

of one political party only, but the vast majority of candidates in the general election gave their constituents to understand that they were opposed to a policy of conscription for overseas service. In so doing, reference was continually made to the effect of the adoption of conscription in the last war, and the serious wound which, at the time, its application had inflicted in the side of our country.

As I look at the membership of this house which represents the will of the nation as expressed in the general elections, held during this very war, I say there are not a dozen members,—if, indeed, there are that many—regardless of party, who could rise in their places and truthfully say that, in the last general election, they had advocated a policy of conscription for military service overseas.

Time and again it has been said by hon. members opposite—and I think my hon. friend the leader of the opposition has said it oftener than anyone else—that the present government would not have had the enormous majority it has in this present parliament if it had not given the explicit assurance that, if returned to power, it would not adopt conscription for military service overseas. Others have held that it is unfair to say that any one issue should be singled out as the decisive issue in a general election. They maintain that many factors were in the minds of the people. It is said, for example, and I believe it to be true, that the present administration owes its vast majority to the belief so generally held that at this time of war no better administration could be found to administer Canada's war effort and to conduct the country's affairs. Not the least of the reasons for this belief was the view that the present administration might be expected to harmonize differences more effectively and thereby to avoid disunity at a time of war when, above all else, unity is vital.

In accordance with the general consensus of view as respects the mandate given by the people themselves, the government, throughout 1940 and 1941, proceeded to develop an all-out war effort. Might I pause here to say a word in reference to what my hon. friend the leader of the opposition said this afternoon with respect to mandates. If I recall aright, he said that this government took immediate action when Japan declared war, though we had no mandate from the people. He referred to a number of other acts performed by the government for which he said the government had no special mandate. He referred to Abraham Lincoln and some of his actions at the time of the civil war, for which my hon. friend said Lincoln had no mandate. That is all perfectly true; but of all the instances mentioned by my hon. friend there was not

one in which, when the possibility of action of the kind mentioned had been placed before the people themselves, any subsequent action on the part of the government was restricted by a specific pledge or commitment with respect thereto. Of all the instances he mentioned there was not one in which the people themselves had been given the assurance, before the event itself took place, that if it did take place the government, while it would do all in its power to meet the situation, would not in one particular go counter to what it believed at the time to be the will of the people, and had expressly set forth the limitation that was to be respected. Therefore there is a great difference between what my hon. friend has put forward with respect to actions where there were no commitments in advance and the action of this government respecting a commitment that was definitely made with regard to a definite situation.

In this connection might I commend to my hon. friend, as I continue with what I have to say, the words by Abraham Lincoln which he quoted, that government was or ought to be "of the people, by the people and for the people." I hope my hon. friend will keep that thought in mind in reference to the criticism he has been offering with respect to myself, that I have been paying too much attention to the people and not enough attention to some of the things that at the present time are being said by a vociferous press.

As I was saying, in accord with the general consensus of view as respects the mandate given by the people themselves, the government, throughout 1940 and 1941, proceeded to develop an all-out war effort. Until parliament was in session in November last, the government continued to carry on that effort, not without criticism, but certainly without the issue of conscription for overseas service being raised, in any authoritative manner, by any party or party leader in this house.

At the time of my tour of western Canada, prior to my visit to Britain, an attempt was made to raise the issue of conscription. A cloud no larger than a man's hand appeared in the political sky at Calgary and in some other of the western cities. I at once recognized that this was not due to a spontaneous movement on the part of the people themselves, but was rather the manifestation of a political movement carefully organized by opponents of the government, to force conscription to the fore as a political issue. I accordingly sought to meet this threat to our national unity in the only way in which I believed it could and should be met, if unity throughout Canada was to be maintained.