

ces between the ex-Minister of Militia and Defence (Sir Sam Hughes) and my right hon. friend the Prime Minister (Sir Robert Borden), and the Minister of Finance (Sir Thomas White) as to what has taken place in regard to recruiting. The ex-Minister of Militia complained that he had been interfered with in his recruiting. He stated in one speech, and he repeated it here, that if recruiting had decreased, it was because his work had been interfered with by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance. There is no doubt about that. That is a statement that everybody has heard. Explanations or excuses have been from time to time offered. It may be true that the minister was never actually stopped in his recruiting, but he was told how not to recruit. He was told: Do not go to this part of the country, do not go to that part of the country, do not go amongst manufacturers, do not do this, do not do that, and the result was that, being interfered with, the work stopped, and, of course, recruiting failed.

You will remember, Sir, the famous chapter in one of Charles Dickens' works as to the effect of the circumlocution office. It is an exact description of what is taking place with this Government. Charles Dickens somewhere says, speaking of what he called the circumlocution office:

The circumlocution office was (as everybody knows without being told) the most important department under Government. No public business of any kind could possibly be done at any time without the acquiescence of this circumlocution office. Its finger was in the largest public pie and in the smallest public tart. Whatever was required to be done, the circumlocution office was beforehand with all the public departments, in the art of perceiving how not to do it.

The Fault of the Government.

That is the case with my hon. friend the ex-Minister of Militia (Sir Sam Hughes); he was told how not to do it; he was balked at every step, and here we have the consequence. When the Government places as the basis of this Bill the fact that there has been no recruiting for some time past, they do not impugn anybody but themselves, and they show up their own delinquencies. But, Sir, after all here is the Bill, as I said a moment ago, and we have it before us. The strongest indictment which was made against this Bill, in my humble judgment, was made by the hon. member for South Wellington (Mr. Guthrie) in a speech which he delivered a few weeks ago. He said that this Bill, if it became law, could not be carried out unless it were by the joint effort of a union government. What does this mean? If it means anything it means that the sentiment against this Bill is so strong, is so rooted in all parts of the community, that the Bill is such a departure from the traditions of the past, that it requires the efforts of the two political parties to put it into operation. If that be true, and if this measure was unavoidable, it should have come in, not as the measure of a party government, but as the measure of a coalition government.

Coalition.

I may be told that I was asked, and my friend from South Wellington may have had it in his mind that I was asked, to be a party to a coalition government. Sir, I was asked to form part of a coalition government when the policy had been framed, when the Bill had been prepared as a party measure, by a party government; and when it had been framed, deliberated on in council, determined upon, and launched before the public. When the Government could not retrace their steps, my poor assistance, such as it might have been, was sought. If, Sir, the Government had been in earnest, they would have consulted me before they determined on their measure. But they did not consult me, they did not ask my opinion upon conscription; they did not ask me what would be my opinion upon its possibilities, its results, and its dangers; they did not ask me to discuss with them the situation, against which they were determined to close their eyes; but when they had concocted

a measure, then they were kind enough to ask me to carry on what they had devised in their wisdom. As in the play of children, they asked me: close your eyes and open your mouth and swallow. I refused.

Sir, some of my friends have reminded me, some of my Liberal friends have reminded me, that George Brown once entered into a coalition Government. He did, and under such circumstances nobody would blame him. In those days, party government in Canada had come to a deadlock. The powerful agitation of George Brown, asking for representation by population, had depleted the majority of the Conservative party until there was a deadlock between the two parties. Then mutual friends asked that George Brown should enter into a coalition. He asked the basis of it, and when representation by population was granted, which had been refused up to that time by John A. Macdonald, when the principle of union of the provinces had also been granted, which also had been refused by Macdonald, he then entered into a coalition. But, Sir, I was not approached in the same way. I have my views upon conscription. They have not changed. It is not a pleasure for me to find myself at variance with so many of the friends I have around me; but I thought and still believe that a measure of conscription, under the circumstances, was an apple of discord, and I could not accept it. That is all I have to say upon that point.

The Referendum Policy.

But I may be asked: what is your policy; it is not sufficient for the Opposition to say "nay" to any proposition, what is your policy? Sir, I laid my policy before Parliament upon the second reading of the Bill. I asked that a referendum should be had and the judgment of the people taken upon this question. I have not the merit of this policy; it did not originate with me; it was not my own device. Sir, it was asked by the whole organized body of labour in the Dominion of Canada. We are familiar with the strong resolutions which have been placed upon the table of this House, passed by the central labour organizations. Every member of this House, I would venture to say, at all events, the large majority of the members of this House, I am sure, have received from labour organizations within their ridings, petitions, resolutions and communications to that effect. I have received them by the bushel. They are there, before the House, and, Sir, under such circumstances I say I have no merit in having proposed that policy. That policy would have given us peace, harmony, and concord, which to-day are in much danger. Objections were made to it, and what were the objections? The objections were that this policy of a referendum should not be granted because, forsooth, the soldiers could not vote. Well, Sir, we passed a law two years ago to give the franchise to the soldiers, and by the same measure we established machinery to give facilities to the soldiers to express their views. Are we to be told that this law is a mere scrap of paper, that it is a mere dead letter, that it cannot be put into execution? Why, Sir, are we to be told that those who two years ago were so insistent upon passing this law intended it only as a clap net? If, Sir, when this measure was proposed, we on this side of the House had opposed it, and if we had defeated it, the welkin would have rung and would be still ringing with denunciation against those who had deprived the soldiers of the sacred right to vote. We did not oppose it; the law is there, and when we are told that the law cannot be put into force upon a referendum or an election, when we have given the right of voting to the soldiers, hon. members are simply playing with the common sense of the country when they advance such an argument.

Mr. A. C. MACDONELL: Is the right hon. member aware that the Act to which he is referring provides only that soldiers shall have votes in elections and not on a referendum?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER: Yes, I am aware of that. I am aware also that the Parliament which gave them power to vote in elections could give them power to vote on a referendum. The difficulty is not serious.

Mr. A. C. MACDONELL: Parliament has not done so;