

truth guarding the ramparts of Canada, and may I say to my hon. friend, guarding the entrance to the St. Lawrence.

I doubt if foreign service is actually possible in this war. I doubt the accuracy of the term because the armies of Canada, on the land, in the air and on the sea, no matter where they may be and no matter where they fight, if it is in north Africa, England, France, Germany or Russia, are defending Canada.

I can say with truth and enthusiasm that there is no class in our community to whom the freedom of this country, the liberty of its people, and the preservation of our ancestral lands are more dear than to my French-Canadian friends. So let us realize that we are all together in this war and that this little distinction of race is a very small matter in view of the danger that our country is facing and the tremendous responsibilities which we have undertaken.

There are periods in the life of a nation when the interests of the state become more important to the individual than his own ambitions and his own future. There are times when men's souls are stirred to enthusiasm and to self-sacrifice. This is one of those periods in the history of Canada. When Canada declared war against Germany in September, 1939, she staked her national existence on the success of her arms and on the fighting qualities of her associates, and instinctively our people everywhere—I do not care whether they came from the conscriptionist districts or the non-conscriptionist districts—recognized the national danger and offered themselves, their services and their property in defence of the state. In periods such as this and in the act that we are now performing, conscience should take command. I hope that it is with a full realization of the solemnity of this moment that we of the House of Commons approach the problems involved in and surrounding this bill. It is with a profound sense of responsibility that I attempt to discuss the measure in this house.

The bill itself, in my judgment, presents almost no problems, and for the simple reason that it has in substance already been approved by a nine-to-one vote of the Canadian electors of my own constituency, and by something like a million majority in the country at large. In courses of debate, it is important that we hold before us the very thing about which we talk. What was the question submitted to the people? "Are you in favour of releasing the government?"—note the word—"from any obligations arising out of any past commitments restricting the methods of raising men for military service?" It does not say, are you in favour of releasing the House

[Mr. Roebuck.]

of Commons, the Liberal party, the Conservative party, or the individuals involved; it asks the people whether they are prepared to release the government. The government was the subject at issue. The people said "yes," specifically. I think they said much more than "yes," but to that question they answered "yes" by a vote of approximately two-to-one. Accordingly the government has introduced a measure to implement in substance the question which was asked. The bill which is now before the house is the practical counterpart of the question which was asked of the public. It proposes to strike out of the mobilization act these words:

The powers conferred by the next preceding section may not be exercised for the purpose of requiring persons to serve in the military, naval or air forces outside of Canada and the territorial waters thereof.

Those who would criticize the assumption of powers by the government in the present bill should realize that all that is happening is the disappearance of certain words, and that the powers which the government will retain were already set out in the mobilization act. No new powers of administration are being given. The only distinction between the exercise of those powers after the bill is passed and their exercise before the bill is passed is that the powers may apply to foreign service, so-called, while at the present time they apply only to local service. So let us not, as the hon. member for Weyburn says, be confused and bewildered. The government is given no powers which it did not formerly possess. It only extends those powers to foreign service. It does seem to me that every hon. member who comes from a constituency which voted "yes" in the plebiscite must in the very nature of things, if he would obey the will of those who sent him here, vote "yes" on this bill. I see very little difficulty as far as the bill itself is concerned; I am satisfied that it will carry with an overwhelming majority in the house, and that majority will not be made up only of members of the party to which I belong. It hardly needs a defence as far as its literal words are concerned.

This bill, however, has implications much more far-reaching than the mere release of a government to do as it sees fit. Irrespective of amendments which may be offered, this bill raises the whole question of methods by which Canada will in the future raise her armed forces for service overseas, and it brings before this house in a formal way the vexed question of conscription. It is a question which, in my judgment, cries out for decision. It is a question which can no longer be evaded. It is a question which will not down.