

*Mobilization Act—Mr. Crete*

the province of Quebec to the effect that national registration would never be used for the purpose of enforcing conscription.

These pledges are associated with very unpleasant memories, for, in that same year 1917, a conscription measure was adopted by the Canadian parliament.

I do not intend to recall the events of this melancholy period, which has left gaping wounds in the hearts of Canadians.

On November 11, 1918, the bells of all our churches were pealing the news of the suspension of hostilities. An armistice had been signed. The civilized world, shaken in its very foundations, grieving the loss of millions of human beings, deprived of its historical treasures and its wealth, returned to its normal occupations. All the nations of the world were unanimous in their resolve that the war just ended should be the last.

During the first few years after the signing of the Versailles treaty, the Canadian people courageously resumed its march towards its ideals, silently grieving the loss of thousands of their sons fallen in strange lands.

In 1922, in Ottawa, the yearly estimates of the Department of National Defence were reduced by 2½ million dollars. Our country waged this pacifist campaign for the next 15 years. But, in the 1937, the national defence estimates were considerably increased. A new programme was announced, which included the reorganization of our military, naval and air forces. This step led the warlike nations of Europe to believe that, following their example, we were forsaking the Versailles formula for the principle of armed peace.

This new trend resulted in a lively reaction from the people and a certain section of the press. Even in the House of Commons, some hon. members uttered energetic protests against steps which were interpreted as preliminary preparations for participation in a future European war.

Reassurances were then given the Canadian people. The government stated, through its best authorized ministers, that these heavy military expenditures would be devoted exclusively to the national defence, to the defence of Canada only.

In 1938, Canada was taking a greater part than ever in the armament race. Military estimates soared still higher. New protests on the part of some members who claimed that as long as the federal parliament neglected to amend the Militia Act in such a way as to incorporate in it some clause establishing Canada as our first line of defence, it would be useless to talk of national defence and that, under certain circumstances, the military estimates voted by parliament for the defence

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of Canada could be used, at some future date, to promote our participation in a foreign war.

In 1939, the increase in our war appropriations took on greater and more alarming proportions. Almost one hundred million dollars for war purposes. There were renewed protests on the part of those who believed Canada was definitely committed to a course of action leading to war and who stated that military preparations would inevitably lead to war, that war meant our participation in it, that such participation would become extra-territorial, that extraterritorial participation would require the sending of men and war equipment overseas, that any expeditionary force of ours would need reinforcements, and that the organization of these reinforcements was predicated on the heavy recruiting of men which would lead in the end to conscription for overseas service, which we are now being asked to adopt. All this, it must be noted, was said way back in 1939.

Is this not, Mr. Speaker, a brief but true description of the course we have followed since 1937? Granting this, who can state now that once the government has the power to conscript men, it will not do so?

Mr. GAUTHIER: No one.

Mr. CRETE: Of what worth are the assurances being given us in order to weaken opposition to this measure?

We have been at war now for over two and a half years. Our total population does not exceed eleven and a half million inhabitants. Nevertheless, over four hundred thousand of our men have enlisted for overseas service. We supply food to the allied nations. We furnish them war equipment and food in enormous quantities. We are taxed and rationed as we have never been in our history. We have just made Britain a gift of one billion dollars. Our financial and economic resources are pledged for generations to come. Our remaining youth are mobilized for the duration. Apparently all this does not count, since we are asked, as danger threatens us, to authorize conscription for overseas service.

Mr. Speaker, Canadians of English and French descent have lived together in this country for almost 200 years. In this most critical of times, let us remember those who first settled on this Canadian land, who cultivated it and willed it to us as our most precious heritage. Let us remember their sacrifices and their hardships. Let us never forget the courage with which they defended this country on two memorable occasions. Let us recall the collective efforts we Canadians have made since 1760 to safeguard Canada, and develop her natural resources.