

Unrevised Hansard

March 26, 1932-1938

pp. 1788/97

Col - Canadian foreign policy

D 14215

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, inasmuch as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Woodsworth) has made an appeal to me to say a word on behalf of the government and more particularly has emphasized the importance of Canada taking a lead in these matters which tend towards peace and the promotion of international understanding, this might be an opportune time for me to make what few remarks I had thought of making in the course of this debate. May I first of all say that any resolution brought into this house and having as its objective the great purpose of promoting peace and international understanding, is certain of a sympathetic reception at the hands not of one political party but, I believe, of all parties in this chamber? The debate which has thus far taken place would indicate that such is the case, and I think the hon. member for Southeast Grey (Miss Macphail) who has introduced the resolution, may feel assured that whatever differences of view there may be as to the particular method which she suggests as the one to be aimed at immediately for the promotion of peace and international understanding, there is no difference of view as to the desirability of the large objective being attained in the most effective manner possible.

We are indebted to her for having emphasized anew the importance of ridding the world, if that is possible, of a war mentality and substituting therefor a peace mentality. But that is not a work that is a matter of days or years; it is perhaps the largest educational effort in which mankind as a whole can be engaged. We cannot emphasize too often the horrors of war, the losses of war, not only the material losses but the losses to nations and to the world in human life, in morals and

in all that we hold dearest in civilization. But it is important, when speaking on the subject of war, that we distinguish between war and its futility, awfulness and hideousness, and the services of those who seek to render impossible the efforts of others who are responsible for provoking wars. That distinction is not kept sufficiently in mind. In the course of the debate one might gather from some of the remarks that have been made, that there were in this chamber those who believed that war was something that others would endorse, something that, in a direct or indirect way, had been endorsed by the nations that took part in the recent war, and because nothing good, as has been said, has come out of war, that therefore the efforts of those who sought to oppose the forces which were responsible for the war in the first instance were of themselves of no avail. If we pause for a moment to consider the situation and to realize the distinction that should be drawn, when we come to speak of war, between those who are responsible for provoking war and those who seek to overthrow and overturn the forces that bring about war, we shall realize that in the recent great international world strife,

had the situation not proven to be what it was on the part of those who opposed the forces responsible for war, we would not this evening be spending our time in this house of parliament debating the question at all. I believe as firmly as I am standing here that if the peoples of the British Empire, Belgium, France, Italy, the United States and the other allied and associated countries that participated in the war had not taken the part which they did, had not opposed the enemy as they did oppose him, there would not be in these countries to-day men and women in a position to stand up and become the advocates of the merits of peace. We should all be in a position of nations that had been overcome by a people who held with respect to peace and progress a point of view diametrically opposite to the one which we hold. We must distinguish, in discussing war, between the forces that are responsible for war and those whose aim and purpose it is to prevent those forces from getting control. I remember very well a passage that appears in one of the writings of that celebrated scientist, Pasteur, and which to my mind vividly portrays the situation:

Two contrary laws seems to be wrestling with each other nowadays: the one, a law of blood and of death, ever imagining new means of destruction, and forcing nations to be constantly ready for the battlefield—the other, a law of peace, work and health, ever evolving new means of delivering man from the scourges which beset him. The one seeks violent conquests, the other the relief of humanity. The latter places one human life above any victory; while the former would sacrifice hundreds of thousands of lives to the ambition of one. Which of these two laws shall ultimately prevail God alone knows.

The great scientist who uttered those words expressed a profound truth, namely, that through the whole of human society there run these two contrary forces: those who are striving for the preservation of peace, health and work, and those who are following some law of blood and of death, and who are ever ready to make conquest serve ends which are their own. These laws are in conflict with each other and unless those who are prepared to support the law of peace, health and work, are ready to support it by means that are effective enough to overthrow the force of blood and death, then the latter and not the former will triumph. This truth I think it is essential for us to keep in mind when we discuss the question of war and preparation for war.

May I say to the hon. member for Southeast Grey that the one exception I have to take to her resolution is that I think it takes too limited a view of how the great objective which she has in mind can be attained, too limited a view of how peace and international understanding may best be promoted. I say that instead of one department of the government being established for that specific purpose, every department of the government should have the promotion of peace and international understanding as its aim. Every

W. L. Mackenzie King Papers

Speeches-1922 - 1932

PUBLIC ARCHIVES
ARCHIVES PUBLIQUES
CANADA