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McNaughton Statements Discussed By Members In House of Commons

Examination of statements made in the House of Commons by General A. G. L. McNaughton, Minister of National Defense, on the subject of overseas reinforcements: from the Hansard official report, Nov. 22. Continued from yesterday's Guardian.
Mr. Mackenzie King: At the beginning of this afternoon's session, the leader of the opposition asked that General McNaughton's answers to questions be confined to today. I thought at that time that in regard to the questions to be asked, there would be a fair distribution as between the members on different sides of the House, and that the general would not be subjected to almost continuous cross-examination by members of one particular group. I am hoping that the chance will be given members of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and those of the Social Credit group to ask questions as well as members of the official opposition. I do not wish to take up time in answering questions at the present time. General McNaughton should be given the time he can possibly have today.
But may I say a word with reference to the questions. There are some things that can be done or which may be unnecessary at one time which cannot be done or do not become unnecessary at another, and if the government had attempted to do a month or two ago what at that time did not appear necessary or what has been done today, I venture to say that its action would have frustrated the ability of the defence department to give to the men fighting on the other side the reinforcements needed at the time they may be needed.

Mr. Coldwell's Questions

Mr. Coldwell: May I ask the Minister of National Defence one or two questions? Will the estimates for reinforcements allow for leave to be given to the men who have been continuously in the line ever since we invaded Italy, or more recently in France? Will the estimate of reinforcements to be sent overseas allow for those men who have borne the brunt of the day?
Mr. McNaughton: I am glad that question has been asked, because that is a matter which has given me most anxious thought from the beginning. Some of our men have been over there for five years, and we are most anxious that those with such long services should have the rest that comes from returning to their families. The number for December is very small. We hope to have home before Christmas 450. That number was set purely by the exigencies of transportation. That is the limiting factor. I am in great hopes that we may have larger numbers very materially as soon as transportation is available. We are certainly going to do that.
Mr. Coldwell: Is this estimate of the needs one that will allow, having in mind what the general has just said, a reasonable and proper margin of safety?
Mr. McNaughton: Yes.
Mr. Coldwell: Is the margin allowance for underestimate?
Mr. McNaughton: I may say to the hon. member that the figures were carefully studied by our military officers and the general staff and they were studied from every angle. The figures with reference to transportation take into account reinforcements in the various progressive times that lie ahead, to the level which is recommended by our military authorities, and on top of that, while it varies from time to time, there is some margin of safety. Again, I may say to hon. members that many uncertainties enter into the picture. We do not know with certainty what the fighting will be, we can only base it on past experience. But that experience has been analysed and the greatest care has been put into these figures, so that we believe that on the average they are sound and safe.

Asks For Figures

Mr. Coldwell: In his statement to the House, the Minister of National Defence stated that there were important gaps in the public session, and he indicated one of those gaps. He said he had had a comprehensive figure prepared, and he had a table under his hand. In the light of the two questions I have asked regarding leave and the margin of safety, I think this House ought to see those figures, and that table. I would therefore ask the general under what conditions he would allow members to have access to that table.

Mr. McNaughton: That particular table was one which I felt that this House in confidential session would like to have. It has been prepared in such a way that I can use it completely without anxiety in a session of that sort.
Mr. Coldwell: The hon. member for Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Rowe) suggested, when I asked these questions, that the minister talked it over with General McNaughton. May I say that I have never spoken to General McNaughton in my life.
Mr. Rowe: I never said that.
Mr. Coldwell: The hon. member said I must have talked it over with him.
Mr. Rowe: Not with him.
Mr. Coldwell: I have talked it over with nobody. I am asking these questions because of their importance, and I think that the further we get away from suggestions of that sort of political strategy the better it will be for the House and the country. I was going to ask a question, but I see it is six o'clock.
Mr. Foullet: Mr. Speaker—
Mr. Speaker: It being six o'clock I now leave the chair. The House will resume at eight o'clock. At six o'clock the House took recess.

After Recess

Mr. Coldwell: Can the Minister of National Defence tell us what are the medical categories of the men in the home defence army, many are in each category, and what categories are considered to be fit for duty in the line?
Mr. McNaughton: I was not able to catch the question in full, but I understand the hon. gentleman

man to be asking for a break-down of the N. R. M. A. men by category. The total strength of the N.R.M.A. as of September 27, the latest figure I have with me, was 68,489, of whom 8,743 were on extended leave, which leaves actually in the service 59,746. Of this number approximately 15,000 were trained as infantry and another 25,000 were of an age and category suitable for infantry training. So that the total potential infantry in the N. R. M. A. is the sum of 16,000, plus 9,000, or 25,000. The remainder, namely some 17,746, are considered to be unsuitable and unavailable for infantry.
Mr. Coldwell: And the lowest category B-2? What will be the lowest category accepted as fit for infantry service in the line?
Mr. McNaughton: We do the categories on what is known as the pulhems system. With the exception of a few tradesmen the minimum pulhems categories acceptable for infantry for service in the line are 1-1-1 and 2-2-2-1.
Mr. Coldwell: What does that mean, precisely?
Mr. McNaughton: The pulhems categorization is a most carefully worked out system with the introduction of which our own medical officers, both here in Canada and overseas, had a great deal to do. It breaks the estimation of a man's fitness down into all parts of the body; for instance, "P" is physical; "I" is upper body; "L" is the lower part of the body, and so on. Unfortunately I have not with me at the moment the rather thick pamphlet giving all the details, but I have sent for it and it will be here in a few moments.

Monthly Quotas

Mr. Diefenbaker: There is one question I should like to ask in connection with the number of voluntary enlistments and the discharges in each of the months beginning with last June. I ask for this information because in a return brought down some months ago, just before the house adjourned, it was stated that the excess of voluntary enlistments over discharges was some 5,400 during the months of March, April and May. So that I would like the minister to give the House a statement setting out the number who volunteered in each of the months from June to October, and the number of discharges in each of those months.
Mr. McNaughton: I have under my hand the figures for January, 1944, to September, 1944, by months which I would be very glad to give.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Would you give them from June, 1944, to the end? We have had the other figures that I wish to get is the figure for the last three or four months starting with June.
Mr. McNaughton: The total enlistments for general services in June were 6,282; July, 4,960; August, 5,236; September, 5,318; October, 4,710. That is the last figure I have. We have no November.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Would you give the discharges for each of the corresponding months?
Mr. McNaughton: I have been able to give the enlistments in terms of precise figures. We have figures with the data I have available here, in June there were 4,000 discharges; in July 3,400; in August, 3,500; and in September, 3,000. The figures I have here were rounded off for another purpose.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Have you October?
Mr. McNaughton: I have not October. I shall be very happy to get it for you if you would ask again.
Mr. Diefenbaker: I should like to ask you whether in your opinion, or whether you would advise the Prime Minister (Mr. Mackenzie King), that you believed or had reason to believe that you could secure a very large increase in enlistments among the N. R. M. A. troops? When was such a suggestion first made to the Prime Minister?
Mr. McNaughton: The answer that I would make to hon. member is that if I had not believed that the measures which were open to me to take that persuasion would yield the results I would not have made that suggestion.

Mr. Diefenbaker: When was the suggestion made? When did the minister first let the Prime Minister know that he believed that he could make the voluntary system supply the necessary reinforcements for the Canadian infantry? When was the suggestion given the Prime Minister that opinion?
Mr. McNaughton: I can only give the hon. member an approximate date from memory because I have kept a diary of it. I would think that it must have been about the last day of October, and I think that the first occasion on which the minister had advised me that he was made minister.

Mr. Mackenzie King: May I say to my hon. friend that I think the minister could give that information best by reference to the day on which he was made minister. The minister was sworn in on Thursday the end of November.
Mr. McNaughton: Yes, I see I have a note in this little diary. The conversation took place on Tuesday, October 31.

No Complete Record
Mr. Diefenbaker: Did the minister at the time he gave that opinion have a full statistical record regarding the enlistments and the difficulties of getting men from the N. R. M. A. men in general as experienced by the department?
Mr. McNaughton: The answer to that question is, no.
Mr. Diefenbaker: I am asking these questions for the purpose of getting information. What change in attitude, what degree of different types of persuasion did the minister decide to use on the N.R.M.A. men that had never been used before? I mention that in connection with the fact that the minister was quoted in the press as using words to this effect, that improper means or unjustifiable means had been used but that that course was to be departed from. What innovation or improvement did the minister suggest could be used on the N.R.M.A. men in order

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to induce them to enlist?
Mr. McNaughton: I would say to the hon. member that I had been going on in various parts of Canada, and I had formed the definite opinion that these men who were in the N.R.M.A. units had been pressed rather than led. It seemed an attitude of mind which had grown up towards them in all quarters. I heard it on all sides. From the earliest days when I was called upon to study these matters for the last war, to study report and recommend what should be the basis of our military organization for the future, I had formed the definite opinion that in this country we should rely on the voluntary system. It struck me that these people had been put into the camps and that they were certainly not being encouraged to come forward the way I would like if I were the one responsible for all that in an appeal to them, pointing out the part that they could play, we would have a considerable measure of success in persuading them to volunteer for general service, or as I have put it more than one occasion, to take up voluntarily the honourable obligation of service.
Mr. Diefenbaker: That is far from an answer to what I had in mind. What were the coercive actions that you objected to? That is far away from an answer to that question.
Mr. McNaughton: The hon. member will forgive me if I do not agree. These matters of opinion and judgment are hardly susceptible of categorical answers in debate.
Mr. Diefenbaker: The question I asked was this: What were the coercive actions that had been practised on these men that the minister decided were not going to be continued any more? What were those practices? I ask this only to ascertain what change has taken place.
Mr. McNaughton: If the hon. member will give me a few minutes I shall have the memorandum looked up.
Mr. Diefenbaker: While the minister is having that information looked up, will he tell me, if, as a result of his examination or knowledge gained in various parts of Canada, he has come to the conclusion that coercion has been used on the draftees who were actually in the forces?
Mr. McNaughton: Since I came back to Canada I have been in the position of an onlooker and I have had very little opportunity to see the men except when they were out of their camps. The impression I have formed is that with leadership and persuasion and appeal these men will come forward.
Mr. Diefenbaker: Did the minister conclude that there had not been leadership before?
Mr. McNaughton: I would answer "No" to that question.
(To Be Continued)

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By The Canadian Press
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