

3. If permission is obtained, will it be possible for the volunteer to exercise his franchise freely and untrammelled by regulations inherent to the enforcing of military discipline?

Hon. Mr. LOUGHEED—The answers to the hon. gentleman's questions are as follows: The answer to No. 1 and No. 2 is no. The answer to the 3rd question is "yes, subject to the paramount obligations of his military duty."

VOTES FOR SOLDIERS BILL.

FIRST AND SECOND READINGS.

A message was received from the House of Commons with Bill No. 111, An Act to enable Canadian soldiers on active military service during the present war to exercise their electoral franchise.

The Bill was read the first time.

Hon. Mr. CLORAN—Before the hon. leader moves the second reading of the Bill I should like to supplement the question put by the hon. leader of the Opposition and the answers by the hon. leader of the Government. It is quite pertinent to the question before the House, and the inquiry which I shall place on the Order Paper is as follows:

Senator Cloran will inquire of the Government as follows:

1. How many, if any, of the one hundred thousand citizens of Canada at present under arms in the defence of Canada and the British Empire, against the German, Austrian and Turkish Governments and armies have petitioned the present Government or the Parliament of Canada to pass and enact a law to secure and provide for them the right to cast their ballots at any general, or by-election, for federal purposes of the Dominion of Canada during the present war.

That is a fair question and I must say that I put it with a feeling of pride after my experience of half an hour. I submitted this question to every soldier I met on the street cars and on the thoroughfares. They did not know who I was when I put the question to them, but they said, "That is right, we are soldiers of the King and we want no politics. We are no party men, and want no vote of that kind." I am glad to be able to put this question on the Order Paper under the circumstances. I have given the answer of all the men who are leaving to-morrow to fight the enemy, and I have their names here. They do not want to be bothered with this kind of petty politics, and I am proud of the soldiers of Canada.

Hon. Mr. LOUGHEED—I move that this Bill be read the second time. Two considerations necessarily enter into the measure, one being the policy of the Bill and the other the method or system by which it is proposed to carry it out. I venture to say that no valid or substantial objection can be taken to the principle of the Bill. The exercise of the franchise by every elector entitled to vote is considered one of the most valued of the rights of citizenship, and a right which he should be assisted in every possible way to exercise. It is not necessary for me to enlarge in any way upon the desirability of every citizen casting his ballot. I also venture to say that under no reasonable circumstances should the elector be deprived of his vote. The trend of all legislation has been to assist the elector to exercise his franchise. Almost every Parliament finds us amending our election Acts for the purpose of overcoming difficulties which may be found in the way of the elector freely exercising his voting. In this particular case it should be considered absolutely incumbent on Parliament that the troops which Canada has sent to the continent of Europe and who are to-day on active service, should be assisted by legislation to exercise that franchise which, if they were in Canada, they would enjoy.

The service which they are rendering, not only in the interest of Canada but in the interest of the whole Empire, should be, and is, one of the strongest reasons why the Parliament of Canada should devise means whereby that franchise may be enjoyed by those who are serving the Empire in the field. I venture to say that hon. gentlemen will not dispute the principle which is embodied in the Bill, and which is the fundamental policy of the legislation which we are now considering. The duty is, therefore, thrown on Parliament to say whether it is possible to so crystallize that principle into legislation as to permit of the 40,000 Canadian soldiers who are now in Europe to-day on active service, serving their King and country, to exercise freely their franchise to the same extent as the citizens of Canada who have stayed at home will vote at the next general election. Now the working out of the method or system whereby this can be put in operation should not require extraordinary ingenuity, should not require any great resourcefulness on the part of legislators. When seriously considered, and worked out, it will be found—and it must appeal I think to every intelligent man—that a system has in this Bill been devised surrounded by all