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CANADA

House of Commons Debates

OFFICIAL REPORT

SPEECH

BY

HON. RODOLPHE LEMIEUX, M.P.

Member for Rouville

ON

COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE

In the House of Commons, Ottawa, on Tuesday, June 19, 1917.

Hon. RODOLPHE LEMIEUX (Rouville): Mr. Speaker, first of all may I be allowed to congratulate my hon. friend from South Wellington (Mr. Guthrie) upon the very eloquent address which he has just delivered. It is the glorious privilege of Liberalism not merely to differ from Conservatism, but to be at times individualistic to the point of differing with its own friends. Although I admire the general form and tenor of my hon. friend's remarks, with many of his statements I am bound to take issue.

In discussing this question I intend to be moderate as usual, but to be firm also, because I believe this is the most complex problem that has ever been approached by the Canadian House of Commons since Confederation. Although it is distasteful in debates where there is such a sharp cleavage of opinion to have to produce a loyalty passport, I wish to say once for all that in taking the stand I intend to take on this Bill, I yield to no one in my loyalty to His Majesty the King. The hon. member for South Wellington spoke a moment ago of the oath of allegiance which the members of this House have taken, and of the danger to unity if this measure were brought direct before the people in the shape of a referendum. Let me remind my hon. friend that there is at the antipodes another British dominion called Australia, which is just as loyal and law-abiding as is Canada. In Australia a referendum was taken on this very question, and I think a greater service was rendered to the Empire in that way than if Mr. Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia, had forced his conscription measure on an unwilling electorate. Need I say that all

of us, whether we are of the Conservative or of the Liberal party, whether we belong to the great province of Ontario or to the old province of Quebec, whether we are from the East or from the West, are united on the question of winning the war. We all are anxious to win the war, and win it as speedily as possible. In the year 1914 a pledge was given on behalf of Great Britain, by that great British statesman, the Hon. Herbert Asquith, then Prime Minister, in which, defining the issues before the British people, he used the following language:

If I am asked what we are fighting for I can reply in two sentences. In the first place to fulfill a solemn international obligation,—an obligation which if it had been entered into between private persons in the ordinary concerns of life would have been regarded as an obligation not only of law but of honour which no self-respecting man could possibly have repudiated. I say secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle which in these days when material force sometimes seems to be the dominating influence and factor in the development of mankind, that small nationalities are not to be crushed in defiance of international good-faith by the arbitrary will of a strong and overmastering power.

The reasons Mr. Asquith gave at the beginning of the war why Great Britain came into this stupendous struggle hold good to-day, and the Canadian people, whether they belong to the French-speaking or English-speaking nationalities, stand and abide by those lofty principles. Canada sided cheerfully with Great Britain and the Allies, and I maintain that all the war measures that have been presented by the Government since August, 1914, have received practically the unanimous consent of the House. It was furthermore stated over and over again that in all these matters we

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