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## A GREAT HISTORIC SPEECH

### SIR ROBERT BORDEN DECLARES FOR POLITICAL PURITY

In One of the Greatest Speeches Ever Delivered in the Canadian Parliament the Prime Minister Reviews the Graft Inquiries, Analyses the Evidence and Lays Down for all Time What the Policy of the Liberal Conservatives is Concerning Graft and Grafters.



In the House of Commons on April 14, when the report of the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts was submitted, Right Hon. Sir Robert Borden, Prime Minister said: "The Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts during the past six or seven weeks has been engaged in the investigation of matters which have not yet been reported by the Auditor General to the House in the ordinary course of his duties, and which, therefore, have been under consideration by that committee a year in advance of the time when they ordinarily would come under its attention. The circumstances under which this was brought about are familiar to the House, and I need not dwell upon them. Certain correspondence with regard to the Accounts was moved for and brought down, and it was suggested that that correspondence ought to be referred to the Committee on Public Accounts, and that reference carried incidentally with it the right and the duty of the committee to investigate the matters referred to in the correspondence. There are two courses which a Government might take under the circumstances: One course would be to rely on technical considerations and rules, and declare to the House that such matters ought only to be investigated in the usual way at the time appointed by law and under ordinary conditions. The other course, and that which we thought to be the correct course, would be to open the door wide to the fullest and freest investigation, and we took that course for the very good reason that we deemed it our right, and our duty as well, to investigate and to know of any frauds or irregularities that might have been practiced upon the Government and the people of this country. One can understand the possible result of such a course, because if any matters are brought forth, even of a comparatively trifling character, the natural and usual result is that they will be greatly magnified and exaggerated and will create in the people throughout the country a condition of unrest which may not be fully justified by the facts. But considerations of that kind ought not to weigh with any Government, and they do not weigh with us. Therefore, my direction to those members of the Government who were members of the Committee on Public Accounts was to make the fullest and freest investigation, and to permit inquiry into any matters whatever that might be desired by gentlemen on the other side of the House, or that might be brought to the attention of hon. members on this side. That course, I believe, was pursued to the fullest possible extent as I will show by some reference to the proceedings of the committee. I may say, in passing, that this was not the course pursued during the fifteen years immediately preceding the time we came into power, because, without dwelling upon particular instances, I am able to point out that from the time of the refusal, in 1898, of an inquiry into matters of no great possible importance in the Yukon until the last refusal to investigate

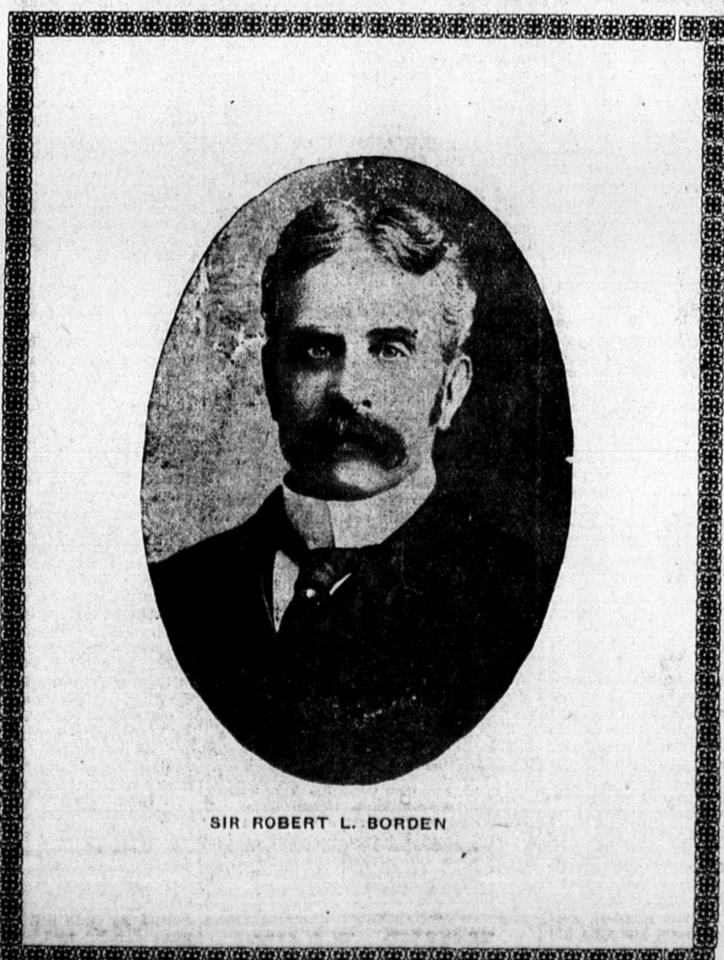
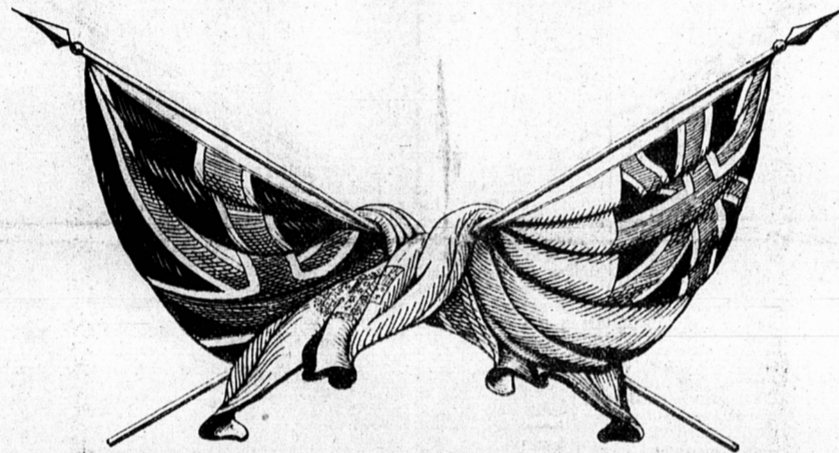
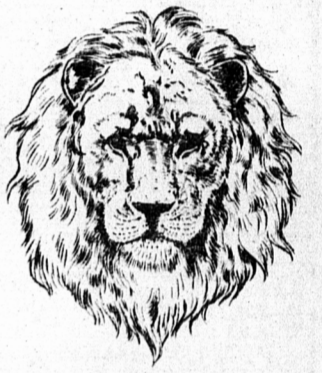
matters of even greater moment in connection with the National Transcontinental railway, there seems to have been a disposition on the part of hon. gentlemen opposite, when they held the reins of power, to restrict inquiry and investigation within the narrowest possible compass. I do not intend to go into those matters at any great length, but it is proper that I should call attention to a resolution which was moved by the hon. member for Percé (Mr. Blain) on the 13th day of February, 1908, which is found in Hansard of that year at page 3070, the vote being recorded at page 33145. That motion is in the following terms: "The Committee on Public Accounts is constituted for the purpose of affording full and free examination and inquiry into the receipts and expenditures of public moneys and the circumstances in connection therewith. That in the public interest the greatest possible freedom of investigation and inquiry should be enjoyed by the committee. That any action of the majority of that committee in excluding evidence or restricting inquiry, should be subject to appeal to this House and upon request for that purpose the necessary report of proceedings ought immediately to be ordered. That does not seem to lay down any startling or unusual standard of public duty; yet when that motion was put before the House by the hon. member for Percé it was voted down by the gentlemen on the other side of the House, then occupying the seats of office, and that motion, which seems to me was not consistent with the public interest of this country. On the 9th day of May, 1906, a certain question arose in the Committee on Public Accounts. The Government of the day was represented on that committee by the Minister of Finance, the gentleman of the public treasury, and the other the Minister of Justice, the man whose duty it would be under the constitution to take proceedings against any persons guilty of fraud against the Government of this country by means of raids upon the public treasury. Mr. George T. Morwin was under examination, and during his examination he was asked to state the price he had paid for an engine sold to the Government by him, and he refused to do so. Thereupon a member of the committee requested the chairman to rule whether the witness should or should not answer. The chairman of the committee, now an hon. member of the Senate, ruled that a business man was not obliged to divulge his private affairs. Having been asked by a member of the committee to direct the witness to answer the question and the chairman having declined to do direct him, the said member appealed from the ruling of the Chair and the ruling of the Chair denying that right to a member of the Government of the day. The people in Parliament, was sustained. Among others who voted on behalf of the Government of the day to deny that right to the representatives of the people in this Parliament were the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Finance of the day. If there was any wrong-doing in connection with public expenditure, and particularly in connection with the expenditure for the purpose of this war, the members of this Government wanted to know it, particularly I wanted to know it, and the Minister of Militia and Defence wanted to know it. I spoke to the Minister of Customs (Mr. Reid) who is member of the Public Accounts Committee, with regard to the scope of the investigation. I spoke to him in the presence of the Minister of Militia and Defence (Major Hughes) and I informed him—and my observations in that regard were emphatically seconded by the Minister of Militia that we wanted the widest possible scope given to that inquiry. If there had been any wrong-doing in connection with political expenditures, we desired it to be investigated to the full. We proposed that if wrong-doing should be discovered, restitution should be made and punishment should follow. And so the Minister of Customs in the Committee on Public Accounts was undoubtedly he would have adopted even if he had not been so informed by me the course to which I will take the opportunity of referring the House. On the 24th of March last the Hon. Mr. Reid said in the committee: "I want to say that if there is any information the committee want, or any wrong-doing, then, as far as the Government is concerned we want to ferret it right to the bottom; we do not want to shield any person. And again on the next day, the 25th of March, he said: "The Government is determined to protect fully the interests of the coun-

stitution shall be made or prosecution be undertaken, to put matters right. And later on, on the same day, the 9th of April, he said: "So far as these matters under investigation are concerned, or any others in connection with the Militia or any other department that have been brought up here, it is the intention of the Government to further the investigation and get to the bottom of every matter. We will follow this investigation from now on until we

worth while to report to this House are matters the events in connection with which occurred during the first six weeks of the war, during a time when there was the greatest possible stress and urgency, and when it could not reasonably be expected that that attention could possibly be given to the safeguarding of the public interest which has been given ever since that early stress and urgency passed away. The order for supplies in connection with what is known as the Powell case

known in the Department of Militia and Defence since this party came into power. Further than that, one of these gentlemen perhaps more than one—states that he does not believe that he ever said anything of the kind. I say that if General Jones ever did make any such observation to Mr. Shaver or anybody else, his conduct must be called into question by this Government, and if he is not able satisfactorily to deny the assertion that he used such language, he is no longer fit to hold a position in the public service. But, in the meantime, I do General Jones the credit of assuming that he never said anything of the kind. I shall not condemn him upon the testimony of this man Shaver, confronted as he is, by the testimony of other reputable men in the department who are appointees not of this Government, but of the Government of hon. gentlemen opposite. I know Gen. Jones very well; he is a native of my own city of Halifax, and an honorable man, so far as I know him. He is the son of a man who filled an important position in the public life of this country, the Hon. Alfred G. Jones, a member of Mr. Mackenzie's Government, and afterwards Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Nova Scotia. I, for one, absolutely refuse to believe for a moment that Guy Carleton Jones ever told Mr. Shaver or any one else the absolute untruth that any such principle or practice was ever laid down by the Department of Militia since we came into power. The transaction itself presents features of a very unsatisfactory character, as one is bound to admit at once. So far as I am concerned, I propose not to attempt to shield any one, Liberal or Conservative, but to mete out what I think to be justice to every man concerned in any of the transactions which have been under review. A purchase was made through Mr. Powell, a very young man, who was in the employ of a company known as the Carleton Drug Company. He was receiving a salary of \$75 a month. His duties were very exacting, according to the evidence; he began his work early in the morning and continued his work until very late at night. He was enabled, under circumstances to which I shall refer a little later to make a contract by which in a few weeks he received a profit of about \$9,000, equivalent to ten years of the salary he was receiving. It is perfectly true that a portion of that profit, some \$2,600, was withheld, through the vigilance of Mr. H. W. Brown, director of contracts, and it is also true that during the progress of the investigation before the committee a further sum of \$6,300 was restored, after a motion had been made by the Minister of Customs recommending that the whole matter should be committed to the Department of Justice for such further investigation and proceedings as might be found necessary to protect the public interest. I desire to say that any further investigation that may be possible in the matter, either for the purpose of further restitution if any is deemed possible or for any other proceedings of any character which may be found necessary to vindicate the public honour and the public interest, will be taken by the Department of Justice. Let me read the report—because I should like to make the record complete—which the committee has made to this House with regard to the Powell contract: "Your committee ask leave to submit to the House, the evidence taken in respect to the contracts for such supplies purchased from Mr. Powell, and to express their opinion, that the contract for such supplies do not appear to fully protect the public interests. Your committee therefore recommend that the evidence adduced, and all papers connected therewith be referred by the House to the Department of Justice, for any further investigation, if necessary, for the recovery of any moneys overpaid, the holding back of any moneys not yet paid over, and the taking of such further action as may be warranted by the facts. That is the resolution which was moved by the Minister of Customs in the Committee on Public Accounts, and which was followed by the repayment of Mr. Powell to the public treasury of the sum of \$6,300. The committee has reported to the House certain evidence and a certain finding with regard to binocular glasses. Their report is as follows: "Your committee have had under consideration the purchase of binocular glasses for the Canadian expedi-

tionary forces and beg to report to the House the evidence and documents in connection therewith. From the evidence it appears a number of binocular glasses were of poor quality, low range and inferior efficiency, but passed inspection were paid for at an excessive price; and this was due to misrepresentation and inadequate inspection. Your committee therefore recommend to the House that the said evidence of all documents connected therewith be referred to the Department of Justice, with instructions to enforce restitution and to take such further proceedings as the law will permit. It is not necessary that I should go into the facts, nor will the time at the disposal of the House under present conditions permit me to do so. The crux of the whole matter is that 166 out of the 2,175 glasses were of inferior quality and were not worth the money which the Government of this country paid out of the treasury for them. It is only fair that I should read to the House a letter which I received yesterday from a gentleman whose name was associated with the matter: Ottawa, April 12, 1915. Right Hon. Sir Robert Borden, G.C. M. G., Prime Minister of Canada, Ottawa, Ont. Dear Sir—I note by the public press that a resolution has been adopted by the Public Accounts Committee, recommending that the purchase of binocular glasses by the Department of Militia and Defence be referred to the Department of Justice, for its consideration. As one of the contractors, I am very anxious that my dealings with the Ellis company of Toronto should be thoroughly investigated by a judicial officer at the very earliest possible moment. I was not represented by counsel before the public Accounts Committee, and I did not have an opportunity of presenting my side of the case in as complete a manner as I would have liked. If I have been guilty of any impropriety, either legal or morally, then I am extremely desirous that an important tribunal should be declared, and in such an event it will give me great pleasure to make all the amends possible in connection with the matter. I would therefore deem it a great favour if you would kindly arrange to have the Department of Justice expedite this matter, and if the same is referred to a judicial officer, such as one of the judges of the Exchequer Court for investigation, I will facilitate and expedite the investigation, in so far as it is in my power. I would feel under very great obligations of such action could be taken immediately. I beg to remain, Sir, Your obedient servant, T. M. BIRKETT, JR. I pronounce no judgment on Mr. Birkett's relation to the case, but this seems a very fair and manly letter in which he desires an early and thorough investigation; and I desire to say (Continued on page two)



SIR ROBERT L. BORDEN



try in this and in all cases and to take such proceedings as may be necessary for that purpose. And again on the same day he said: "I want to repeat here again that so far as the Government is concerned they want to prosecute their investigation to the very utmost limit. And subsequently he said: "As representing the Government I have stated that we want to get to the bottom of these matters. And on the 9th day of April he said: "I also want to say that so far as going into these or any other matters in connection with the Militia or any other department, the Government are not only willing but anxious to go into them from start to finish and get the true facts out in order that if there has been any wrong-doing, either re-

see exactly whether there are any other matter where there has been any wrong-doing. On the 9th day of April some question arose about the investigation and the Minister of Customs again said: "I want to have it understood that it is not the Government who are responsible for stopping any investigations. Mr. Carvell: I thought we had put that very plainly. Mr. Kyte: That is perfectly understood. I now come to the matters that have been reported to the House by the committee. The one which appears first in my note is that which is known as the Powell case. Let me observe here for the information of the House and of the country that every one of the matters upon which the committee has thought it

was given on August 24 last, and is described as rush order. Some evidence was given before the committee by a man named Shaver, who declared that he had been informed by Col. Jones, now General Jones, that the Government did not desire to purchase directly from manufacturers and producers, but that it desired to employ the services of middlemen. Evidence has been given by the director of contracts, Mr. H. W. Brown, by the Deputy Minister of Militia and Defence, General Fleet, by the Quartermaster General, General Macdonald, and, I think, by other officers of the Department of Militia, that no such principle or practice has ever been laid down or that he does not believe that General Jones ever said anything of the kind and I do not believe that he ever said anything of the kind. I say that

your committee have had under consideration the purchase of binocular glasses for the Canadian expedi-

