

*Plebiscite Act*

on the grounds set out in sections 18 and 19 of the national war services regulations. It leaves it optional with any voter whether he shall or shall not vote.

I think I should put this on the record because information was asked for by the leader of the opposition. I have no objection whatever to doing it, but of course I do not want to delay the passage of my own bill. It is urged, on the one hand, that the section is too rigorous in that it precludes any subsequent claim for exemption to anyone who has voted and who may be liable for service under the national war services regulations. On the other hand, it is claimed that it is too generous. I think that is the suggestion by the leader of the opposition.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Not for the man himself, but for his kin.

Mr. McLARTY: I was going to follow that up. It allows to vote those of a particular religious faith or who are conscientious objectors but who, on other grounds, are not capable of performing military service.

I should like to deal with the first suggestion. I believe it can be well admitted that those who are conscientious objectors are so because of their unwillingness to take human life and that they are willing to perform all other services, except this one, which might be required of any citizen. But in dealing with this phase of the matter, if you refer to the specific question itself you will find that there is only one particular pledge which the government has entered into and from which it seeks relief, namely, the matter of military service. This military service does, unfortunately, involve the taking of human life.

This is not a general election. Other considerations would apply in a general election which do not apply here. This is a plebiscite on one definite and specific question, and that question relates to military service, which those of military age might require to answer, but in the answering of which they are not vitally affected. For example, if the answer given by such were yes, what does it mean? It means that those who themselves are able to perform military service, but who on account of religious beliefs do not feel free to do so, are allowed to determine whether or not the government shall be freed from its pledge given in regard to one specific matter. In other words, the answer yes means that while they themselves are not involved, they are quite willing that those who do not hold the same religious beliefs might be compelled to assume obligations which they themselves are not prepared to assume.

On the other hand, if the answer is no, what does that involve? It involves this: Those

who are capable of bearing arms, but who on account of their religious beliefs believe that the taking of human life even in war time is unwarranted, simply say, "while that is our belief, at the same time we wish to restrain the government from breaking a pledge given to those who do not enjoy similar beliefs and whose convictions in the matter of military service are not the same as our own." Consequently, it would be unfair to allow the vote to those of military age who, while enjoying military capacity, are still free to claim exemption, no matter what the outcome of the vote may be. Therefore, the section has been framed in the manner in which it appears.

On the other hand it is urged that everyone whose religious belief, irrespective of whether he or she is capable of military service, bars them from military service, should be barred from voting as well. It has been pointed out to this committee that many of those who hold these beliefs are willing to do any other service, but they object to the taking of human life. That means this: Those incapable of bearing arms are willing to do everything that is physically within their power to do. They are in the same position as those other classes of the community who are incapable of bearing arms by reason of age or physical weakness.

To deprive them of voting would be contrary to the provisions of the Naturalization Act. That act may be more or less regarded as a contract between the Dominion of Canada and those who become citizens of this country. Let me read section 5 of that act:

A person to whom a certificate of naturalization is granted by the minister shall, subject to the provisions of this act, be entitled to all political and other rights, powers and privileges, be subject to all obligations, duties and liabilities, to which a natural-born British subject is entitled or subject, and as from the date of his naturalization have to all intents and purposes the status of a natural-born British subject.

The basis for this provision is that those who vote shall be subject to all the obligations, duties and liabilities to which a natural-born British subject is entitled or subject. On the other hand, the obligations, duties and liabilities will be no greater on those enjoying such obligations, duties and liabilities than they are on a natural-born British subject. In other words, in placing this section in the bill, the government is not breaking faith but keeping faith. That is why the negative provision is put therein. It is not disfranchising those who will be subject to the obligations, duties and liabilities but it is saying that those who assume the right of franchise will be subject to the obligations, duties and liabilities.

[Mr. McLarty.]