

that a contract must be drawn, that we must have a new contract. And we agree that an equitable contract has been drawn. That seems to be settled.

What about the manner of announcement? I suppose that in the Department of Munitions and Supply we draw at least three thousand contracts a month. Many of them run into very large figures. It is done as a matter of routine. We have a large staff of solicitors that do that work. So far as I can remember, no contract has ever been announced in this house or to the press. I have never known it to be done. We have arrangements so that automatically, when a contract is awarded, an announcement is made; and if my hon. friends opposite will check back through the books which we distribute every month, and press notices which have been made from time to time in our department, they will find that every addition to the Bren gun plant, every new type of production, and the value of every contract, have been announced. That is all we do in the ordinary routine, and there was no reason why we should depart from it.

It is true that this was a large contract, but we have entered into a good many larger contracts. It was handled in exactly the way in which all contracts are handled in the Department of Munitions and Supply. Surely my hon. friends would not suggest that we publish the details of every contract we make. In the first place, no newspaper would print it. The press would get tired of it after a while. In the second place, it is not desirable, in dealing with private firms, to publish the details of contracts. The information can be of use only to the competitors of the firms in an attempt to "scrooge out" a better deal with the department for a similar type of product. So we do not make any public statement. How did this get published? I will tell my hon. friends that. They may as well have the whole story.

As some of you may have read in the press, I went to England.

An hon. MEMBER: With difficulty.

Mr. HOWE: A day or two after I left Canada, and before, I may say, the acting minister had really got his feet on the floor in my office, a reporter came in with a letter written by, I believe, Mr. Clifford Sifton to his Ottawa correspondent. It contained some rather extraordinary statements about what he understood to be the new Bren gun contract. My secretary, although I think he is as capable a private secretary as there is in Ottawa, used, I must say, exceedingly bad judgment on that occasion.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): I would not put it on him. That is hardly cricket.

Mr. HOWE: There is nobody else to blame, because, as I think he would tell you, he did it all himself. It became a matter of public interest when a newspaper asked for it. Instead, however, of making a press statement on it, he prepared a statement which he handed only to the reporter in question. The result was that, instead of the statement being distributed to all the press of Canada, it appeared in only two Canadian newspapers—which naturally annoyed the rest of the press. Those are the facts. That is not according to the routine of the department; it is one of those things which happen, and which I do not think anyone can explain, but I am taking the house into my confidence and telling them exactly what occurred.

So much for the announcement. We now come to the question of the effect of the comment. In the John Inglis company we have the largest plant in the British empire for the manufacture of automatic guns. I am not certain that it is not the largest in the world; I know of none larger. This plant has come on amazingly. A great many hon. members have been through it. I doubt whether anywhere in the British empire there is a more efficient operation in the manufacture of any type of gun. What has been the effect of the comment? I have a file from the John Inglis company themselves, showing the effect it has had on the morale of their works, on loss of production, and on the disturbance of their staff.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): On what?

Mr. HOWE: On the disturbance of the morale of their operating staff; that is, their foremen and superintendents.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Is the minister speaking of the cost? I did not catch what he said.

Mr. HOWE: I am saying what has been the effect of the propaganda that went out, of that action by the press.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Of the announcement?

Mr. HOWE: The attack that was made. It was not the announcement. The announcement stated the facts. Here are some of the headlines:

Drew states millions to be saved for public by Bren contract veto.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): That is probably true.

Mr. HOWE: Millions?

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Probably.