

Mr. COPP: During the past two weeks, I have given to hon. gentlemen discussing this measure, a respectful hearing; I ask of them the same. The discussion in this House has not followed political party lines, but each member has sought to understand the question and has voted as his conscience dictated. The main argument of those who support the Bill, as well as I have been able to understand it, is that the Prime Minister, having attended the Imperial Conference overseas during the recess, has come back imbued with the idea that our boys at the front must have reinforcements, and to get them we must introduce a conscription measure because voluntary enlistment, which had been taken up by the Government and endorsed by the leader of the Opposition, has fallen down. Some hon. members who usually do not support the Government have come to the same conclusion, but their reasoning is altogether different.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

Mr. COPP: I put myself on record here, I care not what hon. members may say, "hear, hear," or with what derision they may treat my statements—I put myself on record that I am firmly at one with other hon. members as to what Canada's duty is in this crisis; I believe that we should give every possible assistance to the Allies in this war both in men and money. But the question that arises in my mind is, whether, in order to send the necessary reinforcements to the front at this time, it is better to have coercion and compulsion in the form of this Military Service Bill, or whether it is better to follow the course declared for by the Prime Minister time and time again since the war broke out, and carry on voluntary enlistment. Hon. members who support this Bill tell us that voluntary enlistment has fallen down, and that we cannot raise the necessary reinforcements except by enacting this Military Service Bill and forcing men to go to the front. Yet when you follow the arguments you find that even those who declare that we must have this Military Service Bill because we need these reinforcements and need them now, invariably tell us that the Bill is not to be brought into effect except by Order in Council, as provided in the Bill itself. If this measure is left on the statute book and not brought into effect voluntary enlistment is killed. That means that we cannot get the men in any way. I say it would be far better to

[The Speaker.]

continue voluntary enlistment than place a coercive measure on the statute book which will not be effective, which will not even be enforced. I have just returned from a few days in my own constituency, and while there I received information of the most reliable kind that a member of the other Chamber, a strong supporter and appointee of this Government, was going through the length and breadth of the different counties of that province, absolutely assuring the people of those counties that this measure would not be brought into force. Now, if that statement is being made—and that it is being made I am assured by most reliable authority—and if the Government are not going to bring into effect the Military Service Bill, and bring it in at once, then, I say, the effect of passing it would be absolutely to put Canada out of this war. For voluntary enlistment is at a standstill, and if this Military Service Bill is to be made the law and yet not be brought into force, while you get no voluntary enlistment from any part of the country, you certainly cannot raise reinforcements under a law that is not in operation.

The Prime Minister on January 1, 1916, told the world that Canada would offer 500,000 men to assist the Allied Powers. No one found particular fault with that except that the statement was made by the right hon. gentleman on his own responsibility. In January of that year, when the House met, the right hon. gentleman made the statement that recruiting and voluntary enlistment were satisfactory, and that there would be no conscription and no compulsion. He reiterated that statement on different occasions, and last January he made the same statement at the opening of this House. The argument made by hon. gentlemen in supporting this measure is that the present pressing need at the present time of men influenced the Government in bringing down this Bill. It does seem rather singular that the number of men that the Prime Minister asks for in connection with this Bill coincides exactly with the number of men he said was required eighteen months ago. When the Prime Minister brought home the demand for more men two months ago, he had the same number of reinforcements in mind that he had eighteen months ago when he made the statement that Canada would supply 500,000 men.

I am in favour of voluntary enlistment. That has been followed up in the past. I have spent a good deal of time myself assisting in getting recruits in my own portion of New Brunswick, and I am glad to