

followers he had about him from Quebec and made Secretary of State for Canada. That hon. gentleman sent a letter to the Prime Minister a few days ago just on this point, and in order that hon. gentlemen opposite and on my own side of the House may know that that gentleman concurs exactly in what I have stated, I will read his letter to the Prime Minister:

Dear Sir Robert,

On the 18th of May last when you acquainted the House with your intention presenting a Bill providing for compulsory service during the present war.

From the moment you submitted your intention to the Council, I drew your attention to its extreme gravity and to the consequences which, to my mind, would follow.

I have, however, thought it my duty in these critical times, to abstain from any hasty decision, as long as I could entertain the hope that these considerations, as well as the very serious events which were meanwhile developing, would induce you to modify, if not to completely change your decision.

I cannot now expect that my hope will be realized; you have in fact decided to introduce, without further delay, your proposed Bill, and have it passed during this session.

Therefore, I feel bound to sever my connection with the Cabinet on this question.

I have always thought, and do yet think, that the best interests of Canada make it a duty for this country to give to the cause of the allies its most generous support. But to do this, I cannot concur in any measure which in my estimation imperils national unity. The proposed law, I have every reason to fear, threatens to destroy this unity, and to give rise throughout the country to deep internal divisions of long duration, and even detrimental to the needs of the present moment. Indeed it is better to keep the country united in the present effort than to attempt a mightier one at the cost of national disruption.

I, therefore, find myself unable to approve of the intended law, and the only course open to me is to offer my resignation as a minister of the Crown.

That, Sir, is carrying out precisely what my own view is on that point and connecting that up with what I have already said, I think it is the duty of this country, and that we are doing our full duty, when, in the first instance, we exhaust every legitimate effort to get the number of men we want by the voluntary system, and give the voluntary system a fair show. If finally it is proved to us that that cannot be carried out, it will then be time enough to resort to the compulsory system.

The Minister of Labour talked lightly of our duty in the matter of conscription. I want to bring home to this House and to this minister that it is not a light matter to force anybody to go to the front, and perhaps be shot. I have, perhaps, as much interest as any man in this House in the

[Mr. McKenzie.]

winning of the war. I do not come to this House with any handicap that anybody can throw slurs at my loyalty or the country or people from which I sprang. I stand upon as good a foundation from the standpoint of loyalty and the history of my people, as any man in this House. Therefore I do not fear any taunts or slurs being thrown at me in connection with my loyalty to my King and country. But, at the same time, there is a duty devolving upon us to accomplish this end, and to accomplish it in the easiest possible way, and in the way that will bring least responsibility and heart rending to ourselves and to the country in days to come. A young man may be married, with two or three children around him. He volunteers to go to the front. That is his own act, we are glad that he does it, and we pray that he may return happy to his wife and family. But if anything happens to him, if he is shot down and leaves a widow and two or three little orphans, we have not any great responsibility about it, in a way, because he is a volunteer, he went himself, and it has been his own free voluntary act that has brought that condition about. But if we send an officer of the Crown into that house and tear that man away from his wife and his children and send him to the front and he is shot, it comes home to us with trying feelings indeed that we are responsible for sending the officer after him; we are responsible for sending him to the front; we are responsible for throwing his children upon the mercy of the cold charity of this country, and leaving his wife a widow. These are the conditions that come about in this country, and must of necessity come about, by a compulsory system. Let me impress upon the House and upon you, Sir, that it is only when there is the clearest possible evidence that there is no escaping from compulsory service, that it should be adopted in this or any other country. I submit to you that if the voluntary system had received a fair trial and a fair start in this country, there would be no necessity whatever to resort to means such as the effect of the Bill which is now before the House should it become law. I submit to you, Sir, that voluntary enlistment did not receive a fair show at the hands of our hon. friends. I submit to you that from the very beginning of the war, throughout every day and every month of it from the day of the declaration of war down to this day, hon. gentlemen opposite, who are supporters of the Government and who are members of the Government, were