

war effort would not have been, in any particular, increased, through an extension of the principle of compulsion to service overseas. Indeed, by resulting dissension, it might have been considerably reduced.

I mention these facts first of all to make perfectly clear that the government has meant what it has said when it has stated, as up to the present it consistently has, that conscription for overseas service was not necessary, either on the ground of obtaining the necessary recruits, or to enable the government to meet its objective of a properly balanced total war effort.

I mention these facts, also, to make perfectly clear that in asking, as is being done by the present bill, that, subject only to its responsibility to parliament, the government should possess complete freedom to act in accordance with its judgment of the needs of the situation as they may arise, the government is doing so not in response to political pressure or popular clamour in any part of the country. The government is asking for this freedom solely because it is of the opinion that, at this time of gravest crisis in the world's history, it is in the national interest that the power should be possessed by the administration.

There is nothing to which some of my political opponents have devoted more of their time and attention than in seeking to make the public believe that, as the head of the administration, I have been actuated primarily by considerations of party interests. It is represented that my aim, above all else, has been to maintain the unity of the party which I lead, in order that I may retain office at the head of a party administration. I do not deny that I have, at all times, striven to maintain the unity of the party which has honoured and entrusted me with its leadership. I owe that duty not only to the party but also to the country, more particularly as my following in this House of Commons is the foundation of the administration which was entrusted by the people, in war time, with the task of government. However, I deny most emphatically that, at any time in the course of my public life, I have ever placed any interest of party above the national interest. Least of all have I had any such thought in conducting the affairs of the country at this time of war.

It surely cannot be said that, in asking by means of a plebiscite for release from any obligations arising out of past commitments, I was acting from motives of party advantage. Nor can it be said that in introducing the present bill at the time it was introduced, I was seeking, as some hon. gentlemen opposite and their press continue to say of me, to

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

appease the large following I have in the province of Quebec, and in virtue of which, they like to say, I am able to keep myself in office.

In the last general elections, I did win the support of the province of Quebec to the extent of all but one of its entire representation in this house. Perhaps this might not be an inopportune moment to remind hon. members and the country that apart altogether from the political support obtained from the province of Quebec, I was accorded, in the other provinces of Canada, a considerable majority over and above that of the combined representation in this House of Commons of the Conservative party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and the Social Credit party. Indeed the supporters of the government from the provinces other than Quebec number all but half of the total membership of this House of Commons. Secure as I have felt in the confidence thus accorded me by the Canadian people as a whole, I have considered that it increased my obligation to endeavour to see that all questions of national importance were determined solely in the national interest. This, I have felt, was a special obligation of the Prime Minister at a time of war.

I have had no more trying experience in my political life than the realization that the course which I believed it was in the national interest for the government to follow at this time was one which would occasion a division in the ranks of my loyal followers. On the other hand, realizing Canada's position as I see it in the present world crisis, I should have felt as false to the interests of every member of my own following as to the country itself, had I not sought from parliament at this time the powers which the bill asks should be given to the administration.

I have no doubt whatever that the events of the war will more than justify the course which the government has thus far pursued, and is pursuing to-day. I know that the government's present course is already justified in the eyes of the very large majority of the citizens of Canada who have expressed the view that the government should have complete freedom in meeting the different situations of the war as they may arise. I believe that the wisdom of the government's course will become equally apparent to most, if not to all, of those who have been unwilling, or still hesitate to trust the administration with so wide a measure of discretion. The results of the plebiscite showed that, as respects the application or non-application of conscription for overseas service, the vast majority of the people of Canada were prepared to trust the judgment of the present government. I should

not like the debate to conclude without expressing, on behalf of my colleagues and myself, our appreciation of so great a trust.

It is true that the present bill is a logical sequence of the plebiscite, but its origin is not to be found in the results of that measure. Because the results of the plebiscite have, by some, been represented as a mandate for conscription for service overseas, the significance of the present bill has, as a consequence, been distorted in the eyes of others. Both the plebiscite and the bill have, in fact, a common origin. Each owed its existence to the policy of the government as set forth in the speech from the throne at the opening of the present session of parliament. Each was a necessary step, but only a step in the accomplishment of that policy.

This is the statement of policy as it appears in the speech:

The government is of the opinion, that at this time of gravest crisis in the world's history, the administration, subject only to its responsibility to parliament, should . . . possess complete freedom to act in accordance with its judgment of the needs of the situation as it may arise.

The one and only particular in which the administration was not free to act in accordance with its judgment was with respect to the methods of raising men for military service.

So far as the government's policy as expressed in this bill is concerned, it is not a new policy; it is identical with the government's policy as set forth in the speech from the throne, which parliament approved by the adoption of the address. Because of prior commitments regarding the methods of raising men for military service overseas, the necessary freedom could only be secured in two stages.

The one stage was to seek from the people release from a moral obligation arising out of past commitments, and the other stage, to seek from parliament the removal of a limitation expressed in existing legislation. The former—the release from the moral obligation—was sought and obtained by the plebiscite; the latter—the removal of the legal restriction—is being sought, and I hope will be obtained, by the present bill. But while the second step—the bill which is now before the house—was a logical sequence of the results of the first step, namely, the plebiscite, it does not owe its origin to that measure, but to the policy of the government as set forth in the speech. And may I say to my hon. friend and former colleague the ex-Minister of Public Works (Mr. Cardin) that he was with me and with all of my colleagues at the time when

the policy was settled, and he agreed with all of us at the time that it was a desirable policy for the government.

The government's policy as set forth in the speech from the throne was due not to any political pressure or popular clamour but to what the government, as a result of the changed conditions of the war, had come to recognize as the only sound policy "at this time of gravest crisis in the world's history."

In all sincerity, may I ask would any other policy be justifiable in the face of conditions as we have seen them develop from month to month, and from year to year since the commencement of the present war, and as we know them to-day? If after almost three years of conflict, the course of the war had been different; if, for example, Germany, after overrunning the most of Europe, had been driven out of some, or even one of the countries she has subjugated; if Germany was now more concerned with her own defence than bent, as she continues to be, upon further conquest; if Japan had remained out of the war, instead of challenging the might of the United States, as well as that of the British commonwealth and other of the united nations, there might have been reason to question the need for removal of any limitation upon the complete freedom of the administration to act in accordance with its judgment of the needs of situations as they may arise. But when the very opposite is the case, when the war, instead of remaining upon a single continent has become a war which is world-encircling, embracing all continents as well as all oceans, a war in which all of the great powers of the world have either been partly destroyed, or are fighting for their very existence, and in which the survival of civilization itself is at stake, would it not have shown a lack of responsibility had the government not sought from parliament, in plenty of time, the widest possible powers to cope with any and every situation as it may arise?

A government is responsible not only for what it does, but for what it fails to do. A like responsibility, it seems to me, rests upon the parliament of the country, once its members are appealed to by the government to assist the administration in helping to accomplish the defeat of the enemy, and thereby to preserve the nation's security, and it may be its very existence.

On June 11, the former Minister of Public Works, objecting to the introduction of the bill at the present time, exclaimed, as reported in *Hansard* at page 3562:

In the name of heaven, what is the use of having a dead principle in our statute books?