

War Effort—Government Policy

majority that this country has ever seen it was because he promised the country that he would not tolerate conscription.

It is all very well to talk about the way the war has gone; it is all very well to talk about these things now, but I ask the simple question: Did the Prime Minister not know at that time that we were face to face with one of the most powerful war machines the world has ever seen? He should have known it, because he was Secretary of State for External Affairs at the time. He had gone over to Germany himself, although if he went on a Cooks' tour they would not show him all that. The group with whom I have the honour to be associated recognized the danger. We went to the country too; to the best of our ability we portrayed the truth as we saw it, and that was that since we had declared war on the greatest war machine the world has ever seen we would need every available dollar, every available part of our national resources as well as every man in his proper place. However, the Prime Minister's party was returned. Some of us got back; some of us did not. Then in 1942 when the battle of Britain was on—the nazis had walked roughshod through France and the Netherlands—the war was going seriously against us and something had to be done. Public opinion had undergone a change and so the bright idea was thought up to put over a plebiscite in this country. However, it was not until Britain had been driven from continental Europe that public opinion turned that way. The plebiscite was put on, and may I say it was a plebiscite which nobody seemed to understand. When we were discussing what should be on the ballot, the question on which the people of Canada would have to vote, it was an open secret that the cabinet had burned the midnight oil in an attempt to put a proper question on the ballot paper. Eventually they put that question to which I am inclined to think the right hon. the Prime Minister is accustomed, a question that can be read and interpreted in any way he wishes it to be interpreted.

I would suggest that there are not a half dozen people in Canada to-day who can tell you what was on the ballot paper during the plebiscite. It was not intended that anyone should understand it. As a matter of fact, when some hon. members of this group moved an amendment to the question on the ballot paper in order to clarify the thing we received the answer: Oh, no, no, that could not be done; and the government side of the house voted against any clarification of it.

[Mr. Hansell.]

Speaking of plebiscites, may I digress for a moment to tell the house that I put over a plebiscite of my own.

Mr. JOHNSTON (Bow River): Did it cost a million and a half?

Mr. HANSELL: No, it did not; it cost a few dollars. When I recognized that we would have to come to this session of parliament and that the question to be decided was whether or not we should conscript the draftees, I immediately circularized my constituency. I should say that I did not write to everybody; I have a mailing list of nearly one thousand names, not all of them my supporters, although, of course, most of them are. I sent out a little card. I will send it over to the Prime Minister so that he can see it. One side of the card reads:

Dear sir or madam:

Parliament has been hurriedly called in special session to discuss and vote on the manpower problem. In order to know the feeling of my constituency in this matter I would appreciate having you mark the back of this card with either "yes" or "no" to the question asked. This will help me to vote according to the majority wishes of my riding. You may sign your name if you wish, although this is not necessary. . . .

The question on the reverse side was not the type of question that was put on the plebiscite of 1942. This was one that the people could understand:

Are you in favour of conscripting draftees for military services overseas? Mark yes or no.

There you have it, no bones about it, no quibbling, no getting around it, under it or over it, "yes" or "no." Quite a number of these have been returned, and I find that between ninety and ninety-one per cent told me to vote "yes," while between nine and ten per cent said, "no." I must be fair to those who indicate "no" votes. Many of them, besides sending in their card, wrote to me to explain their position, and I will say that most of the letters I received explaining the "no" vote were sensible letters. The people who wanted to tell me why they did not want the draftees conscripted were people, some of whom I knew, whose judgment I could trust. Some of the arguments in the letters I regarded as sound. I am not going to say that there are not two sides to this question. I believe those who said, "no" did have some argument, and I am not wholly out of accord with my Quebec friends on this. I think they have an argument too. And may I say when we are talking about this national unity, I am just as concerned about the national unity of this country as anyone else is, and I am just as concerned about the future of this country as anyone else is.