

**THE CASE AGAINST CONSCRIPTION**

VI

**CONSCRIPTION  
AND  
TRUE LIBERALISM**

*by*

*Hon. Sydney FISHER*

Ez-Minister of Agriculture,  
Dominion of Canada

---

**PRICE: 2 cents  
BY MAIL: 3 cents**

---

**PRINTED AT LE DEVOIR**

**43 St. Vincent Street  
MONTREAL**

---

**1917**

FC 557

.5  
F5

## The Case against Conscription

---

I—"WIN THE WAR" AND LOSE CANADA,  
by HENRI BOURASSA, director of  
*Le Devoir*.

II—CANADA'S ECONOMIC DESTRUCTION,  
by ÉDOUARD MONTPETIT, professor  
of Political Economy at Laval Uni-  
versity.

III—THE FREE AMERICAN AND THE CA-  
NADIAN FLUNKY, by PAUL-ÉMILE  
LAMARCHE, ex-Member of Parlia-  
ment.

IV—CONSCRIPTION AND AGRICULTURE,  
by Hon. J.-E. CARON, Minister of  
Agriculture, Province of Quebec.

V—THE ECONOMICS OF WAR, by ADÉ-  
LARD FORTIER, President Mon-  
treal Dairy Company; ex-Presi-  
dent Chambre de Commerce.

CANADIAN LABOR AND CONSCRIP-  
TION, by JOSEPH AINEY, Commis-  
sioner of the City of Montreal;  
Vice-President of the Trades and  
Labor Council.

VI—CONSCRIPTION AND TRUE LIBERAL-  
ISM, by Hon. SYDNEY FISHER, ex-  
Minister of Agriculture, Dominion  
of Canada.

---

Price: 2 cents each; by mail 3 cents.

For the series: 10 cents, post free.

CON

"Spe  
radical  
that th  
cated  
howeve  
of my

line, a  
Liberal

"The

ity and  
only fr

will of t

paramo

Parliam

the wil

elected s

which h

with the

that Pa

one vac

There h

since th

question

way bee

"Unde

proposal

radical c

scription

<sup>1</sup> Reprodu  
1917.

ption

## CONSCRIPTION AND TRUE LIBERALISM<sup>1</sup>

---

ANADA,  
ctor of

CTION,  
fessor  
Uni-

E CA-  
MILE  
arlia-

URE,  
er of  
bec.

ADÉ-  
[on-  
resi-

MP-  
nis-  
cal;  
and

AL-  
X-  
on

3.

"Speaking as an old Liberal with radical proclivities, I wish to say that the situation is very complicated and deplorable. There is, however, one clear line which men of my views can take, and only one line, and that is to uphold out Liberal principles.

"The first of these is that authority and government and power come only from the people and that the will of the majority of the people is paramount. In Canada to-day the Parliament is not representative of the will of the people. *It was elected six years ago on old issues which have nothing whatever to do with the present situation.* Even in that Parliament there are twenty-one vacant seats out of the 221. There have been no by-elections since the war began in which the questions now at issue have in any way been pronounced upon.

"Under these circumstances a proposal has been made of the most radical character to introduce conscription after abundant assurance

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from the *Evening Post*, June 30, 1917.

from the Government and leading men in the country that conscription would not be resorted to. Sir Wilfrid Laurier has proposed that this question should be referred to the people by means of a referendum, thus eliminating from the issue the party questions and any personality of leaders. A number of Liberals seem to have been stampeded. I do not wish to go beneath the surface as to their motives but I cannot understand the Liberalism of a man *who says that he believes conscription would be defeated in referendum, but who still intends to vote to make it law.* This is contrary to my fundamental belief in Liberalism, and in representative institutions. I do not mean to say that members of the Liberal party who are going to vote against the referendum will necessarily be defeated in their respective seats, but I do say emphatically that in the Province of Ontario the feeling that is against conscription is not represented in the House and has no means of making itself felt or of voicing its opinion, and this opinion is widespread. Great newspapers in a centre like Toronto are in favor of conscription and are going so far as to largely ignore any arguments against it. I have means of coming into fairly good touch with a large part of rural Ontario, and I have no hesitation in saying that a large proportion, if not a majority, of the

rural  
tion.  
that  
their  
appe  
more  
appli  
they  
food  
main  
this y  
with  
will  
oppos  
labori  
They  
someb

"As  
bec, I  
rural  
French  
Englis  
that th  
lish - s  
popula  
Voting  
would  
vote co  
conside  
would  
candida  
for par  
come in  
ber who  
vative k  
do so to  
ment.  
conserip

rural electorate is against conscription. They do not hesitate to say that they are short of labor to work their farms; that they are being appealed to and urged to produce more food, and that if conscription applies to rural labor and farmers they not only can not increase their food production, but cannot even maintain it; and that the harvest this year will be seriously interfered with if conscription is enforced. I will not say anything about the opposition to conscription from the laboring classes and the labor unions. They can be voiced much better by somebody else.

"As regards the situation in Quebec, I live in an English-speaking rural community with a certain French population mixed with the English and Protestant. I find there that the great majority of the English-speaking Protestant farming population is against conscription. Voting upon it in a referendum they would be almost unanimous. If the vote comes in a party election a considerable number of the Tories would vote for the Government candidate and support conscription for party reasons, though I have come into contact with a large number who have always voted Conservative but who declare they will not do so to support the present Government. This is not entirely due to conscription, but has been growing



for the last two years as a protest against what they consider the inefficiency and mismanagement of the whole nation's affairs by the Government and as a protest against the presence in that Government of Mr. Rogers and some others.

"In the city of Montreal there are a few Liberals who have been carried away by the disgust they feel at what are called "the slackers" and a large number who have their sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers at the front who are influenced by Sir Robert Borden's appeal to help these. The English population in Montreal is largely Protectionist and largely belongs to what are here called "the interests," and some Liberals among these who heretofore stood out against Tory influence are weakened in the present situation; but the bulk of the English Protestant Liberal feeling in Montreal is strongly in favor of the referendum as truly Liberal.

"I want to say that while much is made of the opposition of the French to conscription it is not by any means only the French of Canada who are against conscription. One of the great misfortunes of the present situation is the effort on the part of the Government and certain leaders of public thought to divide the country on this question on racial lines. This is not the real division. It is true that nine-tenths

a protest  
sider the  
gement of  
rs by the  
est against  
rnment of  
ers.

there are  
en carried  
y feel at  
ers" and  
heir sons,  
athers at  
ed by Sir  
to help  
ation in  
onist and  
are here  
d some  
retore  
ence are  
uation;  
sh Pro-  
ontreal  
endum

nuch is  
French  
y any  
anada

One  
of the  
on the  
ertain  
divide  
n on  
real  
enths

of the French are against conscription without the people being consulted, but I have yet to find one who will not bow to the will of the majority of the people as declared at the polls. If the present moribund Parliament passes a conscription law and the Government attempts to put it into force as prescribed by the present bill there will be strong resistance on the part of many French Canadians, possibly going so far in a few instances as rioting; but I am satisfied that even with this improper imposition of this new law there will be nothing that could be fairly called rebellion or civil strife. It does indeed seem a pity that these difficulties cannot be avoided, an opportunity being given to the people to vote. Personally I believe that a vote will defeat conscription. I do not deplore that because I am sure that then a greater assistance to the boys at the front will be brought about than can possibly be brought about in the way proposed to-day before Parliament. I have yet to find the Liberal who is not just as earnest in regard to the prosecution of the war, as desirous of giving all assistance and support to the Canadian battle line as any ultra-Tory conscriptionist, but they do not believe that to defeat Prussianism, the best way is to adopt it."