

House of Commons the facts concerning reinforcements for the Canadian Army overseas; to give the house whatever assistance I can in the interpretation of the facts; to state the problems which now exist; to indicate the action which has been taken and the further measures which are being instituted.

The problem is complicated because time is required to translate action taken in Canada into numbers of fully trained men in the reinforcement pools in the theatres of operations and immediately available for posting to units in the field.

In what I am to say to-day I have had to remember that the information I shall give goes out to all the world. I have to be very careful indeed that no word of mine will carry new information of value to the enemy. For if this should come about it would bring hazard to our troops in action and prejudice their further operations, which is the last thing any of us here would wish to do. I need not, I think, emphasize this grave responsibility. I recognize that this inhibition will result in there being important gaps in the full information I seek to give. I am completely at the disposal of the house should hon. members wish to examine me under circumstances in which I shall be free to give precise answers to questions relating to the Canadian Army. If this is arranged, I shall endeavour to give as complete information as possible.

It is perhaps needless to say that I am not at liberty, in any circumstances, to disclose information affecting allied armies which we have received under an undertaking that it should be kept strictly secret. Some of this would be interesting for comparison and to develop the basis on which our own figures have been estimated, but I do not think it is really necessary for an understanding of our own position.

Right at the start I would like to say that there is no difference of opinion as to purpose between my predecessor in the office of Minister of National Defence and myself. We, both of us, are determined with all the strength we have that our troops in action will not lack for reinforcements to carry forward our part in the war in northwest Europe and in Italy. We intend to march forward with our allies to crush Germany finally into defeat and to confirm the safety of the peace which follows. There is no doubt about this intent. That has been stated by the Prime Minister on behalf of all in clear, explicit terms.

There is agreement on the establishments of our army overseas which should be kept up in present circumstances. We are agreed as

to where our several formations should operate and under which higher command and as to how our command should be organized. I have made no change in any of the arrangements overseas which were made by Colonel Ralston.

Where my predecessor and I differed was on the methods which should be used to provide the reinforcements needed. In October last he took his stand on the basis that we had outrun the possibilities of maintaining our forces overseas by voluntary enlistment. At that time I took the stand that our traditional system which we had used throughout this war and long before, was capable of producing the results we sought and of producing them in time, provided always that it was given the full public support which was requisite.

I submit that it would have been very dangerous indeed to hazard a change until all measures proper to the existing method had been developed to the full and it had become clear and evident to all that they would not suffice. To do so might well not have increased the rate of flow of reinforcements but might instead have reduced it most seriously. This is what I think would have happened if voluntary service had been abandoned for compulsory service in the late days of last month when the question had first come up. Since then, conditions have altered, public attention has been riveted on these matters. The paramount need of reinforcements in adequate supply has been recognized throughout our land from coast to coast. For myself I frankly state I prefer our present system in its application to the conditions we have in Canada, but I have not excluded the other method in circumstances in which it is absolutely necessary.

Since I took office early in November, I have pressed the application of the voluntary system by every means. At the same time I pressed forward the completion of the organization and training of the men in the N.R.M.A.

In my first public address as Minister of National Defence at Arnprior on Sunday, 5th November, I spoke of the last hard stretch we had to pass before victory was achieved—that there must be no relaxation of effort here at home or in the field. I told of the principles I had followed in the organization of our army in England. I stressed the advantages I thought we had. I hoped that the urgent need for support to the army being known, the public would support and encourage our young men to take up voluntarily the honourable obligation of service overseas to meet this need. The following day, to give greater emphasis to my appeal, I repeated these views before an audience in Ottawa.