

Reinforcements—Ministerial Changes

jeopardize our capacity to provide needed reinforcements. I recall that I have repeatedly said that I could not undertake that reinforcements would always be available wholly from volunteers. My point now is that due to an unexpectedly heavy proportion of infantry casualties and the developments of the war we need trained reinforcements, which I consider on the best examination I can make of the situation are not available from volunteers. And we have unused man-power resources in the trained N.R.M.A. personnel, which I think we are bound to use.

In this connection I should remind you that all the formations which we are seeking to support to-day are formations which had been authorized by the government and approved by parliament previous to your speeches in 1942.

This brings me to your point about disunity in Canada. My speeches in the house make it clear, I think, that I have realized, from the first time the question was raised, the grave possibilities of division. That is why from the beginning to the end of my association with the Department of National Defence I have done everything I could to avoid it, and to maintain a wholly volunteer army overseas. I have had regretfully to come to the conclusion that to make reasonable provision for reinforcements it was necessary to recommend action to make N.R.M.A. men available. It seemed obvious that some measure of difference or disunity could not be avoided whichever course were taken. What weighed so heavily with me in the stand I have taken were our pledges to our fighting men and indirectly to their families.

I want to thank you most sincerely for your very generous references to any services I may have rendered to Canada during these difficult years.

Yours very truly,

J. L. Ralston.

To that communication I replied on November 10, 1944, as follows:

Ottawa, November 10, 1944.

The Honourable J. L. Ralston, K.C., M.P.,
Ottawa.

Dear Colonel Ralston:

I have duly received your letter of November the 7th. It seems to call for one or two observations.

The statement in my letter of the 3rd instant, regarding the assurance as to reinforcements, given in August, has relation to the assurance specifically given at that time by the chief of staff to the war committee of the cabinet that the reinforcement situation was satisfactory. You will recall that the matter arose out of proposals submitted by you on the recommendation of Lt.-General Stuart for the authorization of certain additional personnel for various units and formations of the army overseas, including the formation of the additional infantry brigade to which you refer. The assurance sought and given had direct reference to the state of the reinforcement pool.

The reference in my letter to the discussions at Quebec was not to any specific matter discussed there, but rather to the fact that no question of any possible need of additional reinforcements was raised at that time. If, on September 14, at the time members of our war committee and our own chiefs of staff were in

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

conference with Mr. Churchill and the British chiefs of staff, and the probable duration of the war and the future employment of our forces were under discussion, there was any possibility of our having to resort to conscription to obtain additional reinforcements for the army, before the end of the war in Europe, surely that possibility should have been made known. In the absence of any such information, members of the cabinet were entitled to assume that the reinforcement situation continued to be satisfactory.

What was meant by the word "necessary" as used in my speeches in parliament in 1942, will I think be wholly clear from the context as it appears in *Hansard*. I think you are in error in attributing to me any different significance to the word "necessary" than that which it has in my speeches in parliament.

The reference to a general election in my letter, as in our previous discussion on the matter, was not to its being "*a condition*" to the application of conscription under existing legislation, but to a general election being an almost inevitable *consequence* of any such attempt to impose conscription at this stage of the war. I felt that this possibility must be taken into account as it bears directly upon the question of the best method of securing additional trained men for overseas service. In deciding upon the best method for the attainment of a given aim, it is imperative to take into account the probable as well as any known consequences of each and every possible course of action.

In your letter you recognize the grave possibilities of division resulting from the course you recommended. It is because I took so grave a view of the probable division which would result, and of the possibility that disunity and division in the country might seriously weaken our support for the army, as well as for other phases of our war effort, that I believed it was preferable to redouble our efforts to secure the required results by voluntary means, including a special appeal to the N.R.M.A. personnel and a review of the employment of the very considerable number of general service personnel serving in Canada and the United Kingdom.

Yours very sincerely,

W. L. Mackenzie King.

On November 10 I wrote a further letter to Colonel Ralston, which I shall now read:

Office of the Prime Minister
Canada

Confidential

The letter is marked "Confidential", but, as I have already pointed out, His Excellency the Governor General has given his approval to the correspondence being made public. The letter is as follows:

Office of the Prime Minister
Canada

Ottawa, November 10, 1944.

Confidential

The Honourable J. L. Ralston, K.C., M.P.,
Ottawa.

Dear Colonel Ralston:

I notice that in a reply to a request for an explanatory statement on your resignation,