

*The Address—Mr. Mackenzie King*

Speaking in the city of Vancouver before a very large audience, I said:

The policy of the government regarding conscription has been made abundantly clear. We have taken the position that every young man who is physically fit should be liable for military training and service in Canada for the defence of Canada. This policy is designed to provide our country with a second line of defence should the country be subject to direct attack. In the same way, parliament has put at the disposal of the nation, all the material resources of the country.

My colleagues and I, expressing, as we believe, the will of the Canadian people as expressed by themselves in a war-time election, have made it equally clear that service outside Canada in the armed forces of Canada at sea, on land and in the air—service undertaken in the cause of freedom—shall be freely undertaken.

Before war came, the government gave a solemn pledge that in the event of war, we would follow that policy. When war came the pledge was solemnly reaffirmed. At the general elections during the war itself, that policy received the overwhelming approval of the people of Canada. Indeed, no political party can be said to have advocated conscription for overseas service. The leader of the official opposition could scarcely have been more emphatic than he was in declaring that conscription was not an issue; that, having regard to the memories of the past, and experiences in the last war, anyone who might raise that issue was not true to the highest interest of his country.

The present unhappy state of the world is in large part the result of broken pledges. Nazi Germany has erected bad faith and the broken pledge into a principle of action. Bad faith, broken pledges, and disregard of the popular will are the very forces against which Canada is fighting to-day. That being so, I wish the more emphatically to affirm the government's intention to keep the pledge repeatedly given to the people of Canada.

This statement is representative of the views I everywhere expressed in the course of my western tour, and which everywhere met, if not with unanimous, certainly with general approval. With the people of Canada thus reassured, there was little, if any, agitation on the matter during my absence in Britain and immediately after my return. In parliament there was little or no question or discussion raised concerning conscription until, while parliament was in session in November, it was announced that the leader of the Conservative party in the senate was to replace the present leader of the opposition in the leadership of his party, and would also replace him in the leadership of the official opposition in this House of Commons.

Prior to this announcement, I had restated in this House of Commons the government's position with respect to national selective service, as I have already quoted it to the house. At the same time, as leader of the

government, I made clear by own position with respect to the application of conscription to service in the armed forces overseas, in the following words:

But so far as conscription for service overseas is concerned in the armed forces of Canada, that question was submitted to the people of Canada at the last general election, an election which was held in war time, and in which the leaders of all political parties made their statements to the electorate, and the people of Canada decided against conscription for overseas service. So far as I am concerned, without any consultation of the people on that subject, I do not intend to take the responsibility of supporting any policy of conscription for service overseas.

These words are to be found in *Hansard* for November 12, 1941, at page 4321. This statement was made during the afternoon of November 12. On the evening of that day, the new leader of the Conservative party, without any previous attempt at consultation or conference with myself, or any member of the government, and before he himself had become a member of this House of Commons, issued a statement announcing his acceptance of the leadership of the Conservative party, in which he set forth as his policy "compulsory selective service over the whole field of war". In view of the position of the government with respect to national selective service, this statement narrows down simply to a demand for conscription for overseas service. It thereby made the single question of the application of conscription for military service overseas into a political issue of the first magnitude.

Outside parliament altogether, the political skies have now become so overcast with controversy, promoted by high-pressure methods and highly financed publicity, that the nature and extent of Canada's war effort is not only being obscured, but is in danger of being seriously impaired.

If the issue of conscription for service overseas is to be fought out, the place for it to be fought out is on the floor of this parliament. If, however, members of the government and, indeed, members of this House of Commons generally, are to be free to express their views irrespective of any previous commitments, it is necessary that all members be released from any obligation arising out of any past commitments restricting the methods of raising men for military service.

Quite apart from the controversy which has arisen, there are the strongest of reasons why the government should, at this time of gravest crisis in the world's history, possess complete freedom to act in accordance with its judgment of the needs of the situation as they may arise, subject only to its responsibility to parliament.

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]