

Supply—Finance

details shown on page 16 indicate that the amounts in the various departments aggregate \$960,734.50. The reasons for the applications differ. Sometimes it is a case of insolvency. Sometimes it is a case of a claim which, except against the crown, would be long since outlawed under the statute of limitations. Sometimes it is a case where it has been found that there is just no hope of recovery, involving, for example, some indigent person advanced in years who has no hope of ever being on his feet financially again to answer a claim. The claims vary in amount, but I would say they average between \$1,000 and \$2,000. There may be some in excess of that figure. In the Department of National Revenue I see two claims of \$23,000 each. But in every case I can give the committee an assurance that there is no suggestion of writing off any claim which has any real value whatever. Incidentally, those two cases that I mentioned in the Department of National Revenue arose respectively in 1932 and 1937, and in this list which is before me some go back even to 1925.

Mr. Chevrier: I do not know that I understand fully what the claims are for, and how it has anything to do with this item of telephones.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): We are on the next item, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Shall item 654 carry?

Mr. Chevrier: No. What are these debts for?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): They arise in a multitude of ways. These are sums owing to the crown and they arise in different departments in just about every way that debts can arise in favour of the crown. This is a procedure that is carried out periodically.

Mr. Chevrier: I was not questioning the procedure. I wanted to get some information about these various items. The minister a moment ago said something about the statute of limitations. Does the statute of limitations apply as against the crown?

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): It does not run against the crown.

Mr. Benidickson: I noticed that the minister, when answering the inquiry of the hon. member for Laurier, thumbed through three or four pages of notes, information which is always supplied, as we all understand, to the minister when items of this kind are being discussed. I do not think that the committee wants at this stage to go into an exhaustive discussion of every item that might be represented in the over-all total, although this item is very large. I think, perhaps, that in the circumstances the minister might

[Mr. Fleming (Eglinton).]

be willing to review and then table the explanatory notes that I am sure have been provided by the treasury board with respect to these write-offs which involve possible claims of the crown with respect to sums of over \$1,000 in each case. Otherwise, as I think the minister will agree, the discussion here could go on interminably. Certainly on this side we would want a little more information about, for example, the 153 claims of the Department of National Revenue which total \$674,000. I would be willing, if other members of the committee are willing, to have the minister submit his explanatory notes to explain this item.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): With respect, I do not think that is a very happy suggestion. There are pages and pages of this material. I may say that with respect to one of the departments to which the hon. gentleman referred, the 153 claims that pertain to the Department of National Revenue, the list which I have, running to several pages, consists of bankruptcies. All these cases involve bankruptcies. In some cases one dividend was paid and that was the end of it. This is a matter of writing off the balance of a claim against a bankrupt estate. There is nothing unusual about this practice, and I am sure the hon. gentleman was familiar with it when he was parliamentary assistant to the minister of finance. I can assure members of the committee that these items are not written off if there is any hope of the recovery of any portion of them.

Mr. Benidickson: As so often happens, we find that when an offer is made to the Minister of Finance which might reduce the time taken in discussion in parliament the hon. gentleman seems to adopt the attitude that he just cannot be generous in replying. The recourse open to us is to begin immediately to ask, with respect to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, for details about the two claims indicated there which amount to \$2,860. I was quite prepared to forgo the privilege which I think is mine as a member of the committee to go into this thing exhaustively because I am quite satisfied that the minister presiding over treasury board, and with the officials from whom he has help in reviewing all of these cases, acted in accordance with the proper principles that would be expected to apply, but I think we are at least entitled to the detailed information to establish that that is so. If the minister does not choose to do that I am afraid we will have to pursue this case by case under the supplementary estimates.