

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: If the leader of the opposition will allow me, I shall now read the statement to which I made reference. It will be found on page 3621 of the House of Commons debates of June 15, 1942, in the first paragraph of the hon. member's speech. He said:

Up to the present time the only two ministers who have spoken in this debate on behalf of the government have been the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) and the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner), both of whom have consistently opposed military service overseas, and from whom, having regard to the speech to which we have listened to-day, we cannot ever expect in my opinion to have military service overseas regardless of what the people may demand.

Mr. ROWE: That is not at all what the Prime Minister said.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: May I say—

Mr. DUFFENBAKER: There is no such inference in that at all.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: This statement that I have consistently opposed military service overseas is made in the face of the fact that I have since the beginning of this war done all that lies within my power to see that the largest possible number of men were sent overseas in the navy, the air force and the army; and the numbers of men who have enlisted for service anywhere in the world to-day is the answer I make to the member who has just interrupted.

Mr. DUFFENBAKER: Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. MEMBERS: Order.

An hon. MEMBER: Apologize later.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order.

Mr. DUFFENBAKER: There is nothing to apologize for. On a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, the context shows that the reference was entirely to compulsory service for overseas.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: But what is the result? False impressions are thereby also being given to other countries. This is most detrimental to Canada, and is most unfair to Canada's magnificent army overseas.

No one can object to the honest advocacy of conscription by those who believe sincerely that it will advance the country's war effort. But surely there are better ways to advocate conscription than by belittling the Canadian army, and seeking to create the impression that because the men who are steadily going forward have offered their services voluntarily, Canada is not sending troops overseas.

[Mr. Pouliot.]

Both extremes, for opposite reasons, are helping to create the wholly false impression that Canada is not sending or is not willing to send her men to meet and defeat the enemy overseas. Both, for political ends, are prepared to discredit their own country in the eyes of the world.

These two extremes can never be reconciled. The debate must have made it wholly clear even to those who support either extreme, that the adoption of their views would only serve to weaken, and perhaps to destroy, the national unity which all should wish to see maintained. It would be equally destructive of an effective war effort.

Were this House of Commons, on grounds of national necessity, or for any other reason, obliged to yield to either extreme, many hon. members might well find their present position one of considerable embarrassment. Their embarrassment, however, both in the present and in the future, is more likely to arise, indeed, is, I believe, certain to arise, should they fail to lend their support to a policy which avoids extremes, and which, at this time of war, alone gives hope for the preservation of national unity. National unity, it seems to me, can best be preserved by hon. members giving to the government charged with carrying on Canada's war effort, the support which the government must receive from parliament, if its great responsibilities are to be discharged in a manner which will truly serve the national interest.

If, in reference to the very difficult question of service overseas, anyone can conceive of a policy which is better calculated to serve the national interest than the one the government has formulated, and which is clearly and concisely expressed in the words: "Not necessarily conscription, but conscription if necessary", I shall be first to advocate its acceptance. I can only say that nothing of the kind has been proposed by any hon. member in the course of the debate. Nor do I believe that anything better can be suggested. Indeed, the events of the war, as well as all that has been said in the course of the debate, should have made it wholly apparent that, all circumstances taken into account, it is the only sound policy.

We are not dealing with theories, either of government or of war, upon which, without grave risks to themselves and others, men can afford to continue to differ. We are faced with conditions which actually exist, and which have to be met. They must be met with as large a measure of general consent as may be possible, if both Canada and our allies are not to suffer. It is from this point

of view that, regardless of any position thus far taken with respect to the present bill, I now ask all hon. members to view their obligations alike to their constituencies and to Canada.

I said that objection to the bill had been raised on four grounds. I have dealt with the first two. Those who oppose on other grounds do not differ fundamentally with the policy of the government with respect to service overseas: "Not necessarily conscription but conscription if necessary". But they assert that, if the bill is to receive their support, something more is required. The assurance demanded, in the one case, is that if provision is to be made for the conscription of men for service overseas, then provision must equally be made for what is generally termed "the conscription of wealth"; that the two must go together. That, as I understand it, was the purport of the amendment proposed by the leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation group.

First of all, may I say to my hon. friend the leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation group, and to those who share views similar to his own, that the power to conscript wealth at whatever time, and to whatever extent may be deemed advisable and necessary, is already in the act which the government is asking parliament to amend, not by further limiting its provisions, but by extending their application.

The power to conscript wealth will remain unrestricted. There are no limitations upon this power other than such as may result from the judgment of the government in exercising its discretion. The legislation itself as I have pointed out is enabling legislation, and as respects both the conscription of wealth and conscription of man-power will, if the bill is adopted, remain enabling legislation. The government in both particulars will be free to exercise its discretion as the needs of the war may demand.

I need not, I know, remind hon. members that the ground on which, on its second reading, a bill merits support or rejection, is one of principle. It is not a question of additions to or subtractions from its provisions. These are matters to be dealt with when the bill is in committee. What, so far as principle goes, the government is seeking by the bill is exactly what the leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation implies the government should have, namely, complete freedom, subject to its responsibility to parliament, as respects the application of conscription in any direction. To impose conditions of any kind upon the exercise of the government's discretion, other than such

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as attach to its responsibility to parliament, is to destroy altogether the all-out freedom of action by the administration which it is the principle of the bill to secure.

If this year's budget does not serve to convince hon. members and the people of Canada generally of the government's readiness to conscript whatever wealth is necessary to distribute the burden of Canada's war effort as equitably as possible, it is difficult to imagine what more in the way of assurances to this end would be regarded as adequate.

I come now to the last of the reasons which have been urged by some for not supporting the bill, and by others for hesitating to give their support until the government's exact intentions are more fully known.

From both sides of the house, objection has been raised to the possibility of resort to conscription for overseas service at some future date without a further reference to parliament. When, however, hon. members speak of coming again to parliament, some appear to have one thing in mind; and others quite another.

All are agreed that the present bill, if enacted, will give to the government the power to make conscription applicable to service outside Canada, whenever and to whatever extent in the judgment of the government it is necessary and advisable. Some contend that should the government decide that conscription for overseas service has become necessary and advisable, the government should before any action is taken, announce its decision to parliament, and, at that time, by further legislation, define the terms and conditions of such service, or at least permit a second debate on the question of its immediate application. There are others who do not advocate a second debate on conscription, much less further legislation, but who maintain that a due recognition of the ministry's responsibility to parliament demands that, as soon as possible after the government's decision has been reached, it should be communicated to parliament, and before effect is given thereto, that opportunity should be given hon. members for an expression of their views.

May I say, as emphatically as I can, that in no case would I wish to countenance a second debate on conscription.

In setting forth the reasons why the government had not proceeded by stages, in removing the limitation in the mobilization act with respect to service outside Canada, I made the statement that such a course would not have met the purposes of the plebiscite as outlined in the speech from the throne,