

I desire to take the strongest possible exception to the statement of my hon. friend the ex-Minister of Militia and Defence, so far as it referred to me, and to repeat what I said in this House, on the 29th day of January last. I shall quote and I now repeat that portion of my statement then made, which is relevant:

I desire to assure the House and the country that neither to the Ontario Recruiting Committee on the occasion mentioned nor to any other organization or individual on any other occasion, did I ever give any such intimation as that suggested, or anything that could be tortured into such an intimation.

In connection with the whole subject, I think it is desirable to point out that on the 17th of January, 1916, in the debate upon the address, I used this language:

I realize that 500,000 men is a large force for us to undertake in Canada; and I realize further that the national strength of Canada must be maintained, and that in proceeding with our effort to increase our forces in Canada we must have regard to the necessities of the agricultural and industrial interests of this country. Canada, in all the elements of her national life, must be kept strong, and we shall have regard to those considerations.

The subject was also alluded to during the present session, when on the 1st day of February, 1917, in reply to my hon. friend from Pictou (Mr. Macdonald), I spoke as follows:

The recruiting proceeded with a great deal of vigour and earnestness, and the fact that we succeeded in the first three and a half months of the past year in recruiting a hundred thousand men or more is an indication that the work was carried on with a good deal of vigour and with a great deal of success. The criticism has been made that proper regard to selection was not made. I discussed that question with the ex-Minister of Militia and Defence more than a year ago—I think in the autumn of 1915 for the first time. The course which my colleague took in that regard was that he did not think at that time that any more systematic method was necessary, and he said that it would be possible, through instructions given to his recruiting officers, to prevent unwise selection, selection which might result in the closing up of industries essential for the prosecution of the war, when recruits might have been obtained from other classes whose work and service were not so essential. I was informed by General Hughes that instructions had been given in various instances to adopt methods which would give some system to that purpose.

Mr. Oliver: About what time was that?

Sir Robert Borden: I think it was in the autumn of 1915 or early in 1916.

Sir Sam Hughes: Early in 1916.

And then, a little later on in the debate, my hon. friend the ex-Minister of Militia and Defence gave some illustrations of cases in which he had acted upon that principle, and he alluded again to his interview with Mr. McDougall, of the Dominion Iron and Steel Company.

Sir SAM HUGHES: Not to my interview, but to the right hon. the Prime Minister's interview. I was present.

Sir ROBERT BORDEN: Yes, and the hon. the Minister of Labour (Mr. Crothers) was present also. I may say that I have received from Mr. McDougall, without any request on my part, a statement of his recollection of what took place at that interview. It corresponds with my own, and he most emphatically declares that there was not any suggestion on my part at that interview that recruiting should be slowed up, but merely that we should endeavour to prevent unwise selection. That is to say, instead of endeavouring to enlist men who presumably might be of more service to the country in the occupations in which they were then engaged than if they enlisted for service at the front, the activities of recruiting officers should be directed to those whose services at home were not valuable to the same extent to the country.

Sir SAM HUGHES: Has the Prime Minister the date of Mr. McDougall's interview with him?

Sir ROBERT BORDEN: I really do not remember the date. It may be in Mr. McDougall's letter. I shall send a copy of it to my hon. friend. It is not necessary that I should read it now.

Indeed, the course which I was endeavouring to carry out—and I think with the concurrence of my hon. friend the ex-Minister of Militia (Sir Sam Hughes)—was based on precisely the same principle as the Bill which is now under discussion; that is to say, to endeavour to have each man give to the State the best service of which he was capable; not to send to the front men who were of more service to the State in the occupations in which they were engaged, but rather to direct recruiting among those who were not capable of performing service at home of the same value.

I should like to say that my attitude with regard to recruiting is very well set forth in a letter which I wrote to Colonel Mulloy of Kingston, who was President of the Eastern Ontario Recruiting Association. I give this letter because I repeated practically the same thing to another delegation on the 10th of May, 1916.

Ottawa, Ont.,
29th September, 1915.

Dear Professor Mulloy,—

I expressed in Toronto my appreciation of those who have given help in recruiting at various meetings throughout the country. For your