

Inquiries of the Ministry

a more restricted determination of those whose claims will be recognized. There are at least two of those which would appear to be worthy of the most sympathy which would involve a wide definition of Canadians entitled to claims.

I hope that the number of claims that will have to be considered for interim payment will not be great and that the risk to the treasury, even though ultimately they were not included in the classes recognized, will not involve a substantial sum. It is a risk that might be taken because of the distress of those who are urging such claims. The matter is receiving constant attention and I intend to ask my colleagues at the earliest possible opportunity for their views after they have had the opportunity to consider the pros and cons set out in the report received from Mr. Justice Ilsley.

There will be more information as to the exact factual situation available when question No. 8 on the order paper is answered. I hope that that may be answered, if not tomorrow at least not later than Monday next. We are making a compilation of the information requested by the question which will pretty well cover the general factual situation. I trust that we may be able to recommend that whatever risks are involved in dealing sympathetically with these claims for interim payment may be taken.

Mr. Drew: I appreciate the difficulties which the Prime Minister has pointed out in regard to differentiation between the different types of claims. Without extending the discussion too much I would nevertheless urge that if possible immediate consideration be given to claims such as those by widows of husbands who died from starvation or ill treatment and who themselves have little or no earning power today and are thus in a position of great hardship. I need hardly point out that we are only a month away from Christmas and into the winter season and great encouragement would be given to a number of people who are in most difficult positions if they had some assurance that their cases, as distinguished from claims by large companies in respect to the sinking of ships and things of that kind, would be dealt with in the way of some interim allowance that would at least take care of their immediate requirements.

Mr. St. Laurent: The hon. member said that the war has been over for some six years, but all hon. members appreciate that we could not deal with these problems until the peace treaty was signed. In anticipation of the signing of the peace treaty this advisory commission on war claims was set up. It is not intended to adjudicate at the

[Mr. St. Laurent.]

moment on the individual claims but only as to the priority that should be given to claims for personal injury or for the death of heads of families and so forth over property claims, but the whole matter will be dealt with just as expeditiously as possible. We do appreciate that there has been considerable delay in getting the treaty signed and that there should now be as little delay as possible in implementing what has become possible under the treaty.

COMBINES INVESTIGATION ACT**PACKING INDUSTRY—REQUEST FOR INVESTIGATION OF POSSIBLE COLLUSION, ETC.**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. P. E. Wright (Melfort): I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Justice, of which I have given him notice. Will the minister have an immediate investigation made under the Combines Investigation Act as to, first, whether there was collusion, understanding or agreement among firms engaged in the packing industry in bringing about the drastic reduction of 25 per cent in hog prices between July and October of this year? And, second, was there collusion, understanding or agreement among these firms preventing or delaying those declines being reflected in lower prices to the consumer?

Hon. Stuart S. Garson (Minister of Justice): I wish to thank the hon. member for having given me notice of his question. When I received that notice I discussed the matter referred to in his question with the commissioner under the Combines Investigation Act. The commissioner informed me that he had already had this matter under consideration and although he had so far obtained no evidence of collusion or illegal activities, he was seeking further information. If the hon. member, or if any hon. member for that matter, knows of any facts that might be of assistance to the commissioner, I hope he will place them before the commissioner.

If the preliminary inquiries now being made indicate that a formal investigation is warranted, the commissioner has ample powers under the act to undertake that inquiry and would do so in the ordinary course of events without necessarily having any direction from myself as minister.

Mr. Wright: I have a letter here setting out certain facts—

An hon. Member: Give it to the commissioner.

Mr. Wright: —and asking for an investigation on five points. I will send it to the minister. The five points I wish to have investigated are, first—