

*Plebiscite Act*

that after the people had voted the government would not be released from anything, but that we were simply asking the people if they were willing to do something.

Mr. JOHNSTON (Bow River): I used the word "ambiguity", not "cunning".

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I am afraid that I cannot make the English language any plainer than it is.

Mr. JOHNSTON (Bow River): I am trying to help you.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I beg the hon. gentleman's pardon?

Mr. JOHNSTON (Bow River): I am trying to assist.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I appreciate my hon. friend's motive, but I cannot say the same about his methods.

Now, "any obligation arising out of any past commitments. . . ." The whole question relates to past commitments. The leader of the opposition sought yesterday to have it refer to power or to fact, to some existing law. I have said over and over again that the government has power, legal power, to pass any enactment which this house is prepared to pass. It has as a matter of fact legislated with respect to raising men by voluntary enlistment and raising men by conscription, for service within Canada itself; so that there is no question about the matter of power or the question of fact.

But now my hon. friends in the far corner who have spoken raise the question that it is a matter of the disposition of troops. I may point out to them that it is not at all a matter of disposition of troops. Or let me put it in this way first so as to be clear as to the matter of methods. There are two methods of enlisting men for service overseas. One is the voluntary method, the other is the method of compulsion or conscription. With respect to the voluntary method, men raised thereby for service overseas can be sent to any quarter of the globe. Hon. members talk about the disposition of troops; the government is free to-day to dispose of these forces anywhere overseas. Those who have enlisted voluntarily may be sent for service overseas or kept at home.

Mr. LOCKHART: Will the Prime Minister permit a question? Will he at this point explain what are the restrictions on the methods of raising men in Canada?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Well, that is the next point. There is one restriction and one only, and that is the restriction upon raising men for service overseas, not voluntarily—

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

Mr. LOCKHART: The "methods"?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: —but by compulsion. Compulsion is a method. That is the whole point.

Mr. QUELCH: The ballot does not say that. It merely says "military service."

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: There are only two methods—one voluntary, and one compulsory. With regard to raising men compulsorily for service there is no commitment when the service is confined to within Canada. But when resort is to be had to conscription, in other words, to the "method" of conscription, for raising men for service overseas, there is a commitment which binds the government, a commitment made before we entered the war, a commitment made at the time that parliament entered the war, a commitment made at the last general election, a commitment which has been made time and time again.

Now I hope that I have made clear wherein the wording is exactly correct,—"any past commitments restricting the methods of raising men for military service." This commitment not to send men overseas under compulsion restricts the method, namely the compulsory method, of raising men for military service where it applies to overseas. I do not think that anything could be clearer than that.

The hon. member for Weyburn said something a moment ago about "inescapable logic." I would ask him as a logician and a philosopher whether there is any word in the English language which could be more comprehensive when applied to commitments than the word "any" itself? Well, now, "any . . . commitments" covers commitments with respect to sending men to any part of the earth or to any theatres of war, or to anywhere else, if such is to be found. What the government is anxious the people should understand is that we wish a perfectly free hand; we do not wish to be committed in any particular. If the word "any" were not there, it would instantly be said, "Oh yes, you are taking good care to specify a particular commitment, but you don't say anything about some other commitment or what might be construed as a commitment." We wish to make the language so broad that there can be no misgiving as to any commitment from now on, which relates to the method of raising men for service overseas. If this plebiscite carries, neither the government nor any hon. member will be free to argue that we cannot decide upon conscription or any other question with respect to our war effort because of a certain commitment.

Mr. NOSEWORTHY: Would the Prime Minister be willing to take the committee into his confidence and tell us why he