the people of Canada. And it is worthy of remark here that it was sacred money—money voted gladly and without question as to amount—money offered freely by the people of Canada of every station and of every shade of political belief and adherence—because it was money for the equipping of Canadian soldiers to take their rightful part in a war of Empire which is as much the war of Canada as it is the war of Great Britain or any other part of the British Empire.

This was the money that grafting Tory middlemen got away with, aided and protected by the Tory patronage system as amply proved in the sworn evidence.

In view of the attempts to make it appear that the Government was imposed upon; that it knew nothing of these abuses until they were revealed in committee, and that the members of the Government themselves were the most anxious to uncover the real truth, a review of the steps that led up to the investigations is of interest. The facts are taken from the official documents.

Liberal Demands were Blocked.

Repeated and insistent demands by Liberals in Parliament were met by subterfuge and delay. The results of the investigations fully justified the Liberal demands. But for the insistence of the Liberals, the facts as to middleman graft, Government incompetence, lack of proper inspection, etc., all resulting in enormous waste of public money, might never have become known.

Prior to the meeting of Parliament, which was formally opened on February 4th, rumors of irregularities in the purchase of war supplies in Canada were rife throughout the Dominion, from Atlantic to Pacific. There were hints in the newspapers, street gossip everywhere indicated something wrong, but there was no proof and there could be no proof because all the official information was locked up in the various Government departments—and the Government was not giving any information.

Manufacturers Complained of Middlemen.

Early in the autumn, not very long after the War broke out, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association found there was something wrong and they wrote letters to Sir Robert Borden himself. They complained of the manner in which they were being treated by the Government; that they could

not get orders while politicians acting as middlemen could get all the orders that were going. The manufacturers complained that they could sell their goods only through these political middlemen.

Borden's Duty was to Investigate.

Premier Borden answered, asking for specific instances. Very rightly the Manufacturers' Association replied "**You are the Government, it is your duty to investigate.**" The Premier asked again for specific cases which were supplied and referred to the Militia Department. Of course the Department said they were not true.

Half a dozen times in Parliament, Premier Borden was asked to produce this correspondence. He admitted it was in existence and he finally promised to produce it—but Parliament prorogued and the letters were never brought down.

And yet on the day Parliament prorogued Sir Robert Borden, with a great show, **declared that he had been absolutely unaware of the middlemen.**

Red Tape Delays.

This was the situation when Parliament assembled.

February 8th, was the first business day of the session. On February 8th, Mr. A. K. MacLean, Liberal member for Halifax took the first step toward an investigation when he gave formal motion:

"For a copy of all correspondence which has passed between the Auditor General and the Militia Department of the Government service, in regard to the expenditure under the War Appropriation Act."

On February 11th, three days later, the House passed the order, and the proper officials were notified to produce copies of the correspondence.

The correspondence was not voluminous. It was afterward printed in 44 pages. But the Government, with its horde of 12,000 new appointees in addition to the regular staff did not produce these papers until February 25th, just 14 days later. **And then there was only one copy of each paper.**

On February 26, the next day, Sir Wilfrid Laurier asked if it was the intention of the Government to have the papers printed so that they might be available to all the members. The Minister of Finance promised "to consider the matter."

Four days went by in "consideration." On March 2, Sir Wilfrid asked the same question, this time of Sir Robert Borden, who responded that he saw no objection.

On March 3, the next day, the order for printing was given.

Formal Demand for Investigation

On March 5, Mr. A. K. MacLean, Liberal member for Halifax, moved that the correspondence be referred to the Public Accounts Committee. The Government took no action.