

insists on the question being phrased in the general term "any . . . commitment," instead of asking to be relieved from the specific commitment which he has in mind, which we all have in mind, and which we all know this question has reference to?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Yes, I will take the committee into my confidence, and say that the whole is greater than any part; that it includes everything. This precludes the possibility of anyone saying that the government is trying to get away with one thing while keeping back conscription or something else in the nature of a commitment. It is because the government wants to be perfectly straightforward in the matter and to permit of no shadow of doubt with respect to its intentions.

Something has been said about the question of conscription not being an issue. I have pointed out, time and again, that were this house to-day to begin to discuss the question of conscription, hon. members seated on this side of the chamber who are prepared to respect the pledge which was given in the last general election and at different times would rise and say, "We are not in a position to discuss conscription on its merits, because conscription for service overseas was ruled out of consideration by the commitment which was made by the government in the last general election and at other times." So would hon. gentlemen opposite if they were to honour the pledge and the commitment which was made by their leader with respect to conscription. So that the question of conscription is not the issue. The question of conscription may come up, perhaps will come up, after the plebiscite has been passed. If it comes up, then it will become an issue which can be debated in this house, which is the proper place in which to debate it. It is not an issue to be debated by people on the hustings. If conscription were an issue in this plebiscite the government would be placing upon the people of Canada to-day the duty of making a military and political decision. Surely that is clear. That is the thing we have been seeking to avoid; we have been seeking to avoid putting upon the people a responsibility which they are not in a position to exercise. How can the people say whether or not conscription is necessary, whether it should be resorted to or not resorted to, when they do not know all the circumstances that must be taken into account in regard to a matter of the kind? But the government knows them.

Mr. ROWE: Hear, hear.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: My hon. friend says "hear, hear." Certainly the government

knows them and will continue to know them as the war progresses; and the government will take such action as it thinks advisable to take in the light of the knowledge which it has. But that knowledge will not be concerned with one single factor only; it will be in regard to every single factor that should be taken into account in making Canada's war effort as effective and complete as it can possibly be made.

Mr. ROWE: I did not wish to interrupt the Prime Minister but I should like to ask him a question. In view of the fact that it is generally recognized that the government has that knowledge, that no other body in the dominion has, and will have knowledge of the ever-darkening hours from now on; in view of the fact, further, that the Prime Minister has so carefully avoided telling the people of the country what he will do if they say yes to this somewhat misleading question, what will the government say?

Some hon. MEMBERS: Oh, oh.

Mr. ROWE: What will the government say, if the people say no? Will they virtually take us out of the war by putting a stop to the sending of reinforcements overseas to the boys who are fighting with their backs to the wall now, if the people say no?

Some hon. MEMBERS: Oh, oh.

Mr. ROWE: My hon. friends interrupt, but they will answer another body some day if the people say no.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: The trouble with my hon. friend is that he identifies Canada's whole war effort with one single thing, namely, conscription for overseas service regardless of how much else there may be or how little needed conscription itself may be to secure the men necessary for service overseas. May I say this to him—and this is one reason why I want to get rid of the commitment that is standing where it is. That commitment stands to-day like a barn door against which my hon. friend and those who talk like him can keep on hammering and making a noise; but once that commitment which precludes the exercise of conscription, if necessary, is taken out of the way, they will be striking at an open door when they discuss what the government may or may not do. I can only say to my hon. friend, with respect to what the government will do after the plebiscite has been decided one way or the other, that the government will make its policy known in due course in the light of all circumstances as they may then exist.

Mr. ROWE: In view of the fact that my question was not answered, and the Prime