

forty-nine years. Now would any body after those eleven verdicts suggest—let us come to grips again—would any body suggest that that question be put to the electorate, Are you in favour of conscription? That is not the way the hon. member for Edmonton (Mr. Oliver) surely would have the question put. Then how would it be put? Are you in favour of sending conscripted men overseas? Is that the way the hon. gentleman would suggest it be placed before this country? Would not the answer of scores of thousands immediately be: it all depends on what way you get them, it all depends on the terms of your Act. Consequently, we should have to expose the Bill itself to a vote. Indeed I never before heard of a referendum except on a Bill. Now, is it the suggestion of hon. gentlemen opposite that the Bill that embodies not only the principle, but embodies also the terms upon which the principle shall be carried out, shall go to the electorate for a yes or a no? Is that the suggestion of hon. gentlemen opposite? Why, the hon. member for Edmonton (Mr. Oliver) would have to vote against the Bill himself, because he says that within the four corners of this Bill there is not the first element of fairness. One has only to analyze this referendum plea to see how perilous it is, how impossible it is.

The Conscription Bill in its present form, while it may be improved on, is at least the best that some of us can produce. Yet I believe that if the Bill as it stands were submitted to the electorate, it would meet with the opposition of many a man who supports the principle of conscription itself; and any Bill, however drafted, would be confronted with opposition on the part of many who themselves believe in its principle. Do hon. gentlemen really suggest that this great measure, on the success of which depends the sustenance of our armies in France, depends the support of those who have appealed to us in language that we can never forget, appealed to us for months, yea for years, to add to their number, to reduce their burdens, if possible to limit their perils—that this Bill, on which so largely depends the honour and security of this country—should be exposed to such improper hazards, to such unfair opposition, as it would encounter under a conscription referendum? I appeal to hon. gentlemen on the other side of the House who may perhaps in other days have subscribed themselves as believers in a referendum principle, first of all to realize that on a referendum vote we shall get the

[Mr. Meighen.]

vote of those who have failed to do their duty on a parity with the vote of those who have enlisted. We will get that vote to even a greater degree, because everyone who has ever been in France recognizes that at best and with the utmost thoroughness we could poll only a mere fraction of the vote of the soldiers there. I appeal to hon. gentlemen to realize also that, above all things in the carrying on of a war, we must avoid every possible cause or excuse for delay. Germany does not carry on this war by referendums—she will not wait while we hold a referendum. Ask your boys in France whether they are fighting Germany with referendums. They are fighting under the authority of the governing power—and there is no other way to carry on a war. Let us rise to the level of our duty, let us be not afraid to lead. We have been execrated from end to end of Canada for failure of leadership and all the rest. Many of those men who have lagged behind but who ought to have gone to the front have lampooned the leader of this Government because of alleged failure of leadership. Newspaper after newspaper has thundered that out. Well, here is some leadership. Here and now is a chance to follow. Let us as a Parliament get in front; let those who lagged behind and cried for leadership walk up now, close the gap, and stand behind the Prime Minister. The people of Canada we have oft been told, call to the Parliament of Canada for strong and fearless leadership. Are we going to answer that call with our hands up in the air and cry out to the people: "For Heaven's sake, lead us." Such is the amendment of the right hon. leader of the Opposition.

It is all very well to deliberate upon something that is left for us to decide, but we have already decided on the carrying on of this war, and on carrying it on with all our might. If there ever was a time for a referendum—which I deny—it was in August, 1914; it is not now. We have committed ourselves as a nation, we have signed the bond, it is for us now to discharge the obligation.

I want to say something else, and I do so with especial earnestness. It may be that in the heat of discussion I do not avoid animosities perhaps as carefully as I should; but I say this to those hon. gentlemen opposite whose position with regard to this Bill is surrounded by embarrassments much heavier than those that surround us, I say to them that this Bill is not designed and is not framed to be unjust to the province of Quebec or to any other section