

I will say this in favour of the minister, that if he carries on the department in the same excellent manner as he assisted the Steep Rock mines to get under operation he will do a good piece of business on behalf of the country. At Steep Rock the government, through the Canadian National Railways, constructed a large dock for loading iron ore and built the sidings into the mine. I call that reasonable and fair assistance, of somewhat the same nature as that given by the Ontario hydro commission, who built a power line into the mine. But beyond that kind of assistance, I hope the department will be very careful about what it does in the direction of itself entering into construction work.

I understand the minister to say that 2,500 office persons are now employed in the munitions department. How many were employed at the peak of its activities?

Mr. HOWE: About 4,500.

Mr. MacNICOL: That is a good reduction. There are about 300 in the Department of Reconstruction. Do I understand the minister to say that he expects that number to rise?

Mr. HOWE: Operating by itself it will rise shortly to about 350. The combined departments will drop to 2,500 by the first of January.

Mr. MacNICOL: Just a minute until I get this right. When the minister says 350, does he mean that the Department of Reconstruction will require about 350?

Mr. HOWE: As at present organized, yes. The consolidation of the two departments will make for some economies in staff, so that while to-day the staffs of the combined departments would be about 2,800, when the merger is through there will be about 2,500.

Mr. MacNICOL: In other words, the Department of Reconstruction will practically require 2,500 alone, because the Department of Munitions and Supply must be pretty well wound up.

Mr. HOWE: Oh, no; that will take us some time.

Mr. BOUCHER: Of these 2,500 who are now in the Department of Munitions and Supply, how many are permanent civil servants, entitled to superannuation, et cetera; how many are temporaries, and what will be the policy of the department as far as making all employees temporary, or what proportion of employees in the new department will be permanent and what proportion temporary so far as compliance with the Civil

Service Act is concerned in respect of their appointment, their tenure of office and their right to privileges under the act? Could the minister give us some information on that matter?

Mr. HOWE: The Department of Munitions and Supply was a temporary department; the Department of Reconstruction is a temporary department, and the Department of Reconstruction and Supply will be a temporary department. As my hon. friend knows, no civil servant can be appointed as permanent to a temporary department. We have a few permanent civil servants, certainly not more than 200, on loan from other departments. I doubt if there are that many now. They represent the only permanent civil servants in the two departments.

Mr. BOUCHER: These appointments are not made through the civil service commission?

Mr. HOWE: Yes.

Mr. BOUCHER: Appointments are still made through the civil service commission?

Mr. HOWE: Yes.

Mr. BOUCHER: Are there in the department any who are not so appointed?

Mr. HOWE: No; I think the civil service commission recommend any appointments. Certainly they fix the salary of every appointee.

Mr. BOUCHER: In that event, where employees from the various departments are released, is any provision being made for their transfer to another department instead of being let out into the cold, cold world?

Mr. HOWE: My hon. friend knows where the soldier preference comes in. He is also aware that the civil service commission has charge of all permanent appointments. There is nothing that the Minister of Reconstruction can do about that. I am afraid that the employees of our departments must go the way of all temporaries.

Mr. BOUCHER: I cannot quite agree that it cannot be done, because when a civil servant has given good and faithful service to a department, if his department happens to be a temporary one, an opportunity should be given to other branches of the government to avail themselves of his services. I was wondering if the government was giving any consideration to the plight these employees will be in when they are released from a temporary department. Something should be done in that regard.