

people everywhere that compulsory military services, the bane of continental Europe, had never been thought of in Great Britain, and that even the gigantic struggle against Napoleon had been fought on the purely voluntary system.

"At the same time it must be pointed out that in Great Britain, for some years before the war, in view of the immensity of war preparations amongst all the nations of the continent, the question of conscription was seriously and increasingly discussed in Parliament and in the press, so that was at last when a measure to that effect was introduced by the Government it came as no surprise. It found the people prepared, and yet even then strong protests were heard from many classes of the community.

"Very different was the introduction of conscription in Canada. It came as a complete surprise. It never had been discussed in Parliament, and the voice of the press had been strong against it. In the month of July, 1916, such an important paper as the *Toronto Globe* deprecated the very idea of conscription.

Premier on Conscription

"No less emphatic had been the language of the Government. At the beginning of the session of 1916, in answer to my inquiry whether the promise recently made by the prime minister of enlisting 500,000 men meant conscription, he answered in these words:

"My right honorable friend has alluded to conscription—to the idea in this country or elsewhere that there may be conscription in Canada. In speaking in the first two or three months of this war I made it clear to the people of Canada that we did not propose conscription. I repeat that announcement to-day with emphasis."

"Equally emphatic and unqualified were my own declarations on the subject.

"Throughout the whole campaign of 1910 and 1911, I may recall that the Nationalist-Conservative alliance which opposed the naval policy of the Liberal Government of that time asserted that such a policy meant conscription. Again and again after the outbreak of the present war I insisted that conscription should not be introduced in Canada. Such was my position when the Government reversed its attitude, and, without warning, introduced this military service act.

"To force such a drastic measure upon a people thus unprepared and against repeated assurances to the contrary, was neither wise nor prudent, nor effective. It may bring men to the ranks, but it will not infuse into the whole body of the nation that spirit of enthusiasm and determination which is more than half the battle. It will create and intensify division where unity of purpose is essential.

Persuasion Rather Than Coercion

"I am only too well aware that the views which I here present have not met with universal acceptance, even in the party to which I belong, but even yet I hold that to coerce when persuasion has not been attempted is not sound policy, and in this I appeal to the impartial judgment of all Canadians.

"In combating the policy of conscription, all that I asked was that a measure of such moment should not be enforced by Parliament without an appeal to the people. I supported a referendum for the reason that the referendum is the most advanced, the most modern method of consultation of the people, without the complications inseparable from a general election. A referendum has also been asked on this very question by organized labor. My request was denied.

"I appeal with great confidence to the fair judgment of the country that the introduction of conscription at this juncture and in the manner above described was a grave error, if it is remembered that the supreme object should have been and still should be to bring all classes of the community to hearty co-operation in the task which we assumed.