

Supply—Labour

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Chairman, I intend to be very brief. We are still on vote 1 and this is the second day the estimates of the Department of Labour have been considered. I welcome this, incidentally, because it has been many years since the estimates of the Department of Labour have been debated by so many speakers from all parts of the house, who have concerned themselves with the problems of labour in such a sympathetic manner. I think if there is one theme that I have noticed in just about all the speeches on these labour estimates it has been the realization that, in general, if this country is to survive in an economic sense we need a much greater degree of co-operation between labour, management and government.

● (9:30 p.m.)

I was particularly pleased, Mr. Chairman, to note that I, as Minister of Labour, the member for the New Democratic party and also the official spokesman of the official opposition, the hon. member for Central Nova, all in effect adopted, commended and endorsed the philosophy of Freedman. I think this is a breakthrough in this House of Commons, and really it has to come if we are going to maintain the maximum degree of co-operation between the three important segments. We need this type of enlightened legislation for those few industries that fail to live up to their moral obligation.

The hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway, in her usual eloquent style, mentioned the need in the very near future for some substantial legislation more favourable to the female labour force of this country. Her points were well taken. The idea of maternity leave is certainly not an original one. It makes sense and it should at least be part of the provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act, if nothing else, when unemployment insurance comes up for drastic overhaul early in the new year. As the hon. lady knows, we were fortunate in obtaining the services of Mrs. Gelber to head this important branch of the department. She is already chairing a strong interdepartmental committee made up of representatives of labour, manpower and other departments concerned, preparing legislation in anticipation of some of the recommendations of the task force as well as reviewing the report to which the hon. member alluded, one which should be required reading.

The hon. lady also mentioned the problems of the underprivileged in California reflected

[Mr. Gray.]

in the appearance of California grapes on the market here. I notice that one of our leading supermarkets indicated today that it would no longer handle this product. We are fortunate in having an excellent product from the Niagara peninsula, one to which we should be giving a preference anyway, other things being equal.

Mr. Lewis: You are referring to the parliamentary secretary no doubt.

Mr. Mackasey: I might say to the older members of the house, particularly to those who have strong labour contacts, that instead of having to contact my counterpart in the United States regarding the true story behind the grape situation in California, I need go no further than Mr. Pat Conroy, the labour attaché for our department in Washington who is now in Ottawa for a week or so. Without being at all facetious, let me say I would be most happy if the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway and others who are friends of Mr. Conroy could see him for half an hour or so, to discuss this problem with a gentleman who is a walking encyclopaedia, as most people know, as far as situations of this sort are concerned.

We heard an excellent intervention by the hon. member for Moose Jaw. I will not say I can comment openly on all his observations, but he was certainly accurate in his assumption that on the surface many of the recommendations of the International Labour Organization have not been implemented in this country. However I think he realizes, as most members do, that many of the recommendations of the I.L.O.—recommendations which we should like to see part and parcel of our legislation—have not been implemented for the good reason that to do so would infringe the constitution of our country. We have succeeded in ratifying at least 24 I.L.O. conventions to date. We are in constant communication with the deputy ministers of the various provinces. They attend various committee meetings of the I.L.O. as well as the annual convention in Geneva every June.

I think we are about due to get through, in some of the provinces at least, three or four recommendations of the I.L.O., particularly in the field of discrimination in employment policy and underground work for women in mines. There are many countries where there is no legislation specifying that women may not work underground in mines.