

Supply—Public Works

hour cut in wages. Anyone who knows anything about these matters will realize that at a time like that no officers of a union would recommend to their members that they go to work under that kind of an agreement. However, the union made another effort to resume negotiations with the companies on January 28. The company representative, the union representative and the representative of the Department of Labour, which had already concerned itself with the situation, held an informal meeting at which the representative of the companies stated that there was no point in further discussions as the companies would not go beyond the 1952 contract. The union then gave the companies two more weeks to reconsider their attitude, and on the 16th of February the strike was called.

As the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra has pointed out, the strike is a very costly one. I have been given estimates of the cost per week to the companies and to the employees. I am not going to mention the figures here because I do not know how reliable they are, but in my opinion they are not out of line with what is reasonable. When one adds to the cost to the participants the large number of other employees who are now out of employment and have been for some time, and the loss to the railway and other companies involved in the shipping business, the cost to the city of Vancouver and ultimately to Canada as a whole is quite a large figure.

I urge the Department of Labour to try to get the representatives of the employees and the companies together in an effort to reach a settlement in this matter. Labour disputes are no longer questions that merely involve employers and workers. The labour laws—the federal labour code and the codes in the provinces—are clear proof that today everyone agrees that the community has an interest in these labour disputes. Also, of course, we have our Department of Labour here, well staffed with men capable of doing what can or should be done in the way of bringing the two parties together.

Some little time ago I had a communication from the union asking me to urge the government to take steps to settle the strike. I told them that in my opinion that would be a rather dangerous policy to adopt, that it could prove dangerous even to the union, but that if they would tell me the terms on which they would be willing to agree to resume work I would be very glad to pass them on to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Gregg) to see what he could do about it. I do not think any member of parliament could be justified in going farther than that.

Again, as I said, the time is running on, with the strike now going into its eighth week. While the number of men involved directly is not large, I am daily receiving letters from other workers who are being thrown out of employment; and the loss to Canada and particularly to the west coast is on a very big scale indeed. I would urge the leader of the house to see that what has been said here tonight is brought to the attention of the Minister of Labour at as early a date as possible. I am sure, from the conversations I have had with him, that he appreciates the importance of this stoppage of work. Possibly the same methods for settlement might be used as were used in the settlement of the strike at the head of the lakes. Nothing will be lost from trying, and a great deal may be gained.

Motion agreed to and the house went into committee, Mr. Beaudoin in the chair.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE PRODUCTION

79. Departmental administration and payments to Canadian Commercial Corporation and other corporate agencies for services provided in connection with defence purchasing and production, \$6,710,933.

Mr. Dickey: Stand.

Item stands.

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

306. General administration, \$351,802.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Stand.

Item stands.

DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT

364. Departmental administration, \$399,090.

Mr. Winters: Stand.

Item stands.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

320. Departmental administration, \$671,905.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the minister if his statement in connection with the first item under public works will be lengthy?

Hon. Alphonse Fournier (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Chairman, if this is an invitation to make a statement on public works hon. members will be disappointed, and it would be the first time in eleven years that I had made a statement. My general statement is that nearly everything that goes on in public works is contained in the blue book. Members who have taken the time to read it will have found nearly all the details. I do not think it is a perfect book, but up to date we have had little criticism.