

## **French Canadians on Conscription**

. . . I fully realize the possible and probable reactions among a great many in my province to my conduct in accepting to go on when any measure whatsoever of compulsion is added to the voluntary system for service overseas as the policy of the government. But I came here to do a war job, and because it was felt by the Prime Minister, rightly or wrongly, that I could be of some help, I feel I must still go on, whatever may be the increase in the difficulties of the task, so long as it is made apparent to me that these difficulties arise out of facts which have a bearing on the security of the men who are doing so much more for us than anything we can do for them.

Some members of this house wish to register again their opposition to the legal extension of the locality of service of these N.R.M.A. men. I refer, of course, to the subamendment of the hon. member for Mercier. But a majority is apt to be recorded against that subamendment, and if such should be the case I appeal to them to accept that democratic decision in a democratic way. I am sure they can do so without accepting the concept of democracy which is sometimes asserted, the concept that it is both a legal right, and a proper exercise of that right, for the majority to assert its will at all times and in all occasions regardless of the feelings and views of the minority and of the reasons for such feelings and views. That is not my concept of the kind of democracy suited to free men; the kind of democracy for which the free nations are waging this war. It is not the kind of democracy which was envisaged by the fathers of confederation; or not the kind of democracy which will bring to full fruition the constitution that unites in one nation the various elements which make up our Canadian people.

The will of the majority must be respected and it must prevail. But I trust that, here in Canada, the majority will always, as it is doing in this case, assert that will only after giving due consideration to the feelings and views of the minority and to the reasons for such feelings and views, and then only to the extent to which the majority is sincerely convinced that the general interests of the whole body politic require that it be thus asserted. . . .

Believing as I do that the majority in this house, after giving its best consideration to the facts which have been brought to light in this long and earnest debate, is sincerely convinced that the passing of this order in council P.C. 8891 was necessary to the proper conduct of the affairs of the Canadian body politic as a whole, and believing as I do that whenever the majority, after full consultation and mature deliberation, reaches a conclusion of that kind, it is proper the minority

should accept it and loyally assist in carrying it out, I appeal to all the members of this house, whatever may have been their individual views—whether to do more or to do less than the order in council provides—to unite and to assert to the men overseas that this nation, from one ocean to the other, stands pledged to a victory that will be decisive and that will endure. . . .

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Source: Canada, *Debates of the House of Commons* (December 6, 1944): 6859–6860.