

*Reinforcements—Ministerial Changes*

In any case, permission to make such matters public is vested in the crown, and since the matter is of intense public interest I beg most respectfully to suggest that you advise His Excellency to assent to the release of my letter and the further correspondence.

Yours very truly,

J. L. Ralston.

I might say that there was one additional letter which is not in this printed correspondence. It was one which I sent to Colonel Ralston a day or two ago informing him that His Excellency had agreed to the publication of the correspondence in full.

I need scarcely say that the severance of the relations between Colonel Ralston and myself as colleagues in the cabinet after an association of many years, including more than five years of war, has been one of the most painful experiences of my life. Let me repeat what already, on several occasions, I have said of Colonel Ralston: No man in Canada will question the sincerity of Colonel Ralston's motives, his personal integrity and his disinterested patriotism; no man in Canada has given more selfless and devoted service to our country throughout the years of war.

General A. G. L. McNaughton was appointed Minister of National Defence and sworn to office on November 2. Regarding General McNaughton I need only say that, from the moment of his appointment as commander of the First Canadian Division on October 5, 1939, the name of no man in Canada has been held in higher esteem or commanded more in the way of confidence in the minds of the citizens of Canada or on the part of members of the Canadian army and their relatives and friends. I should like to express my appreciation of General McNaughton's readiness to assume the responsibilities of Minister of National Defence at a moment when it is apparent that a last mighty effort is required.

I now table copies of the orders in council respecting Colonel Ralston's resignation and the appointment of General McNaughton as Minister of National Defence. I also table copies of the correspondence between Colonel Ralston and myself respecting his resignation. As I have already stated, in replying to my hon. friend opposite, copies will be made available immediately to hon. members through the distribution office.

Mr. GORDON GRAYDON (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the order of business to-day, as Your Honour indicated at the opening of the session, is a matter which is within the purview and the jurisdiction of the members of this house, because of the fact

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

that, by way of resolution in the previous part of the session the business to be taken up on a Wednesday is a continuation of that which was under consideration at the adjournment of the Tuesday sitting.

I take this liberty, Mr. Speaker, with your permission and that of the house, to make just an observation or so, having regard to the period through which we are passing. What I say will be impromptu and very brief. As I understand the procedure proposed by the government with respect to this first day's sitting, I think I should indicate my stand as leader of the opposition and that of the party which I lead in the house with respect to the manner in which the business will be presented to parliament under the guidance of the Prime Minister and the government. I believe it is the intention of the Prime Minister, after these preliminary proceedings have been disposed of, to move the adjournment of the house and that the house shall meet again, under certain arrangements, to-morrow.

As I stand in this chamber this afternoon I would not want to have notes in front of me or words to read, because I do not think I have ever taken part in any public proceeding wherein I felt so keenly the seriousness of the responsibility which faces me, as it faces every hon. member in so stern, so trying and so grave a time as this. The crowded galleries, the interest manifested all over the land, the fact that in this house itself few if any seats are vacant, cannot fail to impress us and to show how deeply the issues which now confront us have burned into the very soul of the nation. All the little things which may have divided us in the past, all the small and petty issues which from time to time have occasioned controversy, seem smaller now than ever before, because, thrown up by public opinion like lava from a great volcano, is an issue which has to be faced by every hon. member, regardless of where he sits or to whom he may artificially owe allegiance—a testing time, for this parliament and this nation, such as it has never faced before.

I feel my situation very keenly. No one realizes more fully all the ramifications which an issue such as this presents to this parliament and to the Canadian people. Parliament owes it to the Canadian people to keep these discussions on the very highest plane of which we are capable. Sometimes we shall fail; sometimes we shall be misunderstood. But, Mr. Speaker, if there ever was a time when we should be Canadians first and everything else last, it is now. Our audience, outside this chamber as well as inside, is a stern audience.