

*Reconstruction and Supply*

able to do that—and I believe he is—he can bring in to help him not only many capable men from outside this house, but also able parliamentary assistants from inside the house, and if one is not sufficient he can get several. So that I do not think the points raised are of any great importance. There may be sections of the bill which we shall have to scrutinize carefully in committee but, as the matter stands now, I think the principle of creating a Department of Reconstruction, even if it is associated with the Department of Supply, is a reasonable one and this group will be quite prepared to let the resolution go through.

Mr. JOHNSTON: I think the setting up of a Department of Reconstruction is a step in the right direction, because there will be an important function for it to perform in converting from war-time to peace-time production. In our western cities where we had war industries we already have the problem of men being fired and now walking the streets in search of employment. This new department can perform a very useful service in seeing that these men are put to useful employment once more, so that they can earn their livelihood. If this department can take up the slack in employment to-day, which may increase as the days go by, it will be worth while.

I am not one of those who think the government should go into business, because in my experience, especially on the war expenditures committee, I have found that private industry, if given the opportunity, can do a job much better than the government, and that was proven during the war period. But undoubtedly there is a field in which this new department can operate to advantage in the reconstruction period, when the country is turning from war-time to peace-time production. The government can step in and take up the slack in employment. That question is already becoming prominent not only in the west but all over Canada, where there are now hundreds of unemployed people. I am not one of those who take seriously the statement of the government that they have jobs for everyone now. In Calgary many people have sought employment through national selective service, but when they have gone there they have found that the conditions of employment are entirely different from what they have been accustomed to, and that the wages offered are lower than what they were earning before. That is not only true of Calgary but of all Canada. As the leader of this party has pointed out, these lower wages that are now being offered concern labour more than any other factor, and

[Mr. MacInnis.]

rightly so. That is one of the problems we have to face, and I wish to congratulate the government on setting up this department, which I hope will bring about peace-time employment to the utmost possible extent as quickly as possible.

Mr. HOWE: I have often been accused of being rigid, not pliable, but perhaps I have this one distinction, that I am the only man in the world who took on the job of buying war supplies at the beginning of the war and carrying it through to the end of the war. Perhaps if I had been more flexible I would not have lasted as long.

I did think there would be some applause for this move from hon. gentlemen opposite because, if I remember correctly, the hon. member for Muskoka-Ontario in an earlier speech this session demanded that the government reduce the number of ministers, and the purpose of this bill is to reduce the number by one.

Mr. MACDONNELL: I do not think I took such a liberty as that.

Mr. HOWE: I was told that the hon. member did. However, the work of reconstruction is very closely associated with the work of liquidating the Department of Munitions and Supply. We have a great many war plants in this country, and all during the war a great many people were telling me that when the war stopped these plants would be closed and that every employee would be on the street. It is through the efforts of the Department of Reconstruction that not many plants have closed and that a large number of the men working in these plants are still working in them. If it had not been for the strike in the automobile industry the percentage of men still employed in the same plants in which they worked during the war would be still higher. That, of course, required very close coordination between the Department of Munitions and Supply, which was responsible for the operating of the plants as war plants, and the Minister of Reconstruction, who was responsible for the changing over into peace-time plants and finding tenants for those plants who could use them as employers of labour in peace-time work. The particular work of reconstruction is very much wrapped up with that type of service at the present time. My hon. friend has spoken of a shelf of public projects. We are building these as we can. There is a shortage of engineers, but that is gradually being overcome and our public projects are being increased. Unless we can get enough man-power and enough materials to build the homes the people of this country require, anyone in this house who demands