

Supply—National Defence

economic run of weapons to equip themselves, and then can give or sell the surplus to some other country. Our position is directly the reverse. We cannot get an economic run of almost any weapon. We are a surplus producing country. We must work with the United States or Great Britain, and preferably both. We were, therefore, primarily interested in bringing about standardization.

The Department of National Defence at that time drew up a long list of weapons on which we were prepared to standardize. Very few of those weapons were weapons originally produced in Canada, because we are a nation of 14 million people, at that time 13 million, whereas the United States had 140 million or 150 million and the United Kingdom 45 million. Both of them had extensive connections and supply arrangements with other countries. We were the man in the squeeze. We had to work with one or the other, but preferably both. Our life would be much easier if both could come together, and we worked for that. At one time we thought the .300 calibre rifle, not necessarily the present Garand of the United States, but a .300 calibre would be adopted by all countries concerned. A team was set up by the three countries to look into the various possibilities. Our hope still was that they would agree, that the two would agree. It did not much concern us what the course was as long as there was agreement. That was our primary consideration, and it looked to us as if we would standardize on the .300 calibre. So I said at Detroit:

A great step forward would be the adoption by the friendly powers of the rimless cartridge and the .300 calibre.

In talking about the rimless cartridge, I was not talking out of turn because since 1912 the war office in Britain has had the intention of adopting the rimless cartridge. The one thing which prevented that being brought about was the fact that at no stage did they have less than several hundred thousand rifles equipped to fire the rimmed cartridge, and at no stage did they have less than several hundred million rounds of ammunition for that rifle. They were not in a position to throw the .303 rimmed cartridges and rifles into the sea, so they had to keep on with them. To make a transfer of this kind is difficult, and very expensive.

Then I went on to state:

We in Canada have decided to take that step . . .

That is, to standardize on the .300 calibre. That was what we thought would be adopted as a common standard at that time.

. . . but bringing it about is again a difficult matter because we have some hundreds of thousands of

[Mr. Claxton.]

perfectly useful weapons with rimmed cartridges and the .303 calibre.

As a matter of fact, the number of rifles we had of the 303 calibre of Mark IV type was closer to 300,000 than 200,000. Were we to throw these into the sea, give them away or sell them? No, we kept them and we did not start manufacturing because there was no agreement on any common standard, or on a common calibre. It was a matter of the greatest possible regret that there was no agreement. There is no agreement yet.

Mr. Low: Does it look as if it is going to be impossible to get that agreement?

Mr. Claxton: Well, sir, I cannot say. It has been announced in the press that the British have adopted the .280; that has not been accepted by the United States. I cannot go beyond that. Since we have decided, and I think properly decided, to give arms and ammunition for three divisions to Europe, including rifles, and replace it with equipment of United States type, then it means that we have decided, not right across the board but generally, to adopt American standards so that as far as possible our equipment will conform to North American industrial practice.

My colleague the Minister of Defence Production said today that there is no production of the .300 calibre rifle and machine gun, because that is not a standard weapon at this time. That is completely correct. We have not begun to produce this weapon in Canada, because it is not a standard weapon, and also because to tool up for it would not be justified unless it was a standard weapon. Our own needs would not justify the cost of tooling up for the production of this weapon. We can buy them for far less money, even taking into account the exchange difficulties, from the United States without tooling up for production, so unless we can tool up for a production far greater than that necessary to meet our own needs—

Mr. Blackmore: May I ask what the cost of tooling up would be?

Mr. Claxton: I have not that information. That is a matter for the Minister of Defence Production. It would be a large sum.

Mr. Pearkes: It is a standard calibre with the United States army.

Mr. Claxton: Right.

Mr. Pearkes: Where it is a standard calibre, could it not be standard in Canada?

Mr. Claxton: Yes, with agreement between the United Kingdom and the United States. Then the Minister of Defence Production went on and said, until the decision is made as to what will be the standard weapon to