

*War Appropriation—Army*

niche which would not necessitate the violating of their consciences by requiring them to carry arms and take the lives of their fellow men. They have no conscientious objection to engaging in any of these auxiliary services contributory to the winning of the war; the one point at which they draw the line is that they will not deliberately and consciously take the life of a human being, be he friend or foe. Having regard to the constitution of the modern army, I have been wondering whether, among the hundreds of thousands of men required in the armed services, there is not a place where these men, who are good citizens and loyal Canadians and are sympathetic to our ideals, but have a firm conviction, founded on what, as they understand them, are orthodox Christian beliefs, that they should not take the lives of their fellow men, could usefully serve their king and country at this time.

I was told the situation had been met elsewhere. I find that in the United States, by presidential decree issued in 1941, the government recognizes two classes of conscientious objectors: those who are absolutely opposed to any kind of participation in warfare, whether by bearing arms or otherwise, and those who are willing to engage in any of the activities of war except that of taking the life of a fellow man. The head of the United States army, in conformity with the presidential decree, designated certain branches of the armed forces as non-combatant services; and I believe that last year over five thousand adherents of one sect alone, namely the Seventh Day Adventists, were regularly inducted into the United States army and are now wearing the uniform with pride and distinction. Only the other day I received a clipping of a citation of one of these Seventh Day Adventist soldiers for bravery at Guadalcanal. Surely somewhere in our armed forces there are places for such men. I find it difficult to believe that in every branch of the armed services men are required to carry arms.

It is with some hesitation I bring this matter before the committee and put the question squarely to the minister, whether there is not some way whereby the conscientious scruples of these men can be respected while enabling them to do a worth-while job in the armed services. In this connection I am aware that there is a little buck-passing going on, because whether or not a man is a conscientious objector is determined elsewhere than by the service departments. The Department of Labour, or national selective service, which the Department of Labour now administers, makes

[Mr. Edwards.]

that decision. I am a little afraid that a man who approaches that board claiming exemption as a conscientious objector goes to bat with three strikes against him. Are we being quite fair in this respect? To determine a man's medical fitness we employ medical advisers; to pass upon his engineering and trade qualifications we have boards of men who have spent their lives at this work and are competent to judge. I suggest that in matters involving conscientious scruples and objections founded on religious convictions, the ordinary civilian board may lack the requisite background and training to appreciate fully the problem upon which they are to pass judgment. It seems to me that men whose life work it has been to deal with problems of religion and conscientious scruples, or the reverse, might well be added to the board when it is required to pass judgment on a Canadian citizen who comes before it asking for special consideration on the grounds of conscientious objection. Ministers of the gospel are familiar with such matters, and one, if not two, might well be included in a board when it is required to pass on cases involving religious or conscientious scruples.

I commend to the favourable consideration of the committee and of the government, first, that boards dealing with conscientious objectors or those claiming on such grounds should be differently constituted from those dealing with national selective service under other conditions; and, second, that it should be possible to find some place in the Canadian army, navy or air force where a person, despite conscientious scruples in regard to the one matter of taking life, can make his contribution, as is done in the United States.

Mr. McIVOR: I should like to ask the minister how many of the men who tried to escape from internment camps are now at large, if any are at large.

Mr. RALSTON: I think there is only one; he was last heard of on the other side of the ocean.

Mr. McIVOR: That shows two things, first, that the old soldier who wanted to get into the war and could not, on account of his age, has given outstanding service. To think that of all those who were interned on this side, only one is at large, and perhaps not even that one! It shows, too, that the Germans and Italians are not quite as clever as the British or French who can escape from a German camp, get away with it and get back into the war again.