

which he then took; that we should so coordinate our efforts in naval activity with those of the motherland as to ensure the defence of the British Empire as a whole. That was the opinion which Sir Wilfrid Laurier presented to the House of Commons and which received unanimous support when the resolution of 1909 was adopted. Sixty-five members from Quebec united with some eighty members from Ontario and all the members from the west and the maritimes to pass unanimously the resolution upon which in 1910 was based the Naval Act.

I do plead that we might again endeavour to forget some of the animosities and differences that have too frequently been manifest when dealing with a problem of the magnitude of the naval defence of this country, and that the memory of a past which is now ancient might be overcome by the memory of the stirring words to which I have alluded. I can remember, as I heard some of them, the impression they made upon my mind at the time. I suggest that the minister, when he goes to England to deal with problems of imperial import—and I use the word "imperial" in the same sense that Sir Wilfrid Laurier used it—should keep in mind the desirability of there being unity of purpose and unanimity in point of fact. I think there will be no difficulty about unanimity and unity if we bear in mind the fundamental considerations which, in the opinion of the veteran leader of the Liberal party, were the source of his views and his policies with respect to such matters.

There were differences in 1912 and 1913, arising out of the question whether or not there was an emergency. Subsequent events indicated that there was indeed an emergency; but that need not now be discussed. We can forget that, as we pass this appropriation to-night for the purchase of two destroyers.

The minister says he contemplates calling for tenders for four mine sweepers; and we have the training ship now being built for which we made provision in place of the Aurora, the magnificent ship we obtained from the admiralty at the end of the war and which went out of commission. Now, in the face of the admitted danger to which Sir Wilfrid Laurier referred in 1913, in view of the admittedly disturbed conditions in Europe, in view of the threats that have been directed at the very life of this empire, I do not see why by displaying a unity that would indicate to all the world that we had forgotten ancient grievances and animosities that had sprung out of the war, we should not hope that when the Prime Minister and his delegation go to England and confer with

[Mr. Bennett.]

the admiralty they might be able to arrive at a common understanding which would look not merely to the defence of our own shores but, in the words of the late Sir Wilfrid Laurier, more to the defence of civilization and the maintenance of world peace by the defence of the British empire itself.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Mr. Chairman, at this hour of the night, at this stage of the session, and after having spoke on defence policies at considerable length on the main estimates I do not wish to say more than a few words at this time in reply to my right hon. friend. Perhaps I would more accurately describe my own feelings at the moment were I to say a few words in association with what my right hon. friend (Mr. Bennett) has just said.

It would be impossible to have heard from the lips of anyone a more complete endorsement of the Liberal policy with respect to naval defence than that which has been given to-night by the right hon. leader of the opposition. He has quoted the records with respect to naval defence, from the time the policy was introduced in 1909. With one possible exception, which I think ought to be mentioned, namely in reference to what he said as to emergency being the cause of any change of policy which took place, I believe he has fairly stated the significant facts.

The Laurier policy, so-called, was a policy of the defence of Canada's coasts by Canadians, by ships made as largely as possible in Canada and manned by Canadians, a service controlled by the government of Canada, and one which could be placed at the disposal of the British admiralty whenever this parliament decided it was desirable that the service should be placed so as to act in cooperation with other services within the empire.

I was a member of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's government at the time it was decided to introduce the Naval Service Act, and I remember quite vividly the discussions which took place both in cabinet and in parliament with respect to the measure. In considering what it was advisable to do by way of an initial step, the choice lay between making provision at the outset for destroyers and cruisers, and the purchase of dreadnoughts. I recollect that as stated in full the policy was for a fleet unit on the Atlantic and the Pacific, such service when finally constructed to consist of destroyers, cruisers and battleships. It was thought advisable to begin with the smaller ships, aiming ultimately at a service which would embrace the different classes I have mentioned.

My right hon. friend's observations to-night with respect to tenders not having been

awarded prior to 1911 brings back to my mind how scrupulously honourable Sir Wilfrid Laurier was in dealing with public matters. He sought to avoid even the appearance of questionable dealings with respect to any public matter and more especially transactions of national significance, and the defence policy was in that category. I well recall tenders being placed before the cabinet for consideration prior to the election of 1911, and Sir Wilfrid Laurier taking very strongly the position that while for many reasons it might be advisable to award tenders before the election so that there might be no question about the government's intention of going on with the naval service, nevertheless to award contracts of the magnitude involved on the eve of a general election would mean taking a step which in the minds of the public might be misinterpreted. On this ground he held that it would be preferable to leave the awarding of tenders until the election was over. For that reason the date upon which tenders were to be awarded was fixed, as my right hon. friend has pointed out, at a date shortly after that fixed for the election itself.

Hon. members will recollect that 1911 was a year of a general election in which political contest the main subject of controversy was the question of reciprocity. Those who participated in the campaign in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec will recall that in addition to the question of reciprocity the whole question of the naval service, and the part it represented in relations between Canada and other parts of the world, and the British empire in particular, was very fully discussed. In Ontario Sir Wilfrid was bitterly criticized throughout the campaign on what was termed his separatist policy and his tin pot navy. What was being attempted was described as something absolutely useless and having a separatist tendency. In the province of Quebec a different campaign was waged. There it was stated that the Laurier policy was intended to force Canadians into European wars, that it was a species of jingo imperialism, that Sir Wilfrid had become a jingo imperialist, that a jingo imperialist was at the head of the Liberal party and must not be supported any longer as leader of the government of the country.

Hon. members will also recall that out of the agitation in the province of Quebec a third party, a new party developed. That party was not known as the Conservative or the Liberal party, but was called the Nationalist party. That party, as subsequent disclosures proved, had been financed during the campaign by the Conservative party and was in alliance with it. There was a secret

understanding that if the Liberal administration was defeated in the campaign by the Nationalists in the province of Quebec and Conservatives in other provinces, the two would unite after the election to form a government to control the affairs of the country.

As results proved, from the standpoint of political strategy the course which had been adopted was successful. A large number of candidates returned as Nationalists were seen to be Conservatives, when it came to their being seated in the house and arrangements for government were in the making. The two parties combined, the Conservative and the Nationalist, were sufficiently large in numbers to defeat the Liberal administration.

What I want to say this evening is that there is something in the nature of poetic justice in the fact that at the end of a little more than a quarter of a century, after all these divisions have taken place and, fortunately, have been largely forgotten, it should remain to the leader of the Conservative party, the party which defeated Sir Wilfrid Laurier on his naval policy, to be the one to pronounce a strong eulogy with respect to every aspect of the policy put forward by Sir Wilfrid at that time. I want to express to my right hon. friend my appreciation of his manliness in standing up as he has to-night, and crediting Sir Wilfrid Laurier with wisdom and consistency from beginning to end with respect to his policy of naval defence, a consistency which the Liberal party as a whole can also claim. I say that, because we have never at any time departed from our belief that the Laurier policy was the wise and the sound one.

More than that, looking back on the events of the great war, we have reason to know that had the Laurier policy been continued, as it should have been, and had there been that same feeling of loyalty of all parties as has been expressed by my right hon. friend, the fleet unit on the Pacific coast would have played for Canada a part comparable to that which one or two of the ships of the Australian naval service, created at the same time, played for Australia in the course of the great war.

Mr. BENNETT: I believe they were a little ahead of us.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: As a matter of fact, the two services were decided upon at the same time, but the work of construction of the Australian naval service commenced at a date earlier than that on the Canadian naval service.

Mr. BENNETT: They had their ships afloat when the war began.

D 32898

D 32899