

*Mobilization Act—Mr. Perley*

thinks conscription is necessary; how he proposes to bring it about and enforce it. It seems to me that this may easily develop into one of the most important debates we have ever had in this parliament. We are dealing with vital questions, and certainly this is a critical time in the history of Canada. There is hardly any precedent for what we are doing to-day. In his speech delivered yesterday I think the hon. member for Richelieu-Verchères made a reply to the Prime Minister. He reviewed the record since the election of 1940; having been a member of the inner circle until very recently, he knew what he was talking about. His was a great effort, and I considered it a privilege to be here and listen to it. The hon. member dealt with the passing of the mobilization act and recalled how quickly it had gone through this house. He emphasized the fact that the Prime Minister could call parliament together at very short notice, if at any time he wanted to give parliament a chance to debate the question of conscription. His remarks were directed particularly to the Prime Minister, and he went on to point out the right hon. gentleman's inconsistencies during the past two and a half years.

We have had the mobilization act, under which men have been called up first for one month's training, then for four months' training and then for the duration of the war. Now we have this bill, to amend the mobilization act. In the meantime we have had what might be called two national registrations, the first in 1940 and the latest one last month, of all unemployed between the ages of sixteen and seventy. On previous occasions I have suggested that it was unfortunate that the government did not make use of the information gained in the 1940 registration. Had that been done, all Canada's forces could have been mobilized and there would have been no exodus from the farms such as we have seen during the last two years.

In his speech on Wednesday last I do not think the Prime Minister did himself justice. We expected a lengthy speech, but I think it was a disappointment to the people of Canada. I believe this parliament and the people generally expected something very definite from the Prime Minister. The public, having released him from what he termed his moral obligation through the plebiscite vote, expected something definite when he undertook to amend the mobilization act. I think they expected some form of conscription, in order that the Canadian people might put forth an all-out war effort; but in his speech he defied public opinion and this parliament. If conscription is to be imposed within the next six

months, will parliament have an opportunity to discuss the matter? The Prime Minister made it definite that if we have anything to say about conscription, now is the time to say it. He did not propose to give us another opportunity, even though it might be necessary six months or a year hence to put conscription into force, of discussing this matter. We were told to discuss it now or, so to speak, forever hold our peace.

Who knows what is in the mind of the Prime Minister if and when he admits that it is necessary to impose conscription? There was nothing in his speech that would indicate what he had in mind. I think the statement of the leader of the opposition was a proper one to make. He reviewed the situation as it had developed from 1940 and referred to the different debates and speeches that had been made by the Prime Minister, members of the cabinet and others. He covered the ground very well. When he suggested that we should have had something definite, I think he was taking the right stand.

The hon. member for Richelieu-Verchères said yesterday that the plebiscite ballot should have contained a definite question as to whether or not the voter was in favour of conscription. I shall not deal with that now. When the plebiscite bill was before the house I referred to the question on the ballot. When the bill passed I considered it to be the duty of all of us to endeavour to get a "yes" vote. In February last, before the plebiscite bill came before the house, I took the stand that there was no need of a plebiscite vote. On February 3 I referred to the fact that the government had a huge majority and I commented upon the questions that had been raised during the campaign. At that time I said, as reported on page 262 of *Hansard*:

We believe, and I think the majority of the Canadian people believe, that this is no time for a plebiscite, in view of the crisis facing Canada and the world. It would have been more courageous for the government to bring in a resolution for the complete mobilization of all our resources in finance, industry and man-power, and I venture to say that such a resolution would have the almost unanimous support of this house and of the people of this country.

I wonder what our soldiers overseas think about this plebiscite.

Further on in the debate I suggested that we as representatives of the people knew pretty well what was in their minds and what they had been thinking during the two years since the election. I contended that a vote of this house would have been a better criterion of the feeling of the people than a