

Let me say just a few words on what this measure means. It has struck me, in listening to this debate, that it might not have been a bad idea if we had departed from the usual practice and first examined the provisions of the Bill in order to grasp and thoroughly understand its principle. Had we done this, I think we should have been in a better position to discuss the measure. Much of the debate has been upon a principle of conscription, assumed to mean a system under which every man from twenty to forty-five years of age, without regard to condition, domestic relations, occupation, or the distress which might fall upon an abandoned family, was to be taken by force and marched out to the war. And a great deal of the public opinion that my hon. friend from Montcalm (Mr. Lafortune) sought to show by promenading us from parish to parish in the province of Quebec, is based upon the representation that that is what is proposed to be done. But when you look at the Bill you find that it restricts the number of men to be raised to one hundred thousand. Note, that is not a minimum, but a maximum. In the second place, the Bill provides means intended to enable us to ascertain, as I have already said, who can be spared. We have had some criticism of the proposed system. Some hon. gentlemen say it will give an advantage to the rich man at the expense of the poor. If I am not mistaken the hon. member for Pictou (Mr. Macdonald) said it was a system under which discrimination of all sorts was possible; that the measure had been prepared for the very purpose of making discrimination on racial, or provincial, or religious lines, or discrimination as between the rich man and the poor. That was far from the minds of those who drafted the measure. And, more than that, it has been stated by the Prime Minister that suggestions for the improvement of the Bill will be welcomed. Let me say to the hon. members who are at such great pains to have it go forth to the people that there is a desire to discriminate against the poor or against any other class: Come with your suggestion, and it will be welcomed; if you have a better method, to make it sure that there shall be no discrimination, let us know what it is. There is no other desire in the heart of anybody who stands behind the Bill than to find the most effective method of preventing discrimination of any kind. Under this Bill the rich man's son will go under the same conditions as the poor man's son; the man of any province the man of any race, the man of one religion,

[Mr. Doherty.]

will go absolutely under the same conditions as the man of another. There is, from beginning to end of this Bill, nothing upon which can be based what I venture to call the unworthy suggestion put forward that there is hidden in it somewhere the germ of unjust discrimination. But I repeat what I have already said: If any man suspects the existence of that defect, let him tell us how to remove it. The men who have made these suggestions are able, astute, capable men; surely they can find means to make more sure the purpose we have in mind. The suggestion to which I have referred, I say, is unworthy of the men who made it, not only because, in my judgment, there is nothing in the measure to justify it, but because they know that if they have a better suggestion, it will be acceptable, and because they know also that statements of that kind can have but one effect—to add to the already too-much inflamed condition of a public mind which is not yet thoroughly informed upon the imperative necessity of this measure, and more particularly not yet thoroughly informed upon what the putting into effect of the measure will mean throughout the country. I register my most emphatic protest against that sort of insinuation. It is unfair to us who stand behind the Bill—but that is a minor matter—it is the contribution of the hon. gentlemen who make it, to add to the already disturbed condition of public opinion.

Here is a measure that is far from being what it has been represented to be, viz., a measure of conscription which is going to take away man, woman and child. We have had pitiful descriptions of the husband snatched away from his wife and children, and of distressful conditions that, it is said, will surround the enforcement of the measure. We want one hundred thousand men, and before any married man is asked to go under the terms of the Bill we shall have exhausted the supply of men from twenty to thirty-five years of age who are unmarried and fit to go. I shall not go into figures which have been given already, but it would appear to be beyond peradventure that this married man, whose fate we have been asked to bemoan, will not be called upon under this measure; he will certainly not be called upon until every man of the class I have described has been called upon and has given his services. But the picture that has been drawn is really the picture of what has happened under the voluntary system. The