

and irrespective of any previous commitments, possess complete freedom to act in accordance with its judgment of the needs of the situation as they may arise.

My ministers accordingly will seek, from the people, by means of a plebiscite, release from any obligation arising out of any past commitments restricting the methods of raising men for military service.

You will observe that there were three purposes in holding the plebiscite. The first was that nothing should be allowed to obscure or impair the magnitude and balanced nature of Canada's war effort; the second, that the administration, subject only to its responsibility to parliament, should possess complete freedom to act in accordance with its judgment of the needs of the situation as they may arise in the prosecution of the war; and the third, which has a direct bearing upon the first two, that the government and parliament should not be bound by past commitments, but be free to discuss and to decide, on its merits, the extent of the use of conscription.

The real nature and extent of Canada's war effort has, for more than a year past, been obscured because of a persistent effort to make conscription for overseas service the symbol of a total war effort, regardless of whether or not the voluntary method was proving wholly adequate. For example, it was said that Canada's effort was not an all-out effort, and could not be an all-out effort because the possibility of conscripting men for service overseas was excluded by existing commitments. This was said regardless of the fact that it has been unnecessary to resort to compulsion, because volunteers in the required numbers have been available.

No one could deny that such commitments had been made. It was useless to argue that in reality, the commitments were not a limiting factor. So long as the government was held in honour bound by these commitments, it was next to impossible to demonstrate that this seeming restriction was not a limiting factor on an all-out effort.

A release from the moral obligation not to resort to conscription for overseas service was a necessary first step before Canada's war effort could be placed in its true light. Release, on that score, was sought by means of the plebiscite, and release has been obtained as a result of the plebiscite. The government and members of parliament are no longer bound by any moral obligation arising out of past commitments. There is now entire freedom to discuss and to decide upon its merits the question of the method to be employed in enlisting men for service overseas. The government is now free to propose without breach of faith, any extension of the application of conscription which may be thought desirable

or necessary to a furtherance of Canada's war effort. In the consideration of the matter, both in parliament and in the country, controversy arising out of past commitments can no longer be used to obscure the magnitude and balanced nature of our war effort.

A release from the moral obligation not to resort to conscription for overseas service was equally a necessary first step before the government could seek from parliament freedom to act in accordance with its judgment of the needs of the situation, as they might arise in the prosecution of the war. That release the government obtained as a result of the plebiscite. Complete freedom to act in accordance with its best judgment will, however, not exist until parliament has removed section 3 of the mobilization act.

Relationship of plebiscite to conscription

Let me now deal with the relationship of the plebiscite to conscription, and in particular, as to whether a "yes" or "no" vote was a vote for or against conscription. On this point, I should, first of all, remind hon. members of what was said in the course of the plebiscite campaign. Both in this house and throughout the country, it was made perfectly clear by myself as leader of the government, by the leader of the official opposition, and by the leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, and by members of their respective parties, that an affirmative vote was not a vote for conscription. I am afraid I cannot tell the house what stand the leader of the Social Credit party took. I have, however, found nothing in any of his utterances which would enable it to be said that he regarded an affirmative vote as a vote for conscription for service overseas.

The question on the ballot is, however, the best answer as to whether or not the plebiscite was a vote for or against conscription.

The question on which the people of Canada were asked to express an opinion was:

Are you in favour of releasing the government from any obligation arising out of any past commitments restricting the methods of raising men for military service?

Clearly the plebiscite merely released the government from its obligation not to resort to conscription for service overseas. It did not commit the government to conscription for services overseas. The result of the plebiscite leaves no doubt as to the freedom of the government and of parliament to discuss the question of conscription for service overseas upon its merits. It equally leaves no doubt as to the freedom of the government and of parliament to decide, for or against conscription for service overseas, either conditionally or unconditionally.

The result of the plebiscite is no more to be construed as a vote for conscription for service overseas than it is to be construed as a vote of confidence in the present administration, or a vote for any political party. That, too, was stressed throughout the plebiscite campaign.

The people were not called upon to express any opinion on the merits of conscription, or on its desirability or necessity. In fact, the plebiscite was selected as the method of obtaining their views precisely because it afforded the best known means of obtaining an expression of opinion regardless of political affiliations, and regardless of military considerations.

Plebiscite not a mandate

Since conscription was not the question on which the vote was taken, the result of the plebiscite cannot be considered or construed as a mandate for conscription. It was not even in the category of a mandate. It was wholly and solely an expression of opinion. The vast majority of the citizens of Canada indicated that in their opinion the government, in deciding upon the course to be pursued in the prosecution of Canada's war effort, should not be hampered by any restriction respecting the methods of raising men for military service.

Some, however, will say: Would the government have asked to be released from its commitments unless it envisaged the possibility, at some future time, of a need arising for conscription for service overseas? As I have just said, one of the purposes of the plebiscite was to give to the government freedom thereafter to recommend to parliament any measure respecting military service deemed essential to the security of our country and the effectiveness of an all-out war effort. We were thereby taking, in plenty of time, a precaution which would enable the government to meet, in the most effective manner without any possible breach of faith, any emergency that might arise in the future course of the war.

To sum up concisely the relationship of the plebiscite to the issue of conscription, I would say: (1) that the plebiscite cleared the deck for unrestricted discussion and debate; (2) that the amendment if adopted will clear the deck for unrestricted decision and action by the government, subject only to its constitutional responsibility to parliament.

Resignation of Minister of Public Works

The vote on the plebiscite was taken on Monday, April 27. On Friday, May 8, I informed the house of the government's intention to amend the National Resources Mobilization Act, and on Monday, the 11th of May, the bill containing the proposed amendment was introduced and given its first reading. In the interval, on Saturday the 9th of May, the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Cardin) tendered his resignation. I felt that the reasons given by the minister evidenced a mistaken view of the government's purpose and intention and therefore sought to have him reconsider his resignation. But the minister felt he could not change his views, so I had no alternative but to inform His Excellency of the correspondence which had passed between us, and to advise the acceptance of the minister's resignation.

In the minister's letter of resignation, there will be found, I believe, not only the reasons which occasioned the resignation, but an explanation of the misgivings which lie at the root of the reasons themselves. Similar reasons and misgivings are naturally in the minds of some supporters of the government, not only from the province of which the minister was one of the representatives in the cabinet, but from other provinces as well. In the case of all but a few of the government's supporters, they account, I believe, for such objections as have been raised to the amendment. It is important, therefore, that the arguments set forth by the minister in justification of his resignation should be examined with the utmost care. In presenting these arguments, I cannot do better than quote from the words of the minister's letter.

The minister said:

I feel that there is no necessity for repeating here the arguments which, I sincerely believe, justify my action. Suffice it to say at present that, as far as Canada is concerned, since the question of the plebiscite was first discussed and since the vote has been taken, nothing has been said nor anything established to indicate that the war situation has rendered necessary, just a few days after the vote, the introduction of a measure containing the principle of compulsory military service for overseas.

In this paragraph is set forth very clearly a circumstance which has greatly perplexed many of those who saw in the plebiscite simply a clearing of the decks for freedom of discussion and possible future action. They had not envisaged the immediate introduction of legislation; much less, as the minister said, "the introduction of a measure containing the principle of compulsory military service for overseas." The misunderstanding of the exact situation has been further aggravated by the fact that since the result of the plebiscite was known, a deliberate effort has been made to construe the result as a mandate for conscription. Not only has it been said that the result of the plebiscite constitutes a mandate—but what is still farther from the truth—a mandate that necessitates immediate resort to conscription for service overseas.