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The Collapse of the "Boot Scandal"



Liberal Campaign of falsehood
a total failure

But it has robbed the Canadian
Workingman of Millions
of Dollars

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SIR ROBERT BORDEN.

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"The Collapse of the "Boot Scandal"

The famous army "Boot Scandal" which the Liberals thought they had unearthed last session of parliament and by means of which they hoped to discredit the Government has proven a fiasco. As an expected sensational exposure it has utterly collapsed.

From the moment the first criticism of the Canadian boots was heard, the Liberals in Parliament set out to find a scandal and to nurse it along to maturity. They did not know that the boots were bad, but they were willing, for a political purpose, to tell the world that the boots were bad, that the Canadian boot and shoe industry was in the hands of crooks, that the militia system in Canada was not efficient, and that the equipment of the Canadian army was rotten.

The allegations circulated by the Liberal Opposition were good news for the enemies of the Dominion and good news for rival commercial interests in other countries. That would have been bad enough had the allegations been true. **They were not true, have been proven to be untrue.**

The Opposition in their hunger for political capital, were not willing to wait for the facts. They were content to foul their own nest as Canadians, and to do it on the basis of what has been shown to have been a lying rumor.

Liberals Deserted Their Own Offspring.

From the noise which these Liberals made, both before and during the parliamentary investigation, it might have been expected that they would have stood by the issue they had raised. But they did not. They brought in a minority report which was not based upon the facts brought out in the investigation, which they knew to be contrary to those facts, and which they dared not support by a record of their votes on a formal division of the House.

The fact is that so poor a case was presented in support of the minority report that the Liberals dared not place themselves on record as subscribing to it. The report was declared "lost on division," no yeas and nays being taken or asked for. Even the mover of the minority report, Hon. Charles Murphy, himself a member of the investigating committee, was discreet enough to absent himself from the Chamber when the debate came to an end. **Every other Liberal, with the exception of five, did the same thing.** The five were Hon. William Pugsley, F. B. Carvell, Edmund Proulx, Hon. Charles Marcell, and Dr. Warnock. Only one Liberal from Ontario, Proulx was in the Chamber.

Never in the history of Parliament did a "scandal" flatten out so quickly and so completely.

Took the Bread Out of the Mouths of the Workers.

As pointed out by Sir Robert Borden, when the committee reports were presented to the House of Commons, the Opposition had sympathized with an effort to discredit those engaged in the boot and shoe industry in Canada.

"Because I have not the slightest doubt," said Sir Robert Borden, "that statements which have been made in the press, even before this matter could be thoroughly investigated, have led to the detriment of business conditions in Canada and have deprived this country of contracts which it otherwise would have obtained, and in that way have taken the bread out of the mouths of Canadian workmen. That is a very poor kind of business for any man in Canada to be engaged in, whether he is a member of this House or not."

The Prime Minister pointed out that the boot was selected by the late Administration. He ridiculed and demolished the contention that it was only a peace boot, that the Laurier Government proposed to equip soldiers who were war soldiers with a peace boot when every other part of the equipment was intended for war, and when, as argued by the Liberals, the boots were the most essential part of the equipment. The Premier commented forcibly upon the suppression by the Liberals in their report of any reference to the weather conditions to which the boots were subjected at Valcartier and at Salisbury Plain. "Their partisanship," he said, "collided with their patriotism and the latter was very quickly dissipated."

The Work of the Committee Most Exhaustive.

The Parliamentary Boot Committee's investigation was most exhaustive. No fewer than 87 witnesses were examined under oath at the 51 sittings of the Committee. The Government had insisted upon the fullest investigation and the investigation had, in fact, been wide open.

This Committee appointed two experts to examine and report upon all the boots which had been condemned. These experts were appointed unanimously. All the boots rejected by regimental boards and sent to Ottawa were examined, with the following result:

Number of said condemned or discarded boots forwarded and examined, of which 348 were singles and 1,365 were pairs	1,713
Of these there were rendered useless by the soldiers burning them	112
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	1,601
Of this, again, there were repairable boots to the number of	1,448
Leaving unrepairable, only	153
Of these, again, their unrepairable condition was due to the following causes:	
Cut by toe nail	48
Cut by knife or spur	22
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	70
Net unrepairable	83

While 68 had not originally been equal to sample chiefly by reason of being too light in the backs.

The Government records show that out of 86,000 boots issued to and now in use by the soldiers in training in Canada since the war began, only 7,807 have been condemned, or about 9 per cent., but applying the same average and test to these boots as was found by the experts so appointed by the Committee, it will show that out of these totals condemned boots in Canada:

There are repairable	6,599
Mutilated by soldier by knife, spur or toe	319
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Leaving only those rendered useless from other causes . .	379

So that it is clear that the number of bad boots so far as can be ascertained is less than one-half of one per cent. of those issued.

One-half of one per cent. of a "scandal." Small wonder then that the Opposition deserted the Chamber, leaving only five of the hardy ones to see the end.

What the soldiers say

Soldiers Want the Canadian Boot.

Every report which is received from our soldier boys on the firing line in Europe shows that the Canadian boot is proving much more satisfactory and comfortable for the Canadian soldiers than the British footwear. The following are a few of the many received and they speak for themselves:

"Most Satisfactory and Comfortable."

Lt. Col. David Watson, who went with the First Contingent, in a letter to Major General Hughes writes of the Canadian army boot as follows:

"My attention has been directed to certain articles appearing in the press relative to the issue of Canadian boots to the First Canadian Contingent, and maliciously attacking the value of these.

"Permit me to point out that at an inspection of my regiment on the 3rd inst., I took the occasion to ascertain the opinion of the men regarding the relative merits of these boots, and in almost every instance it was intimated that the Canadian boots were most satisfactory, and particularly comfortable. It must be remembered that the conditions and experiences at Salisbury Plains were calculated to destroy any boot made.

"When the new English issue was distributed, it was found that they wear out much quicker than the Canadian boots, and they are much more clumsy and harder on the men's feet. I was pleased to note that the large number of men still wearing the Canadian boot have taken special care of same having them resoled a couple of times."

"British Boot Ill-Wearing and Clumsy."

Colonel John W. Carson, of Montreal, writing from the front, says:

"The British boot is heavy, ill-wearing, clumsy and hard on the feet of the men. There are no half sizes and a man whose size is 7½ has to take a size 8 and wear two pairs of socks. As the summer is coming on a supply of medium weight Canadian boots will be welcomed."

"Much Prefer it to the British Boot."

Sergt. Herbert H. McElroy, of Ottawa, a member of the First Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery and who was seriously wounded at the battle of Ypres in May last in a letter written shortly before then stated:

"I see by the papers that there is a great deal being said about the Canadian Army boot. I must say in so far as my experience goes and that of other members of our brigade, we have found the Canadian boot very satisfactory indeed. We much prefer it to the British Boot. In fact, I am wearing the pair yet which I got at Valcartier camp, having had them resoled once in England while at Salisbury Plains. The boys here will not wear the British boot if it is possible to get a Canadian boot. For comfort and wearing qualities I will put the Canadian boot up against any British boot I have seen so far. In the matter of equipment we have been well looked after by the Canadian authorities. We have no complaints to make whatever."

Sergt. Bert Ward, of Petrolea, writing to his brother, says:

"What the boys would like to know here is whether the people who are talking about graft would sooner have the men wear out two pairs of Canadian shoes and have good feet or wear one pair of English shoes and ruin their feet. Some of the boys have extra Canadian shoes here, and you cannot buy them at any price."

Still Has His Canadian Boots.

Sergt. C. R. Lennan, of Petrolea, Ont., writing to his mother recently, said:

"I still have my Canadian boots, although I threw away two pairs of British boots worn only a short time. The Canadian boots I had were very comfortable and most of the men in the battery got a pair when they could."

Had His Canadian Boots Stolen Three Times.

Captain Rogers, Barrie, Ont., an officer in the 4th Battalion, invalidated home, in an interview to the newspapers on June 15, stated:

"When we left Salisbury Plains we discarded our Canadian boots and were served out with British boots. They were very heavy and the Canadians not accustomed to such footwear soon had their feet slashed to pieces tramping over the cobblestone roads.

"I have seen half of our regiment disabled with sore feet.

"Some of the boys smuggled across with them their Canadian boots and they used them every time they were marching. I had a pair of Canadian boots and I had them stolen on me three times. However, they had a peculiar twist to them and I just watched the boys marching by and soon got back my boots. I wouldn't have taken any money for my Canadian boots and those of us who had footwear from Canada were the envy of the battalion.

"Despite the rain and mud at Salisbury Plain, the boots wore well for those who knew how to take care of them properly. The trouble was that many of the boys from the city did not know how to treat their boots."

British Boot Injures the Feet.

Major Kirkealdy, Brandon, Man., of the 8th Battalion, home on leave of absence early in June, had the following to say regarding the Canadian boot :

"No boot made would have stood the conditions at Salisbury Plains. I bought a pair of British boots and within a month had to resole them. For marching and general use I much prefer the Canadian boots and this is the general opinion of the Canadian soldiers. The British boots are too heavy and cut our feet to pieces marching over the cobblestones of England and France."

Testimony From England.

The following despatch from London, England, which appeared in The Montreal Gazette on June 16 also corroborates what has been said by the soldiers themselves. The despatch reads:

FOR CANADIAN BOOTS.

Troops Don't Like the English Footwear Provided.

London, June 4.—(Special Correspondence.)—The testimony which was given recently before the Parliamentary Committee at Ottawa to the comfort and durability of many pairs of boots provided for the first contingent is being added to by the experiences of certain Canadian officers and men who have tried the English black boots provided on this side. Signed statements from officers returning from the front declare the latter to be unwieldy and uncomfortable and also ill-adapted to the form of the foot. In fact, I am informed that a senior officer recently arrived wounded from the front declared he felt just as if he had boxes on his feet, the average weight being put at about 7½ pounds. Rather than wear the boot at present served out, it is said several officers and men at the training depot in England have preferred to get their old Canadian boots repaired at their own expense. A number of affidavits have been made here showing that the English black boot affords no better protection against water, and that as regards comfort and shape, it is much inferior to the Canadian manufacture.

Laurier's Vague Insinuation.

When the Army boot question was first brought to the attention of the House, it had been represented by the Liberals and had been very generally believed throughout the country that extensive frauds had been committed in connection with the supply of boots. With the Liberal party the responsibility for this impression must to a large extent rest. Sir Wilfrid Laurier drawing the matter to the attention of the House used these words:

"It would hardly be possible to expect that in the case of the expenditure of some \$50,000,000 no mistakes

would arise. It is perhaps more than human nature could expect, but we cannot close our eyes to the fact, not only have mistakes been made, but frauds have been committed, which have resulted in injury to the health of our troops and impairment of their efficiency."

There can be no doubt that the thought in the mind of the leader of the Opposition in making this statement was that serious frauds in connection with the supply of boots had been perpetrated upon the authorities.

Liberal Attack on the Manufacturers.

Liberal members in the House also lost no opportunity of casting reflections and making insinuations against the Canadian shoe manufacturers on this account. The member for Edmonton, Hon. Frank Oliver, in the Budget debate, said:

"There is another class of patriots in this country who ought to have attention at this particular time. I speak of the manufacturers of boots. In the exposures we have had lately, if there is any class of manufacturers who are not entitled to consideration at the hands of this Government, it is our friends who make boots."

The Ferguson report has revealed what a high type of "patriot" Oliver is. Dr. Michael Clark in his emphatic and cynical way expressed himself that "this is the way the bootmakers die for the flag." During the course of the discussions which took place in the House upon varied subjects the members of the Opposition lost no opportunity of casting slurs and discredit upon those Canadian manufacturers who have supplied the Militia Department with boots.

The Liberal press also, from one end of Canada to the other carried on a systematic campaign, having the same object in view. The most important paper in the province of Ontario on the Liberal side is the Toronto Globe. The Toronto Globe is edited by a clergyman and its editorials are supposedly written from a highly moral and religious standpoint, yet the Toronto Globe did not allow an opportunity to pass that could be used to discredit and humiliate Canadian shoe manufacturers. The Toronto Globe on March 1st said this: "The punk bootmen are still at large." On the 8th of the same month it said that "The boot scandal will stand as a discouraging warning until it is cleared away by the adequate punishment of the guilty." On the 24th of March it said, "Shavings of wood and pieces of cork do not appear to be good material out of which to make the soles of soldiers' boots." Many more quotations of a similar nature could be referred to, but enough have been used to show the spirit that had taken possession not only of Liberal members of Parliament but of the Liberal press in their endeavour to discredit the Canadian shoe industry.

Liberal Member Admits no Fraud.

In the minority report, the report of the Liberal members who made up the commission, it will be noted that it does not suggest directly or indirectly that any evidence was submitted that would in any way stand as a charge of graft or fraud against a single shoe manufacturer. One of the members of the committee, the Liberal member for North Oxford, Mr. Nesbitt, in the discussion which followed, said that "The manufacturers had supplied boots to the Department which were well up to the sample" and that "There was absolutely no evidence of fraud upon their part." So that it must be admitted in view of the reports, which have

been received not only from the majority of the committee, but also from the minority report, that there was absolutely no foundation for the unfair campaign that had been carried on in the Liberal party against an important Canadian industry.

Failing to prove or find any evidence of fraud in the search of which the committee begun its investigations the minority report is directed entirely in another direction. An effort is made to prove that while no fraud was attempted or committed by any contractor, the pattern of boot which had been adopted by the Militia Department was not a suitable boot for the purposes for which it was intended. While this was not the purpose for which this committee was appointed, it is perhaps well that some attention should be paid to this side of the question. There has always been and there will always be a very great difference of opinion as to the best type of military boot. As an evidence of this the United States Government appointed a commission of expert men some years ago to thoroughly investigate the question. The commission gathered all possible information for a period of four years before it handed in its report.

An Improved Pattern of Boot.

The boot which is in use by the Canadian militia forces represents the result of a number of changes and improvements. Beginning with the boot which was used in the South African war, the Liberal Government in 1905 had a careful investigation of this question, and in that year certain improvements were made to that boot. Again in 1910 the Militia Department under Sir Frederick Borden, Minister of Militia, again investigated this question, and further improvements were made. When the Conservative Government came into power in 1911 the matter was again taken up, and some slight changes made by way of improvement. When the report of the American commission was available in 1912 the matter was again investigated, and a comparison made between the type of boot as recommended by that Commission, and compared with the boot of the Canadian Government it was found that the boot recommended by the American commission was a lighter boot, although similar in most respects to the Canadian, and it was at that time decided that it would not be advisable to follow the American Commission's recommendations, but keep the boot just as it was. **This is the boot that was used as a sample in the present war, so that it can be said the boot which is in use at the present time is the boot which was adopted and developed up to its present state largely by the Militia Department under the direction of the Liberal Government.**

English Boots Cannot be Worn.

The military boot question is a very old question, as old as wars, and in every war it seems that great difficulties present themselves in connection with this subject. We have heard a great deal about the superiority of the English boot. As a matter of fact many of the English boots have been condemned. In the Toronto Globe on Feb. 19th, we find a quotation from the London Shoe and Leather Record, which says:

“More than half our Company were without boots. The soles came off, and when they gave us new ones they were supplied with kid walking boots similar to those for town wear.”

So it will be seen that even among the English boots, which are much heavier and stronger than our own, they are bound at times to go wrong. There are many advocates of the heavy English type of boot, especially among Old Country officers, as they have been accustomed to it, but it was

shown in the evidence that the Department of Militia had not been blind to this, and as recently as 1913 the English type of boot had been considered, but after careful investigation it was found that Canadian soldiers, accustomed as they were to much lighter boots, would be crippled and made inefficient through attempting to wear the English type of boot. This was borne out by the fact that when some of the Canadian boots were complained of at Salisbury and replaced by boots supplied by the British war officials, letters are being received in Canada to the effect that these are not at all suitable for our men, and are very hard upon them, and that they are again asking that they again be supplied with the boots to which they are accustomed. It may be said that this fact was brought out in the evidence that Canadian shoe manufacturers can make as good a boot for army purposes as can be made anywhere in the world, and there is no doubt that they can supply a boot if that boot is demanded which will overcome as well as any can overcome the extraordinary weather conditions which these boots were called upon to meet.

One-Half of One Per Cent. of a Scandal.

Regarding the whole situation, it cannot be better summed up in so far as the Canadian shoe manufacturers are concerned than in the words and figures of the majority report, which were not and cannot be disputed. Out of 86,000 pairs of shoes issued to the Canadian forces there were condemned by the militia authorities 7,807 pairs. The committee in order to satisfy itself as to the exact condition of the shoes which had been condemned after having been used, had them returned to Ottawa and had two practical men of much experience in connection with the repair and manufacture of shoes make a careful examination and report upon those condemned boots. The result was that it was found that of the 7,807 pairs condemned 6,599 pairs could be repaired and put in serviceable condition; 510 pairs had been burnt, 319 pairs had been mutilated and cut in some way, and there were actually defective only 379 pairs of shoes or less than one-half of one per cent. of all the shoes issued to the forces in Canada; and when this record is taken into consideration, we think it might be well said that the Canadian shoe industry has reason to be proud of this record and that instead of being held up to the ridicule and scorn of the people of Canada they should be pointed to with pride for having met so serious a crisis in so capable a way. It is unfortunate that this prejudice and condemnation of the Canadian shoe trade which has been heralded all over the world should ever have occurred. It has had a far-reaching effect upon the industry.

At the present time Canada is receiving large orders for all kinds of products from Russia, Great Britain and France and we are told that largely through the disparaging reports that have been sent broadcast regarding the class of shoes supplied by the Canadian shoe manufacturers, orders for shoes from these countries have not come to Canada in the way in which they otherwise would, and that in this way a great loss has been suffered by this industry and by the people of this country.

Orders Now Go to the United States .

Up to the month of June, orders for over 7,000,000 pairs of shoes at a cost of over \$20,000,000 have been placed by the allied armies among the United States manufacturers. Some of the large shoe concerns in that country have orders for a million pairs. In Canada little of this business has been secured by our manufacturers and the loss to our shoe manufacturers and their employees is estimated at from seven to ten million dollars.

There is a reason for discrimination against Canada. Even our close relation to the allies, as a country active in their fight with both our men and money, has not been sufficient to remove from their minds the suspicions aroused as to the quality of our army boots by the gross misrepresentation of the Liberal party and press. Irresponsible insinuations fathered by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and enlarged upon by the Liberal press destroyed all hope of Canada participating in this remunerative business.

And what was accomplished by this campaign of slander and insinuation? After the most thorough probe not a Liberal dare stand sponsor for any charges against the boot manufacturers. **No evidence of fraud was adduced, no condemnation of the boots proven nor at the conclusion of the investigation suggested.**

From the front every mail brings from our soldiers appreciation of Canadian footwear, and a demand that they have it and not the heavy, clumsy boots of the European armies. Who should know best the quality of Canadian boots, their wearers or disgruntled Grits, who would sacrifice our soldiers and industries to gain a temporary political advantage?

Many Millions of a Loss to Canada.

The Liberal campaign has been a political boomerang for them. Their irresponsible charges were completely refuted. **But their campaign of slander of the boot manufacturers accomplished its work—a work that has deprived Canada of millions of war orders and the Canadian workingman of millions of dollars. Truly it has taken the bread out of the mouth of the workingman. But the harm has been done with the result that the allied armies are diverting their huge contracts to the United States, where the politicians and newspapers do not make war upon their own people.**

