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Mr. King:

I have said that this is not a question of conscription. Hon. members opposite have been saying, "Why do you not have a referendum, and refer the question of conscription itself to the people?"

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Who said that?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: You never said that?

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): No.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I am delighted to hear it.

Some hon. MEMBERS: No, no!

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: You never have said it?

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Who said it?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Well, I can show my hon. friend several papers supporting his opposition—

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Oh, well—

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: May I say this, then—

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): I did not say it.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Then I understand that my hon. friend now says they are not in favour of a referendum.

Mr. MacNICOL: They never said anything else.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: What are they in favour of, then? They are in favour simply of calling parliament and enforcing conscription without reference to the people, either by plebiscite or referendum! There we have the difference between the two parties. Notwithstanding their position in the House of Commons, and the solemn undertaking given by their leader at the time of the last general election—which they did not denounce, but which they supported—they say to the people of Canada to-day, "We

will not give you even a referendum. We will not give you a plebiscite; but we will take it into our own hands to do the very thing which our leader said he would not do, or we would not do if our party were returned to power."

Mr. STIRLING: On a question of privilege, may I interrupt the Prime Minister? I have stated in the house this session that the course I consider should be adopted by the government is that of submitting a resolution to the elected members of the House of Commons as to whether they should be freed from the commitments under which they placed themselves.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: In other words, if I understand my hon. friend correctly he suggests that we ought to decide among ourselves, without any reference to the people at all.

Mr. STIRLING: The 245 representatives of the people, elected at an election at which this was not an issue.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: And that is where I entirely disagree with my hon. friend. If it was not an issue it was because the leaders of all parties took similar positions, and the position so adopted was that there would be no question of conscription. But that makes the obligation all the greater on every hon. member sitting in the house to see that, before that question is so much as discussed, he should be released from any commitment which may have been made.

Then, in reference to whether the plebiscite is to be in reality a referendum, there is a question which is being asked now which changes the plebiscite into a referendum—and I believe my hon. friend asked this question only a day or two ago—it is, "What are you going to do if the decision is such-and-such?" He wishes me to say that I am going to do so-and-so. If I were to give him an undertaking at this time, and that undertaking is before the people when the question is put before them, is that not a referendum? That is, I commit myself to one course or to the other, and the people then are being asked to decide whether the government should take it or not. In other words I throw on the people of this country the onus of making a political and military decision, when the only body by which such decision should be taken on a question of this kind is the government which is responsible for such decision, advised by its military advisers, and debating its decisions on the floor of parliament, thereby making itself responsible to parliament for the decisions it makes.