

C 270110

CANADA AND THE WAR

### How Canadian Unity Might Have Been Destroyed.

It will add to our understanding of what is essential to the prosecution of Canada's war effort if we recognize, at once, that this demonstration of unity, in Parliament, on the part of the people's representatives, and, in the province of Quebec, by the people themselves, was not born of the moment, and did not arise wholly of itself. It was the result, in no uncertain measure, of the known policies of the present administration, policies which, over many years, in matters of war and peace, have been clearly shown to be in accord with the will of the Canadian people.

That unity did not come from committing Canada to war before Parliament had made its decision. It was not brought about by agreeing to send expeditionary forces overseas, before Parliament had decided that Canada should participate in war, and had appropriated moneys for its prosecution. It was not brought about by the government seeking from Parliament, in time of peace, the appropriation of huge sums of money for military expenditures in preparation for Canada's participation in a European war. Our unity was not maintained by committing Canada to fight in Europe, before, or at the time of the Munich conferences, or even after Czechoslovakia was invaded, when, as we now know, the British government itself was unwilling to take that step. It was not achieved by declaring that, without consulting either the Parliament or the people of Canada, the government would commit this country to fight at any time, at any place, in any cause, if Britain went to war. Least of all was it brought about by pledges to extend the life of Parliament in a time of war without any reference to the people, or to form a so-called "national" government that might enforce conscription

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or disfranchise many classes of Canadian citizens. The memories of those experiences in the last war are still bitter in the minds of the Canadian people.

### How Canadian Unity Was Achieved.

Unity was made possible by none of these things. On the other hand, it was made possible, and it was achieved by the assurances given the people of Canada, year in and year out, that if my colleagues and I could prevent it, none of these things would happen. We were determined that Parliament, or the people themselves, would decide whether Canada should participate in war. That assurance I gave the Canadian people repeatedly. I kept that promise. And I held this country to that course, steadfastly, patiently, and honourably, in spite of criticism, in spite of abuse, and in spite of aggressive demands that I should break so solemn a trust.

I knew as you must know, that, without disastrous results, we could not have entered the war, except as a united nation. I know, and you know that we cannot continue at war, at least with the strength we all desire, except as a united nation. I believe that every fair-minded citizen will agree that the policies which have united Canada are the policies which will keep our country united. Extreme measures used by men of extreme views—whatever means and methods may be taken to enforce them—will only serve to divide and destroy what is most essential in the prosecution of the war—the support, by the people at large, of Canada's war effort.

### Necessary Freedom of Action Carefully Safeguarded.

In September last, in asserting in Parliament, on your behalf, the constitutional right of the people to select their

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W.L.M. King Papers, Memoranda and Notes, 1940-1950,  
MG 26 J 4, Volume 385, pages C269841-C270648

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