

*The Address—Mr. Mackenzie King*

fact, he now wishes me to turn round and ignore the expressed will of the people altogether.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there may to-day be reasons—and I hope this afternoon to make it clear that there are strong reasons—why the people of this country should be told that any commitments made in the past which in any way restrict the government in the exercise of its best judgment with respect to all phases of the war should be removed. That being the case, the people should be told that the government is of opinion that not only the government but all hon. members should be released from any past obligations which may bind their freedom of discussion in any particular at the present time.

When my hon. friend goes on to ask me what I am going to do with respect to any expression of view which may be made by the people in connection with any reference which will be made to them, may I say to him that in seeking to get relief from past commitments I am not going to begin by making new and fresh commitments. In seeking freedom on the part of the ministry I am not going to start in by seeking to tie my own hands. I know the kind of lecture I might have to expect from my hon. friend were I to do anything of the kind.

In the political controversy which, unfortunately, has become so acute of late; which is obscuring the magnitude and balanced nature of Canada's war effort, and which, moreover, threatens to impair its efficiency, attempts are being made to confuse in the public mind three things which should be kept separate and distinct. With respect to each of these the government's position is being misrepresented:

The first relates to total effort to meet total war.

The second relates to national selective service as a means to this end.

The third relates to the application of compulsion without restriction of any kind; in other words, to conscription for service in the armed forces overseas.

As respects total effort to meet total war, that is and has been right along the policy of the present administration. As regards national selective service as a method of achieving a total effort, that, too, is and has been the policy of the government. As respects the use of compulsion in applying the principle of national selective service, that, also, is a part of government policy. In the case of compulsion only one definite limitation has been recognized, and that is the limitation of the use of compulsion as a method of raising men for military service overseas.

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

Whether or not the government, all circumstances considered, has gone as far in achieving a total effort as it might have gone or should have gone, is a fair subject for debate. Whether the government, all circumstances considered, has applied the principle of national selective service as rapidly and as extensively as it should have been applied, is also a fair subject for debate. Whether, with the single limitation referred to, the government has, all circumstances considered, made sufficient use of compulsion in applying the selective principle is also a fair subject for debate. So far, however, as policy itself is concerned, whether it relates to total effort, to national selective service, or to the use of compulsion, with the single limitation mentioned, there exists no difference, so far as I am aware, between the government and its opponents. I propose to substantiate these statements by reference to the government's record.

What, then, is the difference with respect to policy between those who to-day support the administration, and those who, by every means in their power, are seeking to create opposition to the government in its war effort?

Freed from the emotions and passions aroused by the storm of controversy, it will be seen that the only difference that does exist is a difference with respect to the application of compulsion in raising men for military service overseas.

An examination of the facts will show that the difference of which the government's opponents are seeking to make a national issue is a much smaller difference than even the existing limitation on the use of compulsion would seem to imply.

The limitation, as I have stated, relates solely to the application of conscription to the raising of military forces for service overseas. These forces, as hon. members are well aware, are, in the present war, not confined to one single service, as in the last war was almost entirely the case. They include the men enlisted in the Canadian navy and in the Canadian air force, as well as those enlisted in the Canadian active army. I shall later on have something to say about the total numbers already enlisted for services anywhere, in the three branches of the armed forces. So far as the navy and the air force are concerned, it is well known that the numbers who have volunteered have considerably exceeded the number it has been possible to accept for immediate service. Moreover, it is worth noting that in Britain