

King Supporters Upset By Views of Officers On Attitude of Troops

By KENNETH C. CRAGG

Ottawa, Nov. 21 (Staff).—Liberal backers of the King-McNaughton plan to bridge the overseas reinforcement gap by voluntary appeal today openly accused, in conversation and conference discussion, officers of the home army establishment of being hostile to their Defense Minister and of sabotaging his policy.

Reports of yesterday's press conference at Vancouver with high-ranking officers of the 6th Division, in which they expressed doubt as to the efficacy of the volunteer plan and declared for compulsion, created an immediate sensation at the capital in both defense and political circles.

Supporters in the Government for voluntary service immediately seized on the occurrence as a weapon for rallying Liberal backing in support of the Prime Minister and Gen. McNaughton, on the ground that a hostile attitude in the army barred a fair test to the voluntary program, which if to be effective in meeting overseas requirements, must gain immediately a substantial number of highly trained infantrymen from NRMA personnel.

Gen. McNaughton early today said he expected to have a full report on the press interview by nightfall, and said he had no comments. Until he had full knowledge of all the facts and circumstances he could not make a statement, he advised.

Inquiry Sought

In the meantime, it is understood that Gen. McNaughton sent a sharply worded signal to Maj.-Gen. G. R. Pearkes, V.C., general officer commanding Pacific Command, demanding an investigation, and a further signal to all military districts, advising officers that unauthorized press statements on army policy constituted a direct breach of discipline and of regulations.

From army sources it is asserted that Gen. McNaughton has demanded, information as to whether or not the interview was authorized. According to Vancouver sources, the conference was held just prior to a private meeting of the officers concerned with Gen. Pearkes, to plan an enlistment campaign in line with the instructions laid down by the Defense Minister at last week's meeting here of district officers commanding the 13 military districts, together with chiefs of the home defense establishments.

The Sixth Division, which is stationed in the Pacific Coast area, is reported to have a large proportion of draftee personnel. Officers said the majority had received full combat training.

Disciplinary Action

From Government sources today came a strong demand for disciplinary action, and within the army there was strong speculation as to whether headquarters must act in that direction if it is to retain the control over personnel within the authority laid down by regulations.

Definitely the interview projected the reinforcement issue, coming as it did on the eve of the meeting of Parliament, into the public interest as nothing has since former Defense Minister Ralston's resignation, because the Government would not accept his recommendation for compulsion.

In official circles, there were rumors of a major departmental inquiry with inferences of a court martial attached to them. In its political effect, there is accepted by House members the possibility that the officers' interview, believed to be expressive of a tremendous majority in the army at home and overseas, might influence Prime Minister King to advance the date of an appeal for a mandate to carry on Government far ahead of the time that he had planned before the event took place.

The gravity with which Liberals in the field are viewing the situation from a party standpoint is indicated by reports, certified by members, that there has been in some sections informal canvassing of the prospects of election candidates who would be "certified" supporters of Col. Ralston and his stand for compulsion.

They have gone so far, in these areas, that the possibilities of saw-offs with candidates of any party holding similar views are being explored, it is stated.

Bitter as they are over criticism

of Government policy—a criticism that is interpreted as an attempt to discredit that policy immediately before Parliament meets to judge it—Liberals have taken stock of the possibility that disciplinary measures against the spokesmen in the army, might reflect against the Government.

They are, too, keenly aware that the criticism has extended far beyond the Vancouver group, and precedents were established for that declaration for compulsion by other officers, some of them directly back from overseas.

It was recalled that when Major Conn Smythe of Toronto criticized quality of overseas reinforcements there were reports in military circles that he would be disciplined. No such action, however, has ever been reported.

Meanwhile, it was reliably learned if any disciplinary action were taken as result of the Vancouver press interviews it would be applied by commanding officers on the spot and Gen. McNaughton and defense headquarters here would merely be kept informed of proceedings.

Prefers Reprimands

It was understood that if the commanders' reports show there was a breach of discipline Gen. McNaughton would prefer the officers be given stern reprimands to courts martial, with possible accompanying publicity.

A court martial, he is reported to feel, might give the officers unwarranted notoriety and possibly provide them with a forum for a course he feels is wrong.

In the meantime, the general is said to hope the case will "blow over" and he can get on with the job of recruiting. He feels this job has been made more difficult by such reported statements as the ones in question.

Less than half—perhaps not more than one-quarter—of the Liberal members, were checked in at Parliament Hill late today for tomorrow's House—and their activities were directed chiefly to informal conferences designed to test feeling and to close the gaps that are yawning in their ranks.

Bracken Attends Caucus

Progressive Conservatives, under National Leader Bracken and Gordon Graydon, Leader of the Opposition in the House, conferred in caucus in morning and afternoon sittings. National Chairman C. P. McTague was present also.

After the morning sitting, Mr. Graydon, in a statement, declared members supported unanimously their leader's demand of the Government to fulfil its pledges and the will of the people as expressed in the plebiscite, and send available men in the home army as reinforcements. He coupled with it the stand of caucus against a secret House sitting.

The CCF members and members of the party's National Council also held morning and afternoon sittings and the Social Credit party members, who claim their record for compulsion is clear since the war's start, were also in conference.

Procedure Outlined

Outline of procedure for the sitting was given at mid-day to Leaders in Opposition in a conference with Prime Minister King. Details are held secret, but it is understood that they follow the lines forecast this morning—that Mr. King will read correspondence relating to Col. Ralston's resignation into the record; that the House in committee will hear Defense Minister McNaughton on Thursday and that debate proper will be opened on Friday.

There is not the slightest hint of the manner in which Mr. King intends to bring the matter before the House, but in view of the Vancouver interview and the reports of intense feeling on the issue brought to Ottawa by Government members, there is stronger speculation than ever he will demand a flat vote of confidence.

Aside from this speculation, there is a feeling through the Parliament buildings that cannot be denied that the Prime Minister is now facing the most severe test of his political career; that his party is threatened by division and that recent events have opened wide again the possibility of further resigna-

tions from his Cabinet, and the rumors point most directly to Resources Minister Crerar, Finance Minister Ilsley and Navy Minister Macdonald.

Role for LaFleche

It is asserted that Government planning places War Services Minister L. R. LaFleche, former defense deputy, in the House role of chief spokesman for French-Canada and that there will be an attempt to curb back-benchers from the Quebec ridings, in the hope of averting inflammatory anti-conscriptionist speeches which might throw other Liberals into the Opposition camp.

As a side interest, there is admission from responsible quarters that Gen. McNaughton is feeling and is showing the strain that descended upon him when he accepted Mr. King's bid to take the Ministry. Gen. McNaughton, and Liberals frankly believe this in large numbers, had not the slightest idea of what he was letting himself in for, and that both Mr. King and the new Minister completely underestimated public feeling.

Interviews with members, Liberals or persons with Liberal associations, admit that urban centres from Halifax to Vancouver are inflamed in varying intensity against Government policy. Members for rural ridings from Western Canada say that reaction ranges from a questioning to a critical attitude.

Liberals to Convene

A call has gone out for caucuses by Provinces of Liberal members

at 5 p.m. tomorrow, indicating the day's proceedings in the House will not last more than two hours.

"When the House convenes on Wednesday the issue must be faced promptly and squarely," said the statement by Mr. Graydon. "The House must not waste time in preliminaries," he added, repeating his objection to a secret session.

"I am utterly opposed to going into the House with preconceived notions when the information made available there ought to be the sole guide to the actions of responsible members."

Mr. Coldwell said correspondence and other information required should be presented in secret session if necessary.

Cabinet members also held a lengthy meeting and it was believed they went into the question of whether members of Parliament would be permitted to question Gen. McNaughton if he appeared before them. If this was allowed it might be necessary for either the Speaker of the Senate or the House to preside to see the discussion proceeded according to Parliamentary rules.

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