

entering combatant service, he had a right to exemption, and exemption was granted on those grounds by the tribunals from one end of Canada to the other. But the difficulty arose in this way. There were a number of the younger generation who had not formally become members of some of the lesser religious bodies throughout Canada, but who had become adherents of one of those bodies. When the applicant applied for exemption he was asked if he was a member of the faith to which he expressed his adherence, and on the rules of the church being produced these men were found strictly speaking not to be members. These cases were taken to appeal and were definitely settled by the Central Appeal Judge, in accordance with the terms of the Act, that a man must be in actual membership of the particular creed or faith on the 17th of October, 1917, which was the date of the first meeting of the various registration boards; and a man not actually and formally a member on that date was not entitled to exemption under the section I have read. I think the decision of the Hon. Justice Duff was absolutely correct and within the meaning of the enactment. We have no conditional exemption such as they have in England. Parliament in its wisdom did not see fit to adopt the British Act. Consequently, a large number of young men in Canada who believed that they were adherents of the various religious faiths which objected to combatant service found that they were not entitled to exemption under the Act, and some very severe sentences were imposed, a great many of them being for as high as ten years in the penitentiary.

There were two classes of conscientious objectors: Those who failed to report at all, some of them thinking that as they belonged to various objecting faiths it was unnecessary for them to report; and those who reported, joined some military unit, and then refused to obey some military command, or to don His Majesty's uniform. These latter, technically, were charged with refusing to obey a lawful command, but their refusal in many cases was based upon a real conscientious objection. Those who had failed entirely to report were merely defaulters or deserters under the Military Service Act. There were no more than "a few dozen" of these cases. My recollection is that there were, all told, 152 conscientious objectors in confinement undergoing sentence.

The sentences varied from two to ten years. Many of these cases had been dealt with by the military authorities, and in these the sentence was almost uniformly ten years. However, these sentences can

all be reviewed by the Governor General in Council, and they were all reviewed; and all of the extremely long sentences were reduced to two years. At the conclusion of the armistice, or, to be more accurate, about the first day of February last, the Government appointed a special committee, of which I had the honour to be Chairman, and I had associated with me the Judge Advocate General, representing the Militia Department, and Mr. Newcombe, Deputy Minister of Justice, representing the Military Service Board. The question of the sentences which had been imposed upon conscientious objectors, and also upon other military defaulters, was referred to us. After a great deal of consideration of these two classes of cases, the Committee reported that, in its judgment, conscientious objectors who were bona fide objectors and not slackers should be liberated after they had served six months, notwithstanding that many of the sentences were ten years. Up to the present time between 70 and 80 of 152 have been liberated. Twenty cases are now under consideration and, I think, will be disposed of during the present week; and the balance will be disposed of within from two to five weeks, because I think they will all then have served the full six months which is the minimum penalty according to the report of the Committee—which report, I may say, was approved by the Government. We investigated each case to see whether the man was in reality a bona fide conscientious objector, or was more or less of a slacker. We had cases, for instance, where men claimed to be conscientious objectors, and would not engage in combatant service, but were quite willing to make munitions and earn from eight to ten dollars a day. I do not think that clemency should be extended to such men. For the purpose of gaining information in regard to each particular case, we used the services of the parole officers throughout Canada, the reports of trial magistrates, and in some cases the recommendations of hon. members of this House. If the report shews that a man has been a well behaved citizen, is really and virtually a member of the faith to which he claims adherence, and has been of good conduct in the community to which he belongs, we unhesitatingly accept that, and at the end of the six months' term release him. I think that, comparing our action in this matter with that of the United States, our terms have been extremely lenient. Sentences were imposed in the United States of imprisonment for twenty and thirty years, and in many cases