

*Supply—National Defence*

tributed the greatest number of volunteer militiamen per capita in this country. People should fully realize that, no matter what conditions may exist or for what reason the decision is made, if an armoury is destroyed the military training associated with it and all that it means is forever destroyed in that community. It is a dead issue and cannot be revived. The minister never knows—no minister can know—the day upon which he may feel obliged to call for volunteer service in rural areas as well as urban areas throughout the country.

• (3:30 p.m.)

The most serious aspect of this matter is the fact that the tradition of voluntary military service vanishes with the discontinuance of the armouries. Make no mistake, Mr. Chairman, the voluntary participation by our young men in military service, the chief characteristic of Canadian defence, starts first in the armouries across the land. I would ask the minister where he would have these young men drill. On the market square? If voluntary participation does not commence when these boys are at school, then volunteers will not be available the day war is declared.

Coming back then to the young men now engaged in militia training I ask, what of their disposition if the present plans are carried out? On my last visit as a spectator on training night at the Napanee armoury I counted a total of 34 men of all ranks on parade on the drill floor. I have made some independent inquiries in several centres, regarding the number who turn out for training and I find that the figure I have quoted represents an exceptionally good turnout and indicates a healthy activity. Obviously this is not a unit existing only on paper. It is not a unit which can reasonably be discontinued and crossed off the list as is the case with many units in cities which, as we know, exist on paper only. This is a group of young men who have volunteered for military training, the youth that we are talking about and on whom Canada depends in the extremity of wartime need.

By what means did the Department of National Defence measure an effective unit when it decided to obliterate the unit I have described and to decline the service of these young men? What it amounts to, Mr. Chairman, is nothing less than an insult to these volunteer militiamen.

What makes their position even more critical is the fact that as soldiers in uniform they cannot make representations on their own

[Mr. Alkenbrack.]

behalf, as can individuals employed in a civilian capacity. These young men are soldiers and they must quietly accept any disposition made of them by a higher authority. Furthermore, many of them are quite young and the full implication of this action has probably not struck them yet and perhaps never will. All they know is that they like military training, and they are at an age when they can best receive and assimilate it. They are also acting in the tradition of their fathers and their grandfathers.

Let me tell you this, Mr. Chairman, with every moral certainty that it is the truth: Now is the time that these young men can best be moulded and directed. If you decline their service now you may never have them again except at disastrous cost, a cost too great for Canada to afford.

I have no way of knowing how many men have passed through the armouries I have mentioned both in peace and in war, but I do know that the number must be staggeringly large. I know that a respectable number of militiamen were under training in Napanee and Picton. I also know that in the past five years 100 youths have successfully completed the summer recruits training course in both these towns. I only wish we might all find as much enjoyment and enthusiasm in our work as my brief observation of these boys indicated to me that they have in theirs. If I can make any plea at all for these young men and for the young men who will follow them year by year, I will consider it a privilege to do so.

What possible invention could ever fill the need for men if our armouries are dispensed with? The answer is that nothing can replace them. As I asked the minister before, where are these young men going to train in case of necessity? On the market square or outside the town in a field?

Overcrowded schools and overburdened teachers have led to a rapid and dismaying decline in cadet training in our schools and with conditions as they are it is hardly likely that cadet training will reappear in any strength. Even at its best it was too brief and superficial to be of lasting use or interest. Therefore this lends strength to the case for volunteer training of adults past student and cadet age as soldiers. No, Mr. Chairman, there is no alternative to local militia training in a properly equipped and regulated local armoury. History has shown us that Canadian fighting men trained by this system have been the saviours of Canada.