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Personal and Confidential

Ottawa, January 4th, 1943.

Dear Mr. Massey,

Wrong has told me of his talks with you in London on staff matters and of your strong desire that no changes should be made for the present in the senior staff at Canada House. I appreciate and sympathize with your attitude and I shall do my best to see that your wishes are met to the fullest possible extent. You have a harmonious and efficient group of officers at Canada House and if I were in your position I should be just as strongly opposed as you are to any changes at this time. There is, however, one problem which is troubling us. We have in the Department a number of young Third Secretaries who are fit for military service. We have kept them out of the forces on the ground that their employment in the External Affairs Service was more essential. In several cases I think that it would be hard on these young men to keep them in Ottawa - where in fact they are badly needed and are doing very useful work - for the rest of the war. It would be morally more satisfying to them and would give them what might be called a para-military record if we took every opportunity that arose of sending them to posts overseas which can be regarded as the front line diplomatic offices in the Service. These offices are London (both Canada House and the Legation to the Allied Governments), Kuibyshev and Chungking. Some additional opportunities may later arise, perhaps in French North Africa or elsewhere.

We cannot meet this problem by adding additional officers to the existing staffs as we are too shorthanded to use our manpower so lavishly. If this scheme develops and I feel bound to propose some changes in your staff I can assure you that we shall do our best to send to Canada House thoroughly competent replacements so that the efficiency of your staff should only be impaired temporarily while the new appointments are learning their way round. I am not proposing any change now but I should like you to understand the problem and I am sure that you will be ready to help in finding a solution. Those now with you in London can be regarded as having performed their front line service.

We are also troubled by another very involved problem. At present the wartime restrictions on promotion make it nearly impossible to promote an officer of our Service without transferring him to another post at which there is a vacancy of higher rank. We are struggling to find some means whereby it will be possible to restore regular promotions (perhaps by making these temporary and subject to review at the end of the war) but the forces of resistance in Ottawa are strong and we may not succeed. I do not like to see officers on your staff who merit promotion kept in their present rank while others who are no more meritorious receive promotion on transfer. If, therefore, we fail in our efforts to straighten out the general question it may become necessary to propose some alterations in order to prevent cases of what would look like individual discrimination.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) N.A. Robertson.

The Rt. Hon. Vincent Massey,  
High Commissioner for Canada,  
Canada House,  
London, S.W.1.

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