

21. SUBSEQUENT IMPROVEMENTS IN THE POSITION

It soon became apparent from the progress of events in the war zones that the very strengthening of the Allied position in the Pacific which had contributed so much toward the creation of man-power difficulties, was now beginning to produce a fresh situation which in turn would *relieve* the man-power position of the Dominion.

Tactical successes had been achieved in the Pacific, and the enemy had lost heavily in shipping and aircraft, and these, combined with the growing strength, preparedness, and power of mutual reinforcement of the Allies, all combined to improve the prospects of the Dominion as regards the likelihood of full-scale invasion (at any rate within a measurable time) to such an extent that the upward movement in the numerical strength of the home defence forces in New Zealand could be halted and reversed.

A step was taken by the Dominion at about this time which had an important effect on the tactical position in the Pacific and contributed materially to the all-round improvement in the situation as affecting the safety of the Dominion. This was the despatch of a second Division into the Pacific. Though this step offset to some extent the gain of men which might perhaps otherwise have accrued to industry, and set up a fresh and recurring demand for men for reinforcements, it helped to secure the safety of the Dominion against invasion, and hence to increase the size of the pool of men in the home defence forces who could be considered to be surplus to the immediate defence requirements of the Dominion.

The implications of the improvement in the war situation were diverse and complicated. Throughout all the ramifications of the home defence forces and the civil defence organizations a whole train of adjustments were now called for. Street lights came on again, and shops and homes returned to their older and brighter standards of illumination, but always there was to be the caution that a reversion to the black-out might suddenly become necessary at any time, and certain areas in the two principal ports must still observe the precautions which other places were now spared. Fire-watching could be dropped, but the organization of it must continue so that it could again become effective at a few hours' notice.

On the industrial side, one of the many burdens—that of the maintenance of the home forces—could now be reduced in size, and supplies could be diverted to other uses or cancelled so that industrial capacity itself could be used otherwise to better advantage. But from the point of view of industry, by far the greatest gain lay in the prospect of getting back some of the men who had been lost to the forces.

22. THE RE-DISTRIBUTION OF MAN-POWER

The National Service Department was now faced with a new problem. Instead of looking for the best way of finding fresh men for the forces, the problem now was how best to redistribute the men already in the home defence forces to the best advantage, taking into account the rival claims of the overseas forces of the Army, the needs of the Air Force and Navy, and the need for men in a number of war industries which had been becoming more and more embarrassed for man-power in order to meet the demands placed on them. (Chief among these industries were farming, sawmilling, tanning, flax, coal-mining, engineering, and woollen-mills.)

The first step was clearly to find out how far the home defence forces could be reduced. This was determined finally by War Cabinet after a full review of the whole position, and a very substantial reduction indeed was made. The next step was to *allocate* the resulting release of man-power among the various claimants, and to select the actual individuals who should transfer to other phases of the war effort. As a preliminary to this step it was decided to carry out a thorough and detailed survey of the man-power in the home forces.

The general procedure followed in this survey has been to ask each man in the home forces to complete a card showing details of his military service, his qualifications, and employment history, and whether he is prepared to volunteer to join the Air Force or to enter any of the more important industries mentioned above.

Apart from this important result, the survey has enabled the National Service Department to select, in collaboration with the Army, many thousands of men for diversion to industry, including literally hundreds of men with those types of skill which are the most urgently needed, such as tool-makers, pattern-makers, loom-tuners, saw doctors, &c., as well as men whose homes are already located in the most difficult supply and accommodation areas, such as Auckland and Wellington, and experienced volunteers for farming, flax-cutting, coal-mines, and other important industries. It should be emphasized that the men selected were all either too young, too old, or medically unfit for combatant service in the overseas theatres of war. On the other hand, they will in many cases be able to replace fit men held at present from overseas service by Armed Forces Appeal Boards, thus enabling these fit men to be released for active fighting.

A very important feature disclosed by the survey has been that many thousands of men have indicated their willingness to undertake jobs in essential war industries in which they have not had previous experience, and already some of the immediate demands in these industries which cannot be directly met from fully experienced men have been satisfied by drawing on these volunteers.

For some time there had been public concern regarding the future prospects of young men who were mobilized at age eighteen and retained in the forces on an indefinite basis. These young men have, during a critical period, missed the opportunity of laying the foundations of their future careers. In view of the improvement in the situation as a whole, which has enabled a reduction in the strength of the home forces, it has been found possible to allow those young men who wish to do so to leave camp and return to their civilian employment, at least for the time being. At the same time steps are being taken to ensure that they do not return to non-essential or blind-alley occupations, but are placed into industries which will give them training which will be of value to the community both during the war and in peacetime.

In conclusion, it should be made clear that the factors involved in the problem of allocating and redistributing the Dominion's man-power resources are so numerous and complex that a carefully-planned operation, such as that which is at present being carried out, may appear to an uninitiated observer to be so complicated as to be very confusing, whereas in fact the many and intricate details have been most carefully studied and meticulously planned.