

War Appropriation—Labour

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR

Payments to the provinces in connection with organizing and operating day nurseries and like facilities, \$120,000.

Hon. HUMPHREY MITCHELL (Minister of Labour): The leader of the opposition (Mr. Graydon) when the house adjourned last night suggested that I should make a complete statement on this item, which I am now prepared to do.

While at all times there is undoubtedly division of opinion in Canada on the subject of mothers of young children working in industry, I think it is fair to say that the majority opinion tends to favour mothers remaining in the home rather than working, where at all possible, and the mothers' allowance acts of the various provinces have been designed with this objective in view.

Whatever might be said of normal times, war conditions must of necessity of course temporarily change our views with regard to many peace-time practices. Because of manpower and woman power shortages it is necessary to accept the offer of services in industry made by mothers with children, and in some cases it is even necessary to encourage these women to accept industrial employment as an aid to our national effort. Nevertheless, the policy of the Department of Labour is to put emphasis on single women or married women without children accepting industrial employment in the first instance. Of course at all times some mothers must work by reason of domestic circumstances. This is apart from cases where any industrial demand may require their services.

Fully recognizing the problem which arises in regard to the care of children when mothers are engaged in industry, and realizing that their numbers will gradually increase as long as the war lasts, the government believes that special arrangements should be made for the care of the children of mothers working in war industries. The provincial governments were approached, and we received advice that at the moment there was no need of special arrangements except in the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. Further correspondence has taken place from time to time with the other provinces.

On June 16 of last year a conference was called in Ottawa and attended by the ministers and the deputy ministers of public health and welfare in Ontario and the department of health and social welfare in the province of Quebec. With the full and sympathetic co-operation of the provincial governments, a proposed agreement was discussed.

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

Prior to this conference many meetings were held with experts in the field of child care. Among others we were indebted to Doctor George Davidson, executive secretary of the Canadian Welfare Council, and Doctor Karl Bernhardt, acting director of the Institute of Child Study, and to the International Labour Office for their comprehensive summary of systems of day care established throughout the world.

We decided upon a high standard for the day care centres, believing that over a period of time, the expenditures would be well worth while. Health and nutrition services, staff and equipment, were to meet an agreed upon standard.

An order in council passed on July 20 authorized the Minister of Labour to enter into an agreement with any of the provinces for the day care of children. Agreements have already been signed with Ontario and Quebec, the former on July 29 and the latter on August 3, 1942. All other provinces have had the agreement submitted to them. Surveys are being made from time to time by the provincial departments and the social agencies to study the situation and agreements will be signed when the need arises.

The agreement provides for:

(1) Day nursery care for children two to six years old.

(2) School supervision, outside of school hours, of children over six years old.

(3) Foster home care for children when nurseries are impracticable.

(4) A provincial committee with dominion representation and also local committees. All committees represent labour, community welfare, health and educational interests.

All of these plans are developed on a fifty-fifty cost basis between the dominion and the province, less the amount contributed by the parents. We decided that the parents should pay a fee. In general the parents pay 35 cents a day for one child and an additional 15 or 20 cents for other children from the same family. In the school plan the mother contributes 25 cents a day for the first child and an additional 10 cents for other children from the same family. These rates set out in the agreement are not hard and fast and may vary somewhat, according to the unit and circumstances. Our aim is to keep them sufficiently low for the parents to afford them.

In order to keep in touch with the need, our local employment and selective service offices have been directed to cooperate with local committees and provincial authorities