

THE WORD OF A PREMIER.

WHAT IS IT WORTH?

WHEN THE LABOURING MAN IS CONCERNED

The purpose of this sheet is to show how much reliance can be placed on the pledged word and promise of Sir Wilfrid Laurier Prime Minister of Canada.

The evidence is taken from the mouth of the Premier himself and of his colleagues as officially reported.

On the 1st day of September 1896, during the first session of this Parliament, Sir Wilfrid Laurier made the following statement from his place in the House—

“No Minister would pretend to dismiss any official unless he had opportunity to defend himself. Whenever the case is put before him by extraneous evidence, these statements must be substantiated and every man must be given a fair opportunity to be heard before he is dealt with.”

On the following March, during the second session of this Parliament, Sir Wilfrid Laurier repeated the obligation in the following language:

“We announced on the floor of Parliament last session, that no member of the Civil Service, whether of the inside or outside, would be dismissed except for cause. We declared that every man against whom a charge was brought would have an opportunity of defending himself before a court of enquiry what we have done and are doing we shall continue to do. We shall dismiss no man except for cause, every charge shall be investigated and justice be done.”

This is a clear statement which cannot be misunderstood. It was a distinct and unqualified promise that no employee would be dismissed on the representation of any politician or any charges of partisanship until the case had been investigated and the accused had been heard. Let us see how this pledge has been kept.

Less than three weeks after the promise was made Mr. Blair announced in Parliament that his department would not be bound by it, in the case of ordinary mechanics and laborers. Here is his statement explaining certain dismissals made by him from the Intercolonial Railway staff.

They were displaced on the strong representation of gentlemen whose opinions and whose statements upon the subject I felt myself warranted in accepting. They were not persons who were discharging other than that class of labor which ordinary laborers can do. I have

not felt that I was called upon to enter into very elaborate enquiries as to whether a workman on this system had been guilty—to have it proved by formal evidence at all events to me—that a man had been guilty of any political offence in order to entitle him to be dismissed I did not take very much time to enter personally upon much of an enquiry as to whether he ought to be replaced by another or not. I am going to be guided, so far as my administration of the department is concerned, in these matters, by the advice and information of these representatives who have been elected to Parliament and whose advice I know can be safely taken by the Government.”

Here we find the minister laying down one law for higher class of officials and another for the humbler class. The investigation that the Premier promised to all employees, the Government refused to those who had most need of protection and on whom dismissal would inflict the greater suffering.

In carrying out this programme Mr. Blair gave the following instructions to the Commissioners appointed to hear charges against employees:

“I must again point out that cases of daily laborers, or what we call temporary employees, men who are not required to have any special training or experience can be and will be dealt with ordinarily without resorting to enquiry in this form. I allude to such men as section men and persons in that grade of the service.”

It does not seem to have occurred to the Minister of Railways and his colleagues that the position of a section man is as important to him as a higher position is to the man who holds it. The family of the section man requires to be fed and clothed and his wife and children may be as dear to him as if he held the rank of a Minister.

But it will be seen that the Minister of Railways is not the only member of the Government who disregarded the pledge of the leader and that the men whom Mr. Blair contemptuously describes as laborers are not the ones who are dismissed without investigation and without a hearing.

On April 14, 1897, Mr. Sifton, Minister of the Interior, announced that Dr. George Mitchell physician to the Indians of Walpole Island had been dismissed because he took an active part in politics. The Minister added: “The facts were

so notorious that it was not considered necessary to call upon Mr. Mitchell for a defence."

On the 19th of May 1897, Mr. Blair stated that Michael Behan, storeman on the Lachine Canal, and Michael Enright, another official on the Lachine, had been dismissed by his own order, on the request of the members of Parliament from the Montreal district. No investigation was held in this case.

May 19th of the same year Mr. Blair announced that the services of Alexander Stewart, section foreman at the Linwood, Antigonish, were dispensed with. He added: "No investigation was considered necessary, as it was affirmed by Mr. McIsaac, M.P. that he had infringed the rule laid down for the Government employees." The Minister also stated that John Chisholm, section man at Heatherton, had been dismissed on the personal statement of an McIsaac. "There was no investigation," gave same announcement was made in respect to Finlay Chisholm, a foreman at James River.

On the same day the Minister announced that a number of employees at St. Flavie had been dismissed at the request of Dr. Fiset, M.P., who said that they had taken an active part in the last election.

On April 14th, Mr. Blair stated that A. D. Davis, collector of tolls on the Beauharnois Canal, had been dismissed "for taking an active and offensive part in the election of June last on the representation of hon. J. I. Tarte. He asked "for an investigation but none was promised him "because it was not considered necessary."

On April 21st, Postmaster General Mulock stated that G. Larouche, Postmaster of Dablon, had been dismissed because of political partizanship on a charge made by Mr. Savard, M.P. The minister further stated that the evidence was conclusive and no investigation was necessary.

On the 31st March, Mr. Paterson, Minister of Customs, stated that William McArthur, customs officer at Fenelon Falls, who held also an office in the railways and canals department was dismissed because of active and offensive partizanship.

"No investigation was held so far as I am aware" said the Minister.

On April 12th, Mr. Postmaster General Mulock stated that Duncan Crawford, postmaster of Wood Island, P.E.I., was dismissed because he was an active political partizan. "No investigation was necessary" said Mr. Mulock.

"On page 5301 of Hansard, the announcement is made that John Beck, lighthouse keeper at Cape Despair, was dismissed for political partizanship without enquiry."

On May 2nd, Mr. Tarte, announced that he had dismissed Mr. Dagnault, paymaster for St. Maurice division, because he thought it would be in the public interest. There was no investigation.

On March 16th, Mr. Blair admitted that A. Powlic, car inspector at Springhill, was dismissed for political partizanship on the representation of Mr. Logan M.P. There was no investigation.

On March 10th, Mr. Mulock stated that O. Vigneault, postmaster of Kildare had been dismissed for offensive partizanship and that "an enquiry was not considered necessary."

On April 25th, Mr. Paterson, Minister of Customs, stated that Miles Dunn, sub-collector at Margarie was dismissed "for having taken an active political partizan part in the last Dominion elections." He admitted that "no investigation was held."

On June 6th, Mr. Blair stated that Mr. E. W. Woods, postmaster of Welsford, N. B., was dismissed: "There was no investigation in his case as one was really not necessary."

In April 1898, Mr. Fisher explained that the postmaster of St. Tite was dismissed for political partizanship on representation of the member of Parliament for Chicoutimi, another constituency. "No further inquiry being necessary none was held with regard to the charge."

• These are sample statements taken from the record. Others might be quoted that were made in the sessions of 1897 and 1898, and still more during the sessions of 1899 and 1900, but these are sufficient to show the value of the solemn statement made and the obligation taken by the Premier of Canada.