

*Supply—Labour*

In looking through this correspondence I am unable to find reported here an answer from the Minister of Labour to the letter written to him by Premier T. C. Douglas on January 21. This may have been an error in the bringing down of this return. I should like to ask the Minister of Labour whether he has replied to the premier of Saskatchewan; if so, under what date and whether his reply will be produced in the House of Commons in compliance with this order passed by the house.

**Mr. Starr:** Yes, I replied to the premier of Saskatchewan. I cannot tell from memory what the date was. I shall be glad to table the letter. Since I replied to the premier no further correspondence has ensued between the two of us. Hence I would deem that he was satisfied with my answer.

**Mr. Argue:** I would assume that he has probably come to the point reached by many other people in this country. I think he is probably discouraged with the great volume of correspondence he has had with the government and the very little action which results from such correspondence.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** At that he has obtained more than the premier of Manitoba.

**Mr. Argue:** The premier of Manitoba did not get very much.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** No; he certainly did not.

**Mr. Argue:** The premier of Saskatchewan received a letter which has not been produced in this house. Hence the premier of Saskatchewan has not received very much either. The premier of Saskatchewan and the minister of highways in Saskatchewan have been corresponding with the Minister of Public Works and trying to get the Minister of Public Works to embark on some programs to provide employment in this country. I am sure there are projects in which the Minister of Labour would take a great deal of interest. All the Saskatchewan government have been able to get from the Minister of Public Works are answers to their letters, but no action. In his letter of January 21, 1959, the premier of Saskatchewan said in part:

Labour groups in our province have drawn to our attention the fact that to date the wage schedules issued to contractors have been set on the basis of the town of Outlook, the nearest urban centre to the construction site. Outlook, however, is only a town of less than 1,000 people. The great bulk of the workers on the project will have to be drawn from the larger cities such as Saskatoon, Moose Jaw and Regina, and their families will no doubt continue to live in these centres. The labour groups, therefore, contend that establishing rates of pay on the basis of Outlook conditions is manifestly unfair and the government of Saskatchewan shares this view.

We recognize that the schedules issued by your department are only intended to fix minimum

[Mr. Argue.]

rates, but there is no doubt that the construction firms use these schedules in tendering on contracts with the result that the schedules effectively influence the actual wage rates. I would urge very strongly that in future the fair wage schedules should be based at least upon the going rates applicable in the cities of Saskatoon and Regina.

That has not been done, I interpolate, according to the minister's reply this afternoon.

Unless this is done, I am very much concerned that the better contractors will find it difficult to bid successfully on the project and that the overall progress of the construction program will be greatly hampered by continuing labour difficulties.

We in Saskatchewan are proud of the way in which the contractors who have done work for the Saskatchewan government have been able to get along amicably with the trade unions in Saskatchewan. We resent very much the fact that on a federal project contracts being let result in the paying of wages that for Saskatchewan on similar projects are substandard.

**Mr. Garland:** I should just like to say one word briefly on this matter. Those of us in the opposition are indeed disappointed at the attitude of the minister in refusing to allow the first item to stand so that we might learn from him or from the announcements of other ministers in the government their attitude toward this continuing problem of unemployment. Many members on all sides of this house have come here after holding office in municipalities. In looking over the members whom I know I find that many of them have held offices in municipalities and are well aware of the problems that arise there. Regardless of party affiliation, I think many of them must view with some alarm this policy of winter works which was announced last year and which sought to transfer some of the responsibility for unemployment to the provinces and to the municipalities.

This winter works program—as has been said so often in this chamber and it is not my intention to repeat at any length—was a hurriedly conceived scheme at best. It has been described as too little and too late. The effect of it is apparent. It provided employment for less than 1 per cent of the employable people in this country. One might well question the value of a program of this type. Of what use is this type of work, provided, conceived and planned quickly by a municipality—that of laying sewers, digging ditches, cutting brush—to the average office worker, plumber, electrician or carpenter of this country who has the right to seek employment in his own trade?

I say that this is a matter of some real concern to the municipalities of Canada. With the experience that was gained with this