

in this war and to aid the great democracies, Great Britain and France, in the manner that will be most helpful to them, and to the utmost of her capacity. All Canadians must face this task with unflinching courage and determination.

There has been a great body of opinion in Canada to the effect that we should not participate in any extraterritorial war, and should keep ourselves free from any external commitments, whether direct or indirect, which might involve us in such a war. Those who have held this view have had the best interests of Canada at heart. In their opinion all other considerations were subordinate to the welfare of Canada; that was their supreme concern. I have been one of the spokesmen of that body of opinion, and have not hesitated to express my views on this subject whenever the need arose, both outside and inside this house, with such vigour as I could command. I conceived this to be my duty as a Canadian whose first and undivided loyalty is to Canada.

From the bottom of my heart I wish that it were possible to keep the Canadian people out of this war; for I know what war is; I have had personal contact with war, and I am fearful of its consequences, but I am convinced that it has become impossible for Canada to keep out of this war. In my opinion the time has come when even the strongest advocates of a policy of isolation for Canada must abandon their hopes of keeping Canada out of this war—for a vital issue has arisen from which Canada cannot stand aside. The most ardent imperialists and the staunchest Canadian nationalists should show a united front in the long and terrible conflict that is now before us. It has not been an easy task for me to come to this decision, in view of the attitude that I have taken that Canada must strive to the utmost to keep out of war. I have come to this decision after very careful thought. Duty rules responsible men with an iron hand, and responsible men must not stray from the path of duty. It is my duty to express in this house the decision to which I have come, as I have previously expressed with as much courage as I possessed the views that I have held.

In the last session I introduced a bill relating to the status of Canada in time of war. That bill has been misunderstood in some quarters. It could not be misunderstood by those who have read the speech that I delivered on that occasion. That bill asserted Canada's right to decide for herself the issue of peace or war for Canada. I urged that it was not only the right but also the duty of the Canadian

[Mr. Thorson.]

people to decide this issue for themselves whenever the need for deciding it should arise, and that we must not allow this supreme issue of self-government to be determined for us by a government that is not our own, and which is not responsible to us and for which we are not responsible. Can any true Canadian, believing in self-government and that Canada is a free nation, deny the existence of that right or shirk the performance of that duty? I stand by everything I said on that occasion, and I am glad that the government in this great crisis that faces the Canadian people has adopted and followed the fundamental principles underlying the bill that I had the honour to introduce.

It will be remembered that in the course of my speech in support of that bill I drew a sharp distinction between the right to neutrality and a policy of neutrality. I clearly stated that Canada must decide her policy on each occasion, as the need for such decision should arise. I have sufficient faith in Canada to believe that this country will not fail in her duty as she conceives it to be.

In the same speech I endeavoured to set forth certain cardinal principles. I expressed the view that it was the supreme responsibility of every leader of a country to keep his people free from the devastating consequences of war as long as such a course was possible; and that the maintenance of peace was his sacred duty unless some issue greater than peace itself was involved. In my opinion such an issue is now upon us and as Canadians we must face it. I am confident that we shall do so with courage in our hearts.

What is the issue that is now upon us that is greater than peace itself? I do not wish to give offence to anyone in what I am about to say, but the issue is not the status of Danzig or the independence of Poland. If the issue before us at this session were merely the separate political entity of Danzig or Poland I would have no difficulty and not the slightest hesitation in voting against Canadian participation in war solely on that account. At this moment there is no need to elaborate my reasons for that statement. No, Mr. Speaker; the threat to the status of Danzig and the independence of Poland is not of itself the issue so far as Canada is concerned. The issue is much greater and of more vital importance than that; for freedom and individual liberty throughout the world are threatened. More than that, two of the greatest democracies in the world, Great Britain, and France, both of them defenders of freedom and individual liberty and the sacred rights of human personality, are now engaged in a life or death struggle with a powerful nation which has the