

The second would be by means of a referendum solely with reference to the question of conscription for service overseas.

The third would be by means of a plebiscite, not to obtain a decision with respect to conscription, but solely with the object of releasing the government from any obligation arising out of any past commitments restricting the methods of raising men for military service.

These three means have been considered by the government with relation particularly to which of the three would occasion the least interference with the war effort of the country.

The government is of the opinion that neither a general election nor a referendum on the question of conscription is either advisable or necessary.

As for a general election, apart from the fact that the government has every reason to believe it continues to possess the confidence of the country, it would not, we believe, be in the interest of the people themselves, in the existing crisis, to leave the country without a parliament for the time which it would take to hold a general election. Moreover, other issues entering in, it would not be possible to say that the verdict of the people, whatever it might be, had related solely to the issue of the application of conscription for overseas service.

The objection to a referendum on conscription is that far from freeing the hands of the government it would be a specific request to the people to make a decision with respect to conscription. As I have already said, the proper place to debate the question as to the extent to which conscription should be applied is on the floor of parliament.

The strongest of reasons why the government should be given a free hand to take, subject to its responsibility to parliament, any course of action which it may believe to be necessary at a time of war is that the government itself alone can know all the circumstances and reasons which necessitate a particular course of action. These reasons cannot all be made public, linked as they are with the combined plans of other countries, with questions of military strategy, and the necessity of such matters being carefully concealed from the enemy.

A plebiscite differs from a referendum in that a plebiscite is taken to ascertain the views of the people, whereas a referendum is a request for a decision by the people on a specific plan or project. The government does not believe that it would be fair to the people to ask them to make military decisions.

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

It is, as I already have said, not possible, in war time, to make public adequate information on which wise judgments can be made.

In consulting the people by plebiscite, the government is not throwing on the people the responsibility of making a military decision. It is asking the people to give the government full power and full responsibility to take whatever military decisions the government, in the light of all its knowledge, believes to be necessary. In consulting the people, therefore, we are not shirking responsibility, we are asking for full responsibility.

A course completely different from any one of the three I have mentioned has been suggested. It is that the government should ignore commitments altogether, refrain from any consultation with or reference to the people, and here and now immediately put in force conscription for service overseas.

I am perfectly sure that were any government to proceed in any such arbitrary manner, completely disregarding the will of the people as expressed in the past, or as it might be expressed in the present, it would find any such attempt effectively thwarted by the people's representatives in parliament.

Personally, I reject as unworthy of consideration, any course of action by this or any parliament which ignores the authority from which parliament and the government alike derive their power. I reject as still more unworthy the suggestion that the government should break the solemn pledges given and repeated time and again to the electorate. Let me repeat what I said at Vancouver:

The present unhappy state of the world is, in large part, the result of broken pledges. Nazi Germany has erected bad faith and the broken pledge into a principle of action. Bad faith, broken pledges, and disregard of the popular will, are the forces against which Canada is fighting to-day.

I do not propose to erect bad faith and the broken pledge into a principle of action. I propose at all times to do all in my power to see that the will of the people, not that of any particular section or group or interest, however powerful or vociferous, shall prevail in the government of this country.

Perhaps I should add that yet another course of action has been suggested. It is that I should resign and advise His Excellency the Governor General—

Some hon. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Yes, I hear some of them opposite; I hope they listen to what I am going to say. It is that I should resign and advise His Excellency the Governor General to call on some other person to form a government which would ignore all past