

I will tell you what might happen under the Militia Act. A man might have six sons and 100 acres of land. When the ballot was taken those six sons might all be chosen. This man's neighbour, with a farm of 300 acres might have only one son, and he might be chosen to fight the battles of his country. What would become of that man's farm, and what would become of production at this time when the need for production is so great? But if this Military Service Act is honestly administered, if there are thrown around it the proper safeguards which we upon this side of the House, at any rate, will insist upon, there is no reason why it should not work out infinitely better than the Act at present on our statute book. Although the Military Service Act is a separate statute I regard it entirely as an amendment to the Militia Act, because it states in one of its clauses that it shall be read in conjunction with the Militia Act. Consequently, everything in the Militia Act that is inconsistent with the terms of the present Act, is by that clause in effect repealed.

There are several things in this proposed Act which do not appeal to me, and they are basic principles to some extent; at any rate, they are basic principles at this time. In the first place the Bill applies to men of 20 years of age. I do not think that is fair; I do not think it is a right principle to follow. If a man of 18 or 20 years wishes to enlist, that is all very well; he is the keeper of his own liberty, if I might put it that way, and has the right to volunteer in the service of his country. But it is another matter when you compel a man of that age to go and fight the battles of his country. A man of 20 has not got the franchise, he has not the responsibilities or benefits of citizenship in that respect; he cannot say anything in regard to this Act. In view of that, I do not think it is fair that a man over 21 should by his vote cast upon him the responsibility of serving his country in a foreign land. I say in all earnestness to the Prime Minister that the Bill should be amended so as not to include men under 21 years of age. That seems to me a fair thing to do. It is the principle that has been adopted in the United States, and I think it should appeal to every hon. member of this House.

Mr. PROULX: Would the hon. member give the privilege of voting upon this measure to the man of 21?

Mr. ROSS: If the measure is submitted to the people, the hon. member's question is meaningless.

Mr. PROULX: Would the hon. member submit it to the people?

Mr. ROSS: That is for the House to determine. There is another thing in this Bill which does not suit me, and it goes to the very root of the principles we are considering on this second reading. We have been told by the Solicitor General that this Act is going to fall more lightly on the province of Quebec than on any other province. He said as a matter of fact that the Bill was designed and planned to do no injustice to Quebec. That is perfectly right; no injustice should be done to any province. As a reason why this Act would fall more lightly on the province of Quebec he intimated that the people of that province were largely engaged in farming and their men married very young. He commended the latter practice, and I think his commendation was quite right. I think if the other provinces would follow the example of Quebec in that regard we should have a better country. That is just an intimation of what should be in this Act. The Solicitor General may say that we may take his intimation in that respect. I do not want to go into ancient history, but members of this Government have in times past made intimations which never materialized in regard to other things.

The Solicitor General may say that the regulations made under the Act will provide that the farmers shall be exempt from combatant military service. I think that the less we have of regulations in this Act the less of directions under its terms, and the more of concrete principles embodied in the sections of the Act itself, the better the people will be satisfied. Administrative officials are very human, whether appointed by this Government or by any other. They are influenced by local considerations, they are influenced by their own ideas, and I contend that the Government and the Solicitor General, who is sponsor for the Bill, if sincere, should put a clause into the Act to provide that every man bona fide engaged, on the eleventh of June, 1917, in the production of food on the farms of Canada shall be exempt from combatant military service.

I make that suggestion after careful consideration. I am not trying to exempt the farmers from their duty in the battle line—they would not thank me if I did. The farmers of Middlesex county would not, at any rate, for they have given as many of their sons to this struggle as any other community, rural or urban. Only within the last few days two farm boys and one town