

*The War—Hong Kong*

attained, we must expect to share, in common with the other gallant soldiers of the British empire, and of our democratic allies, the fortunes of war.

Whether or not Hong Kong was a mistake I shall not say. Who am I, that I should criticize anyone—the British government, or the Canadian government—with the minimum of information I have? I do not propose to put myself in any such impossible position, and I offer no criticism. As soon as opportunity offers I hope the government or the department will—and I believe it will—ascertain the fate of those who may have survived and, if it is found that they are prisoners of war, do what is possible to render their position secure for the future. I know my hon. friend the minister will undertake to do that. I believe he will give information to those who are so earnestly desirous of obtaining information as to the fate of their relatives and dear ones who may have been enlisted in those regiments.

I believe there has been a somewhat strange misconception with relation to this matter. No one has criticized the Royal Rifles. It is one of the best and most ancient of our militia establishments in Canada, and it was manned by some of the finest officers who ever left our shores. There is no question about that. The personnel of that battalion was, I believe, equal to that of any battalion we have sent overseas. In some quarters there appears to be a misinterpretation of references respecting the Royal regiment. There has been no criticism of the training of the battalion proper. So far as I am aware there has been no criticism of the equipment which went with that battalion. The minister in his statement to-day has made clear the position with respect to equipment, and I accept every word he has said.

But in a measure the question of providing man-power for reinforcements is raised by the very statement the minister has made. Until the exact facts are established—and he has undertaken to establish them—there is some question in my mind whether the 152 men who went from Camp Borden, among whom was Rifleman MacBeth from a county in New Brunswick, should have been sent. That responsibility is for the permanent officials of the army. If they have not discharged that responsibility it is up to the minister to take action to see that the blame is allocated where it belongs.

Following the minister's statement I was startled to learn that before they were sent

[Mr. Ralston.]

overseas a portion of these men had not been trained for the length of time the officials of the department thought necessary. But that of course raises another difficult question, namely the whole question of reserve man-power, one which I do not propose to discuss in the house to-day. But I would remind the minister and the government that it is a very live issue throughout the country, and an issue which sooner or later parliament, the government and the individual membership of the house must face. The Royal Rifles of Canada at Hong Kong are only incidental to that position. I accept without reserve the factual statement the minister has made respecting these men. Until it is shown to me that there is error in his statement, I accept wholly the statement he has made.

Hong Kong?—before this war is over perhaps there will be more Hong Kongs. We have to make up our minds, the Canadian people have to make up their minds, and the people of the democracies who to-day are faced with a situation more serious than that which has ever confronted the peoples of the world have got to make up their minds that there may be more Hong Kongs. Let us as Canadians—not as partisans—get together and face the facts realistically. Let us do our duty by those we are about to send overseas to fight for us and all that we believe.

Mr. M. J. COLDWELL (Rosetown-Biggarr): Mr. Speaker, may I add a word at this point? I believe it may be said that we are united in our admiration of the defence made by the men at Hong Kong. I do not agree with the leader of the opposition (Mr. Hanson) when he states that necessarily there should be other Hong Kongs. The criticism has been made that there were some men who were not sufficiently trained and that the equipment was not all that it might have been. I believe the minister's statement provides ground for these criticisms.

I suggest to the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King) that it is indeed difficult to discuss openly the matter of equipment of men, matters of policy and the training of men either in Newfoundland or in the West Indies. May I add that we saw a Canadian battalion in Newfoundland. We saw the kind of defences they have, and the equipment they have been supplied. I say to the Prime Minister that opportunity should be given the house to discuss these matters in private session, so that no one may be accused at any time of saying anything in the house which might interfere with the war effort.