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AUTOCRACY AND DEMOCRACY

BY
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OF QUEBEC

— 321. —

WITH THE AUTHOR'S COMPLIMENTS

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The present terrible war, which has now involved either directly or indirectly every country in the world, is no doubt in its final analysis a development of the age long struggle between good and evil, but more immediately it had its origin and has its being in the never ceasing conflict between autocracy and democracy, which has waged since families first gathered together into tribes for mutual protection and advantage, and found it necessary or desirable to submit to some form of government. In some cases that government was by a chief, chosen by the people or self-elected, or by a governing body of similar origin, but in either case ruling as by right and with absolute or unlimited power. So autocracy had its beginning. In other cases the government was

through a tribal council, representative of the entire tribe, and accountable to those represented. So democracy commenced. The one may be defined as government of the people, the other as government by the people. In either case the people were governed, and in every case good government involved its being for the people. Abraham Lincoln in memorable words gave a definition of democratic government, as government of the people, by the people, for the people, and to that definition nothing material can be added. Autocracy consists in government with absolute and uncontrolled power or authority, without responsibility to anyone, by either an individual or a number of associated individuals, and it is a question of no relative importance how the power and position were originally obtained. An autocrat elected by the people is as truly an autocrat, as though he ruled by self-election or by divine right, and the same applies to any governing body.

The term Democracy is derived from two Greek words meaning the people, or commons, rule, and in political science is applied to that form of government in which the people rule themselves, either directly or through representatives. It

must not be confounded with ochlacracy, or mob rule, from which it differs as socialism does from anarchism. Both democracy and socialism are subject to defined laws, which neither ochlacracy or anarchism are. Direct democracy is impossible except in small state or in tribes, as in large states the population is too numerous and distances too great for regular assemblies of qualified citizens. This difficulty has been solved by representative government, under which the people elect periodically for a stated term those who shall govern them as their representatives. The stated term cannot be shortened by the people, once the representative is elected, and cannot be lengthened or exceeded by the representative without the consent of the people. In this it is identical with the duration of a Power of Attorney. If a merchant gives his manager a power of attorney to represent him in all financial matters for five years and lodges a copy with his bankers, who honor a cheque signed by the manager in the sixth year, the bank cannot debit the merchant's account with the amount of that cheque without his consent being first obtained, nor can any concerted action on the part of the bank and manager alter

this. When the constitution limits the parliamentary term to five years and the members are elected under that constitution, it is beyond their powers to prolong the life of parliament except by using autocratic methods, nor does any unanimity or legal action or alteration of the constitution make them representatives of the constituencies they were originally elected for, and whose electorate may have entirely changed in sentiment or largely in personality. Even the directors of a bank or chartered company have no power to re-elect themselves, though they are only representatives of the shareholders as trustees, entrusted with property or the management of property for the benefit of others, while members of parliament are representatives of individuals. This is clearly shown by the voting qualification, which for members is individual, the vote of the wealthiest member of the community having an identical value with that of the poorest, or of the largest property owner with that of the voter who has no property. For directors the voting qualification is shares, the holder of one hundred shares, or equivalent proxies, having an equal electoral voice with one hundred shareholders possessed of one share each.

Constitutional government is not necessarily democratic in the fullest sense of that term. It really means government in accordance with the constitution, but is generally understood as implying that a large number of the people have some considerable share in the supreme power. The United Kingdom stands alone in having no written constitution, though established law and precedent form an unwritten one that all recognize as binding until change is brought about by the will of the people, expressed through their elected representatives.

Canada has a written constitution, of which the basis and essence is government by the people through their elected representatives, empowered to represent them for a stated time. It seems needless to state that the office and obligation of a representative is to represent, and that he is in honor bound to act in accordance with his pre-election pledges and promises, unless certain that popular opinion in his constituency justifies him in deviating from them. No representative is justified in substituting his judgment for that of those he represents, or acting in defiance of their wishes. Otherwise he ceases to be a democratic representative and becomes an elected autocrat. No doubt in many

matters, especially those of secondary importance, he must use his own judgment, as all representatives frequently have to do, but if he finds himself at variance with his electors on a matter of the first importance, his manifest duty to them is to resign his seat, or conform his action to their views. It is quite possible for a representative member of parliament, if he is unprincipled and dishonorable enough to do so, once having secured his election, to defy his electors during the term for which he was elected, disregard or even oppose their views and wishes and ignore his pre-election pledges and promises, in short assume autocratic ruling instead of democratic representative powers. The only remedy his constituents have is in refusing to re-elect him at the expiration of his term of representation, and if such action by a member were common instead of exceedingly rare, the electorate would be obliged to shorten the life of parliament as the only means of controlling their representatives. In the early part of the last century, a body of men drew up and advocated what they called the People's Charter. They themselves were called chartists, and bitterly denounced by the ruling classes as agitators and

revolutionists. Yet to-day all they struggled and suffered for, with one exception, has become recognized and approved law throughout the United Kingdom and the self-governing Dominions, and has spread and is spreading throughout the civilized world. They are almost forgotten, but their work will endure. The one point of the charter which has not yet become law is Annual Parliaments. Already the tendency is towards shorter Parliaments, and if the electorate cannot otherwise control their representatives, Annual Parliaments must come, and legislators conform their parliamentary procedure to the change. The present question, however, is how the electorate can provide against a parliament prolonging its life without their consent.

In the United Kingdom as in Canada the present parliament has exceeded its term without appealing to the electorate through a general election. There is a marked difference between the two cases. In the United Kingdom the distribution of seats has remained unchanged, and by-elections have been promptly held for seats becoming vacant. The invariable result of those by-elections has been to show that the government has the full support of the people, and

that they fully approve its retention of power and do not desire a general election or change of government. In the House itself the Government has maintained its position with unprecedented majorities and negligible opposition. In the House and the Country alike it has full and evident support. In Canada no by-elections have been held for some considerable time, and many new constituencies entitled to representation in October, 1916, have had that representation withheld from them. Consequently a large proportion of the seats are vacant, and in the absence of by-elections it is impossible to gauge the feeling of the country on any question.

It would have been impossible for the Canadian Government to have prolonged the life of the present Parliament without the consent and concurrence of the Opposition, which would not have been given if there had been any intimation that the Government might possibly substitute coercive conscription for voluntary recruiting. In May when only six months of the term of office remained, it suddenly without any warning or previous intimation of its possibility, sprung conscription on the people. This was resented by organized labor throughout the

country, whose representatives claimed they had been deceived by the government declaration that conscription was not contemplated, and demanded the prior or concurrent conscription of wealth, a demand the government afterwards met by levying an income tax under which an income of \$4,000 would pay either \$40 or \$80 and one of \$10,000 either \$360 or \$400, which is not likely to be regarded by working men as a conscription of wealth at all, but simply as a taxation of income, and not a heavy one at that, moderate indeed as compared with the British income tax of \$500 to \$700 on \$4,000 income or \$2,166 to \$2,500 on a \$10,000 income, and even that is only a tax on income, while the conscription of wealth properly implies a contribution from capital. There was further opposition to enforced conscription from the Province of Quebec, against which province the measure was specially aimed, as not having furnished its proportionate quota of men under voluntary enlistment. French-Canadian representatives attribute this shortage to various causes, to the feeling of soreness and injustice arising from the Ontario government having persisted during the war in legislation calculated to deprive

French-Canadian children in the Roman Catholic schools of that province of adequate instruction in their own language, to the absence of proper recruiting methods in the Province of Quebec, to early marriages and large families of small children in that province, and to the difficulty that farmers unable to hire or pay farm help experience in leaving small farms and stock. Numerous meetings were held in the province, which were incorrectly called anti-conscription, though they really were pro-referendum, for although the evident feeling at these meetings was against conscription, the resolutions passed at them almost invariably showed a loyal readiness to accept and submit to conscription provided it could be shown that a majority of the electors of all Canada, inclusive of the volunteers from the Dominion in England and at the front, approved it. The readiest and only satisfactory manner of ascertaining the will of the people on this question, which had never previously been submitted to the electorate, was evidently by the referendum, as that neither involved the fate of the government nor mixed up other issues with the question, which a general election inevitably would do. The resolu-

tions therefore asked for a referendum.

There is no provision in the Canadian constitution for a referendum, but there is nothing to prevent one being taken, nor anything to prevent the government and opposition covenanting to abide by its result. If so taken it would have the strong legal sanction of precedent, one having been so taken in 1896. It would have had, in case of any attempt being made to evade the result, the strong force of public opinion in its favor.

A referendum has never been taken in the United Kingdom, but the opinion of so high an authority as the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour deserves consideration. Speaking on 29th November, 1911, he said: The advantage of a referendum is this: that the issue is quite clear and quite precise. A referendum has an enormous advantage. It does not involve a general election; it does not involve all the present bitterness inevitably involved in a contest between two competitors for a seat; it does not carry with it a change of government and it does get a clear verdict from the people.

Democracy is justified in all its developments, of which the referendum is one, but in every form involves government by the people.

The referendum does not conflict with representative government, or with constitutional government as recognized in Canada, for it does not bind the government of the day, except as it is in honor bound, and is merely a means of ascertaining the will of the people on a question of the first importance not previously submitted to them. It is quite distinct from that direct democracy which has become impossible.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier has declared in the House that there is no doubt at all that this parliament is legally constituted, and Mr. Victor E. Mitchell has advanced that as the term of the present parliament was legally and constitutionally extended, constitutional government still exists in Canada. It is not necessary to disprove, or even question, either of these statements to conclusively show that the present Canadian government is neither representative nor democratic. The basis and essence of the Canadian constitution as originally drawn was government by the people through their representatives elected for a stated time. This may have been legally changed under the terms of the constitution for government of the people by men whose mandate has expired, and who consequently are no more representative of the people

han any surviving members of previous parliaments, and indeed represent no one but themselves. The common sense of the common people can see through the legal sophistry and constitutional jugglery involved. They will not accept the emasculated constitution, altered without their concurrence and without their being in any way consulted, as being individual with the one it replaces. If so accepted there is nothing to prevent a parliament with a coalition government prolonging its life, without appeal to the people, or filling vacant seats, till senile debility supervened, or an end came similar to that of the long parliament that once governed England.

The present house is not representative, and not being so, is clearly not democratic. If autocratic government is really necessary under present conditions for the safety of the state, the people are surely entitled to have some voice in choosing the autocrats, especially as members of the present parliament have declared that they now represent no one but themselves. A very notable instance of this exists in Mr. William Power, M.P. for Quebec West, whose three sons and two sons-in-law have done and are doing good service at the front, and who has stated

not only that he no longer represents his electors, but that he believes that properly organized and united efforts for voluntary service would be much more effectual than any attempt to enforce conscription. He is more deeply interested than any other member of the house in prompt reinforcements of overseas contingents, but is evidently convinced that enforced conscription will only make of Canada a divided nation, not even able to stand, much less effectually assist in winning the war.. It is painfully evident that the Military Service Act is dividing the provinces, and in the provinces themselves dividing class from class. What the end may be none can foretell, but history fails to give one instance of a divided people succeeding in anything. It has never been explained why the Militia Act, on the Statute Books since Confederation, or as amended since 1904, has not long ago been used to call out, organize, equip and drill troops. The call being by ballot might have been promptly and readily altered to its being by selective conscription, if the government found the change necessary or desirable. It would not have taken long to settle whether service outside Canada meant overseas service, and

even if some considerable time had been so occupied, that time might have been utilized in calling out and preparing the men.

During the last century and the early part of the present one, the age old argument of autocracy was still current, claiming the right to rule the people for their good, as being wiser than they, and as possessing special information that it would be impossible or undesirable to impart to them. To this the reply of the people was "If they will not rule us as we wish they must be made to do so." More recently leading and representative statesmen of both parties have admitted that the will of the people must prevail, and the autocratic power of the House of Lords has followed that of the King.

If the electorate determines on enforced conscription as needed to save the country, and the government concludes that voluntary service with greater inducements and better pay would be more efficacious, the government would not be justified in resisting the will of the people, or parliament entitled to withhold from them at the end of the term for which it was elected the right of electing other representatives that will enforce conscription. If this is true, as it undoubtedly is,

the converse is equally unquestionably true.

The people can certainly exercise an intelligent judgement in such questions as whether conscription should be enforced or not, and have quite sufficient information to judge whether it is necessary or not.

The real practical question is whether enforced conscription or greater inducements would better ensure getting the men it is desirable to send, and the people know far more about that than any government can tell them. They may think with the Right Rev. David William, Lord Bishop of Huron, that it is a grave injustice that the men who stay at home should be able to make in many instances five to ten dollars a day, while the soldiers at the front should receive the princely sum of little more than one dollar a day. When the service was purely voluntary this question was not so pressing, but under enforced service it became of first importance. By what right can the government claim, not only to oblige men to fight, but to oblige them to do so at inadequate wages, judged by the current market value of their labor services. No wonder organized labor protests, for the same principle is capable of much wider extension, and might be appli-

ed to any service or work in the interest of the state, to the utter destruction of all Trades Unionism has so long struggled for and so painfully won.

In the United Kingdom, even when it became evident that voluntary recruiting would not supply the necessary quota of fighting men, the government made haste slowly and handled the subject with the greatest care and consideration for public opinion and general feeling. The question of compulsion had first been brought up in the Lords in January, 1915. In July 1915 Lord Landsdowne publicly asserted that he did not believe voluntary service would be tolerated much longer by the country, marking how great a revolution had taken place in the feeling of the people since the commencement of the war, when voluntary service was regarded as the only possible course and compulsory conscription had only to be mentioned to be denounced. In May 1915 a coalition government was formed, and meantime Lord Derby's plan of volunteering given an exhaustive trial. The Zeppelin raids, and feelings of the ever increasing number of those who had relatives at the front or at sea, strengthened the change, till as Mr. H. B. Neely asserted on 28 June in

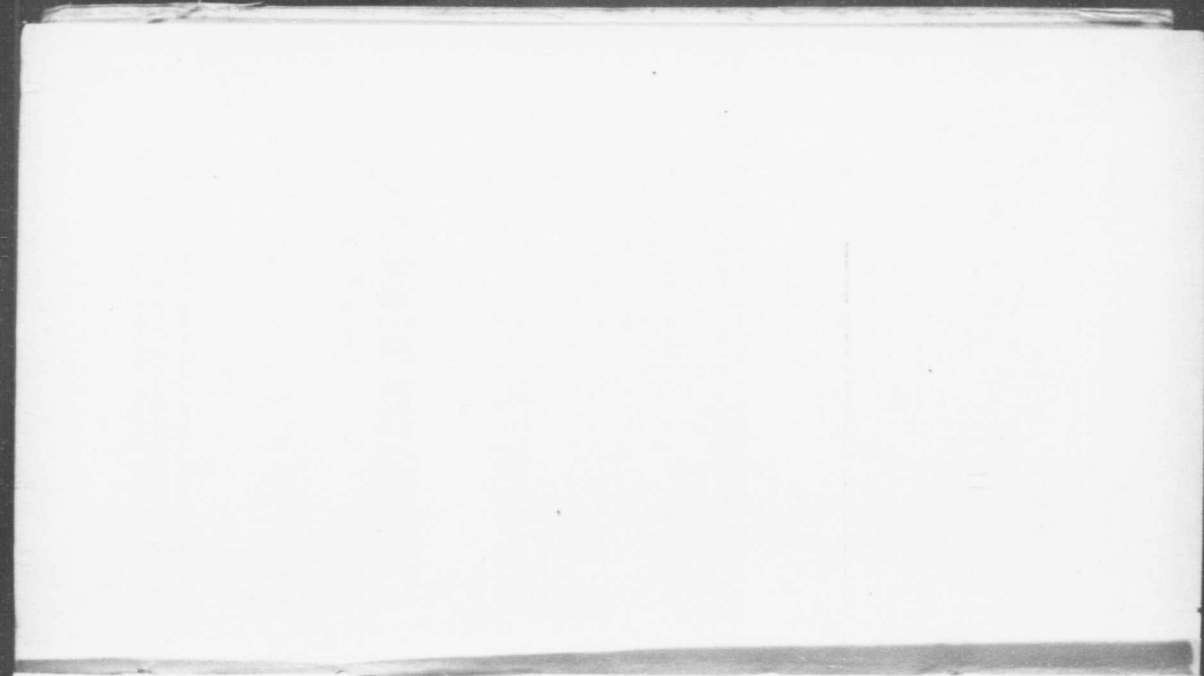
the Ottawa House compulsory service in Great Britain was accepted freely readily and happily. No doubt there still existed an opposition to it, which had dwindled till it became comparatively negligible. Contrast this to the position in Canada where the government obtained from the opposition a consent to the prolongation of the life of parliament, and consequently of its term of office, by giving the impression that military service would remain voluntary, the Minister of Militia stating in April that conscription had not been considered by the government, a declaration which was followed by its being suddenly sprung on an astounded and utterly unprepared people in May. Mr. Victor E. Mitchell has asserted that the Compulsory service bill was passed by the House of Commons because the Government could no longer raise by the voluntary system the number of men which the necessities of the war demanded. This, like most of his statements, may be quite correct, but the government had long seen that such a position would inevitably come, and had carefully prepared the people for it with the result that, although some negligible opposition remained till the last, the feeling of the great

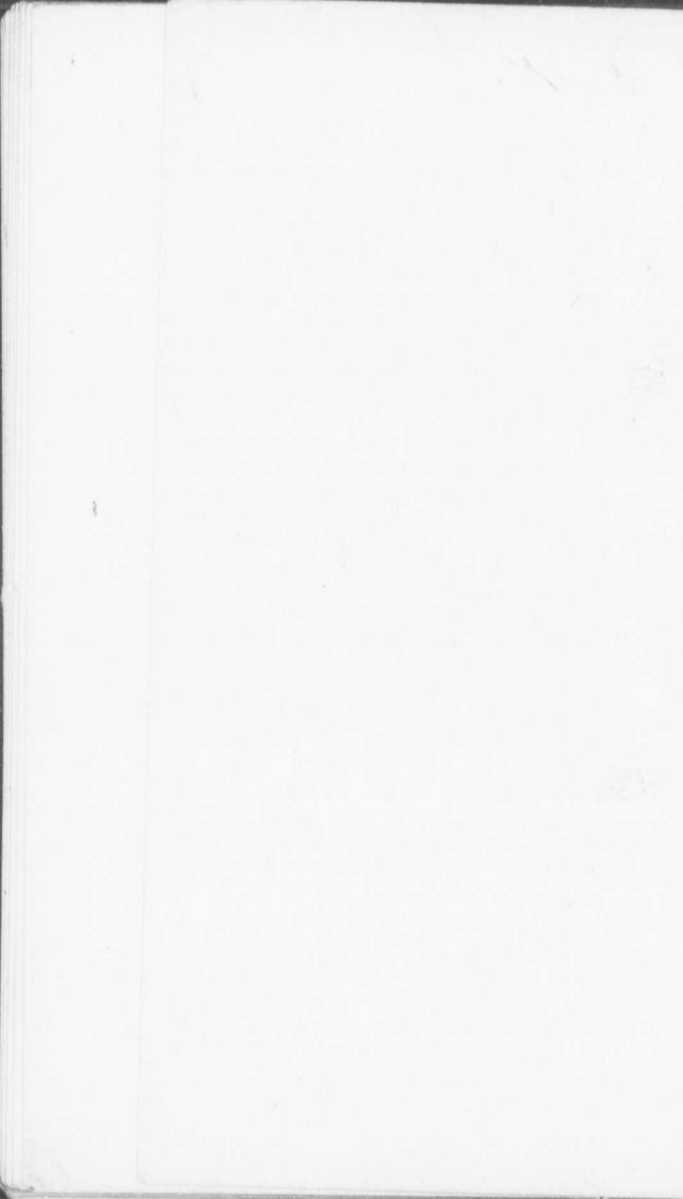
body of the electorate demanded conscription and it was accepted as Mr. Neely stated.

In the United States, when the fate of the Union hung in the balance, that great statesman Abraham Lincoln, made no attempt to defer the elections, but trusted the people when the constitutional time for holding them came, and left the fate of himself as President, of his party as holding a majority in Congress, and of the Union itself to the people, with the happiest results. It has been stated that on some occasions the law officers pronounced his proposed procedure unconstitutional. He was not the man to allow technical questions to influence his action, and he told them he stood by the constitution as he read it, and it was for Congress to confirm his action. In all he did he had the support of that Congress, which was undoubtedly and unquestionably representative of the people, and when on the unaltered constitutional date he and the congress appealed to the people, all that he and it had done was approved and confirmed. Technical constitutional questions and differences of opinion on constitutional questions and differences of opinion on constitutional procedure are one thing, altering

the constitution in its very basis and essence without consulting the people, and retaining power, position and emoluments in defiance of the common sense reading of the unaltered constitution quite another.

Canada must never forget that she is not a possession of England, but a free self governing confederation of provinces, an integral portion of the first home rule empire the world has ever seen; an empire of which the United Kingdom is the centre and the King of England the head governing by the advice of his ministers as representing specially the British people, but also in some sense the peoples of the Dominions and Dependencies. Her people must guard those democratic principles and privileges which autocracy is always ready to infringe upon. To avoid the possibility of trouble elections were not held on the appointed date, and see, how great a trouble has resulted. May it be a lasting lesson to all, that we may never again deviate from true democratic principles, lest a worse thing come upon us.





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CANADIAN AUTOCRACY

AND

BRITISH DEMOCRACY

Robert Borden has set his feet in the path Paul Kruger trod to his undoing, and it is for all Canadians without distinction of race or party to consider what it means to them collectively and individually. It is the age old way of Autocracy, no good road. In its beginning it resembles the primrose path, and we all know where that leads to. The words of Solomon are equally applicable to either:—"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death." In it John Lackland found his nickname, and Charles Stuart, lost his head. By obstinately and persistently following it, a King of England severed from the Empire the fairest British possession. In that path Rehoboam divided Israel from Judea. There is no need to multiply instances, for they are written large

in the history of all nations. Rudyard Kipling truly wrote. "Many feet have worn it, and the road is old indeed." The trumpets of Democracy, that sounded by the isle of Runnymede, and round the scaffold at Whitehall, give warning that wherever and whenever Autocracy raises its head, though the crown is veiled and the sceptre hidden, though the fashion of the lies that cloak it is changed Autocracy is unalterable and unteachable, for step by step, and word for word, so the old kings did.

Autocracy consists in government with absolute power careless of the will of the people, by either an individual or associated individuals, and it is a question of no relative importance how the power and position were originally obtained. An autocrat elected by the people is as truly an autocrat as though he ruled by self-election or Divine right, and the same applies to any governing body. A great statesman defined it as distrust of the people tempered by fear. It claims to govern the people for their own good, as being wiser than they, and as possessing special information that it is impossible or undesirable to impart to them.

Democracy means government by the people, and is as distinct from Ochlocracy or moblaw as the socialism which is exemplified in the post office is from the anarchism that would

destroy all institutions. Under constitutional government the people rule through representatives elected to represent them for a stated term, bound in honor to hold to their election pledges, and to remember that their duty is to act as representatives of the electors, not to substitute their own ideas for the views of those they represent. Abraham Lincoln, in memorable words gave a definition of Democracy, as government of the people, by the people, for the people, and to that definition nothing material can be added. Another great statesman defined it as trust in the people, tempered with prudence. When not only his own fate as President and the fate of his party, but also the fate of the Union hung in the balance, Abraham Lincoln made no attempt to defer elections but trusted the people with the happiest result.

The franchise is not a reward or gift which it is within the power of any government to grant or withhold, but a sacred right of which no qualified voter can justly be deprived and to which all women are entitled equally with men whenever the people decide on extending the suffrage to them. If one woman is entitled to the suffrage, all are, for fancy franchises cannot be reconciled with democratic principles, nor what is more important, with even-handed justice. The grand old Chartist prin-

ciple of one man, one vote, with all votes of equal value, will in due time be extended to one person, one vote, each vote counting alike. The franchise cannot justly be given to those that have no right to it as Canadians, whatever service they may have rendered to the Empire or even to Canada.

In the bitterly fought struggle for the extension of the franchise in the United Kingdom I was old enough to participate. I was in England when Hyde Park railings came down, and the common people won the right to be represented. I heard the reply of the people to the age old claims of Autocracy. "If they will not rule us as we wish they must be made to do so." I remember the extended franchise being condemned as a leap in the dark, and have lived to see from it only the happiest results. I have seen the autocratic House of Lords oppose the will of the people expressed through the democratic House of Commons, with a fine contempt for the consequences conveyed in unparliamentary language, and have seen as a consequence the Lords deproved of their autocratic power. I have lived to hear the most Conservative British statesmen declare that the will of the people must prevail. Now I find that autocracy which has been driven out of England and the United Kingdom has gained a footing

and found a new home on another continent in the land of my adoption. It is well for Robert Borden that he has not Englishmen to deal with. He should have noted how careful the British Government was to make sure that it had the people with it, before extending the life of parliament or enforcing conscription.

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide, and the time is now fast approaching when the Canadian people must decide between Autocracy and Democracy, for becloud it as you may, that is the real issue. Of course the more immediate one is which political party will be returned to power for five years to come, and there is also the secondary one of whether our boys at the front shall be reinforced by willing volunteers or unwilling conscripts. The people will see to it that they do not lack adequate support. I and many others like me, who have a son at the front, or it may be in the case of others sons or brothers, or one dearer than either, are quite ready to trust the people for that. Very many think double pay, increased pensions, better conditions, more consideration, and wiser and better organized recruiting methods than in the more recent past, especially the lukewarm ones that have obtained in Canada since conscription was sprung on the people, would be more efficacious than com-

pulsion. I would ask those who think conscription must be enforced at all costs, if they really believe that the case is so exceptional that the end justifies the means. I would ask those that grudge the necessary outlay if they would conscript men and not wealth, if they would force one man to give up a good position and comfortable income for little over a dollar a day, and allow another to remain under no equivalent burden of taxation. Take a man with a salary of \$2,500 a year for example, that cannot qualify for active service, or that can escape it, what special tax does he pay in consideration of not risking his life in the trenches and retaining his position and salary? None whatever. If conscripted as fit for service, he loses both position and income. How many ablebodied munition workers can you get for a dollar and ten cents a day, all found, but no extra pay for overtime? We have the answer of the government about both pay and pensions. To better pay, a flat refusal, to increased pensions, deferred consideration, to conscription of wealth, a ridiculously inadequate income tax. The Germans are basing their hopes on starving Great Britain and incidentally the British soldiers and Canadian volunteers in the trenches and at the front. Few in Canada give this a thought but the British Government knows how serious

the situation is. With Americans going forward in thousands and Britishers coming over the line to enlist in hundreds it is quite a question as long as there are ample Canadian reinforcements still in England, whether our first duty is not to conscript men for shipbuilding and wheat growing. I would like to see any government try it at fighting wages and on war conscription terms.

As we all know Harry Lauder gave what he held dearest in the world—his son. Few know the government asked him for one thing more. That he would help them to induce people to limit the household use of bread to the absolutely necessary. He has told the people they may know what it is to starve, that it is also possible that our brave boys may have to go over the top hungry. He told them he spoke not as a Scotch comedian, but as a simple man of the people.

Thoughtless as the trout that takes the angler's fly, the voter that cannot see beyond the bait of conscription, which has little indeed to do with winning the war, may find too late that he has swallowed the hook of autocracy, and strange as it may seem that the three letters w-a-r in the label on the bait really spell election. Those who can swallow fancy franchises, being simple enough never to suspect they were given for a purpose, or who think the disfranchisement of

those who for many years past have thrown in their lot amongst us, and shown themselves good citizens, is justifiable, had better vote for those that are responsible for such innovations. Those that feel perfectly satisfied with all the government has done in regulating food prices and many other matters, will no doubt do so. For myself I know that the end can never justify the means, or injustice bear good fruit till figs grow on thistles. The franchise has been given to those who have no right to it, and taken from those that have every right. No good can come of such unprecedented and unjustifiable action. The end is not yet.

ED. HARPER WADE.



Quebec, September 25th, 1917.