

The Canadian Contingent

PATRIOTIC SPEECH
BY CANADA'S
FRENCH NOBLEMAN

SIR WILFRID LAURIER



PREMIER OF THE
DOMINION OF CANADA

Delivered in the Canadian House of Parliament, in reply
to Mr. Bourassa's dissenting motion, March 13th, 1900

DEBATE:

On the Sending of the Canadian Contingent to South Africa

After a lengthy speech, in which he opposed the sending of the Canadian Contingent to South Africa, because it was a departure from the letter of the Canadian Constitution, Mr. Bourassa moved the following resolution :

"That this House insists on the principle of the Sovereignty and the Independence of Parliament as the basis of British Institutions, and the safeguard of the civil and political liberties of British citizens, and refuses, consequently, to consider the action of the Government in relation to the South African war as a precedent which should commit this country to any action in the future. That this House further declares that it opposes any change in the political and military relations which exist at present between Canada and Great Britain, unless such change is initiated by the sovereign will of Parliament and sanctioned by the people of Canada."

SIR WILFRID LAURIER :

"Mr. Speaker, I have listened to every word uttered by my hon. friend (Mr. Bourassa) with very deep and close attention, an attention all the closer after having known my hon. friend for many years, almost since his infancy. Being an admirer of his brilliant talents, entertaining for him warm personal friendship, I feel all the more deeply the regret of having to differ from him. My hon. friend is young and enthusiastic; he is at that age, that happy age, where the pride of cherished theories far outweighs and, indeed, usually makes light of considerations of practical reality. But I may be permitted to observe to my hon. friend at once, that

since his object was to vindicate those constitutional principles which in his opinion should have guided and inspired the Government when they came to the conclusion that it was their duty to send a military contingent to Africa, that it would have been far more in accordance with the fitness of things that he should have moved his amendment either upon the address, when that subject was debated at length, or upon the motion presented to the House by the Minister of Finance, in order to make good the expenditure incurred for that object. Then my hon. friend would have presented to this House a real and live issue, a concrete motion which could have been discussed and debated, affirmed or denied, or amended to some practical purpose; whereas he now offers us not a practical motion, but an academic, abstract and rigid motion, which can be debated, which can be affirmed or denied, but cannot be amended, and which, by the rules of this House, has either to be swallowed whole or rejected whole. My hon. friend, in the course of his very able and eloquent speech, has taken the House into his confidence as to the relations which have existed between him and me upon this subject. He has informed the House, and truly informed the House, that he was not present when the motion which I offered to the House, I think on the 31st July or the 1st of August last, of sympathy with the Uitlanders, was adopted, and he has said that if he had been present in the House at that time he would have opposed the motion. He has informed the House also that at that time, and later on, he repeatedly warned me that if we were to incur any military expenditure he would oppose that step of the Government. My hon. friend will permit me to say that I have always respected his convictions, that although I differ from his views I have too much respect, and I may say, without hesitation, admiration for him, not to allow him the full liberty which he claimed. (Hear, hear.) My hon. friend informed me more than once that he wanted to move an amendment to the policy of the Government in order to affirm his conviction.

A More Fitting Occasion. The hon. gentleman will agree with me if I go a little farther in the confidence to which he has invited the House, and if I say that I often represented to my hon. friend that if he felt bound in the discharge of the duty which he owed to himself of bringing in an amendment, he should do it either upon the address, or upon the resolution of the Minister of Finance, because if my

hon. friend had offered his motion upon the address, or upon the motion of the Minister of Finance, that motion then might have been subjected to amendment. I do not find fault with the principles involved in the motion of my hon. friend. I am not prepared, however, to accept the whole language of it, neither am I prepared to accept the opportunity of it, and if my hon. friend had moved his motion, as I suggested to him, as an amendment to the address, or as an amendment to the resolution providing for the South African expenditure, it would have been possible for me to offer an amendment to his amendment, embodying this principle invoked by him, but embodying it in my own language or in language which would have been more suited to the House, language less harsh, if my hon. friend will permit me to say so, in language which I believe would have rallied around the amendment the unanimous opinion of this House. (Cheers.) My hon. friend, in the exercise of his own judgment, and in the exercise of his right, chose, on the contrary, to select his own language and to import into the House his resolution in the manner in which he has. The hon. gentlemen must not be surprised that, although I agree with him in many things, I must tell him at once that I cannot adopt his motion. If I have come to this conclusion it is not because I find fault with the principles enunciated in this amendment, but I challenge altogether the opportunity or the *raison d'être* of this motion. It is not sufficient that the principles involved in a motion submitted to the House should be incontrovertible, for the House to adopt that motion. There must be an opportunity and a reason for it. If my hon. friend, or any member of this House, were to propose as an amendment to supply that two and two make four, or that there are twelve months in a year, or that it is the duty of a good Christian to observe the ten commandments, no one would be disposed to controvert any of his propositions, but no one would feel disposed, on the other hand, to place any of these propositions on the records of the House. (Hear, hear.)

**The
Argument
Challenged.**

The reason why I felt bound to oppose the amendment is not so much because of the terms of the motion itself as because of the arguments with which he has supported it. My hon. friend asserted in his argument that because of the action the Government took we have practically violated the terms which the constitution lays down. Let me repeat to the House the first

proposition set forth by the hon. gentleman in his Motion :—
"That this House insists on the principle of the Sovereignty and Independence of Parliament as the basis of British Institutions and the safeguard of the civil and political liberties of British citizens, and refuses consequently to consider the action of the Government in relation to the South African war as a precedent which should commit this country to any action in the future."

Sir, when we determined to send the first military contingent to Africa we passed an Order in Council, in which we stated that we did not intend our action to be construed as a precedent. We were in so doing abundantly cautious. We were not bound to make any such declaration, because I contend against the argument of my hon. friend that in the action which we took we did not violate the Independence of Parliament, we did not violate any principle of the British Constitution. The whole argument upon which he has based his motion and the principle which he has there laid down, that by our act and by our conduct we have violated the principles of the British Constitution, is founded on the basis of his thory that we incurred this expenditure before we had obtained the sanction of Parliament. Now, sir, I am prepared to state now that this course, to which we add "and as to which we declared we would not take it as a precedent," was a course well within the well-understood term of the British Constitution. Let me call the attention of the House and of my hon. friend to the standard authority upon these matters. I am proud to say that that standard authority is a Canadian, the late Mr. Alpheus Todd. His work is acknowledged as being the work par excellence which truly lays down the doctrine of Parliamentary government in England. I call attention to page fifteen of the last edition of Todd. After having laid down the well-known elementary principle that no expenditure is to be incurred unless with the previous sanction of Parliament, he goes on to say that there are several exceptions, and this is the language to which I call the attention of the hon. gentleman. Here is the point, however: "It is, therefore, erroneous to suppose that the Government can be absolutely prevented from any misapplication or expenditure in excess of the Parliamentary grants. Even were it possible to do so, it would not be politic to restrain the Government from expending money, under any circumstances, without the previous authority of Parliament."

British Here is the law well recognized in England,
Precedents. here is the principle laid down, together with a series of precedents to that effect. Todd quotes several precedents, but I will content myself with two. The first one is: "At the commencement of the French revolutionary war Mr. Pitt advanced enormous sums, amounting to upwards of £1,200,000 to the Emperor of Germany, to aid in the defence of the general interests of Europe, without the previous sanction of Parliament. Upon the attention of the House of Commons being directed to this affair it was proposed to pass a vote of censure on the Minister, but his friends interposed and induced the House to agree to an amendment, declaring that the proceeding in question, though not to be drawn into precedent, but upon occasion of special necessity, was under the peculiar circumstances of the case a justifiable and proper exercise of the discretion vested in His Majesty's Ministers by a former vote of credit.

But Mr. Bourassa may say that there had been a vote of credit to carry on the war, and that the vote had only been exhausted. Well, the principle is the same. Let me call attention to another case which occurred in 1867, and which is quoted by Todd: "On February 18th, 1867, the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposed a vote of £45,721 to defray the cost of buying Blaca's collection of coins and antiquities for the British Museum. Ministers had in the previous autumn assumed the responsibility of this purchase in order to secure this unique and valuable collection for the nation. Under the circumstances the vote was agreed to without opposition."

I could also call attention to another very remarkable precedent. I could point to the Government of Disraeli purchasing the whole stock of the Government of the Khedive in the Suez Canal, and doing this without the authority or the vote of Parliament. Disraeli's action was approved by the British Parliament later on. Now, sir, there were British Liberals in those days just as there are to-day in this Parliament also. There were Liberals who had not the label on their breasts and the badge on their necks, but the principles in their hearts, just as much as any Liberals have them to-day. There was Fox in the time of Pitt, and Gladstone and Bright in the time of Disraeli, and there the Authority of Parliament was sanctioned by those Liberals, who held that Parliament could sanction the expenditure of money in certain emergencies. It is true that in circumstances of that kind the Government has

to take a great risk—a very great risk in its hands and upon its shoulders. The Government has to take the risk of the approval of its course by Parliament.

**Ample
Justification.**

In the matter in hand, had we not ample justification to believe that our course would be justified by Parliament? As soon as Parliament met we submitted our action to it. We laid before it everything that we had done. Our resolution stood the fire of a long discussion, and the principle of our action was approved unanimously by this House. The resolution introduced by the Finance Minister to cover the expenditure incurred in sending the contingent to Africa has received the unanimous sanction of this House. What avails it to-day, then, to say that we have not behind us the force of public opinion, that we were not to be guided solely by the voice of the press? Public opinion has more than one means of expressing itself. There is not only the press, but there is what is heard on the street and in private conversations, and what one can feel in the air. We knew that that public opinion was with us. It is true that my hon. friend has stated on another occasion, I believe, that it is a weak thing to be guided by public opinion. Well, sir, I do not look on it as a weak thing. (Hear, hear.) If public opinion were to ask something against one's honor, or one's sense of right, or one's sense of dignity, it would be a weak thing indeed to follow public opinion; but if the voice of the people asks for a thing that is right and honorable, would it not, then, be a good thing to follow the voice of public opinion? It would be a weak thing not to follow the voice of public opinion.

**If the
Government
Had Refused.**

I put this question to my hon. friend: What would be the condition of this country to-day if we had refused to obey the voice of public opinion? (Hear, hear.) If we had refused at that time to do what was, in my judgment, our imperative duty, it is only too true that a most dangerous agitation would have arisen—an agitation which, according to all human probability, would have ended in a line of cleavage upon racial lines. A greater calamity would never take place in Canada. My hon. friend and I have long been on terms of intimacy. He has long been a political friend and supporter of mine. He knows as well as any man in this House knows that if there is one thing to which I have given my political life it is to try to pro-

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mote the unity and harmony and amity between the diverse elements of this country. My friends can desert me, they can withdraw their confidence from me, they can withdraw the trust which they have placed in my hands, but never shall I deviate from that line of policy. Whatever may be the consequence, whether loss of prestige, loss of popularity or loss of power, I feel that I am in the right, and I know that a time will come when every man, my hon. friend himself included, will render me full justice in that respect.

Character

But, sir, I understand much better now than I did before what is the reason which has impelled my hon. friend to take the position which he has taken. My hon. friend is opposed to the war. He thinks the war is unjust. I do not blame him for holding this view. We are a British country, and a free country, and every man has the right to express his opinion. My hon. friend has the same right to believe that the war is unjust that Mr. John Morley has to believe it, that Mr. Courtney has to believe it, that many other Liberals in England have to believe it. But, if my hon. friend believes that the war is unjust, for my part I am just as fully convinced in my heart and conscience that there never was a juster war on the part of England than that war. I am fully convinced that there never was a more unjust war on the part of any man than the war that is now carried on by President Kruger and the people of the Transvaal. I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that for President Kruger personally I have the most unbounded admiration. He is a stern patriot, and that he believes himself to be in the right I do not question, but if you examine his conduct and his policy in the light of history you cannot but come to the conclusion that in this matter he has been the worst enemy of his own country.

Kruger's

What are the facts with regard to that? It is just as well that we should have it out, as I have it in my own mind. It is easy to understand the position taken by President Kruger. The whole ground of the dispute has been that President Kruger has refused to give the Uitlanders the right of suffrage—political and civil rights. His position is that if he gives the right of suffrage to the Outlanders they will outland him. But, sir, President Kruger is not in the position to maintain that argument. He opened that country to the foreign population; he sold them their

lands and took their money; more than that he invited them to his territory. Even if he had not invited them, he adopted the policy that has been adopted by the American nation and the Canadian nation as well. At the opening of the century the American people opened their vast territory to all the nations of the earth, and granted citizenship to all who came, giving them perfect and absolute equality with themselves. We in Canada for the last forty years have been doing the same thing. We have opened our country to the immigrants of the world, we have invited them to come, and as soon as they come, by conforming to the laws, they are granted full citizenship, and everything we enjoy we have given to them. Well, sir, was it not fair and right, and is it not a rule of the civilization of the nineteenth century, that if a young nation opens its door to foreign immigration, a kind of obligation rests on that nation to give to the immigrants the same rights of citizenship which its own people enjoy? There is more on this occasion. I assert without hesitation that President Kruger himself invited a foreign element into the Transvaal. Let me quote from a book published some time ago by Mr. Fitzpatrick and entitled "The Transvaal from Within." It is a strongly partisan book, I admit, but here is a statement which I have never seen contradicted anywhere. At page 58 Mr. Fitzpatrick says:—"In 1884 Messrs. Kruger and Smith proceeded to Europe to endeavor to raise funds, which were badly needed, and also to obtain some modifications of the convention. The attempt to raise funds through the parties in Holland to whom the concession had just been granted failed, but the Delegates were more fortunate in their other negotiations. They negotiated the London convention, which fixed certain hitherto undefined boundaries, and in that document no reference was made to the suzerainty of Great Britain. They also secured the consent of the British Government to the alteration of the title of the country. Instead of Transvaal State it became once more the 'South African Republic.' During this visit there occurred an incident which provides the answer to Mr. Kruger's oft, too oft, repeated remark, that the Uitlanders were never asked to settle in the Transvaal, and are not wanted there. Messrs. Kruger and Smith were staying at the Albermarle Hotel, where they found themselves, after some weeks' delay, in the uncomfortable position of being unable to pay their hotel bill. In their extremity they applied to one Baron Grant, at that time a bright particular star in the Stock Exchange firmament. Baron Grant was largely interested

in the gold concession of Lydenburg, and he was willing to assist, but on terms. And the quid pro quo which he asked was some public assurance of good-will, protection and encouragement to British settlers in the Transvaal. Mr. Kruger responded on behalf of the Republic by publishing in the London press the cordial invitation and welcome and the promise of rights and protection to all who would come, so frequently quoted against him of late."

I have never seen this contradicted, and I ask, in the face of this invitation by President Kruger, could there be any justification for the policy afterwards adopted by him of refusing these people the right of suffrage and practically making helots of them?

The Taxation of the Transvaal.

I am not going into the particulars of the policy of the Transvaal Republic, or into the religious question touched on this afternoon by my hon. friend. But let me give a single circumstance which is to be found in the last statement of the Year Book. The population of the Transvaal is 245,397, and the revenue exacted from that population is £4,480,210 sterling, or \$24,401,000—very nearly \$100 of taxation per head. Let me compare this with the taxation of the three foremost nations of the world—England, France, and the United States. The taxation of the United States is about \$7 or \$8 per head, of England \$12 per head, and of France \$20 per head. But in the Transvaal the population is taxed to the tune of \$100 per head, the bulk of which is borne by the Uitlanders. That population has to bear almost the whole of that taxation, and yet is denied every vestige of representation. That being the case, we must admit that the quarrel of England was just, when she insisted that her British subjects in the Transvaal should at least have the rights of citizenship when willing to submit to the law. I believe that her quarrel was just, and public opinion in this country being anxious that we should take part in the war, we thought it our duty to satisfy public opinion by sending our military contingent, relying confidently upon Parliament ratifying our course.

Imperial Relations.

My hon. friend has submitted a second proposition. It is this:—"That this House further declares that it opposes any change in the political and military relations which exist at present between Canada and

Great Britain, unless such change is initiated by the sovereign will of Parliament and sanctioned by the people of Canada." I have nothing to say against that proposition. If the relations between Great Britain and Canada are to be changed, they can only be changed by the will and with the consent of the people. I am not going to say that the will of the people should be ascertained by a plebiscite. For I believe the method provided in our Constitution is better. But the argument of my hon. friend is that by taking the position we did we have changed the relations, civil and military, which now exist between Great Britain and Canada. I altogether repudiate that doctrine, and I cannot conceive upon what argument it can be based. I listened carefully to my hon. friend, and admired him in many ways, but I did not understand the argument upon which he based his doctrines that by sending a military contingent to South Africa we changed the political relation existing between Great Britain and Canada. He went further. He asserted, and still more insinuated than asserted, that in doing what we did we had been dictated to by Downing Street, that we had been compelled to do it by the strong hand of Mr. Chamberlain. He rather insinuated also, in passing the resolution we did last session expressing our sympathy with the Uitlanders, we were rather subdued by the will of Mr. Chamberlain. He rather insinuated that the resolution which we then introduced had been framed by an agent of Mr. Chamberlain. Well, sir, the fact is that nobody saw that resolution except the hon. leader of the opposition, who received it from me after it had been adopted by us in Council. He also said that as far back as July last, when we introduced that resolution, Mr. Chamberlain was preparing for war. Now, I ask my hon. friend how he can say such a thing in the face of events well known. Why, it will be to the eternal glory of England that instead of preparing for war during last summer, that war found her absolutely unprepared. (Cheers.) Mr. Kruger has been preparing for years for war, buying ammunition and artillery, accumulating provisions, importing European officers and drilling his people, and when the time came and he thought he was ready and issued his insolent ultimatum calling upon England to give up her possessions in South Africa, England was found absolutely unprepared. She had hardly a few thousand of men out there, and consequently had to submit to the humiliation of successive defeats. I ask how it is possible, in face of such a condition of things, to say that Mr. Cham-

berlain had been preparing for war? No, sir, we were not forced by England, we were not forced by Mr. Chamberlain or by Downing Street, to do what we did, and I cannot conceive what my hon. friend meant when he said that the future of this country was not to be pledged by this Government. When and where did we pledge the future of this country? We acted in the full independence of our sovereign power. What we did we did of our own free will, but I am not to answer for the consequences or for what will take place in the future. My hon. friend says that the consequence is that we will be called on to take part in other wars.

**Our Part in
Future
Wars.**

I have only this to answer to my hon. friend, that if it should be the will of the people of Canada, at any future stage, to take part in any war of England, the people of Canada will have to have their way. (Prolonged cheering from both sides.) Let me say to my hon. friend further, the maxim which he has advocated this afternoon, and which he took from the despatch of Lord Grey to Lord Elgin—"It must be remembered that the Government of the British Colonies in North America cannot be carried on in opposition to the will of the people"—that was the language in 1847; it holds good in 1900, and will be the language used so long as we have free parliamentary institutions in Canada. (Cheers.) But I have no hesitation in saying to my hon. friend that if, as a consequence of our action to-day, the doctrine were to be admitted that Canada should take part in all the wars of Great Britain and contribute to the military expenditure of the Empire, I will agree with him that we should revise the conditions of things existing between us and Great Britain. (Cheers.) If we were to be compelled to take part in all the wars of Britain, I have no hesitation in saying that I agree with my hon. friend that, sharing the burden we should also share the responsibility. Under that condition of things, which does not exist, we should have the right to say to Great Britain, "If you want us to help you, you must call us to your councils; if you want us to take part in wars, let us share not only the burdens but the responsibility as well." But there is no occasion to say that to-day. My hon. friend forgets one thing which is essential to this discussion, that we did not use our power as a Government to go into that war. We have a Militia Act in this country; we have a force composed of stand-

ing militia and volunteers. We did not call upon the standing militia or volunteers; we compelled no man to go to South Africa. We did not do what we did in 1885, when we had to put down the rebellion in the Northwest; then we used the power vested in us by the law. The Government called for volunteers, and the volunteers were forced to go. They went willingly of course, but if they had not gone willingly they would have been compelled by their oath to obey the command of the Government. But in this case we did nothing of that kind. We simply provided the machinery and expenses for the two thousand young men who wanted to go and give their lives for the honor of their country and the flag they love. (Cheers.) My hon. friend found fault with us this afternoon because, instead of sending them five hundred, we sent two thousand. Again, I ask my hon. friend what would be the condition of Canada if we had denied to those young men who wanted to serve their Queen in South Africa this privilege that they claimed from us? If we had said only five hundred of you shall go, what would have been the condition of this country to-day? And did we do anything wrong, after all, and can my hon. friend complain of our action, when we simply put it in the power of these young men who wanted to go and give their lives in order to promote what was to them a sacred cause?

An Appeal to Patriotism.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that if ever there was an occasion when we should not have a voice of dissent in this House it is the present occasion. I greatly admire the speech of my hon. friend, though I am far from sharing his views, but I call upon him to remember that he belongs to a patriotic family, as he said to us to-day. I call upon him to remember that the liberties he enjoys are largely due to his own family. But if we have liberties on one side, would he not accept some duties on the other side, would he not accept some obligations on the other side? Shall the sacrifice be all on the one side and none on the other, the obligation all on one side and none on the other? We were not compelled to do what we did, but if we chose to be generous, to do a little more than we were bound to do, where is a man living who would find fault with us for that action? (Cheers.) He dreads the consequences of this action in sending out a military contingent to South Africa. Let me tell him from the bottom of my heart that my heart is full of the hopes

I entertain of the beneficial results which will accrue from that action. When our young volunteers sailed from our shores to join the British Army in South Africa, great were our expectations that they would display on those distant battlefields the same courage which had been displayed by their fathers when fighting against one another in the last century. Again, in many breasts there was a fugitive sense of uneasiness at the thought that the first facing of musketry and cannon by raw recruits is always a severe trial. But when the telegraph brought us the news that such was the good impression made by our volunteers that the Commander-in-Chief had placed them in the post of honor, in the first rank, to share the danger with that famous corps, the Gordon Highlanders; when we heard that they had justified fully the confidence placed in them, that they had charged like veterans, that their conduct was heroic and had won for them the encomiums of the Commander-in-Chief and the unstinted admiration of their comrades, who had faced death upon a hundred battle-fields in all parts of the world, is there a man whose bosom did not swell with pride, that noblest of all pride, that pride of pure patriotism, the pride of the consciousness of our rising strength, the pride of the consciousness that on that day it has been revealed to the world that a new power had arisen in the west? (Loud and prolonged cheers from both sides.)

A New Bond Nor is that all. The work of union and harmony between the chief races of this country is not yet complete. We know by the unfortunate occurrences that took place only last week that there is much to do in that way. But there is no bond of union so strong as the bond created by common dangers faced in common. (Hear, hear.) To-day there are men in South Africa representing the two branches of the Canadian family, fighting side by side for the honor of Canada. Already some of them have fallen, giving to the country the last full measure of devotion. Their remains have been laid in the same grave, there to remain to the end of time in that last fraternal embrace. Can we not hope, I ask my hon. friend himself, that in that grave shall be buried the last vestiges of our former antagonism. If such shall be the result, if we can indulge that hope, if we can believe that in that grave shall be buried contentions, the sending of the contingent would be the greatest service ever

rendered to Canada since Confederation. These are the motives, at all events, which guided us, these are the thoughts which inspired us, and they are thoughts which ought to commend themselves to the heart and judgment of my hon. friend, knowing him as I know him; these, in my judgment, should induce him not to press further this motion that he has presented.