

which appeared in the press of the 7th instant, you are reported as having said that you feel "that responsibility for informing the public belongs primarily to the Prime Minister". With this, of course, I am in complete accord, and in the broadcast I made on Wednesday night (the 8th instant) I sought to discharge that responsibility.

The report added that you had said you recognized that in this matter the public and the armed forces were entitled to full information consistent with military security. With this also, I agree.

The report continues: "I would assume, said Colonel Ralston in his statement, that the Prime Minister would inform the public of the circumstances by making available my letter of resignation and any further correspondence between us in the matter. The correspondence will speak for itself. I therefore refrain from making any statement at present."

In addition to the obligation upon a member of a government to respect military secrecy in making information public, there is also the obligation of secrecy respecting cabinet deliberations, imposed by the oath of the members of the privy council, "to keep close and secret all such matters as shall be treated, debated and resolved on in privy council, without publishing or disclosing the same, or any part thereof, by word, writing or any otherwise to any person out of the same council, but to such only as be of the council."

The privy councillor's oath is not less binding upon the Prime Minister than upon all other members of the privy council. It is an obligation I am bound to respect, one of which I must take the fullest account in considering the course to be pursued in making available to the public the correspondence which has passed between us concerning your resignation.

I have the added responsibility for which I will be held accountable by parliament, of advising the crown as to the time and place at which publicity should be given to such communications. This responsibility is particularly great at a time of war.

In your letter of November 1 you say: "The whole question was discussed at very considerable length both at meetings of the cabinet and of the war committee of the cabinet". In subsequent paragraphs you proceed to set forth matters which were "treated and debated" in council.

I cannot feel that I would be justified, in the light of this obligation, in advising the publication of those portions of your letter relating to the deliberations in council or of those portions of my reply referring to what you have said respecting these discussions.

I believe there should be an exchange of letters between us with respect to which no question as to the propriety of publication could arise.

Yours very sincerely,

W. L. Mackenzie King.

To the first letter of November 10, I received the following reply from Colonel Ralston:

Ottawa, November 14, 1944.

Right Honourable W. L. Mackenzie King,

P.C., M.P.,  
Prime Minister of Canada,  
Ottawa, Canada.

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

I have your letter of November 10 marked "secret", in reply to mine. (It refers to my

letter of November 7; I presume you mean my letter of November 6.)

With reference to the assurances given by the responsible officers to the war committee, I had the same assurances as you, and as explained to me and to you the changed situation arises from the unexpectedly heavy proportion of infantry casualties.

Regarding the meeting at Quebec, I still think that this has, for the reasons mentioned in my letter of November 6, really no relevance to my recommendation.

You speak as if "any possibility" of having to resort to conscription for overseas service had not been in mind. May I point out that your speeches in 1942 envisage that very possibility, and the initiation and passing of Bill 80 was in the light of that possibility.

You will recall also that I went to you at Quebec, regarding certain reports I had heard as to your expressed attitude on this matter; and the fact that I asked you, and you gave me, your assurance then that you would stand by your speeches in 1942, indicates that, at least in my mind, the possibility still existed; although I must say that at the time I had no expectation of the developments which have since occurred.

As a matter of fact, it was, I think, at the next meeting of war committee following the Quebec conference that I did indicate, as a result of further information received in the meantime, the possibility of difficulties regarding infantry reinforcements and the necessity, in my view, for keeping N.R.M.A. personnel available in the light of the uncertainties.

May I again come back to the real crux of this matter, which is the actual and urgent situation which I reported instantly on my return from overseas, and which I considered left me no alternative but to recommend as I did.

Yours very truly,

J. L. Ralston.

In reply to my second letter of November 10, I received the following communication from Colonel Ralston, dated Ottawa, November 14, 1944:

Ottawa, November 14, 1944.

Right Honourable W. L. Mackenzie King,

P.C., M.P.,  
Prime Minister of Canada,  
Ottawa, Canada.

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

I have your letter of November 10 regarding the release of my letter of resignation and the further correspondence between us.

I do not think there could be any injury to security whatever in publishing the letter and the correspondence, particularly in view of the information given to the public in the speeches by yourself and the Minister of National Defence and by the Minister of Justice.

Regarding privy council secrecy, I feel I ought to point out that your own speech of November 8 contains references to matters treated, debated and resolved in council discussions, and I am sure these references would not have been made had you not considered that they were permissible. Furthermore, you had no hesitation in May 1942 in publishing the correspondence regarding Honourable Mr. Cardin's resignation, which contained references to council discussions.