

*Plebiscite Act*

have a negative vote on this plebiscite, Canada will be virtually out of the war so far as reinforcements to the boys overseas are concerned. Words can scarcely describe the uncertainty. A plebiscite is always uncertain, but under this bill the question is put in such a way as to make it the most uncertain question that has ever been put to the Canadian people.

Mr. MacNICOL: I should like a little light. I base my question to the Prime Minister on the few words he said in reference to the amendment moved by the hon. member to my left asking that the words "in any theatre of war" be added. I am not sure whether I understood the Prime Minister aright, but I thought he himself then asked the question whether, if the people voted yes he would then be expected to say he would send troops to any theatre of war. My question is whether in the event of the country voting yes the Prime Minister would then feel free to send troops to any theatre of war. If so, I would be disposed to vote for the plebiscite.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: My point in reference to the amendment which proposes to add to the question the words "in any theatre of war" was that if those words were added a large number of people would immediately begin to read into them something that had never been in the mind of the government at all. The first thought that would come to many of them is: Oh, well, the government evidently has something further in view than has ever thus far been discussed publicly, and perhaps for that reason we had better be careful before we support this plebiscite. I do not think the words would help to gain support for the question, and for that reason I do not think they should be added. I am anxious to see the question made as simple and direct as possible, and one that will not create suspicion in the mind of anyone as to the intentions of the government. All the government wants as a result of this question is to have a perfectly free hand to deal with situations as they may arise in the light of all the knowledge it possesses, with a view to having done what is most effective with respect to Canada's war effort.

As to where troops should be sent, or when they should be sent, or how many should be sent, all these questions will be dealt with by the government itself in the light of its knowledge of the world situation and of what is likely best to serve the war effort of the country, and of the allied nations, without restriction of any kind. I cannot say that the government might be disposed to send troops here, there or elsewhere. Everything will

[Mr. Rowe.]

depend upon how the war develops, and what it may become most advisable to do. What the government wants is to have a free hand to do the thing that is most advisable and most necessary.

Mr. ROSS (Souris): I wonder whether I could ask a question with regard to what the Prime Minister said a few moments ago. I know he compared the official opposition with nazis, and I wonder whether in the same way he would compare President Roosevelt with Hitler, having regard to his broken pledges on this point. I listened to several of the Prime Minister's broadcasts during the election campaign of 1940, but I did not hear him in any of those speeches refer to conscription for overseas. I heard him say there would be no conscription if his government were returned to power. So that when he speaks of this moral obligation I should like him to tell us just at what point during the campaign of 1940 he established the distinction between conscription and conscription for overseas service. I believe that moral obligation has been broken to some extent already, having regard to the speeches I heard him deliver. Perhaps he could establish the point during the campaign at which the distinction was made.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: First of all may I say to my hon. friend that when I spoke of nazi methods I was not reflecting on the opposition. I was setting out the difference between an attitude which takes account of moral obligations and an attitude which says, "We care nothing about moral obligations except to ignore and destroy them." I say that to-day the people are vitally concerned as to whether the former method of viewing obligations is to hold in Canadian affairs or as to whether the other method, which is the nazi method, is going to hold. I was not reflecting upon any individuals; I was speaking about methods in connection with matters of government.

With regard to the question of conscription, I would say to my hon. friend that it has always been understood, and in fact it is embedded in the Militia Act, that in time of war every man may be compulsorily called out to serve his country. That is there; it has been there from the start. Compulsion in regard to the defence of your own country is something that does not need to be referred to, because it is an obligation that the government may require to be fulfilled at any moment it pleases.

Mr. ROSS (Souris): I would not think the general public would know much about that.