

CANADA HOLDING WAR PLEBISCITE

Vote on Conscription Will Be
a Test of Sentiment for an
Even Greater Effort

ALL PARTIES ARE FOR IT

By P. J. PHILIP

OTTAWA, April 25—The decision of the Canadian Government to hold a nation-wide plebiscite on Monday, asking release from the last restraints on the organization of the country on a total-war footing, is not, as it may seem, an admission of failure of the voluntary system to which until now Canada has largely adhered. It is just the opposite.

In these two and a half years since Canada, as an autonomous member of the British Empire and of the League of Nations, went to war with Nazi Germany because the latter had unjustifiably attacked Poland, she has far outgrown what any one then believed she should or could do. Now her people are being asked to complete that splendid record.

A Last Step

It is in that spirit that the great majority is expected to go to the polls on Monday and vote "yes" to the government's request, supported by all parties, for release from any past commitments regarding the manner of raising men for the armed forces.

And this is insisted on, for it is true that if, after the plebiscite and in view of the needs of the war situation, the government finds it necessary to impose conscription for overseas service that measure will be only the coping stone to the edifice of Canada's war effort and not the foundation, as it has been in the totalitarian and in so many other countries.

Here has been seen the transition of a people, by its own decision, from deep peace to total war. It has already raised a volunteer army, navy and air force of 450,000 men who are second to none of their size in mechanical and moral fighting force. It has turned its peace industry into a vast arsenal which is sending tanks, planes, guns, shells, rifles, vehicles, ships, equipment and instruments of every kind to every nation and every front where there is war with the Axis powers.

Up to Now

It has trained air crews of its own men and other British nations which are daily and nightly fighting everywhere from the Arctic to the South Pacific. It has been the great granary and storehouse from which the people of Britain and the armies of the Empire have been fed through these dangerous years. It is giving immense quantities of its produce free of charge to the common cause, and while doing so it has kept its internal economy moving smoothly along.

With such a record both the government and the people might have been content. They had gone far beyond what could have been expected from a nation of 11,500,000 people, less than 50 per cent of whom are of British stock.

CANADA'S WAR LEADER



Wible
Prime Minister Mackenzie King
seeks release from draft pledge.

But the urge has been constant, in every section of the community, that Canada must not be content with being ahead of other democracies in so many things. She must not be behind them in anything.

There is only one real problem—the problem of the right of a minority to dissent. Every other problem has been solved except that. It is complicated by the fact that the largest minority vote will be from the French Canadians, who are in their conception the oldest Canadians, who are very loyal Canadians, but who are separated from the others by the tradition of their origin. Among them the manner in which conscription was voted and imposed during the last war still rankles, for it was immensely complicated by politics. They have accepted conscription for home defense, but many among them have seized on the situation of Australia to urge that that is enough, that it would be folly to send more men abroad when they may be needed at home, and so they have been urging the rejection of the government's plebiscite demand.

Support Among French

Of course opinion, even in Quebec, is greatly divided. All the French Canadian Ministers and a majority of the members of the Federal Parliament have appealed to their compatriots to vote "yes." If they are listened to and Quebec gives an affirmative majority there will be no problem. The Province, which has done splendidly under the volunteer system, will gather new glory.

But even if the vote is negative, Canada will go on to the fulfillment of the steady purpose in which her government and people have lived and worked during these past three years—that the aggressors shall be defeated and she herself emerge from the trial stronger and more independent.

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