

The CHAIRMAN: Order; surely we cannot have a discussion of that matter before the committee. If so, we shall never finish.

At six o'clock the committee took recess.

After Recess

The committee resumed at eight o'clock.

Mr. BRUCE: I have a certain amount of sympathy for the minister who has been under questioning for so long, and I would not intervene at this moment except to clear up if possible, the confusion which seems to exist in the minds of many people, even among members of this house, as to the real situation in regard to our armed forces, their dispositions, and the available reinforcements which will be very much needed as soon as we open a western front.

There has been a certain amount of discrepancy between the figures given out by the minister and by the wartime information board. The minister stated in September last that the intake of the draft boards between January 1 and September 30, 1943, totalled 30,796. But according to the wartime information board's release, the total number of men obtained during that period by conscription was only 17,264, or 13,332 short of the minister's claim.

Mr. RALSTON: What were the dates?

Mr. BRUCE: I have the statement made by the minister in September, 1943, and those were his figures. In other words, only about fifty-seven per cent of the number claimed by the minister were taken in by draft. I have a good many other figures here which show a similar discrepancy, but I do not intend to take up the time of the committee in referring to them because they will be found in the records of *Hansard* and the press.

I was under the impression that, to maintain an army overseas, eight divisions will be necessary. I think three divisions have already been broken up. Have the men so released been used as reinforcements overseas?

The minister stated a little time ago that there was a shortage of tradesmen in the army. If this is so, does it not stem back to the shortage of man-power? If there were sufficient man-power it would not be difficult to train tradesmen.

The idea of Canada being able to create and maintain an army overseas without conscription will prove to be a fantasy. It is difficult to understand how a government which would

not countenance conscription would make commitments which it should have known it could not fulfil without conscription.

The situation briefly would seem to be that many of these young fit men called up under the N.R.M.A.—and I understood the minister to say last night that there were 73,000 of them in Canada—are holding non-active jobs which could equally well be filled by returned men now being boarded out. I wonder why the minister does not use these returned men to replace the fit ones now holding non-active jobs, and send the latter overseas where they will soon be needed urgently for reinforcements.

Again I would ask, what about the men who are being freed from industry? I understand that these men are under call, and therefore that is another source for reinforcements for overseas.

The minister stated the other evening that if the time arrives when it will be necessary to bring into force the conscription act by removing its restricting clauses, he would do so. I would ask him if he thinks he is justified in waiting until reinforcements are urgently needed before taking the preliminary steps to make it possible to secure them. It does not require expert army staff officers to tell us that an assault against a highly fortified position such as our troops will have to face on the western front, a position prepared over a period of three years by a resourceful enemy and fortified, I understand, for many miles in depth, will be very costly in casualties. Have we not had sufficient information of the cost in casualties that our troops have already experienced at Dieppe, at Salerno and at the present moment are experiencing at the Anzio bridgehead. Surely, therefore, we should realize what will happen when the second front is opened in western Europe. An officer of experience told me recently that in his opinion the casualties within the first two weeks of the opening of the second front will amount to fifty per cent of those engaged, and that within another two weeks the rest of our troops might have to be replaced. This would necessitate a very large number of reinforcements being available in a position from which they could easily get to the front.

I asked the hon. minister the other evening if he thought he had sufficient reinforcements in the pool in England to take care of the situation. I ask him again if, after further consideration, he thinks that reinforcement pool will be amply sufficient. If not, will it not be imperatively necessary to take steps at the earliest possible moment to have the