

ad absurdum. If that is not reducing to the absurd the consequences of government by the people, then I have no comprehension of what the absurd means.

Let us understand each other about government by the people. Under our constitution we have government by the people in this sense: that it belongs absolutely to the people, to determine who shall govern them. But it is a novel proposition that government by the people necessarily involves enactment of legislation by the people themselves, and that is in practical effect what is suggested by this referendum. There may be circumstances when it is proper to do that. But now, when the whole question involved is not, mind you, whether the people ought to do a duty, but whether there ought to be a law enacted to compel them to do that duty, it is proposed that we should go out and ask the people, who do not want to be compelled, if they want to be compelled. Surely, if the people want to be compelled it is the clearest evidence that they do not need to be compelled; for if they do want to be compelled they will go out and do the duty without compulsion. So, when you ask the question, you must assume that they do not want to do the duty. Therefore, the proposal is that we should go out and say to them: Gentlemen, you do not want to go to the war; will you be good enough to tell us if you want us to make a law to compel you to go to the war you do not want to go to? What answer is expected, I do not know.

It may be said that it is the majority of the people who would determine that question; and I quite understand that a large part of the majority will not be liable or not unwilling to go to the war. Their votes will compel the liable but unwilling, and what I am suggesting is not true as an absolute proposition governing the whole of the people. But it remains true that in the majority, whichever way it votes—and certainly in the majority if you have a majority saying they do not want a law to compel those who do not want to go to the war to go—you will have the vote of every man who does not want to go to the war; you will have the vote of every man who, if any body ought to be compelled, is the man who ought to be compelled to go to the war. And you are told that this is a necessary consequence of democratic institutions. If I were called upon to make an attack upon government by the democracy, I do not think I could find a stronger argument than to point

to that as one of its necessary consequences. We are asked to trust the people. Mr. Speaker, I trust the people; I trust the people far and beyond where many hon. gentlemen on the other side trust them. I trust them miles beyond where my hon. friend from Montcalm trusts them. He gave us a pathetic description of the efforts that would have to be made to enforce this law and of the ways that people would find to evade it. And I must pay him—I wonder if it is safe to call it the compliment—of saying that he gave us some of the most original law it has ever been my fortune to listen to. There are many things in which originality is a very good quality. I do not want to discuss at the moment how far originality in law is a good quality; but I give the hon. gentleman credit for producing some most original law. He has laboured to show how easy it is for the people of Canada—who, of course, according to him, do not want to obey the law—to evade the law. I trust the people more than he does. I trust the people that, after this law shall have been enacted, and when they understand and know just what it is and just how it operates, they will recognize it as the proper method of providing both that those who should not go to the war shall be exempt from pressure to go, and that those who should go shall come forward to do their duty. I have not the apprehension the hon. gentleman has expressed, for I trust the people. I trust to their mature judgment; I trust them when they shall have had time to reflect. But

9 p.m. the suggestion is that we do not trust the people because we will not take their judgment at the first moment when a proposition of this kind is made to them, when they are unprepared for it, ill-informed or mis-informed upon it. Reproaches have been cast upon the Government in this matter, I am not concerned about that, because I think we have come to the day when the personal reproach that an individual may earn, and the question whether a particular Government is deserving of condemnation or the contrary, or whether a particular party has always been on right lines, or the contrary, are matters of absolutely no consequence. I am quite satisfied that the people of Canada are not in the remotest degree interested to-day in the past sins or past virtues of the existing Government or of the present party to which I have the honour to belong, nor in those of the party of hon. gentlemen opposite. Whether the people of Canada are for this measure or against it, there is