

there would be any objection to this being done. Obviously no member of the commonwealth is going to ask this government, and face a refusal, because that is not the way governments do business. But the information I have is that the British government was desirous of finding here an opportunity for the training of flyers and aviators, because of our climatic and other conditions that made such training possible, as compared with the limitations imposed upon them by reason of the density of their population and other matters of that kind.

What I was anxious about was whether the government would not be very greatly concerned to assist in this being done, not only because we are a part of the British commonwealth of nations but also because it would enable us to derive the benefits that would come from such an arrangement. Then there is another matter which becomes of importance. I am informed that the commission which visited the country some time ago did not go into the factories at all, but received from the department a memorandum showing what our factories in Canada were capable of producing; that they had no knowledge, for instance, that this country could produce shells of a certain type, and were ready and willing to enter into a contract for the production of shells if we were prepared to sanction it. That also becomes a matter of very considerable importance.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver): That is entirely incorrect, may I say right away.

Mr. BENNETT: That may be; but certainly it is clear that the British government were willing to purchase supplies in this country, just as they were of Bren guns; and the question is whether or not they were given the opportunity to do so, as they were with respect to Bren guns. That is the only question, and I think that puts it clearly. Those two matters should be cleared up.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver): I will deal briefly with the three points raised by my right hon. friend. In the first place, with respect to the issuance of supplies I can assure my right hon. friend that so far as I know there is not the slightest suggestion of any partisan consideration in regard to the issuance of supplies.

Mr. BENNETT: I did not say "partisan."

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver): I thought my right hon. friend did suggest that.

Mr. BENNETT: No, far from it. I did not even mention it.

(Mr. Bennett.)

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver): Last week I had the pleasure of accommodating three of my good colleagues from the other side of the house with respect to supplies, and I can assure my right hon. friend it is fully a matter of supplies being available. Where we are able to accommodate the public demand we are only too pleased to do so.

Mr. BENNETT: I referred to favouritism, and did not use the word "partisan."

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver): I accept the amendment—but I am not conscious of that, either.

With reference to the contract for Bren guns, I want to say immediately that it is a very important question. I suggested myself very early this session that all these contracts could very well be examined by either the public accounts committee or a special committee of this house. I feel it is due to myself as minister, and to the department, that there should be a complete investigation from the business point of view, because I do say this, that from the business point of view this is one of the finest contracts that was ever signed in the public interest of Canada.

I want to say in the second place that the minister cannot take the slightest credit for the contract, and the minister never sat in on any of the consultations, and never met Major Hahn until after the contract was signed. The contract was discussed by an interdepartmental committee which was formed about two years ago. I think that a subcommittee studying the terms of the contract for three months found they had various possible alternatives. One would be that once the unit basis was established with reference to the contract that they might possibly call for tenders. That suggestion was made to those who had already organized the main details in England of a complementary contract, and we were told that if any further delay occurred the arrangements could not be proceeded with. That was exactly the situation.

Mr. BENNETT: If any delay ensued.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver): Yes. We were told that if that suggestion was carried out the contract as had been arranged would have been impossible. Major Hahn went to England in 1936 and evidently made a favourable impression upon the British people. He also had access over there to the specifications of the Bren gun. I want to leave the idea with the committee that these are secret specifications and we had no control over them. It is quite possible they would not be available to any competitor of the firm