

of this country. Long years ago, when the Conservative party went into opposition, the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Tupper spoke to me and asked me to take general supervision of the militia affairs of this country. I consented to do so.

Some hon. MEMBERS. Oh, oh.

Mr. FOSTER. Lightened the task of the minister!

Mr. SAM HUGHES. I mean from an opposition viewpoint—as far as criticism by the Conservative party is concerned, and I had the honour of being asked, when the Conservative party was in power, of occupying the position of Minister of Militia in this country. Sir Charles Tupper asked me, in opposition, to take general supervision of the militia affairs of this country and I consented to do so on the distinct understanding that, in so far as practicable, questions bearing upon the militia should be removed entirely from the arena of party politics. When Mr. R. L. Borden was appointed leader of the opposition I had the same understanding with him—that, as far as possible, matters affecting the militia would not be thrown into the arena of party politics unless it were absolutely necessary. You may search the records of the United States in vain, you may search the records of Great Britain in vain, of France or any other civilized country on the face of the earth; to the hon. member for Sherbrooke belongs the unique distinction of having first brought into the arena of party politics the discussion of the weapon or the arm that we may be called upon to use. Millions upon millions of dollars have been expended in Great Britain in changing rifles, in testing rifles; millions upon millions have been expended in the United States, as I shall show, in testing and changing rifles and I challenge the hon. member for Sherbrooke, with all his detective instincts, to produce one solitary instance wherein a member of parliament in Great Britain, or of Congress in the United States, or any representative of the people, has been found base enough to stand in his place, as this hon. gentleman has stood for two sessions, and endeavour to create personal animosities at the expense of the arm of the country. There are ways and ways of criticising these matters. The little defects—I use the term 'defects' advisedly—that have cropped up and shown themselves in connection with the Ross rifle from time to time, were being removed one after the other and the report to which reference has been made by the hon. member for Sherbrooke, the criticisms of those wisacres in England and the criticisms of others in various parts of the country were not the means of calling attention to these defects, because they had been discovered and remedied by the Canadian committee before these reports were received in this coun-

try. However, the hon. gentleman told us last night how he had been sitting impatiently all session in order to get strewing the earth with the fragments of this Ross rifle and with the remains of the hon. Minister of Militia and incidentally with those of the hon. member for Victoria and Halliburton. Well, Sir, the mountain has laboured and brought forth a mouse, stillborn. Whether it was due to the fact that the parentage and the medical attendance were one and the same person or not I give it up, but it is the sorriest object I have ever seen presented to the people of a free country. I regret very much that on the present occasion I have to take issue with the Conservative party, but it is not the first time I have done so. One thing that I do remember having heard the late Hon. Sir Oliver Mowat say was that next to the approval of his own conscience he regarded the honest opinions of his fellow men. That is exactly the position in which I stand. But much as I regard the approval of my fellow men, I regard the approval of my own conscience very much more. In matters of politics, I am prepared to follow my leader in non-essentials, but in essentials I claim the right to follow my own bent, and I am prepared to abide by the consequences. I do not deny that it gives me a good deal of tribulation not to have my friends in the Conservative party stand with me; but on other occasions when I have differed from them, I have had the endorsement of the people of my own county. I have learned that my scalp remains on my head, not by grace of the hon. member for Sherbrooke or of any other set of men in this country.

On two notable occasions I have differed from my party. One of them was the occasion of the Manitoba School Act of 1896 when my good friend the present member for North Toronto (Mr. Foster) sought with his mellifluous voice to induce me to give up the line of conduct which I had laid down for myself and take another line. I did not choose, as some other hon. gentlemen on this side of the House did, to follow the bad leadership on that occasion of the present right hon. First Minister, nor did I choose to follow the leadership of the present member for North Toronto. I took the line that there should be no separate schools imposed on Manitoba either then by the Liberal-Conservative party or six months after through the instrumentality of the First Minister. I took the stand that the people of Manitoba should be left free to take their own course, and, Sir, I faced the best gentlemen that could be sent by the First Minister or by the emissaries of the Conservative party who wished to destroy me, and I had the endorsement of the people of my county, and to-day I have the endorsement of the people of Canada along that line—at least the endorsement of any whose endorsement I care to have.

Another occasion on which I differed from