

But it has been argued that it is our duty as loyal Canadians to follow Great Britain automatically into war no matter what the issues may be. The purpose of my bill is to guard the people of Canada against such a course and against such a policy; for the following of such a policy would destroy national unity in Canada. We in this country must decide our foreign policy; we must not follow blindly the foreign policy set by any other nation. The fundamental principle of my bill is that we ourselves must face our national responsibility for foreign policy in the interests of Canadian unity, so that whatever course of action we follow will be the result of the free choice of the people of Canada. I am grateful to the Prime Minister for the support which he gave to this fundamental principle which underlies the bill which I am introducing. Yesterday he said this, as reported at page 2613 of *Hansard*.

I cannot accept the view which is being urged in some quarters to-day, that regardless of what government or party may be in office, regardless of what its policy may be, regardless of what the issue itself may come to be, this country should say here and now that Canada is prepared to support whatever may be proposed by the government at Westminster.

That was a sound Canadian statement. The Prime Minister has always shown a zealous regard for Canada and the welfare of its people. I should also like to congratulate the leader of the opposition (Mr. Manion) upon the contribution that he made to the debate yesterday. He made a striking statement. At page 2627 of *Hansard* he is reported as having said:

So far as I am concerned I demand for us in Canada the same right to form and express opinions as is possessed by the citizens of the British Isles. I refuse to subscribe to any doctrine of inferiority which would cast us in the role of pawns on the international chessboard.

If I might be permitted to say so, the leader of the opposition made a fine contribution to the cause of Canadian unity when he refused to be stamped into a statement that Canada would support whatever policy was put into effect by Great Britain, and I am convinced that thoughtful Canadians will appreciate the contribution that he made.

Automatic commitment to war is the negation of self-government; it is a denial of responsible government. The greatest issue that any government can be called upon to face is the issue of peace or war. How can we in this house be responsible to the people who sent us here; how can the government of this country be responsible to parliament, if we follow a policy of automatic commitment to whatever Great Britain lays down as a matter

[Mr. Thorson.]

of foreign policy? Where would our responsible government be if we followed such a course? How could we discharge our supreme duty to the people of Canada of maintaining peace and keeping them free from the appalling consequences of war, if we left the decision as to peace or war in the hands of another nation, no matter how great may be our respect or our affection for that nation? How can we as Canadians delegate that supreme responsibility to a government that is not our own?

Self-government is the essence of the British constitution. The decision of the issue between peace and war is the supreme exercise of self-government. We would be untrue to the very spirit and the essence of the British constitution if we did not decide that issue for ourselves but allowed it instead to be decided by the Prime Minister of Great Britain. We should assert our right to determine for ourselves whether we are or are not at war. The policies of Great Britain may change. Governments come and go, and there may be governments in Great Britain whose policies are repugnant to the Canadian people. If, for example, there should be in Great Britain a fascist government, or a communist government, should we in Canada blindly follow their foreign policy or any other policy? Certainly not. The present policy of peace in Great Britain might change; it might change under the pressure of the frenzy of hatred that is sometimes being manifested. If Great Britain were to declare war upon Germany merely because of attacks upon Poland, or Lithuania, or Hungary, shall we in Canada automatically be committed to such a war and participate in it? Certainly not. Such a course would disrupt the Canadian nation. If the national existence of Great Britain were really at stake; if she were in danger of destruction, that would be a different matter.

The speeches made by the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition yesterday strengthen the hand of the responsible people in the government of Great Britain. Speeches of that sort are much more helpful to them than frenzied offers of support under all circumstances. Speeches of the kind made yesterday and to-day will make it easier for the government of Great Britain to withstand the clamours of irresponsible people. If the government of Great Britain knows that it cannot automatically carry the dominions into war with it unless it stands upon solid ground, we are doing a service to Great Britain in telling them that we shall decide for ourselves the issues of peace and war.

We in Canada would be greatly concerned if the life or liberty of Great Britain were involved, but I for one would not approve going into a war on an issue that centred on purely national prestige or economic advantage, or one that was engaged in for the purpose of teaching the totalitarian states a lesson. My first loyalty, Mr. Speaker, is to Canada and to the Canadian people. Their lives and their futures are our supreme concern. We might well be acclaimed by many if we demanded strong action to halt the aggression of totalitarian states, but we would not be the ones who would pay the price. Most of us are too old for active military service. The price, the appalling price, would be paid by the masses of the people, and another generation of young men would be totally destroyed. No, Mr. Speaker, let us not prate falsely of patriotism. It has been said that war is futile, that it settles no controversy; but it can be said of the last war that it was not fought in vain; for the memory of that war helps us to keep our heads cool and our hearts warm for the maintenance of peace. Since 1918 there have been countless incidents any one of which would have provoked a world war had it not been for the memory of that terrible war. May the memory of that war, therefore, and of its appalling consequences, never perish. May our minds be kept steadfast against war as long as war can be avoided.

We in Canada have gone a long way in asserting our freedom of action in time of war. We have definitely settled the principle that Canada will always decide the extent of her participation, if any, in war. The Prime Minister has made that statement on numerous occasions. He took an isolationist attitude once in 1922; I refer to the Chanak incident. On that occasion Canada did a great service to Great Britain through the action of the present Prime Minister, who said that parliament must decide. I am convinced that Great Britain was to a large extent deterred from embarking upon war on that occasion by the action taken by Canada.

But, after all, there is nothing unusual or striking about the statement that parliament will decide the extent of Canada's participation in war. It could not be otherwise, for parliament votes the money; and the extent of our participation in a war depends upon the money parliament votes for the purpose of carrying on that war. Indeed, it could not be otherwise.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Go ahead.

Mr. SPEAKER: With the unanimous consent of the house.

Mr. THORSON: I thank the house very much for the courtesy.

Canada must go further than she has gone. She must settle her right to neutrality, her right to freedom of choice in deciding the issues of peace and war, apart from the participation that Canada will take in that war. There are differences of opinion, even on the part of those who believe that Canada is a nation and no longer a colony, as to Canada's position in the matter of a right to neutrality.

May I first clear away certain misconceptions that have been prevalent. The bill which I am advocating is not a declaration of neutrality. I am not advocating a policy of neutrality. The bill says nothing whatever about what Canada should or should not do in any particular circumstances. It is not a statement in advance as to the position that Canada will take. I repeat that I am not advocating neutrality and that my bill is not a declaration of neutrality.

Nor is my bill a declaration of independence. It will not prevent unity of action between this country and Great Britain. Indeed, it will not alter in the slightest degree the relationship between this country and Great Britain. This fact was clearly recognized by Great Britain, it was acknowledged by Lord Stanley in the quotation I made a moment ago. It was acknowledged by Great Britain itself in considering a similar bill passed by the Irish Free State. The constitution of the new Irish Free State contains a clause to this effect—section 28 (3):

War shall not be declared and the state shall not participate in any war save with the consent of Dail Eireann.

The government of Great Britain—

Mr. SPEAKER: Order. The hon. member has exhausted his time. If he continues to speak, it must be with the unanimous consent of the house.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Go ahead.

Mr. SPEAKER: I understand the hon. member has the unanimous consent of the house.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Yes.

Mr. THORSON: The British government made an announcement with regard to this clause in the new Irish constitution. They announced on December 29, 1937, that they were prepared to treat the new constitution as not effecting a fundamental alteration in the position of the Irish Free State in future to be described under the new constitution as Eire or Ireland as a member of the British commonwealth of nations.

The bill does not touch the question as to the status of Canada in the matter of war—