

have no doubt that my good friend from Laurier-Outremont will comply with the suggestion of the Acting Prime Minister, after such discussion takes place as hon. gentlemen may desire, by withdrawing his resolution.

Mr. DuTREMBLAY: In view of the interesting declaration of the Acting Prime Minister, who seems to agree very largely with my views on this question, I shall be pleased to agree with his suggestion that I withdraw my resolution.

Resolution withdrawn.

RELIGIOUS CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS.

Hon. RODOLPHE LEMIEUX (Rouville) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, amnesty should now be granted to religious conscientious objectors to Military Service.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I do not think it is necessary for me to speak at any great length on this resolution. I believe that it expresses clearly the sentiments of those who have any regard for liberty of conscience, a principle which has always been honoured in all countries forming part of the British Empire.

The adoption of this resolution would affect not very many people. I have not the figures, but I am under the impression that only a few dozen people were sent to jail because of their conscientious objections to the Military Service Act. My reason for bringing this matter before the House is involved in a personal reminiscence.

It was my good fortune to see my late lamented leader on the Tuesday before he died, and he reminded me that one of the matters which he intended to bring before the House was this very question of an amnesty for conscientious objectors. He had received many letters from various parts of the country, and to a circular letter addressed by Mr. George Wait to every member and senator, the late Sir Wilfrid Laurier sent this reply:

Ottawa, December 14, 1918.

George Wait, Esq.,

Dear Sir,—I am in receipt of your favour enclosing circular letter addressed to every member of the Dominion Senate and the Dominion House of Commons. The matter therein set forth ought to excite deep sympathy and I consider it to be our duty to take it up as soon as the session opens. In the meantime, I will be much obliged for any details with which you can supply me.

I can, in all truthfulness, state to the House that it was the intention of the late lamented Sir Wilfrid Laurier to bring this

matter before this House and to appeal to the mercy of the Government on behalf of conscientious objectors. It is true that, according to our Military Service Act, those who, owing to the tenets of their church or their creed, could not conscientiously undertake military service, were exempted; but as you are aware, Sir, there was no clause which would apply to the conscientious objector not belonging to a special church, like, for instance, the Society of Friends, or the Plymouth Brethren. Therefore, many in this country who did not belong to any of those churches had to present themselves before the military boards. I am not, of course, speaking of the defaulters, or those who did not appear, who did not obey the law. But many conscientious objectors appeared before the military boards and there argued their conscientious objections. The military boards were, however, unable to grant their claim for exemption, and I am informed—at least this circular conveys the information—that those conscientious objectors were sent to jail and even to the penitentiary. As a British subject, as a Canadian, I beseech the Government to be merciful. The great war is over, and to all those who had conscientious objections to military service, I claim that the Government should grant an amnesty. We should only be following a noble precedent. In England conscientious objectors were exempted. In the United States conscientious objectors were exempted. It is a fact that when the question came up in the British House of Commons the conscientious objectors had for an advocate no other than Lord Hugh Cecil himself. He spoke against a resolution for the disfranchisement of conscientious objectors:

Lord Hugh Cecil, on the other side, said that the State could not go into the reasonableness of an opinion. Complete liberty of opinion must be allowed in the interest of truth. He held that view not simply because of his respect for the religious opinions of other people, but because of his own religious convictions also. It was an indisputable part of Christian belief that if a person sincerely thought a thing was wrong, then it was wrong to him. He was entirely out of sympathy with the conscientious objectors, but if they thought it would be doing a wrong thing to fight in the war, he did not want his country to descend to the wickedness of forcing people to do what they thought was wrong, or of punishing them because they refused to do what they thought was wrong.

Lord Cecil boldly denied that the safety of the State was the supreme law. Carried to its logical conclusion, that doctrine would justify the sinking of the Lusitania, or the bombing of women and children. Not the State, but the Divine law was supreme.

State worship is undoubtedly the poison which has affected Germany. "My country, right or