

Events Which Led Up to Ralston's Resignation

The King-Ralston correspondence which was read in parliament yesterday gives a picture of the development of the situation in which Col. Ralston finally found himself in disagreement with the Prime Minister.

In August the war committee of the cabinet had a specific assurance from the overseas chief of staff that the reinforcement situation was satisfactory.

On September 14, when the Canadian war committee and chiefs of staff were in conference with Mr. Churchill and British chiefs of staff, no question of any possible need of additional reinforcements was raised.

At the next war committee meeting after the Quebec conference, says Col. Ralston, "I did indicate, as the 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. (draftee) personnel available in the light of the uncertainties."

Later Col. Ralston went overseas, and while there he cabled Mr. King on October 13 expressing apprehension on reinforcements.

On arrival home on October 18, he reported personally to Mr. King.

On October 19 the war committee of the cabinet was given Col. Ralston's view of the situation. To quote Mr. King: "You informed the cabinet war committee that you had received a report from the chief of staff at Canadian military headquarters in London, stating that the future effective maintenance of our forces in the two theatres of operations required that additional personnel be made available from Canada." And to quote Col. Ralston: "Since it appeared clear to me that enough volunteer personnel could not be made available to meet the need, I considered that I had no alternative but to recommend that N.R.M.A. personnel be sent

overseas as reinforcements. I felt that this was necessary to fulfil our pledges to our fighting men."

Prolonged cabinet discussions followed. It was suggested that other means than conscription be tried, but Col. Ralston feared that this would involve serious delays if they were not successful. To quote him: "Consequently I wished to be assured that it was government policy that if, after the appeal, the need for reinforcements overseas still existed and volunteers were not available, N.R.M.A. personnel would be sent. This was the course which I and some other colleagues had understood would follow from your (Mr. King's) speech in 1942. It was in effect what I, as minister, have repeatedly said in the House since then."

Again to quote Col. Ralston: "No such assurance was forthcoming. On the contrary it has developed in the discussions that the government as a whole (certain colleagues excepted) do not consider that your speech committed the government to this course."

In consequence Col. Ralston said in a letter of resignation on November 1 that he had failed to receive assurance that the government was committed to making home defence troops available for overseas when it was considered they were required.

In a letter to Col. Ralston on November 10, Mr. King wrote: "What was meant by the word 'necessary,' as used in my speeches in parliament in 1942 will, I think, be wholly clear from the context as it appears in Hansard. I think you are in error in attributing to me any different significance to the word than that which it has in my speeches in parliament."

Certainly it has always been understood that Mr. King and his government were pledged to send the draftees overseas if that course should become necessary in order to reinforce the active army. Why otherwise should the Mobilization Act have been amended to make it possible? The only question is whether the situation can be met and the reinforcements provided in time in some other way. General McNaughton thinks they can. Col. Ralston thinks otherwise.

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