

"You have asked for an assurance that under no circumstances will conscription be undertaken or carried out. As I stated to you at our interview, I must decline to give any such assurance. I hope that conscription may not be necessary, but if it should prove the only effective method to preserve the existence of the State and of the institutions and liberties which we enjoy, I should consider it necessary and I should not hesitate to act accordingly" (a).

So we may take it that, notwithstanding the failure in recruiting, Sir Robert did not as yet see any propriety in conscription, and the question is: Did he ever become convinced that conscription in Canada was

"the only effective method to preserve the existence of the State?"

He did not. The British authorities told him—what indeed he himself, and all of us who follow events well knew—that the most effective method was "production, more production, and still more production."

**SIR ROBERT'S REASONS.**—Early in February, Sir Robert left for England. Until then, we may assume that his opinion as to conscription remained unaltered, for not another syllable on the subject escaped his lips. He returned on the 14th May, and four days afterwards he introduced the conscription bill. What was the reason for the change? If we look at his introducing speech (June 11), we find him saying:

" . . . I am in a position to assure the House and the country that the need of reinforcements is urgent, insistent and imperative. The effort of Russia is paralyzed for the present—no one knows for how long. The effort of the United States is only beginning" (b).

He said that

"reinforcements must be obtained or the divisions must dwindle."

He said that unless reinforced, the troops at the front would deem themselves "deserted and betrayed." But with the exception of Russia's partial paralysis and the accession of the United States with its almost inexhaustible supply of men, as quickly available as ours, the conditions were similar to those which existed two months before when Sir Robert thought and hoped that conscription was not and would not be appropriate.

Sir Robert's supporters suggested that he was possessed of very special, and startlingly serious, information which he was not at liberty to divulge. For the moment, the suggestion had some effect. We

(a) *Quoted in Hansard, 1917, p. 2278.*

(b) *Hansard, p. 2278.*