

Government Organization

• (4:20 p.m.)

Some time ago the right hon. gentleman handed the Economic Council a job which some of us thought was to study price increases in this country and what might be done about them. I gather that is not quite what the Economic Council has been asked to do; it has been asked to do something else in the field of pricing. The important thing to note is that we have an Economic Council which has been given the job of making an annual survey normally done by economists, and which has been done exceedingly well by Dr. Deutsch and the members of his council. The same Economic Council has been given the job of looking into some aspects of pricing. I do not know exactly what aspects it now will be asked to look into in the field of consumer affairs generally.

If the Economic Council ever had any vestige of planning, the right hon. gentleman is making sure it will not have any in the future. It will have ad hoc jobs to do such as the economic survey, prices, and consumer affairs and it never will be able to do any planning whatever. If there may be some requirement later, why not now? One hon. member boasted about the fact that the former government had instituted a do-it-now campaign which this government also is carrying out. Why not now?

I urge, Mr. Speaker, that a department of consumer affairs is an essential part of modern living and is the only way in which we can meet the problems of the modern consumer which, as I have said, do not merely involve prices, important though they are. The entire problem concerns the way in which we live, the kinds of things we choose among the many things from which we may choose. It involves clean air to breathe or clear unpolluted water or beautified cities. All these are things with regard to which the Canadian citizen as a consumer must have protection. A department of consumer affairs should have various agencies to cover these many fields. A prices review board is, of course, very essential. The right hon. gentleman simply does not meet the needs of the present day when he satisfies himself by saying that he has asked some body which is going to look into something related to the protection of the consumer.

I wish to say a word now about what I consider to be the most important lack in this re-organization. There is no ministry of planning or economic affairs, or whatever you wish to call it. Let me point out to hon.

[Mr. Lewis.]

members with the utmost seriousness that this is a lack which this government and this country will regret in the years to come. If you look at the various facets of our economy with which various departments of government deal, at least partially, you see the following picture; and I cannot give you the entire picture because I have not had the time to make the necessary study. You have the whole problem of manpower, placement and training in the hands of the ministry of manpower; you have the whole problem of disputes, harmony in labour-management relations, and the labour standards code in the hands of the Minister of Labour; you have the question of investment planning, which is basic to the economy, in the hands of the Minister of Trade and Commerce. The Economic Council and the war on poverty are under the Prime Minister. The various research councils, which again are basic to the modern economy and its development, also are directly under the Prime Minister.

With great respect to the right hon. gentleman, it is as obvious as anything can be that he is not in a position to give a direction to any of these agencies since he has to have overall supervision of all agencies of government. Yet these important instruments for an understanding of what is happening which are necessary for planning to meet what is happening, such as the Economic Council, the agencies for the war on poverty, the science council and the research council, are directly under the Prime Minister. I submit that this situation is not encouraging.

Then, if you go to such very important parts of the economic development in Canada as the designated area legislation, that is under the ministry of industry. Then, for some mysterious reason which perhaps is not so mysterious, the Atlantic Development Board comes under the Minister of Transport. I do not know what the Minister of Transport has to do with development of that sort except that the present minister comes from one of the Atlantic provinces; I suppose that explains it.

Mr. Knowles: He represents one of the Atlantic provinces.

Mr. Lewis: The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) says that the minister represents one of the Atlantic provinces. That probably is a more accurate political way of describing it. The minister comes from one of the Atlantic provinces but that is a pretty poor reason for giving him something like the Atlantic Development