

period of time. This material should be received by the special returning officer in London at least three weeks before polling day, since the voting starts twelve days before that day.

I should like now to deal with the estimated cost of the plebiscite. It is estimated that the cost of the plebiscite will be \$1,500,000. It is not anticipated that this figure will be in any way exceeded, and it is possible that it will be somewhat reduced.

The suggestion has been made that we should endeavour to use voluntary workers in this connection. It would, however, be unwise to assume that the plebiscite could be carried on in all districts on a voluntary basis and, for this reason, in budgeting the cost it is necessary to assume that payment will be required for all services to be rendered.

The amount so stated will be required if everyone necessary for taking the plebiscite requires to be paid for his or her services.

On the other hand, it is the hope of the government that a large number will undertake the work without remuneration, and, if this hope is realized, it will result in a considerable reduction in the amount of this expenditure.

I have endeavoured to place before this committee the general principles which have been followed in the framing of the measure, and the general procedure which will be followed in the taking of the vote. I believe that the bill itself is the best guarantee of the desire of the government that people in every electoral district of Canada and those enrolled in military service will have that opportunity, which only a democratic form of government provides, of expressing freely his or her wish upon the issue which is involved.

The bill is one which is so just and fair that, bearing in mind the fact that the holding of a plebiscite has been already decided by this house, and irrespective of opinion held as to the desirability of holding one, all parties and groups can agree upon it.

Might I point out, however, that the measure is not unchangeable in form and immutable in its terms. If, in the course of its consideration, it can be shown, on the one hand, that the bill is too broad or, on the other, too narrow, every consideration will be given to the suggestions thus made.

The important point for this committee to remember is that this bill, when finally passed, will be evidence—and conclusive evidence—that the parliament of Canada, notwithstanding that the clouds may be threatening and the skies black, has kept faith with the people of this country.

[Mr. McLarty.]

At a time when we are fighting to maintain the democratic way of life throughout the world, let us endeavour in every way to maintain it in our own country.

Hon. R. B. HANSON (Leader of the Opposition): This is not a very good time to start an extended debate on a matter of this kind. I do not propose to debate the measure at length, but, there are some observations which I desire to make with respect to this resolution. The proposal to which the resolution seeks to give effect has already of course been the subject of a lengthy debate in this house, and personally I see no great advantage to be gained by entering into a long discussion of the principle involved.

I have not changed my view with respect to this plebiscite. To me it is just as objectionable as when it was first announced. I am still convinced that it is an unworthy evasion of a responsibility which properly belongs to this house. I am still convinced that the importation of this practice into our parliamentary system is inconsistent with the principles of responsible government. The Secretary of State said that it was unique in the history of parliamentary institutions, or rather that the legislation proposed was unique in the history—

Mr. McLARTY: I wonder if my hon. friend will allow me to correct him on that. When I began my remarks I said that the position was unique in one respect, namely, that the general resolution which would ordinarily be discussed on this motion had already been discussed in the debate on the speech from the throne.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Then I misapprehended the purport of the minister's statement. I stand corrected, and I am obliged to him for the correction, but I would say this, that a government asking to be released from a position which it voluntarily took, without being asked to do so by the people of the country, is unique in the history of Canada—absolutely unique. In this connection I want to quote a paragraph that has come to my attention in a periodical with which I think all hon. members are familiar. I am quoting from *Maclean's* magazine of February 15 under the caption "Backstage at Ottawa, by the Man with a Notebook." I think most of us have read these articles from time to time. This is what he says:

In the whole long history of British government, in all the story of democratic government, there has been nothing like this.

Democratic governments—though not British governments—have taken both plebiscites and referendums; plebiscites to give them direction before legislation was passed—with the verdict not binding—referendums to approve or reject

legislation already passed. Nowhere in democratic government has there been a case where the leader of a government, whether in peace or war, has taken a plebiscite to release himself from a pledge.

That is true. Never in the whole history of parliamentary government have the people of the country been confronted with a proposal to release a leader of a government from a pledge of this or any other kind, a pledge which, as I stated on a previous occasion, was self-imposed and which I assert was not an issue in the last general election.

In the course of his remarks the Secretary of State made the assertion that this was not the first plebiscite bill to be found upon the statute books of this country. I recall that some forty-three years ago the then leader of the government, Right Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, in order to stall off a proposal which was then being pressed upon him by the temperance and prohibition forces, did hold a plebiscite on the question of the sale of intoxicating liquor in Canada. I was a boy in 1898 but I remember the occasion well, and I remember the anxiety everyone felt as to what would be the result of the plebiscite. I recall, too, that the temperance people fathered the affirmative, and the brewers and distillers fathered the negative—fathered it pretty well, I think.

Mr. POWER: Look at the results—not the brewers and distillers; but there were a great many wet votes.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): In your province, yes. The liquor interests were pretty well out opposing the plebiscite. That was their right; I am not questioning it, nor am I making any attack on the liquor interests of this country. I am merely reciting a matter of history. But this is the point: on that plebiscite the people voted by a substantial majority to prohibit the sale of intoxicating liquor.

Mr. POWER: Thirteen thousand.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Yes, the people of my hon. friend's province voted overwhelmingly against it, but the great mass of the electorate in every other province, I think, voted for the principle. Sir Wilfrid refused to act, on the theory that the majority was not sufficiently decisive. That is my recollection. I have not looked up the debates; I did not think it necessary. I should not have referred to it at all had not the Secretary of State himself said that there was a precedent for a plebiscite. But Sir Wilfrid did not act, on the theory, as I recall it, that there was too nice a balance among the electorate. I think that is a fair statement of the position.

An hon. MEMBER: A great number did not vote.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Many did not vote, and there will be many who will not vote in this plebiscite; make no mistake about that.

That brings me to the consideration of this question: if upon this plebiscite the result is inconclusive, what will the Prime Minister do?

An hon. MEMBER: Stall a while.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): "Stall" is not a nice word to use; it is a slang word and I am not going to use it. But I have no doubt that if the result is indecisive the Prime Minister will do nothing unless the ministers who sit around him and beside him and who want to do something compel him to do something. If the exhibition we had from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Ilsley) the other day is an indication, I am not at all sure that party loyalty and partisan considerations will not outweigh principle with hon. members on the treasury benches. I am afraid it will.

Why is this plebiscite being taken? Perhaps I should not rehash that whole story again, especially when it is so near six o'clock. But without doubt this plebiscite is being taken to save the face of the ministry. Has it a single element of courage about it? Silence gives consent.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver Centre): We are just being courteous.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Well, the minister usually is very courteous. I should thank him. But I am not quite so sure that that is the reason for his silence. If the result is indecisive, I ask, what is the ministry to do? Will they tell the house and the country? That is one of the first considerations. Someone should answer that question before this debate closes.

Mr. KIRK: You should go out and make it decisive.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Does the hon. member say that it is any responsibility of mine to go out and ask the people to vote for this plebiscite?

An hon. MEMBER: It is everybody's.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): It is not my baby. On a matter of principle I prefer the direct approach rather than the indirect approach of hon. gentlemen opposite. I am prepared to stake my political life on any matter of principle, while hon. gentlemen opposite are seeking to hide and save their political skins behind a subterfuge, to do by the backdoor method something they do not