

SUPPLY--THE ROSS RIFLE.

Mr. FIELDING moved that the House go into Committee of Supply.

Mr. A. N. WORTHINGTON (Sherbrooke). Mr. Speaker, I propose for a short time this afternoon to discuss the Ross rifle and to conclude my remarks with a motion. In again bringing the subject of the Ross rifle before the House I would refer to my remarks of last session, in which I stated that it was not my intention to endeavor in any way to embarrass the Department of Militia and Defence, to injure the manufacturer, or to impede the manufacture of the rifle in Canada. My sole object was to have placed in the hands of the militia of Canada a safe, serviceable and efficient rifle. With this object in view I urged the Minister of Militia to submit the rifle to such an inspection at the hands of musketry experts of note as would result in one of two things -- in allaying the fear which existed in the minds of an already gun-shy militia, or in the rifle being perfected; or a better rifle being placed in the hands of the militia of Canada. This the minister refused to do in spite of the criticism in the House and in the press, in spite of the absolute condemnation of the rifle by the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, in spite of its more or less general failure in the hands of the permanent force and the militia, in spite of the refusal of men to use it, and in spite of the severe accidents which have happened at St. John, at Eastman and at Lethbridge; so that to-day, Mr. Speaker, I have no apology to offer for a strenuous criticism of the weakness of the right hon. gentleman who leads this House and his War Minister in placing in the hands of the militia of Canada an unsafe and unserviceable rifle--an action, Mr. Speaker, which, in the mind of any one who has read the reports, is nothing short of criminal.

To begin with, I would refer to the *raison d'etre* for the rifle. This was a very commendable desire on the part of the Minister of Militia and the Militia Council to have a rifle manufactured in Canada--to have a factory established within our own borders capable of turning out a sufficient number of arms so that in the event of our being cut off from the mother country in time of trouble we would still have

our own source of supply in Canada. This was a very commendable idea, but we shall soon see, Mr. Speaker, how the idea turned out, and how a contraband Yankee rifle came to be placed in the hands of the militia of Canada. The Minister of Militia started in search of a rifle and somebody to manufacture the same. The manufacturer was soon forthcoming in the person of Sir Charles Ross, and the rifle adopted was the Ross straight-pull magazine rifle. A company was formed and incorporated. As to the personnel of the company it matters little, as we were told by the minister in this House that the original company never went into existence but that Sir Charles Ross is doing business individually under his own name. The company was given a free site on the Plains of Abraham. It might be well to inquire why the Ross rifle was adopted? How it came to find favor in the eyes of the Minister of Militia and the Government? It is very hard to say why the British pattern rifle was not adopted, but we were told in the Public Accounts Committee by the solicitor of the Ross Rifle Company, that the Ross rifle was an exact reproduction of the Mannlicher rifle with which some 250,000 men of the Australian army are armed.

We were also told that a commission had sat upon and adopted this rifle as being one of the best and most up to date. But in the event of the rifle having been adopted on the strength of its being the same as that used in the Austrian army, that army has not been re-armed since 1896, so that we are not getting a very new or up to date weapon. As no very favorable opinions have been given up to this time, it would be only reasonable to ask if the rifle has been reported on by the war office or any particular commission up to that time. We have been told by the Minister of Militia that the War Office has never reported upon or criticized the rifle for the simple reason that it had never been submitted to the war office, a fairly comprehensive alibi. But the statement is one I would be inclined to take with a grain of salt, considering the fact that the hon. minister has told us that none of the component parts of this rifle were