

*War Effort—Government Policy*

evidence which I think has been adduced rather plentifully since we came to attend this session.

Any member of parliament in this present critical session must keep his eye on the ball. The ball, in this instance, is reinforcements for the infantry section of the Canadian Army overseas. This is definitely a war session, and has been called together to deal with a specific war problem. That problem is the one of determining how to obtain trained infantrymen urgently needed by the sons of Canada who are now desperately fighting on the battle front. We want men who are physically qualified and properly trained to fight as infantrymen. We want them now, as soon as possible. There is no time to think about political considerations. That which might be politically expedient must be disregarded in the interests of what is nationally expedient.

Where can be found the kind of men we need? The only men really accessible are the N.R.M.A. men. Of these, some 16,000 acceptably qualified are in Canada, and 8,000 are ready to move at once. However, up to the present time these 16,000 N.R.M.A. men in large measure have failed to volunteer. Canada has had to find an effective means of rendering immediately available 16,000 N.R.M.A. men.

In Colonel Ralston's opinion the only means was conscription. Many of the cabinet ministers agreed with him. Other cabinet ministers were determined that conscription should not be used. However, Colonel Ralston was so confident that he was right that he left the cabinet over the question: Shall conscription be used to render available for service overseas Canadian soldiers known as N.R.M.A. men?

That, Mr. Speaker, is the situation as I interpret it up to the present time. General McNaughton was called to the cabinet because he declared he believed that the voluntary method would succeed. The high court of parliament was called to hear the evidence on the question of conscription for overseas service. Members of parliament were divided on the question. Most of them have exceedingly stern attitudes either for or against. During my nine years in the House of Commons I have never known a time when I have seen men so stern either for or against a question as are the men I meet in the corridors to-day.

This is the point which must be borne in mind. There is a violent clash of opinion as to the advisability or otherwise of using conscription to send N.R.M.A. men overseas.

[Mr. Blackmore.]

Likewise, Canadian voters are sternly divided. Very soon after parliament assembled the new Minister of National Defence, Mr. McNaughton, confessed, apparently, that under circumstances prevailing at the present time the voluntary system simply would not get the required number of men in time. Therefore he presumably recommended to the government that conscription be used until 16,000 suitable men were obtained. The government passed an order in council empowering General McNaughton to raise 16,000 men, by conscription if necessary.

The Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Mackenzie King), has introduced a resolution stating that this house will aid the government in its policy of maintaining a vigorous war effort. As I see it, what the individual member of parliament must decide is this: Shall I vote to support the application of conscription at the present time, so as to enable Canada to send overseas the 16,000 N.R.M.A. men so sorely needed as infantrymen in the battle zone—yes or no? I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the question is just as simple as that, shorn of all the confusion engendered.

Here is a Canadian government that has passed an order in council to conscript, if needs be, 16,000 N.R.M.A. men. I may or may not like the government. I may or may not have confidence in it. I may say that I have not confidence in it. I may or may not favour its general policies on various things that it has done while in office in war time or in pre-war time—and in a general way I may say that I personally do not approve the policies which it has followed either before the war or during the war. I may or may not agree with its future proposals during the remaining war years, or with its proposals for the post-war years. But the question to-night is: Do I agree with its decision on conscription now, to send 16,000 suitable men overseas to reinforce in time the sons of Canada whose lives and whose cause are at stake in the heat of action right now. The answer which I as one member give to my country, to the anguished loved ones of my country, to the noble boys who have already suffered and some of whom have died, and to their sorrowing bereaved ones is: Yes, I will. I think, Mr. Speaker, that my answer must be just that if I am to prove myself worthy of the responsibility which I bear as one member of this house in this critical year of 1944. Disregarding all other considerations I will vote "yes" in support of the resolution to apply conscription to certain N.R.M.A. men.