

Mr. JOHNSTON (Bow River): Does the minister not think it would have been far better to have hired that man outright? I have never seen any man so indispensable that his place could not be taken by somebody else, and I would suggest to the minister that \$25,000 is an extremely good salary. If the company is lending that man to the government; if the government pays only that portion of his salary applicable to the period during which he is employed by the government, in addition to a living allowance or other expenses, then I suggest to the minister that this man is not working for a dollar a year. To suggest to the public that this man is being lent to the government by this company for a dollar a year is certainly misleading the public in that regard. I say to the minister that if we need these men we should hire them outright. Let us do it fairly and openly, and let us pay them decent salaries. I am not one of those who advocate that you should underpay anyone, either a worker or a salaried man; I think there should be justice in all cases, and I believe it would be much better to give these men decent salaries and not allow any deductions by the companies. I think that would be more satisfactory to all concerned, and everyone would know what they were getting.

Mr. REID: I think every member of the committee realizes the great task and heavy responsibility of the Minister of Finance as the responsible head of an organization such as the wartime prices and trade board, but I say in all kindness that the minister must not take it amiss if some criticisms are offered in regard to what has occurred. So far as I know, there has never before been an organization that has touched the individual lives of all citizens in Canada to the extent the wartime prices and trade board does at the present time. When the chairman of the board was in Vancouver he was challenged as being a sort of dictator, as being separate and apart from the government, but he made it quite clear to the people of British Columbia that such is not the situation. He said this was a very democratic organization; if anything went wrong, the people had their members of parliament and could complain to them, and of course their members would bring these matters to the attention of the minister.

I must say that I hardly needed that advice to bring any matters of this kind to the attention of the house. However, it has been a unique experience for a member of parliament to be called into disputes between farmers and others and the wartime prices and trade board, and to be told that members of parliament have nothing at all to do with

[Mr. Hsley.]

these matters, that we are separate and apart from the government and that if there are any complaints they should be taken up with the Minister of Finance. We all realize that the Minister of Finance is not in a position to know everything about agriculture. His field is finance, and we have a Minister of Agriculture; but I am afraid we are drifting into the position of having three ministers of agriculture in the house, the Minister of Trade and Commerce, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Agriculture. I am one of those who have said publicly both in the house and outside that it is an extremely good thing we have the present Minister of Agriculture, or, heaven knows, the farmers would not have got as square a deal under Donald Gordon as they have managed to get.

I should now like to bring one or two matters to the attention of the minister, and to offer one or two suggestions. The officials of the board whom we have met out in British Columbia by and large have treated the public very fairly. I have visited the office and had occasion to meet the personnel, and I have heard the same thing said by others who have had occasion to do business with them, but I wish to warn the minister that he had better take care that the prosecutions do not keep increasing, in case they might amount to persecution.

Greater cooperation might be obtained by the officials of the department were they to consult municipal and city authorities. I will give a case I have in mind. During the wood shortage on the Pacific coast a report was sent to the wartime prices and trade board in Vancouver that a poor widow woman in New Westminster had two cords of wood. Within an hour two men in a large car came all the way from Vancouver to New Westminster to investigate the matter. Of course anyone who knows anything at all about the wood situation knows that very often out there wood is taken directly from the water, and that one has to stack it and leave it for months before it can be used. This good lady was following the usual practice of buying what is known as green wood, and having it stacked. Of course that did not save her from being prosecuted.

Then, only last week an old age pensioner seventy-six years of age had been up against it for the need of a load of sawdust. I might explain that out there some people burn sawdust; some burn wood; others burn coal, and others burn oil, when they can get it. As I say, he was stuck for fuel, and he said to a truck driver, "I will give you a little honorarium if you will just deliver a load of sawdust to my home." The truck driver did that.