

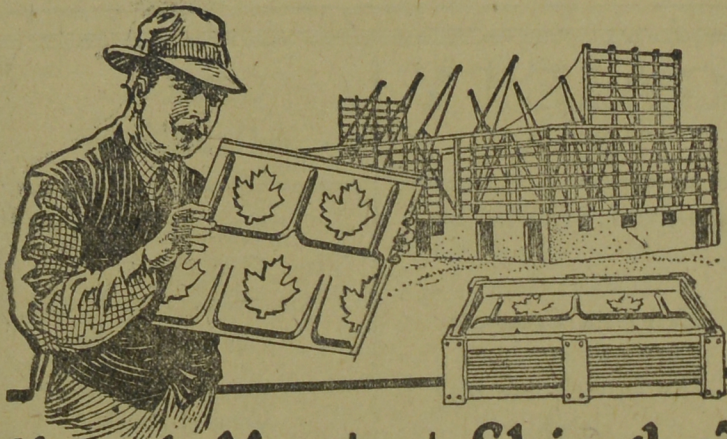
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A CONSERVATIVE OPINION OF THE BOOT SCANDAL

(From The Ottawa Citizen, Ind. Con.)

The evidence brought out before the boot committee on Parliament Hill is there for any Canadian citizen to judge for himself; and many people in Ottawa and other places where the soldiers have mobilized have had visual evidence for themselves this last winter. They have not needed a parliamentary committee to tell them what hundreds of soldiers in the streets could tell them more truthfully—without political artifice.

Men have suffered in health and certainly in the healthy spirit of devotion to the cause which, inspired them to enlist, by the patronage curse in Canada. But to palliate the low business of party patronage the sophist politician will resort to the most wretched, trumped-up kind of argument. The patronage politician with dry feet, will even go so far as to blame the soldiers themselves for the patronage-rotten boots, suggesting that the men neglected them or deliberately burnt or otherwise damaged their boots to get new pairs.

The political profiteers try to belittle the evidence of impartial, though indignant, regimental boards composed of Canadian officers. The soldiers were made to suffer in health and in spirit for the benefit of the patronage profiteering fund; and the officers, outraged and thoroughly angry, roundly condemned the whole scandalous business. But the gall of the patronage politician is unlimited even in the face of the present critical war period. Even the protest and condemnation of General Alderson, the British officer responsible for the welfare and efficiency of the Canadian forces, does not seem to count for anything in the political camp of patronage-ridden Canada.

Sir George Perley, acting Canadian high commissioner, witnessing the damage done to the business reputation of Canada by sending men to the front in useless boots, might cable a reproof. Genuine boot manufacturers in Canada might urge the political profiteers to have done with patronage and get down to the business of equipping the Canadian forces with a proper service boot. Through it all political patronage is allowed to pursue the devious tenor of its way, and at the end the politicians on the defensive emerge with a pail of white-wash and think to make the boot scandal look clean by plastering it with a thick and broken coat.

But not content with whitewashing the Canadian patronage defenders needs must try to bolster up their case by slandering the British army boot. They prate about the standard British army boot not being suitable for the Canadian forces, and even scratch up a few isolated cases where dishonest contractors in Britain (out of the millions of pairs of boots manufactured for Kitchener's great volunteer army) have failed to supply boots up to the standard.

The difference between cases cannot be too clearly recognized by loyal Canadians anxious for the progress and prosperity of their country. Dishonest workmanship or business dealing will occur in any country. But a comparatively trifling offence in Britain will arouse national indignation and the government will not hesitate to apply the law vigorously against the offenders. In Canada the boot scandal is but one incident in a nation-wide political orgy of patronage profiteering. The question of good or bad army boots in Britain has practically nothing to do with politics; in Canada the basis of the whole disgraceful business is rooted in political patronage: a business upheld and practised by both political parties.

Finally the effort to excuse the dominion government's failure to supply the soldiers with serviceable boots by casting reflections on the British standard army boot is a rascally slander. Any Britisher accustomed to the national practice of going off on long week-end tramps in the hill countries and lake districts, across the moors and fells or along the rugged coasts, could testify to the reliability and comfort of the heavy army boot. So, too, the laborers in factories or on building work or in the fields adopt the standard army boot for everyday wear, whenever they can buy it. For snow or wet weather it is a splendid boot; and, when so thoroughly shod, no man would think of fooling about with overshoes or rubbers to work or march in.

True, it may be the British army boot is not designed for sitting in street cars or for attending tea parties; nor do the fifty thousand Canadian soldiers under arms and training for active service want an office or a parlor boot. They want something substantial to wear when they take hold of a shovel and trench-dig for bare life. They want something to carry them through Flanders and Belgium and into the heart of an enemy country and at a hot-foot pace to settle the fate of Prussianism. Some of Canada's brave soldiers, if they are spared and choose to come back to this country may want a good pair of heavy hob-nailed boots to kick the life out of the dominion patronage magotry when peace is restored in Europe.

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