



MINISTERS OFFICE

OTTAWA

November 1, 1916.

35868

Dear Sir Robert,-

In reply to your Memorandum of October 31st, ultimo, permit me in brief to summarize.

I do recall my visit to Great Britain in the autumn of 1914. I did expect both under the statutory law of Britain and under the law of common courtesy, that I would have been permitted to exercise some "control and direction" over our gallant Canadian boys, in the way of organization.

But there had evidently been some communication to the effect that "control and direction" of this magnificent Force should be under the British Government direct. The then Mr. George Perley, Acting High Commissioner implied such in the following words;- "You do not pretend surely to have anything to do with the Canadian soldiers in Britain."

Further, Sir Robert, I spoke to you on my return and told you the circumstances both then and subsequently. You yourself knew that last year you took occasion to speak to Sir George Perley concerning the matter. The treatment he accorded me after this was the only respectable or courteous treatment he ever gave me.

Regarding the consultative sub-Militia Council. It has only been tentatively formed. My way of doing things is to obtain results, not necessarily the creation of bodies organized by Order-in-Council. As everyone knows what may seem workable in theory does not so turn out in practice.

On my arrival in England this year, I was met by your cablegram of July 31st., which you quote.

During the month of August I visited every Camp in England, France and Belgium and consulted in detail with all the leading Officers of the Canadian Force. I went further, and asked for suggestions from leading Officers of every Force.

Not content with this, however, I decided to try the thing out in practice, and in an informal way, and before embodying anything in Order-in-Council would find any weak points in the system which might arise, and could add any improvements necessary.

Every Officer concerned was distinctly notified of this that no question of rank, or pay, or precedence or anything else, other than trial organization, was contemplated.

As a result, before I left England, we had made many improvements.

Permit me to draw your attention to



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nearly every Commission which has been formed. They look beautiful on paper, but few, if any one of them have been anything like perfect in practice. The Hospitals Commission, The Pensions Board and the National Service Commission all seemed lovely when sent out, but everyone concerned with them knows of the absurdities therein contained.

Permit me further to draw your attention to the fact that the British Constitution does not exist on paper; no Order-in-Council is behind it.

Further, had I ventured to conduct this Force on the basis of formal Orders-in-Council, the First Division would not have left Valcartier yet, and you know yourself how, by technicalities the Second Division was held up for four months through little petty haggling on the question of motor trucks, etc., etc.

The second line of your Memorandum says; "So far as I am aware you exercised the same control and direction over the Forces in Great Britain during the first year as subsequently."

Sir Robert, no one knows better than you that this statement is incorrect. This last year, with the full concurrence of the War Office, our management and direction have been given every consideration, and by their request.

One other point and I am through. It might be implied from your memorandum that my failing to secure authority by Order-in-Council for this sub Militia Council impelled you to the course you are now pursuing regarding Sir George Perley. May I be permitted to say that both you and I know to the contrary. I knew early in August that Sir George Perley had planned something along these very lines. You have, also, admitted that as early as the first week of September you had this matter under consideration. I understand that it was under consideration by you and Perley earlier. You incidently remarked yesterday that you had not consulted any of your colleagues. Of course when I drew your attention to the statement, you corrected yourself.

Faithfully,

The Right Honourable,
Sir Robert L. Borden, G.C.M.G.,
Prime Minister of Canada,
Ottawa, Canada.