

hon. friend the Prime Minister has the first day of this year issued a statement that he was prepared to offer 500,000 men. I shall not to-day discuss whether or not the premature statement of my right hon. friend was exactly on the lines of parliamentary government. I put aside all these questions on such a day as this. I understand that we shall have a statement made upon the offer of 500,000 men, which it seems to me is a large contract, but, again, upon this I pass no judgment. I shall be prepared, and my friends around me will be prepared to listen to, and to discuss in the spirit in which all such propositions should be discussed, the proposition which the Government deems essential to carry on the fight in which we are engaged. But let me say—and I believe that upon this we should have an expression of opinion—that we must repel at once the impression which has been sought to be created that this offer is a preliminary step to conscription. There is to be no conscription in Canada. Sir, there has been an attempt made for many years to frighten the people with the spectre of conscription. There are some men in this House, as you know, who in the elections of 1911 stated that the enactment of the naval law was a prelude to conscription. There are men in the province of Quebec who have been asserting that the moment conscription was adopted in Great Britain, conscription would be adopted or proposed in Canada. The naval law has been for six years on the statute book. It is still there; it has not been repealed, as many members in this House were pledged to repeal it. It is there, and there is yet no conscription. Conscription has come in England, but conscription is not to come in Canada. So far as conscription in England is concerned, it would be in bad taste, nay, it would be impertinent for us to attempt to pass any remarks, either of approval or of disapproval with regard to it. For my own part I am free to say that I expected that Great Britain would be able to carry on this stupendous war under her old system of voluntary enlistment. The British Government have thought otherwise; they have thought that the magnitude, the stupendous magnitude of the war we have to face, compelled them to resort to conscription, and the step taken by the government seems to meet with the approval of the great majority of the English people. But, Sir,

the conditions are not the same in Canada as in Great Britain. The reasons why there can be no conscription in Canada are obvious. Apart from any other, one paramount reason, which is on top of all the others, is that we could not adopt conscription in Canada without giving a severe blow to our policy of immigration. If we are to pass successfully through the period which is to follow the war, and face the enormous debt which we are accumulating, the enormous expenditure which we are assuming, the best way to do it is to have a wise and broad policy of immigration so as to develop our resources. But if it were to be known that conscription existed in Canada, it would, I repeat, deal a severe blow to our hopes in that respect. Why, the very thought of conscription has had a detrimental effect on our settlements in the Northwest.

My attention has been called to a letter published in the New York American of December 26, in which the following statement from a correspondent in Omaha appears:

Five or six years ago a hundred thousand of Iowa and Nebraska's finest young farmers broke away from their homes and went into Western Canada to take up homesteads and make their fortunes.

And now these same young men are simply falling over themselves to get back to the old farms in the American west. Hundreds of them are passing through Omaha every week. Some walked across the border—sneaked their way across, in fact, because they feared they would not be permitted to leave Canada.

Others purchased round-trip railroad tickets and showed the return portion as proof that they were going into the "States" on a visit only. Some had a little cash when the time came for them to get out of the Dominion, but others were forced to write back to the "old folks" for money with which to pay their way back to the old farm. They are all fleeing from threatened conscription.

When I read that I took some measures to obtain confirmation or information regarding it. I must say that my information, while not complete, has satisfied me that the statement is very much exaggerated. That there is some foundation for it I believe, but I do not think the movement has assumed such proportions as are here indicated. At all events, there is enough to show that it is important that we should have at once from my right hon. friend the Prime Minister an authoritative statement upon this point.

But, Sir, while the bogey of conscription can be easily disposed of, the same cannot be said of the financial consequences which