

I appeal to my fellow citizens of both English and French descent and ask them whether the passing of a conscription measure would not forever destroy the foundations on which this country rests.

While we are fighting for everything we hold dear, so we are told, which one among us would insist on conscription if such a measure is destined to divide the Canadian people, and destroy that harmony so essential to the development of our country and the attainment of its destiny.

Which one among us wants conscription, if it entails the break-up of confederation?

What member, what Canadian citizen will reasonably uphold that conscription, by adding a few thousand men to the strength of the allied nations, will ensure victory for our side and justify destroying the results of our collective efforts, during two centuries, to make Canada what it is to-day?

Mr. Speaker, I pray that Providence may spare us from such a disaster.

Mr. BROOKE CLAXTON (St. Lawrence-St. George): Mr. Speaker, this is the third day of this debate, and all hon. members will agree that it began with a good speech and has continued with a series of good speeches; that so far it has been conducted in a tone that has been tolerant and forbearing, and that if it continues on the same plane there is at least a possibility that out of this crisis, because it is little less, we may step up to a better basis of unity than we have ever known before.

Burke said that magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom, and our English-speaking people to-day should show to the French-speaking people magnanimity. That, even more than cold justice or efficient sternness, is what we need. Between the French- and English-speaking there should be a real effort to understand the changing nature of the world and the changing nature of Canada, and that we each must seek the same things—the security of Canada, the unity of Canada, the welfare of Canada, and the defeat of the aggressors, without which no one of these three would be possible.

This bill has been introduced in consequence of the plebiscite, and I suppose every hon. member in the course of the debate will give his interpretation of what the plebiscite meant. It seems to me to be clear that the people of Canada, in giving the government a free hand in the prosecution of the war, want the government to take the measures necessary to defend Canada wherever that can best be done. The people having removed the moral bar, the government has now introduced this bill to remove the legal

bar and to give effect to the will of the people as expressed in the plebiscite.

Yesterday the member for Richelieu-Verchères (Mr. Cardin), in his exceedingly eloquent speech, seemed to be most concerned over what in the long run is really a question of procedure, whether parliament should be consulted once, or twice, on this question. It has been suggested that in proceeding in the way in which it is the government has betrayed promises made during the plebiscite campaign, that parliament would be consulted. My own view is that this is a consultation of parliament. But if there is anything in the suggestion that has been made, I should like to make this comment: that the people, and the only people, who are qualified to raise the issue of having been misled are the people who voted yes on the plebiscite, and not the people who voted no.

As for conscription, we have had a great deal of talk about it, and it has become common to refer to it as a symbol. It is two symbols. To the French-speaking people of Canada it is a symbol of racial domination; to the English-speaking people of Canada or some of them, it is a symbol of total effort. It has become a shibboleth. As I listened to the speech of the leader of the opposition (Mr. Hanson), it seemed to me that he was more concerned with the symbol of conscription as meaning total effort than he was with any other feature of it. He advanced no reasons as to why it should be necessary now; he advanced no suggestion that the voluntary system had broken down; it was in effect the same speech that was given during the plebiscite debate, and nothing was indicated to justify any other action than that which the government is taking.

The government does not want a symbol; it wants to do whatever is necessary to make the utmost effort that the people of Canada can make. The government has said that if that is by a voluntary effort, then it will choose the voluntary method; if it is by means of conscription, then it will choose conscription, and if it is by a combination of both, then it will combine both methods. Thus we are really discussing a means to one end—the achievement of a total and balanced war effort. My view is plain enough; it is that if conscription would advance our war effort, then we should have conscription for overseas service, but if it would not, why take any further step than we have already taken?

The leader of the opposition said that our national honour was involved in our failure to go ahead. But is there dishonour in having half a million volunteers in the armed services of Canada? Is there dishonour in having raised by the voluntary method every man