

had something to say as to the meaning of the vote in Saskatchewan, and it has been suggested that I had something to do with the campaign which was put on in that province. I was in Saskatchewan most of the period during which the plebiscite was being discussed, and during that time I delivered eight speeches in the province. On one occasion I had on the platform with me the member for Weyburn (Mr. Douglas), who has already spoken in this debate, and the runner-up for the leadership of the Conservative party in the convention of 1938, Mr. M. A. MacPherson. I would suggest that all three of us made practically the same appeal to the people of Moose Jaw. I have before me the appeal which I made in the presence of those two gentlemen at a dinner in the evening, and also the appeal which I made over the radio later, and which was made on each occasion that I spoke to the people of the province. Before reading it, however, I would remind hon. members of what I said in this house on February 10 last, as reported at page 480 of *Hansard*. I said:

I shall never say that under no circumstance will I support conscription, but I will say that until such time as I am convinced that we can get in Canada a more effective force under conscription than under voluntary enlistment for overseas service, I am against conscription. So far as I am concerned, a vote of "yes" on the plebiscite will leave me free to make my decision, as a member of this government, with all the facts before me, when the time comes to make that decision. I am not called upon at this moment, neither is anyone else in the house, nor anybody else in Canada, to make a decision on conscription at a time when the best authority in Canada states that at the moment it is not necessary.

Speaking on the plebiscite in the province of Saskatchewan on each occasion I made this appeal:

Those who value democracy will, I am sure, agree that nothing should be preserved which can be made an instrument to divide our people. The pledge given by every political party excepting Social Credit, in the last election not to resort to conscription for overseas service is tending to raise issues which tend to divide our people. We are therefore asking the people to release us one and all from any pledge given. We are not asking you to vote for conscription, nor are we asking you to vote against it; we are merely asking you to say—Do not let any past commitment to me interfere with your judgment in deciding what ought to be done under the circumstances which threaten our country. Up to date the government would not have brought in conscription even had it never been mentioned in the last election. But let no one say after April 27 next that the government was bound by our votes and therefore could not have brought in conscription for overseas service even had it desired to do so. Vote "yes".

I think that makes perfectly plain the issue which was before the people of Saskatchewan,

and I do not think it leaves any ground for anyone who took part in the campaign to say to the people of Canada that a "yes" vote on the plebiscite meant "yes" for conscription or meant "no" for conscription. In my opinion it meant neither one.

Mr. ROWE: It meant nothing.

Mr. GARDINER: My hon. friend says it meant nothing. If we wish to have a decision whether the vote meant conscription or did not mean conscription immediately, I would refer to what has already happened in this house. To start at the lower end of the house, I should mention the speech delivered by the leader of the Social Credit group (Mr. Blackmore). I need only remind the house that it was stated that that group would not vote for conscription immediately, if that issue were placed before the house at the present time, unless upon terms which I am sure my hon. friends who sit immediately opposite could not support.

On the other hand the leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation party (Mr. Coldwell) has stated to this house that unless the foundations for state socialism were to be established in Canada he and his supporters would not be prepared at this time to vote for conscription either immediately, as I understand it, or in the distant future.

Mr. COLDWELL: I said nothing about state socialism.

Mr. GARDINER: Well, we will come to that. I have read very carefully the speech of the leader of the opposition (Mr. Hanson), and I have grave doubts as to whether he would vote for conscription immediately if it were presented to this house. I shall deal with that later as well.

But when I come to this side of the house I have no doubts. The Prime Minister has already quoted to the house the contention of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Ilsley), the contention of the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Ralston), and there is already on the records of this house the contention of the Minister of Munitions and Supply (Mr. Howe), and the contention of myself as Minister of Agriculture; and the other day there was placed on the records of this house in unquestionable terms the contention of the leader of the government that conscription for service overseas is not necessary at the present time in order to provide total effort. This assures me that the great majority of hon. members on this side of the house, if not all of them, would cast a "no" vote on conscription if the issue were presented to this house for the calling up of men for service overseas immediately.