

FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 1942.

A PLEBISCITE!

Astute Premier Bracken of Manitoba did not overstate the case on Tuesday when he expressed the hope that the nation might be "spared such a crowning indignity" as a referendum on conscription "in order to relieve our elected representatives from a responsibility that goes with responsible government."

But while he condemned the referendum in strong terms, both as an indignity to the nation and a waste of money needed for war in the middle of a world crisis, even he did not conceive, apparently, of the possibility of a Government going to the extremity of cowardice by introducing a plebiscite. A referendum would call for the passing of legislation first, the people being asked to approve or repudiate it. There would have been some semblance of Government leadership in this procedure, although it still would have been an abrogation of responsibility. The Speech from the Throne announces a plebiscite, which calls for no such leadership and is a most abject disavowal of Government obligations.

Under our system, by which a Government continues to function so long as it holds the confidence of a majority of the people's representatives, and resigns when evidence of lack of confidence appears, the principle of referendum and recall has no proper place. The members are expected to exercise control by expressing the people's wishes. But here, because the Prime Minister has committed himself on two points, he asks a popular vote on one. Why not the other also—that of National Government?

The only excuse the Government can have for action of any sort along this line is the knowledge that a critical situation calls for men in larger numbers and more prompt enlistments than the present voluntary system ensures. In this event, unquestionably, it should tell the facts and take the responsi-

bility of making the necessary decisions. Instead, however, it leaves the question to the people, who know nothing of the needs except what their own intelligent reading of the news tells them. It asks the people to decide for it.

We can think of no step fraught with greater danger. If the verdict proves to be against compulsory service it will be equivalent to notification to the brave boys who have gone abroad of their free will and offered to sacrifice for their country that the Government refuses to send them support. The effect on their morale can easily be imagined. The plebiscite will take time and cause delay which may well register in the fortunes of war. But the Government has decided to "pass the buck."

It can be said with certainty that this cowardly evasion of leadership will be recorded by posterity not as a pattern to imitate but as an example to deter.

149

WAR
EUROPEAN
1939
CANADA
CONSCRIPTION

58-54-007