

Supply—Forestry

which ministers holding this portfolio have come in the short time the department has been in existence, since 1960, is that it could perhaps be considered symbolic of the fact that the forest industry and the forests of Canada are a very important natural resource that extends from one side of Canada to the other.

I suppose that in discussing the estimates of the minister one could launch into an exposition of the importance to our entire economy of the forest products industry, its value in regard to exports, and in this connection to our external trade balance, and that sort of thing. However, I believe these facts are fairly widely appreciated in the house and indeed by the Canadian people, and that little purpose would be served by venturing into this area in any major way in the discussion of these estimates today. Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I should like to suggest to the committee and the minister that the work of this department and what it is doing is perhaps much less well known and understood by the Canadian people, in part I think because it is a new department and in part because of the rather specific jurisdictional field of the forests and the forest industry.

● (4:00 p.m.)

I am aware of the fact that when the department was established it was not created out of whole cloth, but it was in part at least a consolidation of some existing efforts of the federal administration in Ottawa. If I am correct, I believe the research elements of the present Department of Forestry were carried on through the Minister of Agriculture in the days before the department was established.

As one examines these estimates he becomes aware of the fact that they are limited, as I understand it, to two basic fields, one the conduct of research programs and the other a program of assistance under agreements with the provinces in the forestry work, which is constitutionally considered to be a provincial responsibility.

I must say, Mr. Chairman, that coming from the province of British Columbia where this industry is the major one in our economy, I find myself much tempted to launch into a field of discussion which perhaps more properly could take place on the floor of the provincial legislature and where the whole question of the management, the development, the harvesting, marketing and manufacturing of our forest products very properly is a subject for extensive debate.

I had intended, Mr. Chairman, to avoid yielding to that temptation entirely in view of the constitutional jurisdictional division, until I listened to the remarks made a little earlier by the member for Cariboo. As I listened to him, it seemed to me that he could more properly have been making his remarks on the floor of the legislature of British Columbia, in view of his laudatory description of the work being done by the minister of forestry of British Columbia, Hon. Ray Williston. Since he has opened up this question, I would like to make some comment, Mr. Chairman, and I would make my comment in these terms, that while most of us from British Columbia recognize that Mr. Williston is a member of a provincial administration with considerable abilities and energy, nevertheless he does follow a policy in the management of our forest industry in respect of which there are some very grave differences of opinion. I would suggest from my point of view that Mr. Williston is simply perpetuating a basic error in his approach to the management of the forests of British Columbia which was originally committed by the coalition government formed by the Liberals and Conservatives of that day. I would suggest that the perpetuation of this basic error in policy is one which has worked both to the short run and the long run detriment of the interests of the people in British Columbia in their forest heritage.

Mr. Patterson: We do not look at it in that way.

Mr. Barnett: As the hon. member says, some of them do not look at it in that way. I may say in reply to the interjection by the member for Fraser Valley that, unfortunately for him a large part of the forests which were once in his constituency were long ago logged off by the old cut-out and get-out method. So perhaps he has not had as much opportunity in observing at first hand what is going on in respect of the management of our forests as I do over in my own constituency of Comox-Alberni.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I would like to dwell for a moment or two on the approach we are taking to the consideration of these estimates. I believe the minister will recall that the other day the member for Timiskaming raised the point that the estimates of the Department of Agriculture have been referred to a standing committee of the house for consideration, and pointed out to the minister that very closely associated with