

minister hopes it will pass. When it passes the administration of the act will be taken away from the Department of Labour and put under the president of the privy council and a commission. In that event the minister may ask us to make an appropriation for the administration of the act by the commission. However, so long as the committee understand the situation I have no further objection.

Mr. GORDON: The right hon. gentleman is not unacquainted with the history of the Combines Investigation Act, since he had a very great deal to do with it and, down the years, undoubtedly struggled hard with it. The act does present great difficulties, and I think reference to the public records will disclose that from time to time the right hon. gentleman has made it clear that these matters go forward by orderly, progressive steps. We trust that the legislation which may be introduced will be a further progressive step; certainly, while the administration may be removed from the Department of Labour in a sense, that administration by that department has presented some difficulties. This change may not be an improvement, but we hope it will be.

Mr. ILSLEY: I should like to say a word about the administration of the Combines Investigation Act. During the sittings of the price spreads commission we attempted to obtain certain reports made by the registrar, but we were told by the minister that he could not make those reports public. Several members of that commission were of opinion that there was nothing in the act to prevent these reports being made public, and I should like to know from the minister whether that is his own view or whether he is merely of opinion that he has a discretion in the matter, and whether he exercised that discretion against publicity in particular cases under consideration. In order to recall the matter to his mind I will state what one or two of the reports were. One was the report on the alleged rubber combine which was under investigation by the price spreads commission; undoubtedly that report would have been of great assistance to us. Another report was in connection with the radio business. We were unable to secure those reports, and for our assistance in considering the legislation now before the house amending the Combines Investigation Act I should like to find out whether the government takes the view that they are not permitted to make the reports public or whether they take the view that they have a discretion in the matter. In the

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

last few years it has amounted to the same thing; we have not been able to get those reports. Speaking for myself, and I think for my colleagues on the price spreads commission without exception, we think that if this is the law at the present time it should be amended. I have just glanced over the amending act and I cannot see that the government have made any provision for making reports public in the future. If that is the case I believe that provision should be made, and I should like to have a statement from the minister in that regard.

Mr. GORDON: Mr. Chairman, the Combines Investigation Act as it exists at present does not contemplate the making public of preliminary inquiries by the registrar. The question of making public preliminary inquiries of that kind was dealt with at great length when the act was first introduced twenty-five years ago and subsequently when measures were introduced to amend it. It is quite true that investigations made by a commissioner under the act have been dealt with, in regard to publicity, as the act suggests. With respect to preliminary inquiries it has been the practice—and I think the sound practice—of all governments since the act was passed that preliminary inquiries and reports concerning the business of individuals should not be made public, and I do not think the Combines Investigation Act ever contemplated that they should be made public. The preliminary inquiry is made by the registrar, and the information given him is usually a full and complete disclosure of all the intimate activities of the individual. That being the case it always has been held, not only by this and the preceding government but by all governments since the act was passed, that publicity should not be given to an inquiry of this kind.

With respect to the activities of the royal commission on price spreads and mass buying, surely they could not have been hampered in their activities by reason of the non-disclosure of any preliminary inquiry such as I have just indicated, made by the registrar. They had the widest possible opportunity afforded them to take evidence with respect to anybody's business, and certainly they were not hampered in any way by this government. So if a report was withheld from them, which report fell within the class that always has been withheld by every government since the act was passed, I think there should be no complaint on that score.