

*Mobilization Act—Mr. Cardin*

from a moral obligation, that there was no legal objection in the way. Why did we state that we wanted to be released from a moral obligation pure and simple? Why did we not tell them that the plebiscite meant conscription? I have no time to go to the record and quote from speeches which the Prime Minister made both in the House of Commons and outside the house stating that the government simply wanted to be released from a moral obligation. We never asked power to abrogate Section 3 of the Mobilization Act.

We are now faced with a measure of conscription for service overseas, resulting from an action which, according to the Prime Minister himself and all those who asked for a "yes" vote on the plebiscite of the 27th of April last, did not mean conscription.

When clause 3 is deleted from the mobilization act, it will stand deleted not only for this government but for any other government that may succeed the present one. It is going to be the law of the land, and any government succeeding the present one, any Prime Minister succeeding the present Prime Minister, will have the law in his hand and will be in a position to apply the principle by a simple order in council which he will have the right to keep in secret drawers in his office. That is the position.

There are those who say, "Well, what is the use of making so much noise? Conscription is not going to be applied and is not necessary." Well, Mr. Speaker, if conscription is not necessary at the present time, why, in the name of God, authorize it? Why interpret the vote on the plebiscite, which was not a vote on conscription, as if it had been a vote on the issue of conscription? If it was the intention why then have they not been frank enough to indicate it to the public? Why did we not ask the people of Canada whether they were in favour of conscription—yes or no? Trusting the people as we should have trusted them, we should not have been afraid of asking the question squarely and without, in any way, avoiding the issue. That is my view. We should have faced the issue squarely. If it was a question of releasing the government from a legal obligation, why not say that the government wanted to know if the people of Canada were ready to delete clause three of the mobilization act? No, it was too clear an issue. We had to adopt another way. After having argued that it was not a question of conscription, it is now desired to interpret the answer as being in favour of conscription. But there is more. It has been said all through the campaign on the plebiscite that parliament would be consulted,

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and that every decision of the government would be taken in the light of its responsibilities to parliament. We told the people that the government would adopt a policy according to the need of the moment, and come before parliament, explain it in black and white, and give the representatives of the country in this house, the advantage of judging the issue on its merit. After all that, what are we doing? We are not doing what we have told the people we would do. We are playing on words.

It was said yesterday that a full discussion of conscription was welcome, that it would give parliament the opportunity to express its will on that very important question. But that is not the question which was placed before the electors. We said to the electors, that in the light of a new situation that might arise we would later on adopt the required policy. That is what the Prime Minister said on February 25 last, "Later on, when the need is apparent, when the necessity is clear to everyone, in the light of the information that will be given to us by the military authorities, the government will take its stand and will come before parliament with the reasons justifying the attitude." "Later on" has become to-day.

I am told I used the wrong expression in my letter of resignation in saying that a new policy had been adopted. I am perfectly justified, I claim, in saying that this is a new policy. We have not respected the pledge which we gave to the electors during the campaign on the plebiscite. We said action would be taken when the necessity would have arisen later on, and now we are interpreting it as meaning "to-day". And legislation is presented to do away with a legal objection, when we told the electors that there was no legal objection. We have discovered an objection since the plebiscite, since the majority of the country has voted yes, and the province of Quebec alone voted no. The new legal objection, is clause three. That is not a great discovery. It has existed in our legislation for a very long time. We should have been frank enough to say to the electors of Canada, "After you have freed us from our pledges during the campaign, we propose to abolish and to delete clause three of the National Resources Mobilization Act." That is what we should have said, but we did not say it. We said to the electors, "The government is going to wait until a new situation arises, until new conditions prevail, to adopt the policy which should be adopted to meet the situation, and then we will come before parliament." There are many reasons, Mr. Speaker, which convince me that I was right in stating in my letter that the policy