

# CONSCRIPTION, WHY, WHAT, HOW

## A Clear Presentation of the Problem about which so many People are Talking

By A MILITARY MAN

Editor's Note: The Ex-Minister of Militia has publicly advocated conscription. This article may interest those who think he is right.

CONSCRIPTION has not yet become effective in Canada, but every male inhabitant between the ages of 18 and 60 who is not enrolled in the active militia is, with a few exceptions, grouped into a reserve. The prescribing of a period of service for this reserve is legally within the discretion of the military authorities. Actually, however, the organization of this reserve, or conscription, in Canada is impossible without an election, without taking it to the people, and this is a situation fraught with serious consequences.

The order in which the male population may be called to the colours begins with the young unmarried (18-30) and progresses through the older unmarried (30-45) and the married (18-45) to the old, married or single (45-60). Now why have the men of Canada been arranged in this order? Because it was believed that comparatively few would ever have to make the supreme sacrifice, and it was decided that these should be the ones with the smallest family responsibilities. But is a nation justified in putting the family responsibilities of its citizens ahead of the ultimate best for its people? The statesman worthy the name is building for generations yet unborn, and just as truly as the civilization of a man may be gauged by the extent of his provision for the future, so may the wisdom of a national policy. We believe, and will try to show, that Canada has been committed to the adoption of a short-sighted policy in her conscription terms, and that this is true with regard to both the method of procedure and the things to which conscription is to be applied.

Indeed it is fortunate for Canada that she did not enforce conscription under the terms to which she was, and still is, committed at the opening of hostilities. That system, only the best, and unmarried first, robs the future of a virile element which it sorely needs and is fair neither to the individual, the family, or the race. For a nation to carry this principle to the extent of first conscripting all the members of this class up to the age of 45 is, in the event of a world war, criminally short-sighted. Moreover, it would have to do it in face of the fact that in no "compulsory-service" country is there this discrimination against the unmarried man.

Why do we hear the word conscription? Voluntary effort has been depended upon for more than two years. Those who are attracted by the love of travel and adventure, those who are out of work and need a job, those in whom patriotism is a compelling force, those who are moved to action by emotional appeals, and those who feel that it is their solemn duty to go have already enlisted. Who are left? Slackers, the physically unfit, those whose family responsibilities have seemed to them imperative, and those whom Science and Industry can not spare. But conscription can not take the physically unfit, and the latter classes overlap and include the army at home which is essential to the success of the army in the field. Conscription, as a last resort, is therefore aimed principally at slackers.

In England, a properly conducted census at the time conscription was decided upon would have reached so large a portion of this guilty class as to make any general conscription unnecessary, for the working of the voluntary system had so thoroughly combed the population that the administration of the general conscription law resulted in a confusion of exemptions and netted a scant three hundred thousand men. England, with a population of forty-five million, raised an army of something less than four million volunteers, the exact figures are difficult of access. Canada has secured nearly four hundred thousand from a population of less than eight million. England's percentage is about 7 or 8, Canada's about 5. Conditions in the two countries credit England with by far the larger proportion of unemployed and unproductive, and partly explain a discrepancy which might be assigned solely to the relative imminence of the struggle in which the empire is engaged. Our percentage is high enough, however, so that conscription here is practically a last resort and can therefore claim few of the advantages which make proper conscription advisable as a principle at the opening of hostilities. Then, if it is administered with the idea of deciding where the manhood of a nation is best employed, it has the value of making every individual a partner in the nation of which he owns a share. The supreme difficulty is the fact that peoples were not taken into active partnership before the war began.

But why, when conscription is mentioned, do we think of men only? Canada is now spending daily one or two hundred lives and a million of dollars.

Lives and dollars, each essential as the other, but the lives are ours and the dollars those of a coming generation. Promises to let our children pay are buying bullets, but promises to let our children die won't stop them. We need the men right now. This is why we hear of conscripting men only. We borrow the money, but aren't we borrowing life as well?

Professor Kellogg has said: "When a man of character and ability gives his life to his nation he gives more than himself. He gives the long line, the ever widening wedge of those who would be his descendants. In the long run those may have greater potential value than any political end they have helped to accomplish." Thus it has been estimated that Pasteur, through his discovery of methods of preventing and curing anthrax, silkworm disease, and chicken cholera, is adding annually to the wealth of France an amount equivalent to the entire indemnity paid by France to Germany after the war of 1870.

We must grant that we are borrowing from the future, borrowing money which the future may be able to repay, borrowing life blood which the future will not be able to replace. Why is it that a Government which handles its citizens with utter disregard of their individual fortunes, which feels free to demand the lives of whom it will, will not ease the financial burden it is shaping for the shoulders of the future by levying on the surplus of the present? Money seems to be as essential as blood; why borrow it, and use, destroy, and rob the future of the other?

A MAN gives his pocket book and the Government promises to give it back to him intact and pay him for the privilege of using its contents; a man gives himself and the Government sends him into the trenches at his own risk! Why does the Government furnish as the only outlet for the patriotism of its citizens the giving up of life? If this is the supreme sacrifice why not ask first for the sacrifice of lesser things?

A woman empties her stocking, and receives a bond, a promise to repay both principal and interest. She gives up her husband and the father of her children, and receives—what? Absurd interest, as we shall show, and probably no principal. For if he is killed she loses the principal, and if she marries again she loses the interest.



Then presently the fire burns down into ashes and the night comes and the dark. And where the grain once stood and the meadows smiled in the sun, the wolves shall hunt again in the gloom of the forest. And where the homestead was there will be graves. Such is the interpretation of war.

—Racey in Montreal Star.

What is the hard cold cash value of a man? We must confine ourselves to this; his sacrifice and hers, the heart aches, lonely vigils, must be left behind a kindly veil. A voluntarily gives \$15,000 to the nation, B gives \$60,000. The nation pays A the yearly sum of \$750, five per cent., and contracts to return the \$15,000 at a definite future date. To B it pays \$3,000 yearly, also five per cent., and promises him the return of his \$60,000. Mrs. C's husband volun-

teers, gives his life. He has been earning \$750 a year and is therefore worth as much to his wife in cold cash as the money upon which A earns his \$750 a year, or \$15,000. The nation takes him, if there is nothing the matter with him, and pays her \$240 a year, separation allowance at the rate of 1.6 per cent. Mrs. D's husband, a man with a yearly salary of \$3,000 and therefore worth \$60,000 to his wife, volunteers, and the nation pays her \$240 a year, separation allowance at the rate of less than half of one per cent. Suppose the Government should announce that any man subscribing over \$5,000 to a war loan would receive a "separation allowance" from his money of \$240 a year, irrespective of the amount he gave; that B with his 60 thousand-dollar bonds would receive a "separation allowance" from his money at the rate of less than half of one per cent. a year. How many voluntary subscriptions do you think it would receive? Why was the subscription limit placed at \$5,000? Primarily because every one of Canada's 375,000 volunteers who has ever earned more than a dollar a day is worth more than \$5,000 to his family.

But the nation sends C and D, the men who volunteered, where the chances are in favour of their being killed, and if they are, increases the yearly sum payable to their wives from a separation allowance of \$240 a year to a pension of \$384 a year. This is a large increase, 75 per cent., but the men are now where they can not help their wives out of their own salaries, so that the nation they gave their lives for is really giving the bereaved families less than it did when the breadwinners were alive. Six months ago the conditions were deplorably worse. Then our Government was actually committed to a policy of cutting down the amount payable to the soldiers' widows from \$240 a year to \$226 or even \$132, cuts of 5 and 45 per cent., respectively, all depending upon where the husbands happened to get killed, and this penalty was further increased by the fact that the man's salary was also stopped. These conditions are happily past but their very alteration proves that changes are not impossible.

Suppose the Government should announce that it would gamble with the monies it received from A and B, and that in case of the probable loss of the principal it would compensate them for the loss of their money by increasing the interest (under the present pension system B would still receive less than one per cent.), but would stop paying this if they died or married again. Can you imagine the result? But why shouldn't this be done? Dare we admit that conscription of wealth in the form of the following announcement:

The Government sees injustice in waste of life and inviolability of money, and will henceforth place equal premiums upon the money which it borrows and upon the lives it uses.

would set in motion forces that would stop the war?

LET us look at it in two ways: If nations had to reimburse the families of their casualties, place the same premium on the lives used up as they are putting on the money spent, the additional outlay to date would be so many times the growing total as to make the nations stop. If nations were to cut the interest on their bonds and jeopardize their safety, place the same premium on the money spent as they are putting on the life they use, they would get no more voluntary money. We must admit the truth of this indictment. In either of the cases mentioned, or in a compromise between the two, wealth would have to be conscripted. If this can not be done, if pocket-books "must" be inviolate, violate them. If the principles at stake will not stand this test then let its operation free the manhood of the world from their supreme self-sacrifice.

The results aimed at by those who favour conscription can now be better secured by registration and selection, for, if the lack of visible means of support means vagrancy and is amenable to civil law in times of peace, surely the lack of persons to support

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