

*Supply—Labour*

the plural word advisedly—has made significant advances with the introduction of programs of lasting value, especially during recent years. I refer for instance to the winter works program which provides essential employment in a country such as Canada during the difficult winter months. This program was introduced not by my predecessor but by his immediate predecessor. I also wish to refer to the comprehensive Labour (Standards) Code, the establishment of the manpower consultative service, and the introduction of the winter house building incentive program, just to mention a few programs in which the Department of Labour has been interested over the past decade.

Partly as a result of the services which the department was able to develop, these services now have been divided between two departments. Since the first of January this year the National Employment Service, the Technical Vocational Branch, along with the manpower functions of the Department of Labour have been transferred to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, soon, I hope, to be a part of the new department of manpower. I say this because it affects the estimates which are to be discussed by the committee this afternoon. In the light of these changes, my officers have been giving consideration to the organization which we believe the department should have in order to carry out its direct responsibilities in the field of industrial relations.

In the field of labour management relations, I include labour standards and safety, research, information services, and also international labour affairs. In connection with my references to international labour affairs I think the house should know that the Minister of Labour had hoped to leave for Geneva tonight along with other members of the house to participate in the annual meeting of the International Labour Organization. This meeting opens on the evening of Tuesday next, and I am pleased to say that a strong delegation including members from all parts of this house is due to leave for Geneva over the week end. It appears to be extremely doubtful whether the minister will be there, at least for the first week of this very important international conference. I will go if I can, but the chances of my getting away for the next four or five days are extremely doubtful, because of a combination of circumstances to some of which I will refer in a moment.

• (2:20 p.m.)

The bulk of the work of the department as presently constituted—that is since January 1—aside from administrative services has been divided into three main sectors, and I think an examination of the estimates that we will be considering this afternoon will show this very clearly. Each of these main sectors will be headed by an officer with the necessary high qualifications and the rank needed to supervise and take responsibility in these fields.

The three sectors are: labour management relations, labour standards and benefits, and research and development. I will try to answer any questions that may be asked in connection with these three sectors of the department.

Before discussing even briefly the activities of the Department of Labour, having in mind the field of responsibilities that remain with it since January 1, I think it might be well if I made a very short statement about the general economic situation we have in Canada today, and more particularly about those aspects of this general economic situation which are of special interest to Canadian workers and employers.

I would not be frank if I did not say to this committee that I, as minister, and my department, have been plagued with a flood of disastrous strikes over the past few weeks. These strikes all seriously threaten the Canadian economy, and I urge all members of this house, regardless of party, to apply their minds to this serious situation which threatens our basic economy. We should be applying our minds in an attempt to find some corrective formula or solution which will prevent matters from getting completely out of hand.

In my own province of British Columbia we have a particularly serious situation which, at the present time, is not the direct responsibility of the federal Minister of Labour, but a responsibility that none of us can ignore as Canadians. We have the threat of a massive strike which will affect the economy of the province, and its forest industry. Nearly 50 cents of every dollar earned in the province comes from the forest industry. The situation is very serious.

We are faced with the situations that have been referred to in the last week, namely the dock strike in Montreal, the threatened strike in Air Canada, the railway problems and others which are particularly serious. I really think that we should apply our minds in an