

*Reinforcements*

that the chance will be given members of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and those of the Social Credit group to ask questions as well as members of the official opposition.

I do not wish to take up time in answering questions at the present time. General McNaughton should be given all the time he can possibly have to-day.

But may I say a word with reference to the question. There are some things that can be done or which may be unnecessary at one time which cannot be done or which may become unnecessary at another, and if the government had attempted to do a month or two ago what at that time did not appear necessary or what has been done to-day, I venture to say that its action would have frustrated the ability of the defence department to give to the men fighting on the other side the reinforcements needed at the time they may be needed.

Mr. COLDWELL: May I ask the Minister of National Defence one or two questions? Will the estimate for reinforcements allow for leave to be given to the men who have been continuously in the firing line ever since we invaded Italy, or more recently in France? Will the estimate of reinforcements to be sent overseas allow for proper leave for those men who have borne the brunt of the day?

Mr. McNAUGHTON: I am glad that question has been asked, because that is a matter which has given me most anxious thought from the beginning. Some of our men have been over there for five years or more, away from their homes, and we are most anxious that those with such long service should have the rest that comes from returning to their families. The number for December is very small. We hope to have home before Christmas 450. That number was set purely by the exigencies of transportation. That is the limiting factor. I am in great hopes that we may have larger numbers and that we can increase them very materially as soon as transportation is available. We are certainly going to do that.

Mr. COLDWELL: Is this estimate of the needs one that will allow, having in mind what the general has just said, a reasonable and proper margin of safety—

Mr. McNAUGHTON: Yes.

Mr. COLDWELL: —making allowance for underestimate?

Mr. McNAUGHTON: I may say to the hon. member that the figures were carefully [Mr. Mackenzie King.]

studied by our military officers and the general staff, and they were studied from every angle. The figures with reference to transportation take into account reinforcements in the various progressive times that lie ahead, to the level which is recommended by our military authorities, and on top of that, while it varies from time to time, there is some margin of safety. Again, I may say to hon. members that many uncertainties enter into the picture. We do not know with certainty what the fighting will be; we can only base it on past experience. But that experience has been analysed and the greatest care has been put into these figures, so that we believe that on the average they are sound and safe.

Mr. COLDWELL: In his statement to the house, the Minister of National Defence stated that there might be important gaps in it which he could not disclose in public session, and he indicated one of those gaps. He said he had had comprehensive figures prepared, and he had a table under his hand. In the light of the two questions I have asked regarding leave and the margin of safety, I think this house ought to see those figures and that table. I would therefore ask the general under what conditions he would allow members to have access to that table.

Mr. McNAUGHTON: That particular table was one which I felt that this house in confidential session would like to have. It has been prepared in such a way that I can use it complete without anxiety in a session of that sort.

Mr. COLDWELL: The hon. member for Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Rowe) suggested, when I asked these questions, that I must have talked it over with General McNaughton. May I say that I have never spoken to General McNaughton in my life.

Mr. ROWE: I never said that.

Mr. COLDWELL: The hon. member said I must have talked it over with him.

Mr. ROWE: Not with him.

Mr. COLDWELL: I have talked it over with nobody. I am asking these questions because of their importance, and I think that the further we get away from suggestions of that sort of political strategy the better it will be for the house and the country. I was going to ask a question, but I see it is six o'clock.

At six o'clock the house took recess.