

Frequently we hear on the street some such reference as the following, to members of Parliament: "Those fellows up on the Hill have very comfortable jobs, they are living on the fat of the land, and instead of showing some appreciation of the struggles of the humble people who are earning their livelihood by the sweat of their brow, those fellows are ready with a cheer to send away our sons and daughters to be mowed down in foreign lands.—Those fellows, without hesitation, vote hundreds of thousands, yes, millions of dollars to finance a war, but they refuse to set aside half that amount of money to solve the problem of unemployment." Well, honourable members, I repeat to you what I said to one of my fellow-citizens a few minutes before I entered this Chamber: "Yes, we do vote millions to finance a war. But do not think for a moment that in doing so we do not appreciate our very heavy responsibility. If we act quickly, it is because this crisis compels us to do so."

As to sending with a smile the flower of our youth to face death on distant battlefields, I had intended consulting the records of Parliament and ascertaining the number of provincial and federal members of Parliament who did their duty in past wars and are ready to-day to answer the call of their country. I am confident the figures would prove very impressive. In this connection let me offer the following suggestion. If the voluntary offer of the father of a family could prevent the slaughter of the youth of our country and the destruction of his own sons and daughters, I would suggest to the Administration that a special battalion be formed to comprise all men between the ages of 40 and 50. To prevent any person from questioning my own sincerity in this matter, I do now solemnly declare that I would consider it a great honour and a privilege to be the first man to enlist in such a battalion. This is no idle talk. It is an emphatic and sincere reply to what we hear outside this Parliament, and is made to maintain the trust of our people in their Government and in their representatives on Parliament Hill. Secondly, this solemn offer is made in order to preserve unity among the rank and file of our population, and to sustain their hope and faith in the future. I trust that every honourable member of this House will at least give me credit for sincerity, and will realize that I am not talking through my hat. I know that among certain honourable members I have the reputation of holding some radical views. Well, honourable gentlemen, this is no time to give undue emphasis to petty things and forget the ringing call of duty.

In consonance with what I have already said, I would add this. I am irrevocably opposed to conscription for service abroad. Enough volunteers will be found to man our military machine. Last week three large anti-conscription meetings were held in the city of Montreal, one of which I attended in order to get first-hand information on this subject. I am glad to tell you that in spite of the eloquence of the speakers who addressed those meetings, more than 1,200 young French Canadians in the city of Montreal, without any coercion, flocked to the ranks of the two local battalions within that very short period of time.

Some Hon. SENATORS: Hear, hear.

Hon. Mr. LACASSE: I contend, therefore, that we shall have enough volunteers to perform the sacred task ahead of us without having to resort to coercion, which is the antithesis of the very principles for which we are fighting.

One more word and I am done, for, after all, I have to be considerate of my leader and help to maintain discipline in the ranks. Since Parliament opened a few days ago we have been working rapidly, and until now I have refrained from speaking. I think, therefore, I should be allowed to express my views at this stage of proceedings. I just wish to add this. If ever the Government of Canada think it opportune to raise an army of one, two or three hundred thousand men for the service of our country, the defence of our coasts or the protection of our institutions—religious, industrial, social or other—I shall be the first to applaud and welcome conscription. Here again I have some authority to speak, for I believe that I, as one of the thousands of fathers throughout our land, am in a position to express the patriotic feelings of all true sons of Canada; and I repeat, honourable members, this is not cheap publicity. I believe we should do everything we can, and give all we have, to defend our country. In this there should be unanimity. But I am opposed to any policy which advocates the sacrificing of the last dollar, the last man and the last drop of our blood in a war on foreign soil.

Hon. Mr. DANDURAND: My honourable friend stated that fathers of large families had been enlisted. Some of those men were officers in the Militia. I may say that it is the policy of the Government to see that single men are called first, and that men with more than two children are refused. Many of the men who already have answered the call have done so because they belong to the