

"to force Canadians into the ranks" and summed up public opinion thus:—

"Trades unionists are found opposing Conscription, and the leading opponents of every manifestation of democracy are favouring the system"

No less emphatic had been the language of the government.

At the beginning of the session of 1916, in answer to my enquiry whether the promise recently made by the Prime Minister of enlisting 500,000 men meant Conscription, he answered in these words:—

"My Right Honourable friend has alluded to Conscription—to the idea in this country or elsewhere that there may be Conscription in Canada. In speaking in the first two or three months of this war, I made it clear to the people of Canada that we did not propose Conscription. I repeat that announcement today with emphasis."

Equally emphatic and unqualified were my own declarations on the subject.

Throughout the whole campaign of 1910 and 1911, I may recall that the Nationalists-Conservative alliance which opposed the naval policy of the Liberal government of that time asserted that such a policy meant conscription. Meeting these assertions I gave the public frequent assurance that under no circumstances would conscription follow the adoption of our policy. Again and again after the outbreak of the present war I insisted that conscription should not be introduced in Canada. Such was my position when the government reversed its attitude and, without warning, introduced the Military Service Act.

To force such a drastic measure upon a people thus unprepared and against repeated assurances to the contrary, was neither wise nor prudent, nor effective. It may bring men to the ranks but it will not infuse into the whole body of the nation that spirit of enthusiasm and determination which is more than half the battle. It will create and intensify division where unity of purpose is essential.

I am only too well aware that the views which I here present have not met with universal acceptance, even in the party to which I belong, but even yet I hold that to coerce when persuasion has not been attempted, is not sound policy, and in this I appeal to the impartial judgment of all Canadians.

In combatting the policy of conscription, all that I asked was that a measure of such moment should not be enforced by Parliament without an appeal to the people. I supported a referendum for the reason that the referendum is the most advanced and the most modern method of consultation of the people, without the complications inseparable from a general election. A referendum had also been asked on this very question by organized labour. My request was denied.

I appeal with great confidence to the fair judgment of the country that the introduction of conscription at this juncture and in the manner above described was a grave error, if it is remembered that the supreme object should have been and still should be to bring all classes of the community to hearty co-operation in the task which we assumed.

A fundamental objection to the Government's policy of Conscription is that it conscripts human life only, and that it does not attempt to conscript wealth, resources, or the services of any persons other than those who come within the age limit prescribed by the Military Service Act. This is manifestly unjust. The man who is prepared to volunteer his services and to risk his life in his country's defence is entitled to first consideration. Those dependent upon him, and who spare him from their midst are the next most deserving of the State's solicitude and care. A policy which will accord first place to the soldier and the sailor in the concern of the State will, I believe, bring forth all the men necessary to fight its battles, without the need of recourse to conscription. If returned to power, I should adopt such a policy. My first duty will be to seek out the ablest men of the country, men of organizing capacity as well as men representative of all classes in the community, and invite them, irrespective of what it may involve in the way of sacrifice of their personal interests, to join with me in the formation of a cabinet whose first object will be to find the men, money and resources necessary to ensure the fullest measure of support to our heroic soldiers at the front, and to enable Canada to continue to do her splendid part to win the war.

As to the present Military Service Act my policy will be not to proceed further under its provisions until the people have an opportunity to pronounce upon it by way of a referendum. I pledge myself to forthwith submit the Act to the people and with my followers to carry out the wishes of the majority of the nation as thus expressed.

I would at the same time organize and carry out a strong appeal for voluntary recruiting. It is a fact that cannot be denied that the voluntary system, especially in Quebec, did not get a fair trial, and a fair trial would receive from a generous people a ready response which would bring men to the ranks, with good will and enthusiasm, and which would eliminate from our political life one of its most harrowing problems, as no loyal Canadian can view without the gravest apprehension a disunited Canada at this critical hour of our history.

To these views it is no answer to say as is now often said, that we must have conscription or 'quit.' This statement is falsified by a recent and conclusive example. Australia rejected