

Minister of Militia and Defence Strongly Defends Gov't. Measure

Sir Edward Kemp expressed deep regret that the coalition proposal had not been successful. He said that not one of Sir Robert Borden's colleagues criticized his proposal although it would have meant that half the seats in the Cabinet would have gone to the Opposition. It would have been a great advantage, but now that it had been refused they must work out the bill together in the most sympathetic manner.

Referring to the arguments that under the Militia Act troops could not be sent outside the country, Sir Edward said that he could not agree with them. He had no hesitation in concluding that troops could be sent abroad. He said that since the outbreak of the war, Sir France Roy Lemieux, Chief Justice for Quebec had given an important decision on this point. An appeal had been made to him for the release of a certain private on the grounds that the Government had no authority to send an enlisted man outside of Canada. Mr. Lemieux declared that the Government had a constitutional right to raise troops to send abroad. He ruled that the right to enlist for overseas service was valid.

Difficult to Get Army Vote.

Taking up the question of the referendum, Sir Edward said it would be difficult to poll the vote of the soldiers. When the bill was passed providing for the votes of the soldiers, there were many troops in Canada and few at the front, now the situation was reversed. He said that the referendum would give a chance to every slacker and every alien enemy to vote against conscription.

Sir Edward said that he believed that some form of selective system was necessary even if voluntary enlistment be kept up in order to furnish the necessary reinforcements at the front. He said that under the voluntary system there were many inequalities. Many families had sent over all their sons

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while others had sent none. There were hundreds of instances.

Hon. William Pugsley asked if under the present act a fifth son might be taken where say, four had volunteered.

Sir Edward replied that this was a matter which would be taken care of by the tribunals.

Mr. Pugsley insisted that the tribunals would have no authority in such a case.

Sir Edward said that the Prime Minister in introducing the bill, had stated that he was prepared to consider any necessary amendments. It might be necessary to make amendments to meet such cases.

Artillery Popular Branch.

Continuing Sir Edward said that in the month of May there were 6,407 recruits. Of these 1,842 were obtained for the Railway Construction and Forestry Battalions; Artillery, 955; Infantry, 1,208; miscellaneous, 2,402. Sir Edward pointed out that under the voluntary method men could enlist in any arm of the service they wished. The artillery was a very popular service and as a result there was a surplus of artillery both in Canada and in England. They had been compelled to order recruiting for artillery to cease.

Mr. Pugsley intervened to know if a man could not be transferred from one arm to another.

Sir Edward admitted that this was correct but said it was not fair under the voluntary system where a man had enlisted in good faith in one branch to change him to another without his consent.

Continuing, Sir Edward said that infantry was what the authorities were crying out for at the front. We were not getting the infantry recruits under the voluntary system.

Mr. Pugsley again interposed to say that the Prime Minister had recently said that we needed forestry battalions.

Sir Edward said that that was true enough, but infantry was also wanted most urgently.

The Minister thought that a 100,000 men could be secured under the selective system without inconvenience to the industrial life of Canada.

Mr. E. M. Macdonald said that on April 28, Sir Edward Kemp had stated in the House in answer to a query that the question of conscription had not been considered by the Government. He asked when it had first been considered.

Sir Edward Kemp suggested that the question be put to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Pugsley said that apparently the Prime Minister had introduced the subject to the House and the Government had considered it afterwards. This was the inference.

The Quebec Situation.

Taking up the question of recruiting in Quebec Sir Edward said that he wanted to discuss the question with frankness but without the slightest offence. He claimed that the same methods had been adopted in Quebec for recruiting as in any other province. Voluntary recruiting had been successful in the other provinces because everyone and all classes and communities had lent a helping hand. This was what had given it an impetus. He was not prepared to discuss the conditions in Quebec.

Continuing, Sir Edward said that Mr. Lapointe of Kamouraska had questioned the figures produced in the House relative to the enlistment

of French-Canadians. He said that the statement putting such enlistments at 14,100 was as nearly correct as it was possible to make it.

Referring to the criticism of the appointment of Rev. Major C. A. Williams as Chief Recruiting Officer for Montreal Sir Edward stated that it was never the intention of the Government that Major Williams should recruit amongst French Canadians. An attempt had been made to enlist the co-operation of several of the Roman Catholic clergy but it had not proved to be successful. Major Williams, he said had done splendid work recruiting amongst the English speaking people of the Montreal district.

Sir Edward then told the House that the campaign instituted by Col. Blondin and Gen. Lessard had been productive of 221 men. He produced a list of recruiting officers in Quebec to show that a large number of French-Canadian recruiting officers had been engaged. The list, he said, extended over twelve typewritten pages.

The Home Guard Force.

Sir Edward made brief reference to the attempt to organize the home guard force. He said that last winter the Imperial authorities had asked that all the available forces in Canada be sent overseas. This had made it necessary that there should be some force in Canada, as the old militia force had become less than a skeleton. While very few had enlisted in the home force, the campaign on its behalf had stimulated recruiting for the overseas force. Since the entry of the United States into the war, the necessity for the home force had been lessened.

Sir Edward repeated the figures already given to the House by Sir Robert Borden as to the number of men available in England on May the 14th for service in France. He denied that in so far as he was concerned any attempt had ever been made to retard recruiting in Canada. It was going on today just as usual. Selective conscription was desirable at the present time, he said, because of the necessity of directing enlistments to the infantry units, whose need of men is the greatest. It was also desirable to prevent the departure overseas of men who would be of greater service to Canada at home. The selective conscription bill, Sir Edward said, would not do an injustice to anyone. The Government may or may not go down to defeat because of having introduced it, but better defeat a hundred times than the abandonment of the soldiers at the front.

Wants People's Approval.

Mr. Wm. German, (Welland) said they had no right to pass this bill without the approval of the people. He would like to see a bill which would bring about compulsory service, but he would like to see a bill passed which would be effective, which would have the approval of the people. Unless they had that approval it would not be effective.

He admitted that the need for men was imperative. The places of slaughtered men must be filled if the war was to be won, but he believed that the course of Sir Wilfrid Laurier was safer and surer. He did not favor a general election for the question of compulsion could not be pro-

perly settled at a general election. There would be too many side issues. The only way was to go straight to the people for approval, to go with candor and with courage. He was sure that they would not go in vain; the people would support it. The statement had been made in the House that they would not go to the people because the people were overwhelmingly against conscription. "In the name of High Heaven," said Mr. German, "what sort of doctrine is that to preach in this country! I will never subscribe to a doctrine like that. It is Prussianism, it may be toryism, but it is not liberalism, and it is not democracy."

Sees Legal Tangles.

Mr. German declared that if the Government did not accept the proposal contained in the referendum, then he would not stand in the way of the Government passing the bill and making the best success they could of it. (Conservative laughter). He predicted that within six weeks the bill would receive the Governor General's assent. The Government would then appoint their officials who would draw their pay. They would then perhaps issue a proclamation calling out the first class of troops and they would stop there. The courts of appeal would put an end to the proceedings from then on. Then the Government would have an election, declaring that they wanted the approval of the people on the bill. And the issue would not be conscription, it would be between English and French, between Protestant and Catholic.

Mr. Sevigny Tells of Threats.

Hon. Albert Sevigny, Minister of Inland Revenue, followed. He declared that in 1911 no member of Parliament had received a mandate to carry on this war, but that the people had not reproached the Government for taking that mandate. The outraged conscience of the people gave them an absolute mandate. When an extension was asked for last session, no one had complained, because the one reason at heart was to carry on the war.

He did not intend to retaliate by insults against those who had coolly insulted him in the last month. The desire was to help the 400,000 of his fellowcountrymen who had died or were ready to die for their country. To those who had threatened his life he would say that he was no more in danger than the soldiers in the trenches. Pressure had been brought to bear

upon him to resign from the Government, but he had decided to resist for the following reasons. In December of 1916, the Prime Minister in answering a delegation had declined assurances that conscription would not be enforced, if it were later found necessary. A few days later, Hon. T. Chase Casgrain had died, and his portfolio was left vacant. If the Prime Minister had chosen he could have filled that portfolio with an English speaking member, thought the French Canadians would have cried out if he had done so. Instead Mr. Sevigny was brought into the Cabinet. At the byelection in Dorchester which followed, his opponents had used the spectre of conscription through the national service cards. He himself had declared that they had nothing to do with conscription and that if conscription were decided upon, it would be introduced in Parliament. His electors with this knowledge had returned him with a larger majority than before. This surely meant that they approved of the Government's war policy, and of the Government's decision to carry the war to a successful end.

He thought his mandate was clear.

The Government had asked the nine provinces to unite in carrying the war to an end. That was why he was called upon to resign. But why should not the same demand be made upon every member of the country. Why should the minority be isolated in Quebec. That broad minded man the Prime Minister, had not seen it that way.

The Trouble in Quebec,

Mr. Sevigny declared that French Canadians in Quebec had been influenced by people who declared that Canada had done enough, that she owed nothing to England and that the country was being ruined with the war. In other provinces where as much influence had not been used French Canadians had enlisted well. While he had information from the United States that French Canadians and Americans of French origin had responded ardently to conscription. Mr. Sevigny stated that if a body of interprovincial men had been organized in Quebec to advise the Government the province would have done her share.

Quebec's Share.

Mr. Sevigny estimated that Quebec's share of the 100,000 draft would probably be 25,000 men. He said the loss of 25,000 men would not ruin Quebec. He thought that every French-Canadian ought to be proud to have that many more men in the army fighting for freedom.

"Others may say what they like, as for my part I accept the bill," he said in resuming his seat.

Mr. Pugsley Is Opposed.

Hon. Mr. Pugsley referring to the United States said that if that country did its part as nobly as Canada had done the American army would be between six and seven million men. It was their war as much as Canada's. Canada had been fighting the battle of the United States. If the war lasted three years longer, were we to go on draining our country, he asked. It must not be expected of us, he said that we should do more than is human.

He said there was no reason for this extraordinary measure that was being brought before the House, and it should not be passed except by a Parliament having the mandate of the people. There were

some who were talking about the extension of the life of Parliament. "I want to say," he added, "that in view of what is now taking place, the unreasonable, autocratic effort to pass this bill through Parliament, I say I will not repeat the blunder of which I was guilty at the last session of Parliament." He added that he would never again rely on the pledges of the treasury.

Comparing Quebec with Ulster, Mr. Pugsley said, that when religious and racial questions were aroused there was no telling what the result would be. But there was a way to stop it. Mr. Sevigny could persuade the Government to agree to a referendum. It would not defeat the bill and it would only mean a delay of three or four weeks at the most. They would have to take the vote of the soldiers, of course.

The adjournment of the debate was moved by Col. James Arthurs.