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*Article
by Mackenzie King*

CONSCRIPTION IN CANADA

The passage of the Conscription Bill through the lower house of the Canadian Parliament by a vote of 118 to 55 is an event of more than mere military significance.

This bill, "the Military Service Act of 1917," includes men between the ages of twenty and forty-five. Men between twenty and thirty-five are to be called first.

Roughly speaking, the Canadian population of, say, 8,000,000 is about a quarter French. Most of the French-Canadians live in the Province of Quebec, but there are a few hundred thousand in the Provinces of Ontario and Manitoba.

When the war broke out, it was announced that Canadian military service would remain voluntary. Under that pledge the number of men to be enlisted for overseas service was raised gradually from 20,000 to 500,000.

When in January, 1916, Parliament allowed the full increase, Sir Robert Borden, the Conservative Prime Minister, said: "In speaking in the first three months of the war, I made it clear to the people of Canada that we did not propose any conscription. I repeat that announcement with emphasis to-day." In his turn, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, leader of the Liberal party, and the most distinguished of French-Canadians, declared that "conscription has come in England, but conscription is not to come in Canada." In the debate the other day Sir Wilfrid said no word against conscription, but his position regarding it may be thus summarized: He has no desire to diminish the numbers of those to be sent abroad, but he urges that the extra force to be raised by conscription can be raised by the present volunteer system. Moreover, he points out, under existing law the Government's actual power is limited to repel "invasion" and to "the defense of Canada," and it has no power to conscript for service abroad; for the present Parliament, therefore, to give the Government that power would not be just, because with its many vacancies the present Parliament does not fully represent the people's will. Furthermore, the Constitution fixes the life of a Parliament at five years, and the present Parliament's life has been extended a year on the understanding that there was to be no conscription. Finally, as British procedure provides for an appeal to the people where important issues arise on which they have not been consulted, the present Parliament's attempt violates constitutional right. Hence the Government should have appealed to the people. But Sir Wilfrid's proposal of a referendum was defeated by a majority of 49.

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