

Oral Questions

to involve several provinces and activities of persons in a number of provinces. In the ordinary course, the provincial attorneys general have been insisting that they are able to deal with these matters. This, of course, raises very important questions throughout the country if the suggestion is that when interprovincial activities are involved, the ordinary criminal administration of justice by the provincial attorney general is not possible. I also want to know from Ontario why it is that matters of intimidation, matters of alleged criminal activity, cannot be dealt with in the ordinary way with such improvements in police activity as may be required. Those are substantial questions we have to deal with in this area.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, the position taken by the Minister of Justice a number of days ago, if I understood him, was that if those responsible for the administration of justice in the province felt they were unable to discharge their responsibilities effectively in a particular case, that would be reason for the federal government to intervene. Now that the provincial solicitor general has indicated to the Minister of Justice inability to do a satisfactory job for the reasons given, what is it the Minister of Justice requires to persuade him to move?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I think more accurately I indicated that if the provincial attorney general in carrying out his obligations to enforce the criminal law was not able to do so without our assistance, I would want to consider what assistance we could offer. At the present time he has not made any specific request for assistance in carrying out his responsibilities in relation to the Criminal Code. He has indicated that the activity involves a union which has a federal charter. However, that does not change the fact that the ordinary criminal activities involved are really within the responsibilities of the provincial attorney general. As far as any request of his is concerned, it is only that we give serious consideration to having an inquiry. Of course, the simple request for serious consideration to have an inquiry does not automatically mean there will be an inquiry.

REFERENCE TO STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER OF CRITERIA
FOR HOLDING INQUIRY INTO ALLEGATIONS AGAINST
SEAFARERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, my question is supplementary to those asked by my leader. It appears that the government is now becoming prosecutor, judge and jury. My question is directed to the Prime Minister who, I wish to remind, stated on December 9 with regard to the Ontario government:

It is only if they report failure, that they are unable to do anything and feel very strongly that the only way to get at the facts would be by a public inquiry held by the federal government rather than them, that I would consider this matter.

In light of the circumstances presented to the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General, does the Prime Minister not believe it is high time that he respects the criteria which he pointed out in this House on December 9 and called for an inquiry into this entire matter?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman quoted me rightly that I said

[Mr. Lang.]

I would consider this matter. That is exactly what the Minister of Justice just said we would do at the request of the minister of the Ontario government. We will consider this matter.

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the government is reluctant to move in light of the fact that the provincial government through its authorities, have consistently stated they cannot apply the facts. With all due respect, the government has been playing footsy with this matter for the past two weeks. Is there not a responsibility on the part of the government to now give us the answer rather than continuing to wait until we in this House relieve ourselves of responsibility and the government thinks the matter will die down? Why can we not have an answer now?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member says he cannot understand our reluctance to move. I must remind him and the House that a commission of inquiry is a departure from our normal process of criminal justice. Under our system of criminal justice there is, as every member of the House knows, a presumption of innocence. That is the way in which our law operates. In very exceptional circumstances one can, and should, resort to an inquisitorial form of justice. This is not a course we would embark upon lightly and this is a position which we hope the hon. member will understand, and, perhaps, show some reluctance himself before calling for it.

• (1510)

Mr. Alexander: We want the facts.

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THE CANADIAN ECONOMY

INFLATION—SUGGESTED INCREASE IN WAGES OF WORKING POOR TO EQUAL AVERAGE INCREASE OF INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister. In his attempts to build a consensus of various groups and governments in Canada to deal with the pressing issue of inflation, would the Prime Minister inform the House whether it is the intention of the federal government to take the initiative, particularly in its discussions with private business, in attempting to obtain commitments from that source to provide increases in wages for the working poor in Canada in the months ahead which are at least equivalent to the average increase in the wages of industrial workers as a whole?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): I will take that question by way of a representation which will be considered in due course. I must remind the hon. member that the Minister of Finance and myself have both stated that at this stage we are not enjoining or ordering parties to do anything. It is an exploratory phase.

Mr. Broadbent: In view of the fact that the government has taken certain initiatives with regard to the salaries of members of parliament—

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): Will you accept it?