

the Act is confined to elections.

The Soldier Vote.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: If there is to be a referendum, the law would have to be passed by this Parliament and this Parliament could as easily give a vote to the soldiers on a referendum as on an election, and I would be the first to vote for it, and, I suppose, so would my hon. friend. The objection that a soldier could not vote on a referendum has no weight. It would imply that this Parliament refused him the right to vote, and nobody would suppose that. Moreover, as I said a moment ago, in Australia there have been both an election and a referendum upon this very question of conscription, and the soldiers voted upon both issues. That I do not know personally, but I am told it, and I have reason to believe it is true. More than that; in British Columbia there has been an election and there has been a referendum on the question of prohibition, and the soldiers voted on the referendum and in the election also. Are we to be told that what can be done in British Columbia, Australia and New Zealand cannot be done in Canada? To state such a proposition is simply to refute it. Furthermore, to-day I heard my hon. friend from Assiniboia (Mr. Turriff) tell us that he was against referendum because he was sure it would not carry. In other words, he said that a referendum would be defeated. Well, Sir, I ask, is that a reason why a referendum should not be taken? Again I ask: Where are we living now? Is it Canada, or is it Prussia?

Some hon. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

A Government of the People, for the People, and by the People.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: We want no more hypocrisy. If that is the position, no more can it be said that we are fighting to maintain the government of the people, for the people, and by the people. Sir, we have a vast country composed of different nationalities, brought here by the force of circumstances. We have opened our doors to all the working people of Europe to come here and help us build up this country, to develop it and bring it up to the standard we hope it will attain some day, and are we to be told that in this year 1917 we are going to deny a vote to the men whom we have made British subjects under the law? That is not British policy. It is the policy of Paul Kruger, the very policy which started the war in South Africa. When Kruger, after inviting British subjects to come and live in that country, denied them the privileges he promised them, and after giving them the privileges of citizenship, took away their right by an Act of Parliament, the war ensued. For my part, I do not believe in such doctrine as that. My hon. friend from Assiniboia (Mr. Turriff) said a few minutes ago that, if there was to be a referendum, the whole of the French province would vote against it; the foreign voter would be against it, and the slacker would be against it. I do not want, in this country, to hear of any such division. I stand upon the broad line of Canadian citizenship.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Oh, oh.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: I know very well that the same feeling does not appeal to all Canadians. I know that the majority of French-Canadians have a certain way of looking at these things. I know that English-Canadians look at them in another way, but when you tell me that all French-Canadians are on one side, and all English-Canadians are on the other side, I do not believe one statement or the other. It has been said that all the French-Canadians are on one side and all the English-Canadians are on the other side, and if that be so the English-Canadians are more numerous, and they would carry the vote. It is not by such appeals as this that we can hope to settle this vexed question. It is simply by appealing to the better instincts of the people, and for my part I hope that the day will never come

and I am sure it will never come—that I shall appeal either to the prejudices of one man or to the prejudices of another.

One Policy only for Ontario and Quebec.

Referring to the position which I have taken upon the floor of this House on this question, if I cannot defend it in Ontario as well as in Quebec, I want to lose my name as a French-Canadian citizen, as an English-Canadian citizen, and as a Canadian. I am prepared to defend my policy. I may be right or I may be wrong, but at all events I am sincere in my belief, and when a man speaks the voice of his conscience, there is no part of Canada where he should fear to state his views. I have been told that there is no constructive feature in the policy of a referendum. On the contrary, I say it is the most constructive policy which has yet been presented in this debate. I do not know how the vote will go. I have taken my pledge, and I repeat it again to-day with more fervour than before, that if the vote had gone for conscription the verdict would be accepted in every part of Canada, even in the province of Quebec, where it has been said it would not be accepted. When the people had spoken my way of a referendum, I believe that those who voted against it would, had it been carried, come forward to do their duty and uphold the law. If it were defeated, a duty would be imposed on all, and there would be a new basis, and new appeal to the whole people of Canada to lend their best endeavours in the defence of a noble cause. But my hon. friend said that the minority must govern sometimes. I do not admit that proposition at all. If you admitted the policy that the minority could govern, you could say goodbye to representative institutions. My hon. friend was very badly advised when he referred to the referendum on prohibition in 1898. Let the hon. gentleman look at Hansard. I have not looked at it for twenty years, but he will find that the Government stated they they would not be satisfied with a bare majority, even if prohibition were endorsed, unless there was behind it such a body of public opinion as would insure its success. But when we found that prohibition had been carried by a vote of only 10,000 out of more than half a million, we thought we were not justified in putting it in force. I have been asked as to what my policy is. I may say that it is the same as it has been from the first. I am in this war to the finish.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Oh.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: I am in this war under the voluntary system to the last. I am in this war as Australia is in it to-day. Australia voted against conscription but still she is in the war. I am sorry that on an occasion of this kind I cannot see eye to eye with my hon. friends on the other side. I do not want to speak severely of anybody. I do not want to introduce any bitterness that it is possible to avoid. I respect the convictions of all men, and I hope my own convictions will be respected.

In the position that I occupy on this side of the House, I am part and parcel of the machinery of the Government, and up to the 18th May no man occupying a position similar to that which I occupied, in any country, whether in England, France, New Zealand, or South Africa, gave to the Government a more consistent support than I gave them. But when the conscription measure was proposed I had to oppose it, and why? Because, presented as it had been presented, before the country, it had been made an instrument of coercion.

It is a denial of those principles of democracy which we hold dear and sacred. I oppose this Bill because it has in it the seeds of discord and disunion; because it is an obstacle and a bar to that union of heart and soul without which it is impossible to hope that this Confederation will attain the aims and ends that were had in view when Confederation was effected. Sir, all my life I have fought coercion; all my life I have promoted union; and the inspiration which led me to that course shall be my guide at all times, so long as there is a breath left in my body.