

Supply—National Defence

The fact is this, and I will repeat the whole thing again if necessary. The Minister of Defence Production was referring to production. He said: Until a decision is made as to what will be the standard weapon to produce in Canada, we will have no orders for the .300 calibre gun. I said that and he said that. I say it again. And I will say it again and again, and he will say it again. There is no inconsistency. Unless we can have a line built up and a demand built up to justify the production of rifles by the 50,000 or the 100,000, there is no point in our doing it in Canada. We will get them from the United States, as I said. And as I said, we have arranged with the United States to get the .300 calibre rifle. If they change, then we will have to look at the situation again. What could be plainer?

Mr. Drew: The answer has not been given to the question as to whether we are in fact buying .300 calibre rifles.

Mr. Claxton: Of course we are.

Mr. Drew: We are?

Mr. Claxton: Of course.

Mr. Drew: Are those going to be orphans?

Mr. Claxton: No, not at all. I do not see how the leader of the opposition can feel that he could possibly raise such a question at this time. We are trying to standardize with the United States. We get the equipment for three divisions from the United States or make it in Canada. That part of it which it is economical to make in Canada, we make in Canada. So far, because the .300 calibre is not standardized with any country except the United States, we do not think it is economical to make it in Canada. However, if the United States should, in the middle of the transfer of this three divisions' equipment, change the pattern of its rifle, we would stop the flow of the .300 calibre rifle to Canada and take the new one. In the meantime, we have lots of rifles of .303 pattern exactly identical with those with which the British, the Netherlands, the Belgians and the Italians would have to fight, as well as all the countries of the commonwealth at the present time. What other course can we follow? It takes about eighteen months to do one of these operations, to change the pattern of a rifle.

Mr. Johnston: We are still producing the .303?

Mr. Claxton: We are not making any .303's. We have more than we need, much more than we need. We are transferring them to Europe.

To make this kind of change takes time, sometimes a few years. As I said, the

[Mr. Claxton.]

British war office decided on the rimless cartridge in 1912, and now for the first time it has decided to bring it about. Why? Because they always had such tremendous stocks of rimmed cartridges. This is very obvious. If there is any misunderstanding left I will be very glad to hear about it.

Mr. Drew: The minister has now indicated that we are buying the .300 calibre weapons for our three divisions. I will assume from what he has said, and from what has been indicated before, this equipment is what is intended to be the service equipment. If that is so, then is there any thought that we will be manufacturing rifles or machine guns of any other calibre than that which we are purchasing of this scale for the service units?

Mr. Claxton: No.

Mr. Drew: If that is so, I would point out—

Mr. Claxton: I beg your pardon. As regards machine guns I am not too sure, because we have found the Sten gun to be exceedingly useful and we may continue to produce that if it becomes desirable because of any shortage of stocks. We hope that other countries will adopt it. It is a very cheap kind of gun to make and very effective at short range, and we think there is a real military need for it. There may be exceptions of that kind, but let us stick to rifles.

Mr. Drew: No; I think the minister will agree with me that distinction is drawn between the Sten and the machine guns of the same calibre as the service rifle, and that is standard practice with all arms, whatever their calibre is.

The Sten is correctly described as a sub-machine gun; is that not correct?

Mr. Claxton: Right.

Mr. Drew: And a distinction is drawn between machine guns and sub-machine guns. I was referring to machine guns because the ammunition supply is the same for both machine guns and the rifles. I would point out that this concern about manufacturing for our own demands is not consistent with the attitude this country has adopted in the past. This country first started to manufacture its own rifles before 1910, and some of the machinery which was used to make rifles and machine guns in this country during the war was machinery that was continuously in this country from that time.

Mr. Claxton: Right.

Mr. Drew: During the last war we set up plants and I understand that most of the rifles that are here now are rifles that were made in Canada, and for that reason it seems