

Supply—National Defence

produce in Canada we will have no orders for .300 calibre guns. I have explained why that is so. We can buy from the United States—if they do not change their calibre and do not change their type of weapons—weapons to equip our forces with three divisions equipment, far cheaper than we can produce them in Canada unless the weapon is made standard in some countries other than in Canada and the United States.

Mr. Low: Whom we could supply.

Mr. Claxton: Whom we could supply; because obviously the United States is not going to buy rifles from us.

Mr. Brooks: When can they supply us?

Mr. Claxton: Within a matter of the next two or three weeks supply will be beginning. If we had tooled up for the production of either the .300 or the .280, we would have been out of step with one country or the other. Meanwhile we had between 250,000 and 300,000 .303 rifles that were just about as good, as I said. Why should we tool up and begin on production until we had explored every possible avenue of bringing the two countries together so as to have a common standard? That is the story. As I say, we now have somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000 .303 rifles in good shape, ready to fire, ready to shoot; and if our forces had to go into action tomorrow they would be equipped with .303 rifles. So would the British. So would the Dutch. So would the Belgians. So would the Italians but not the Americans. But in a year and a half from now or something like that the British will have the .280 and that no doubt will be made uniform with the Belgians. Meanwhile if we go into action we would always be fighting with both the British and the Americans, on the same front, organized with possibly separate supply lines. So long as we fight on the same front with the British and the Americans the difficulties of supply will not be great. But it would be infinitely better if the British and the Americans would get together and that is what we have been trying to achieve. If we had followed any other course than the one we have adopted, we would have been wasting the public's money.

Mr. Drew: The statement by the Minister of National Defence constitutes an argument against a decision at this time. But it does not answer the question as to whether the statement made—and a very positive statement—by the deputy minister of national defence was accurate. The statement he made was consistent with the statement made much earlier by the Minister of National Defence and I might say that what he has read does not in any way suggest that the

press report was incorrect because, referring to the .303 calibre small arms, the exact words he has quoted from the text of the speech he made at that time were: We in Canada have decided to take that step. Evidently there were qualifications that followed and those qualifications are put before us today.

The minister says that we would not want to find ourselves out of step with one of the great nations with which we are associated. As it is we are going to be out of step with both of them. The United States has made its decision. It is going to use the .300 calibre. The United Kingdom has made its decision; it is going to use the .280 calibre. I think that all of us will agree with the minister that it is most regrettable that the United Kingdom and the United States have not agreed. But again without referring to the exact words but—and, I am sure, doing so correctly—paraphrasing what the deputy minister of national defence said before the committee on the same day to which I have referred, the deputy minister explained why the decision had been made. He explained that we are next door to the United States, that our industrial standards are similar to theirs, that the industrial flow in this country goes side by side with theirs and therefore it was reasonable for us to make the decision to adopt their standards. The explanation related to a decision that had already been made. I am pointing out at this time that we have conflicting statements before us and that those statements should be resolved. It is not enough for the members of this committee to be left to guess as to who makes correct statements and at what time. It is not for us to guess about a statement of the Minister of National Defence in 1949 on qualifications that were never fulfilled; nor is it for us to guess that there were some reservations which did not appear in any statement made when the deputy minister of national defence, taking great care to inform himself before giving any answer, gave a statement to this effect as recently as May 1.

The Minister of National Defence has placed some emphasis upon the fact that we can hardly yet make this decision. But I was under the impression that just a short time ago he had indicated that we had made a decision to the extent of buying equipment from the United States. I think we should know whether any .300 calibre weapons have been purchased from the United States or, if not yet purchased, whether they are on order or whether an order is contemplated.

Mr. Claxton: I thought I had made the position just as plain as it could be made for the understanding of any reasonable being.