

*Plebiscite Act*

strong and emphatic language used by the leader of the Conservative party pledging all his party in exactly the same way as I was pledging mine. It was not as I say in reference to not possessing the power that any pledge was given, but having the power, that the power would not be exercised in one particular; that commitment was made. The pledge admitted the power, if you wish, but the commitment was that that power would not be exercised in one form or particular, namely, raising men for military service overseas by conscription. The commitment was a commitment restricting the methods of raising men for military service. The restriction was as to raising men by conscription for military service overseas.

Now the hon. leader of the opposition seeks to-night to make out that the question as it is worded here is related to the law or to the fact. It is not related to the law or to the fact at all; it is related to a commitment that was made with respect to whatever law there might be or whatever the fact might be. A commitment that no matter whatever power the government had, it would not exercise that power with respect to men to be sent overseas if the method to be employed was to be the method of conscription. In other words, that as far as service overseas was concerned that was to be by voluntary enlistment, not by enlistment under coercion or conscription. That was a commitment. That is the commitment. It is that commitment that the government is asking to be freed from. That commitment does not apply to the use of conscription generally; we have conscription with respect to the raising of men for service in Canada; this parliament itself has enacted a measure which contains the power of the use of compulsion for military service. No exception was taken by the government to that; in fact the government brought forward the measure. The commitment that was made at the time of the general election was not against applying compulsory service for the defence of Canada within Canada; it was only in relation to service overseas. That is why I said the other night that if to-morrow it became necessary to exercise compulsion in the matter of protecting our shores to the extent of our armed forces going out in the Pacific beyond Queen Charlotte island, or to Alaska, or to Labrador or Newfoundland, I would not hesitate one moment in using the War Measures Act to see that conscription was enforced for that purpose were such a step necessary. That would not be violating the commitment made. The commitment was not made with respect to the protection of our own shores; it was made with respect to sending men

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

overseas; everyone so understood it, and it was to that extent that the law and the fact was limited and that the government at the present time is limited.

If we attached no importance whatsoever to a solemn pledge given in relation to this particular war, as respects one aspect and one phase of our war effort, then I might join as my hon. friend is prepared to do now, but was not prepared to do at the time he asked the people to return him to parliament; we might say, as he does, discount all that and pay no further attention to it. But we are not prepared so to do; we are going to stand by the pledge we have made until the people themselves release us from it. But we are going to tell the people that we believe it is in their own interest that the government should be released from that pledge or commitment. That is the simple question we are putting before them, the one and only question:

Are you in favour of releasing the government from any obligation arising out of—

Not the law, not the fact, but—

—any past commitments—

—and “any past commitments” and “any” covers everything that can be construed as a commitment.

—restricting the methods of raising men for military service.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Overseas; that is the point.

An hon. MEMBER: Put the word “overseas” in.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING:—“arising out of any past commitments restricting the methods of raising men for military service.” “Any” covers everything, overseas, and all else. What more could any one wish for? That is the whole purpose. So that there can be no doubt whatsoever with respect to any commitment that has been made, whether it relates to any theatre of war or any part of the world, or any aspect of the war service, it covers everything. That is as clear as it possibly can be, and I am saying it as emphatically as I can.

I agree with those who have spoken to-night as to the form of the ballot and who have said that the simpler it can be made the better. I so expressed myself to the minister when I saw what the committee had recommended, but when I heard that the special committee, composed of members of all parties in the house, were unanimously of the view, after having heard the chief electoral officer, that this form of ballot which is now on the order paper was preferable, I said nothing further about it. And for the same reason I thought I would refrain from