

*Plebiscite Act*

far as the pledge made before parliament was concerned, parliament could release him from that pledge, but that he could only get release from a pledge made to the people of Canada during an election campaign by asking the people to release the government from the moral obligation created thereby. Then I ask the Prime Minister, why not ask the people a direct, unequivocal question? Why make things even more confusing by asking a question that is capable of interpretation according to the feelings of the individual voter?

The Prime Minister claims that to change the wording of the plebiscite would create unwarranted suspicions. I wonder in whose minds would there be suspicion. If you are going to ask a person, "Will you do this or that?" you ask that very question. You do not clothe it in words that permit of equivocation in the interpretation placed thereon by the person being questioned or the one who asks the question.

So far as the last election campaign is concerned—I am speaking of western Canada—a minister of the crown who spoke there, the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner), throughout the campaign pointed out that the difference between the three political parties in the field, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, the Conservatives and the Liberals, was this:

... the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation party, from whose platform he (the Minister of Agriculture) read a number of clauses, referred particularly to the call for the conscription of wealth for war. In the second group was the party headed by Hon. R. J. Manion that opposed the conscription of men to be sent out of Canada; they did not mind conscripting men for the defence of Canada.

The Liberals, through their leader, Right Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King, had already taken their stand, no conscription of men, and no direct conscription of wealth, but men and money for the prosecution of the war.

In other words the Minister of Agriculture meant to convey to the people that the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation party stood for the conscription of wealth; the Conservative party did not stand for the conscription of man-power for overseas service but for conscription of man-power for service within Canada; and the Liberal party stood for neither. But in June, 1940, when conditions made necessary the raising of men, that pledge given by a minister of the Prime Minister's own government was departed from and conscription was brought in of man-power for service within Canada because of the need for men and the then prevailing war exigencies. Who was then asked to decide on that matter? It was parliament. The pledge that was given to the people of Canada in the words quoted above was that no conscription

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

whether for service within Canada or beyond Canada would be introduced by the government. But in June, 1940, the government in effect secured a release from its pledge not to bring in conscription for service in Canada by introducing and securing the passage through parliament of the National Resources Mobilization Act. Why cannot the same course be followed to-day?

If, however, the government is going on with the submission of the plebiscite, I ask the Prime Minister to change the wording of the question, so that there will be no possible misunderstanding as to the meaning of the question. As it stands to-day, it reads:

Are you in favour of releasing the government from any obligation arising out of any past commitments restricting the methods of raising men for military service?

I urge the government to make this question clear. We on this side of the house are not trying to hold up the matter. We want action too, and to secure that, all we ask is that the people of Canada be given an opportunity of voting on something regarding which they will know what question they are voting on, and that they will have some idea of the responsibility for action which will rest on this government and on parliament in the event that there is an affirmative vote.

Mr. BRUCE: I do not intend to delay the committee for more than a moment or two, but I think it will be very apparent to those who have listened to the speeches in this chamber and have read the press of the country that there is much confusion as to what is meant by the question which is to be submitted to the people in the plebiscite. The hon. member for Macleod has used a great many adjectives to indicate the extent of the confusion. I would say it is "confusion worse confounded". Nobody seems to know exactly what is meant by this question, in spite of the explanations given by the Prime Minister in a considerable speech a week ago, again yesterday, and to-day. I believe that if we adopted the amendment of the hon. member for Macleod and clarified the situation by the addition of the five words, "in any theatre of war," everybody would be satisfied, at least with the question which is being submitted.

I wonder whether this plebiscite would be gone on with if the Japanese landed on Vancouver island, or if the city of Quebec or some of the cities of the maritime provinces were subjected to bombing or shelling. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that, before there is a chance of submitting this question to the people, we in Canada shall be in a very serious and dangerous position.