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SIR WILFRID LAURIER AND LORD MINTO

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IN *Laurier: a Study in Canadian Politics* (1922) the late Mr. John W. Dafoe, without benefit of supporting documents, made a strong indictment of Lord Minto as Governor-General, an indictment repeated and embroidered by many later writers.

"Laurier had five years of more or less continuous struggle with Lord Minto, a combination of country squire and heavy dragoon, who was sent to Canada in 1898 to forward by every means in his power the Chamberlain policies. He busied himself at once and persistently in trying to induce the Canadian Government to commit itself formally to the policy of supplying Canadian troops for Imperial wars . . . With the outbreak of the South African War Lord Minto regarded himself less as Governor-General than as Imperial Commissioner charged with the vague and shadowy powers which go with that office; and Sir Wilfrid had, in consequence, to instruct him on more than one occasion that Canada was still a self-governing country and not a military satrapy . . . The story which would be most interesting and suggestive, will perhaps never be told."¹

Part of the story was told in very different terms two years later by John Buchan in *Lord Minto, a Memoir*. In the eighty odd pages dealing with Minto's Canadian sojourn, from November 1898 to November 1905, Buchan presents the relations of the Governor-General to his First Minister in a light more favourable to both men. Each shrewdly assessed the other, and respected the other's integrity; by frank speaking they agreed to differ or composed their differences. Yet the charges of interference on the part of Minto, of jingoistic imperialism, disrespect for constitutional practice, and irritable stubbornness are repeated by Creighton,² Lower,³ Penlington⁴ and others.

The Minto-Laurier correspondence, formerly at Queen's and now in the Public Archives, supplemented by lately acquired transcripts of the Minto Papers, also in the Archives, dispel the myth of squire-cum-dragoon and reveal Minto as a shrewd constitutional governor whose services to Canada have received scant recognition. Skelton, who knew the documents, could have given just credit to Minto. But apart from two or three passing references, he relegates him to a footnote in which he quotes Laurier's conversational comment: "Lord Minto had much sound sense, a stronger man than was thought.

¹John W. Dafoe, *Laurier: A Study in Canadian Politics*, (Toronto, 1922), 78-79.

²Donald G. Creighton, *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada*, (Boston, 1944), 399-400.

³Arthur R. M. Lower, *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada*, (Toronto, 1946), 400, 443.

⁴Norman Penlington, "General Hutton and the Problem of Military Imperialism in Canada, 1898-1900" (*Canadian Historical Review*, XXIV, June, 1943, 156-171).

When he came to Canada first he was absolutely untrained in constitutional practice, knew little but horses and soldiering, but he took his duties to heart and became an effective governor, if sometimes very stiff."⁶

The suggestion that Minto was Chamberlain's protégé is supported by neither Buchan nor Garvin.⁷ The Colonial Secretary's choice had been the Duke of Connaught but the Queen had withheld her consent. It was only after several other distinguished nominees had declined the post, that Chamberlain consented to Minto, put forward by Lord Wolseley. Although he lacked political experience, his strength lay in a first-hand knowledge of imperial problems from military service in Afghanistan, in Egypt, and in Canada as Chief of Staff to General Middleton during the North West Rebellion. While his views on the Empire coincided more closely with those of Chamberlain than with those of Laurier, he was without taint of jingoism, and before coming to Canada had been critical of Chamberlain's policy in South Africa.⁸

On assuming office, Minto was immediately attracted to Laurier, "Far the biggest man in Canada",⁹ and subtly appreciated what he called the "honourable opportunism" by which he united the support of both sections of the population. Minto never underestimated the difficulties that beset his Prime Minister, least of all at the time of the South African War.

Preoccupied with the Manitoba School Question, the opening up of the West, railway policy, and Canadian-American relations, Laurier had not followed closely events in the Transvaal. Britain was conducting various skirmishes in India, in Egypt, on the Afghan border, in Hong-Kong, in which Canadian participation was not even mooted. Trouble in South Africa seemed just as remote, a menace neither to the Empire nor to Canada. To the Canadian imperialists, however, both Liberal and Tory, the situation, already grave, was in danger of becoming much worse. Publication of the Uitlanders' petition to the Queen for redress of their grievances stirred imperial fervor, and there was talk in Ottawa of introducing a resolution of sympathy with these disfranchised British subjects.

As soon as Minto learned of this, on May 2, 1899, he wrote to Laurier: "I yesterday heard indirectly there was some idea here of asking me to recommend an expression of sympathy from Canada with the Uitlanders in South Africa. I hear something has already been said to you about it. I feel sure you will agree with me, viz, I am decidedly of opinion that it would be very inopportune at present to mingle in any way with South African complications. There may be plenty of opportunity later on to show our good will — but at present we do not even know what line the Imperial Government may adopt."¹⁰

⁶Oscar D. Skelton, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, (2 vols., Toronto, 1921), II, 86 n.

⁷John L. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, (London, 1924), vol. III.

⁸John Buchan, *Lord Minto: A Memoir*, (London, 1924), 105.

⁹*Ibid.* 159.

¹⁰Public Archives of Canada, Laurier Papers. (Note: At the time of writing, the Laurier Papers formerly at Queen's University are in process of being interfiled with those previously deposited in the Public Archives. New volume numbers have not yet been assigned.)

The 'line' was soon clarified. On July 3, Chamberlain sent a "secret and confidential" message to Minto asking if Canada would volunteer troops in event of war but without the application of "external pressure or suggestion".¹⁰

By mid-July, when Minto received the letter, Kruger was making some concessions and Britain had held out the 'olive branch' of a joint inquiry into the franchise proposals. As it appeared that the crisis might be averted, it was not the most opportune time to sound out Laurier on the question of contributing troops. "The news this morning looks rather better," Minto wrote to him, "but it is quite possible it is only the lull before the storm, and no doubt the greater show of strength the Empire can now make, the better are the chances of peace."¹¹ Had the Prime Minister considered the possibility of Canada's offering troops? Such an offer should be spontaneous, "not merely the result of a desire to meet hopes expressed at home". As an old friend of Canada, Minto hoped that she might be first in the field.

Minto had to report to Chamberlain that, in the face of Quebec opposition, Laurier did not choose to compete in the race for offering troops. Nevertheless he assured the Colonial Secretary that "in any real emergency the British determination to assist the mother country will be irresistible by any government".¹²

A British agent from the South African League who had come to Canada to represent to the government the disabilities suffered by the Uitlanders, convinced Laurier that their cause was just. The Prime Minister now personally moved a resolution of sympathy with the efforts of Her Majesty's government to obtain justice for the Uitlanders, expressing the hope that "wiser and more humane counsels [would] prevail in the Transvaal and possibly avert the awful arbitrement of war".¹³ Seconded by Mr. Foster, in the absence of Sir Charles Tupper, the resolution carried unanimously.¹⁴

To make his own position clear, Laurier, in forwarding the resolution to Minto, repeated his conviction that the colonies should not, in event of war, be asked by Britain or even expected to assume military burdens except in the case of pressing danger. Minto at once replied that "there has been no question of England asking for aid in troops, and no expression of opinion in any way that she considered herself justified in expecting such assistance . . . You know my own views on the question, but I quite recognize the serious considerations connected with such an offer."¹⁵

Despite the increasing tension as Kruger temporized and Britain prepared a seven-fold ultimatum, Minto would not and could not force the hand of the Canadian government. He had made his representations to Laurier, and Laurier had not changed his stand. Each respected the other's convictions. On September 28, Minto wrote to his brother, Arthur: "From the point of view of a Canadian statesman I don't see why they should commit their country to the expen-

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Garvin, *Joseph Chamberlain*, III, 530.

¹³Skelton, *Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, II, 92.

¹⁴Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, L (1899), 8994.

¹⁵Skelton, *Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, II, 92-93.

diture of lives and money for a quarrel not threatening imperial safety and directly contrary to the opinion of a colonial government at the Cape. They are loyal here to a degree . . . but I confess I doubt the advisability of their taking part now, from the point of view of the Canadian Government."¹⁶

Meanwhile the sands were running out in South Africa while Kruger was preparing his ultimatum to forestall Chamberlain's. On the eve of hostilities, August 3, the Colonial Secretary cabled the colonies a message of thanks for the offer of troops, with detailed instructions for the organization of military units. Canada, of course, had made no offer but Minto received a cable in identical terms, the gist of which was published in *The Times* and reprinted in the Canadian press. By coincidence, on the same day that the cable was sent, the *Canadian Military Gazette* announced without authorization that the government would offer a contingent for South Africa. Sir Wilfrid promptly denied the report as a pure invention. War had not yet been declared; South Africa was not a menace to Canada; parliament was in recess; no grant had been made, and no contingent offered. "Though we may be willing to contribute troops", he said to *The Globe* reporter, "I do not see how we can do so."¹⁷

Minto, who was in New York on October 5 when Chamberlain's cable arrived, wrote to Laurier in obvious concern. The cabinet was placed in the embarrassing position of being thanked for an offer that had not been made, and of appearing niggardly and unpatriotic if they did not equip a volunteer force out of public funds. His first assurance was that the Colonial Secretary had certainly not intended to embarrass the government; the cable could have reference only to private offers, especially that of Col. Hughes. Nevertheless there would be strong public reaction and an official reply would have to be made. The offer of a contingent would more accord with public sentiment. It might therefore be better "to reconsider the question rather than to allow an irresponsible call for volunteers." "I can not," he added, "think it advisable that Colonel Hughes should be allowed to raise an expedition on his own responsibility representing Canada."¹⁸

Before Laurier could consult with Minto, he had to leave Ottawa, August 7, to keep an engagement with President McKinley in Chicago. "For three days," says Willison, who accompanied the Prime Minister, "we discussed the Imperial obligation of Canada and the possible political consequences of a decision against sending contingents in all its phases. . . . Sir Wilfrid contended the war in South Africa . . . would be a petty tribal conflict in which the aid of the Dominion would not be required, and . . . over and over again he declared he would put all the resources of Canada at the service of the mother country in any great war for the security and integrity of the Empire."¹⁹

While they were returning by train to Canada, the news broke on August 11, that Britain had rejected the Boer ultimatum and war had been declared. Laurier, "very sober and silent", pondered the

¹⁶Buchan, *Minto*, 136 n.

¹⁷Skelton, *Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, II, 93.

¹⁸*Ibid.* 94.

¹⁹Sir John Willison, *Reminiscences Political and Personal* (Toronto, 1919), 303

consequences for Canada. Before leaving the train at Toronto, Willison urged him to issue an immediate announcement that the government would send troops; but the Prime Minister remained "reluctant, unconvinced, and rebellious".²⁰

In Ottawa Sir Wilfred faced a divided council. Some, including Dr. Borden, the Minister of Militia, wanted a full Canadian contingent at government expense; others advocated unofficial volunteer units; the French-Canadians led by J. Israel Tarte wanted no share in Britain's wars without a voice in her foreign policy. At the end of the first day no agreement was reached and Minto cabled to Chamberlain that he saw no hope for a Canadian contingent.²¹ The cabinet sat again on the 13th and after an all-day session reached a compromise. Without summoning parliament the government undertook to equip volunteers up to one thousand men and provide for their transportation to South Africa, on the understanding that this would not be "construed as a precedent for future action."²²

Minto wrote at once to the Colonial Secretary clarifying Laurier's position. Public pressure, he felt, especially since the publication of Chamberlain's cable, had decided the issue. Laurier admitted "the undoubted necessity of war" but on grounds of policy was disinclined to admit that Canada should assume imperial liabilities. The point, however, had been minimized by the British offer to transport and pay Canadian troops. The Prime Minister, he assured Chamberlain, "is thoroughly imperialistic, though he may have his doubts as to colonial action. I like him very much. He takes a broad view of things, and has an extremely difficult team to drive . . . Quebec is perfectly loyal, but you cannot on such an occasion expect Frenchmen to possess British enthusiasm or thoroughly to understand it . . . I have myself carefully avoided any appearance of pressing for troops, but I have put what I believe to be the imperial view of the question strongly before Sir Wilfrid . . ."²³ Within two weeks the first Canadian contingent was ready to sail from Quebec, followed a few months later by a second.

The despatch of troops by Canada brought up the question of Canada's position when the war should end. On March 16, Senator Drummond took the opportunity of sounding out the Governor-General on the advisability of a resolution in the House claiming representation for Canada in the final peace negotiations.²⁴ Minto's reaction was favourable, though he felt that the resolution should not be expressed as a demand. If granted, it might lead to official Canadian representation in Britain's counsels as advocated by Tarte and Bourassa. He made it very clear to Drummond, however, that this was "absolutely private and not official advice in any way."²⁵ When he broached the matter to the Prime Minister, Minto was told in a very forthright manner that Sir Wilfrid "would not advise any such resolution, that he considered it very undesirable—the country not [being] at present ripe for discussion of the question." As for

²⁰*Ibid.*, 304.

²¹Buchan, *Minto*, 140.

²²Skelton, *Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, II, p. 97.

²³Buchan, *Minto*, 141. By "imperialistic" Minto seems to mean in this context "loyal in support of the British Empire".

²⁴Public Archives of Canada, Minto Papers, Memorandum, 16 March, 1900.

²⁵*Ibid.*

Tarte and Bourassa, they did not really want a closer imperial connection, but were content with things as they were, while "entertaining the possibility of founding an independent French [Canadian] republic."²⁶

Canadian participation in the South African War directed public attention to the whole subject of Canada's defence policy. Before the war the Canadian army had been a toy command taken seriously neither by the government nor by the War Office. The Permanent Force numbered less than one thousand men; it was poorly equipped, poorly paid, and commissions were bartered as minor patronage for political services. The appointment of minister of militia was not one of senior cabinet rank; at least since the days of Sir George Cartier. Under the minister of militia and responsible to him was the G.O.C. who, according to statute, had to be an officer in Her Majesty's regular army not below the rank of colonel. Their respective spheres of influence were ill defined, however, and there was no body of precedent as a safeguard against disagreement.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Minister of Militia, Dr. Frederick Borden, a general practitioner from Nova Scotia, was both an ardent militia man and an equally ardent politician. As minister he was determined to 'Liberalize' the army, too long under Tory domination. Ancient staff officers were retired, tenure of commands limited to five years, annual camps instituted, and party followers induced to join the reserve forces. Major-General Gascoigne, his G.O.C., spent most of his time keeping up with the paper work that Borden's reorganization entailed, and was glad to be relieved of the post in 1898. The Imperial authorities, having decided that an energetic officer was required in view of South African complications, appointed Major-General E. T. H. Hutton a few months before Minto became Governor-General. The almost simultaneous appointment to Canada of two well known military men appeared to augur a shake-up in the Canadian militia. Before Minto left England, Hutton wrote to him, welcoming his assistance, but advising him to say nothing about militia reform until he had acquainted him with the position of army affairs.²⁷

According to Hutton's own unpublished account of his relations with Minto, the Governor-General, while acting strictly in accord with his constitutional rights, cooperated with the G.O.C. in educating public opinion and "by a combination of tact and firmness" induced the government to adopt a policy formerly repudiated.²⁸

Tact and firmness soon had to be exercised by Minto in a clash between Hutton and Borden. Far from admiring the Minister's vaunted reforms, the new G.O.C. was deeply shocked by the state of the military establishments from coast to coast, and the ubiquitous evidence of political interference. It was obvious that these colonials needed an imperial officer to show them how an army should be run. Everything was wrong, but everything would be put right; the public must be informed and the nation must gird up its loins. The more Hutton spoke, the more publicity he got, and the more he irritated the

²⁶*Ibid*, Memorandum, 23 March, 1900.

²⁷*Ibid*, Hutton to Minto, 9 November, 1898.

²⁸*Ibid*, Sir E. T. H. Hutton, "Narrative of Lord Minto's Career" (Typescript, Chapters 1 and 2 only.)

Minister of Militia who felt he was being made to appear responsible for the deplorable state of the Canadian army. Minto took alarm and wrote to Laurier "To tell you the truth I am very anxious he [Hutton] should avoid public speaking and I have told him so."²⁹

Minor friction over promotions and commissions flared up when Hutton innocently recommended a Conservative to replace Col. Domville, a Liberal M.P. with a poor army record, already slated for retirement. Hutton then wrote a personal letter to his Minister discussing some of their points of disagreement. Borden took the letter to Laurier who sent it to Minto stating that it was his painful duty to bring before His Excellency the conflict that had arisen between General Hutton and the Minister of Militia.³⁰ Minto lectured Hutton on his want of tact, and then in a long talk with Borden assured him that the General wished to serve him well and give due credit for any reforms to the Department. If Borden insisted upon reinstating Col. Domville the G.O.C.'s position would be rendered quite untenable. Concerning the offending letter, he wrote to Laurier, "I can not see anything in the tone of it from beginning to end to which anyone could take exception. It of course expresses differences of opinion with Borden but beyond that it does not appear to go."³¹ Ruffled tempers were smoothed for the time being, and Hutton worked feverishly to prepare the army for the possible emergency of service in South Africa. Indeed the Cabinet began to suspect that he had secretly promised a Canadian contingent. For one thing, he discouraged individual offers to volunteer; and he was totally opposed to Col. Sam Hughes's campaign to raise a volunteer brigade. It was strongly suspected later that Hutton had inspired the premature announcement about a contingent in the *Canadian Military Gazette*. There is no proof that he did, but certainly without his advance preparations the first contingent could not so promptly have left Canada.

In organizing the second contingent, Hutton had another altercation with Borden who suspected him of favouring Conservative horse-dealers in purchasing horses for the mounted infantry. A Liberal member was detailed to report on the General's purchasing committee.

"I am truly and deeply sick at heart over this militia," Hutton wrote to Minto, January 4, 1900. "It seems impossible to evolve order out of chaos and to make dirty water run clear when the political atmosphere polutes everything and no one goes for the public good."³²

From the government point of view, Laurier informed Lord Strathcona that Hutton was "meddlesome, ignores the authority of the Minister and constantly acts as one who holds himself independent of Civil Authority."³³

The axe fell when Borden discovered that Hutton had given orders to Col. Aylmer, the Adjutant-General, and Col. Foster, the Quarter-Master General, not to see the Minister of Militia or show

²⁹Laurier Papers, Minto to Laurier, 8 November, 1899.

³⁰*Ibid.*, Laurier to Minto, June, 1899. Cited by Penlington, *C.H.R.* XXIV, June, 1943, 162 n.

³¹Laurier Papers, Minto to Laurier, 7 June, 1899.

³²Minto Papers, Hutton to Minto, 24 January, 1900.

³³Laurier Papers, Laurier Scrapbook, Feb. 1, 1900, Very Confidential. Cited by Penlington, *C.H.R.* XXIV, June, 1943, 167.

him any papers without permission of the G.O.C. and that all interviews must be reported to him.

All Minto's tact and firmness could not save the General from recall. But to state, as Penlington does,³⁴ that the interviews between Minto and Laurier over this episode were "heated and stormy" is to mistake the temper and tactics of both men. The clash between Hutton and Borden was not repeated by Minto and the Prime Minister. Minto, to be sure, was firm in protesting against political interference in purely military matters; Laurier was equally firm in maintaining that the G.O.C. was clearly subordinate to the Minister of Militia. When His Excellency suggested that a reshuffle of the cabinet might clear the air, Laurier replied that no minister except himself would agree to serve with General Hutton.³⁵ At the Prime Minister's request, Minto sent to him a confidential memorandum embodying the points which they had discussed, with a covering note in which he said "I am sure you know my views generally and will not say more, except that I am always most anxious to support you and sincerely wish a way could be found out of this troublesome business".³⁶

A week later Minto was informed that the cabinet had issued for his signature an Order-in-Council asking for Hutton's recall. He accepted the decision, but in a note to Laurier stated that in forwarding the order "I shall feel bound to send with it a despatch in the general sense of the confidential memo I have already submitted to you".³⁷

Laurier was not pleased. "At the drawing room in the evening," Minto wrote, ". . . Sir Wilfrid Laurier seemed very stiff toward Her Excellency and me."³⁸ Next day the Prime Minister ill-advisedly broke a confidence by placing the Governor-General's memorandum before council. After the meeting Israel Tarte informed Lady Minto of Laurier's action which he considered very unfair to His Excellency.³⁹

Minto wrote a pained rebuke to Laurier, but so couched as to avoid any breach in their relations.

"We have always so generally agreed in our views that I am very sorry to differ at all with you on any point, but for the sake of the position I have taken up I must repeat that the 'confidential memo' I sent to you was never intended to be laid before Council . . . though it embodied my conversation with you to a great extent, it was so worded that I am afraid Dr. Borden may have taken my words more to heart than would have been at all necessary from reading a more carefully prepared document. I have particularly wished to avoid creating any bitter feelings by anything I have said that might go beyond ourselves."⁴⁰

After receiving this note, Laurier called at Government House with the privy council order which Minto signed. "He also" recorded Minto, "brought back my 'confidential memo' to himself which he had presented to council; he apologized very nicely for having done so and tore it up in my presence to be considered as never written."⁴¹

³⁴Penlington, 167.

³⁵Minto Papers, Memorandum, 31 January, 1900.

³⁶Laurier Papers, Minto to Laurier, 20 January, 1900.

³⁷*Ibid.*, Minto to Laurier, 27 January, 1900.

³⁸Minto Papers, Memorandum, January, 1900.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰Laurier Papers, Minto to Laurier, 2 February, 1900.

⁴¹Minto Papers, Memorandum, 4 February, 1900.

One point which Minto had emphasized during this dispute was the need for defining more accurately the respective spheres of the G.O.C. and the Minister of Militia. The position, he pointed out to council, was rapidly becoming "such as a high minded British officer would not care to accept".⁴² Laurier's reply was that all G.O.C.'s had failed because "they did not understand their constitutional position i.e. below the Minister. When they are appointed here, they come as Canadian officials not Imperial officers".⁴³

Hutton's successor, Major General R. H. O'Grady Haly was merely a temporary appointment. The "high minded" British officer who finally accepted the post in 1902 was Major General the Earl of Dundonald. No sooner had Dundonald become G.O.C. than the politico-military pot was set boiling again.

On the second day after the General's arrival Laurier concluded an interview with him by saying "You must not take the Militia seriously, for though it is useful for suppressing internal disturbances, it will not be required for the defence of the country, as the Munroe doctrine protects us against enemy aggression."⁴⁴—or so Dundonald reports him as saying. But the General was determined to make the government take the army seriously and stop playing politics with it. On each inspection tour he accumulated evidence of political interference, lists of Liberal tradesmen who had to be patronized, broken windows in a drill hall which could not be repaired until the Liberal glazier recovered from an illness, and so on. The organization of a new regiment in the Eastern Townships was held up for months because the Liberal Member, the Hon. Sidney Fisher, Minister of Agriculture, had to screen the list of commissions. When a final revised list was submitted for gazetting, Fisher, acting for the Minister of Militia who was away from Ottawa, scratched out the name of Dr. Pickel.

This was too much for Dundonald. In a speech to the officers of the District Militia in Montreal on June 4, 1904, he cited Fisher's action as "a gross instance of political interference" and an example of "extraordinary lack of etiquette".⁴⁵ Four days later the speech was reported in the *Ottawa Citizen* under the caption *A Military Sensation*. Next day a question was asked in the House which precipitated an acrimonious debate. There were charges and counter charges, egregious puns about "a tempest in a pickel pot", sharp exchanges between the leaders of both parties, and a dignified explanation by Laurier of his slip of the tongue in referring to Dundonald as a "foreigner" when he meant "stranger".

The G.O.C. placed his defence in the hands of the Hon. Sam Hughes whose long-winded speeches were characterized by a Liberal member as "a medley of blatherskite and rhodomontade" and the speaker himself as "the redoubtable only one genuine heaven-born, heaven-descended child of the gods—Sam Hughes".⁴⁶ The opposition retorted by calling Fisher a "chicken fattener" and Borden "a little tin god".

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴Lieut.-Gen. The Earl of Dundonald, *My Army Life* (London, 1926), 191.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 262.

⁴⁶Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, LXVI (1904), 5498.

Hutton wrote to Minto from Australia: "Dundonald has been experiencing the same logrolling and parti-political immoralities to which I was subjected . . . It seems as if he had then allowed himself to lose his temper and publicly impugn the Government he was serving. If so, he, poor fellow, has put himself entirely in the wrong".⁴⁷

This was precisely the view of the Governor-General, and when Dundonald called at Government House on June 11 Minto did not disguise his disapproval. "I told him he must clearly understand that I could not possibly approve of the line of action he had adopted . . . I also told him that I felt sure exceptions would be taken to the assistance he had sought from Col. Sam Hughes as an opposition member".⁴⁸

To Laurier he made no attempt to defend the G.O.C. but Fisher, he thought, should resign from the cabinet. Instead the cabinet exonerated Fisher in an Order-in-Council rescinding the appointment of Dundonald. Minto signed the Order, brought to him by Dr. Borden, but at midnight sent a note to Laurier suggesting that the wording might be changed from a dismissal to a request for recall. When no change was made, the Governor-General, through his secretary, sent a message to council strongly censuring Fisher's interference in the militia as "entirely subversive of constitutional government".⁴⁹

Laurier called upon Minto with a copy of the memorandum in his hand. "This is a very weighty document, Your Excellency," he said. "Do you intend to dismiss your ministers?" Minto affirmed that he had no such intention, that the memorandum was not to be placed in the Archives or tabled on request of the opposition. The interview ended on a constitutional note. "So long," said Minto "as I retained the services of my ministers I should not be justified in adopting a line which would place me before the public as censuring their action. I felt that if I did so I should step down into the political arena and should at once myself become a centre around which the political storm would rage."⁵⁰

On a division of the House over Dundonald's dismissal, the Government was sustained by a vote of 84 to 42. The Earl "very sore at the manner of his dismissal" went to see Minto in a truculent frame of mind and "used very strong language as regards Borden and especially as to Sir Wilfrid Laurier whom he said he hated and wished to do him all the harm he could".⁵¹ Minto, the same day, wrote to Laurier commending the remarks he had made in the House about Dundonald's military career, observing once more that political pressure was ruinous to any military force and concluding, with relief, "I am so glad to think the matter is over for the present, and hope to be off to Cascapedia on Monday night . . . I hear salmon are very scarce".⁵²

⁴⁷Minto Papers, Hutton to Minto, 21 June, 1904.

⁴⁸*Ibid*, Minto to Lyttleton, 11 June, 1904.

⁴⁹*Ibid*, Memorandum to Council, 15 June, 1904.

⁵⁰*Ibid*, Minto to Lyttleton, 17 June, 1904.

⁵¹*Ibid*, 25 June, 1904.

⁵²Laurier Papers, Minto to Laurier, 25 June, 1904.

To return to Dafoe's strictures upon Lord Minto, there is little if anything in the Minto or Laurier Papers to substantiate the charges, nothing that even faintly suggests the blunt country squire or the blustering heavy dragoon. Each at times called the other "stiff"; there were honest differences of opinion, but instead of continuous struggle there was a friendly approach to all problems and a deepening respect for each other. To an unusual degree they shared their fears, their confidences, and their triumphs. In a letter thanking the Governor-General for a farewell gift, Laurier sums up their relations:

" . . . I regard this parting gift as an additional evidence of what you have often told me, *viz.* that the relations which have existed between Your Excellency as representative of the King and myself as first servant of the Crown in this country have been satisfactory to you. They certainly have been most satisfactory to me. As I look back upon these last six years, I feel happy and proud that there never occurred between us any disagreement and even very few differences of opinion . . . Allow me the pleasure of conveying to you and to Lady Minto the grateful and heartfelt good wishes of a very true friend . . . "

³³Minto Papers, Laurier to Minto, Nov. 1904.