

Why Sir Wilfrid Declined Place on Recruiting Board

A Partizan Body With a Tory Majority of Two, Presided Over By Mr. R. B. Bennett, M. P.—Sir Thomas Tait Was Not Allowed to Appoint His Own Secretary—All the District Deputies Were of One Party Stripe.

(By H. F. Gadsby.)

Ottawa, Nov. 2.—When Paris handed the golden apple to Venus, it turned out, rather a grim joke, but the incident is not to be compared with the lemon R. B. Bennett, M. P., would have handed Sir Wilfrid Laurier if the Opposition had consented to sit on the recruiting board, of which the Calgary statesman has been made chairman.

Circumstances alter cases, of course, and there is no doubt that an invitation from the non-partisan chairman of a National Service Commission, to wit, Sir Thomas Tait, to sit along with him on a non-partisan board, would have received sympathetic consideration. But an invitation to be part of a seven to five board, consisting of members of parliament, and others, shepherded by a violent partisan like R. B. Bennett, was another story. In vain is the net spread in sight of the intended victim.

Whether Sir Thomas Tait himself conceived the idea of inviting Sir Wilfrid Laurier to his council, or whether the idea had its source in more artful quarters, is neither here nor there. The fact remains that one man, Sir Thomas Tait, penned the invitation, and another man, R. B. Bennett, was there to receive the answer. Necessarily, the vehement politician received a different answer from that which would have been suitable if a strictly impartial patriot, wholly detached from party politics, had been there to get the answer.

Too Much Partisanship.

Another fact that presses is that the non-partisanship of which Sir Thomas Tait was supposed to be the symbol, vanished with Sir Thomas Tait. What happened to Sir Thomas is a pithy commentary on the non-partisanship of the commission which he was asked to handle. They did not endow Sir Thomas with enough independence to appoint his own secretary. When he appointed one, Mr. Murray, who had told one little shed of truth about the Borden Government, namely, that "it was dawdling away its time on the recruiting business"—in short, making a tedious and expensive bluff—Sir Thomas was promptly told that he couldn't have plain-speakers like that about him and that Mr. Murray had better get out. Sir Thomas felt that he had about as much chance of being non-partisan on a commission like that as a celluloid collar has of surviving the flames of Vesuvius.

It is within the bounds of probability

also that Sir Thomas cast an appraising eye on the dozen district directors of recruiting thoughtfully appointed to assist him before he was called on to act as their chief. For a man who had non-partisanship in his mind, as Sir Thomas Tait did, it must have been painful to note that all these district recruiting directors were of one party stripe and that stripe the same color as the party in power.

This fact may also have influenced Sir Thomas' conduct and have led him to believe that non-partisanship wasn't going to have much of a show even before the incident in regard to his secretary confirmed him in that opinion. At any rate Sir Thomas quit cold. He saw that a National Service Commission, under the direct tutelage of somebody else, was no place for a non-partisan patriot who had nothing but the good of his country and the British Empire at heart. It was pre-eminently a place and time for disappearing—and disappear Sir Thomas did.

Safety First.

It was this nervous scene of partisanship, made still more palpitant by the presence of R. B. Bennett, that Sir Wilfrid was asked to countenance by becoming a private member of a committee of twelve members of Parliament, divided politically seven and five. They didn't even have the grace to suggest did those party manipulators, that a supposedly non-partisan committee should be evenly balanced by cutting out the partisan majority of two. No, indeed. Safety first—that was R. B. Bennett's motto, and presumably the party managers' who are behind Premier Borden.

The Conservative party was not to lose its exclusive grip of the war. So far as Canada is concerned, this is to be a Tory war from start to finish.

Even the National Service Commission is to be Tory by a comfortable percentage. All they wanted Sir Wilfrid or his Liberal supporters to share is any blame that may accrue as a result of dilatory methods.

Moreover, Sir Wilfrid Laurier was offered no place on this committee commensurate with his importance as the leader of His Majesty's loyal Opposition. He was to be a simple member of the committee, an insignificant voting unit who might give good advice and then lose it in division. Instead of co-ordinate authority with R. B. Bennett, what this committee offered him was a subordinate position in which his wisdom, the weight of his years,

and his experience would all be subject to the veto of a bumptious young man from the west who has been only five years in Parliament. That was a nice job for Sir Wilfrid Laurier, especially when you consider how non-partisan R. B. can't be when he gets his Tory dander up, which is most of the time.

Sir Wilfrid Wouldn't Bite.

Viewed in this light, Sir Wilfrid's refusal to sit on a committee headed by as vehement a partisan as R. B. Bennett, acting under the direction of a government with such a violent repugnance to facts that it fires a private secretary for telling one small iota of the truth—viewed in this light, I repeat, Sir Wilfrid's refusal to sit on the committee is both natural and commendable.

The only thing ahead of this National Service Commission with R. B. Bennett as its pilot, is strife and engine trouble. Besides, there is much force in Sir Wilfrid's contention that a committee of business men and manufacturers would be of more use than a committee of parliamentarians in advising a National Service Commission where and how to lay hands on the man power that is not being used to the best advantage in this war.

Meanwhile the registration scheme languishes. Nothing is done about it. The public doesn't even know whether the registration is mandatory or optional. It is optional it will probably amount to nothing. If it is mandatory it will dig up a lot of information about the workers which may ultimately be utilized if the Borden Government decides on conscription, as Sir George Foster would have it do. At all events that is the way registration worked out in Australia where Premier Hughes is now utilizing the facts unearthed by it in his arguments for conscription.

Sir Robert Some Caller.

While the National Service Commission under Mr. Bennett is marking time Premier Borden is issuing calls for the last hundred thousand. Sir Robert is some caller. That's his way out of it. When there's nothing else to do he calls. "I hear you calling me." He calls this way and that—but never angrily. No menace—no sharp words—not even a slap on the wrist—just calls. He calls on the people to do their bit to save the empire by enlisting, just as Sir Thomas White calls on them to save the Empire by being thrifty and turning over their savings to him to establish a Canadian war

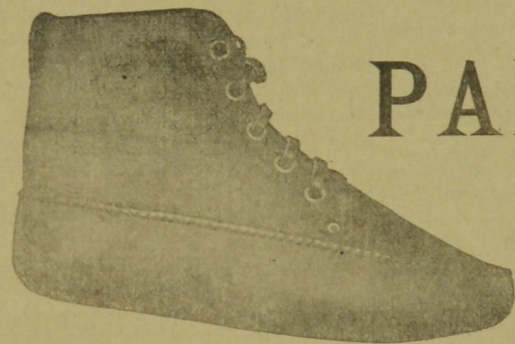
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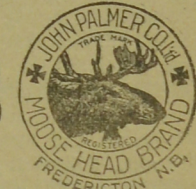
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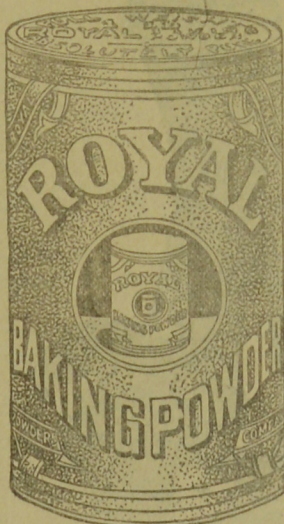
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