

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, there is one thought that I should like to place before the Prime Minister in connection with what he has just said to the house. When he speaks of claims being established, that could, of course, mean the total figure of the claim. Where there may be some doubt about the total figure of the claim but no doubt about there being some substantial measure of claim, I would suggest that some system be devised under which interim payment could be made so that very needy cases, of which I know the Prime Minister is aware, could be dealt with without further delay. I think this would prevent real hardship without the necessity for awaiting the determination of the larger amounts which it may take more time to deal with.

Mr. St. Laurent: I am sure that those who are processing these claims have this consideration in mind, and my information is that they wish to have, in connection with one we both have in mind, something on record to show that there is real need.

CHEESE**MAINTENANCE OF INDUSTRY AS MARKET FOR SURPLUS MILK**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. H. O. White (Middlesex East): I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Agriculture or, in his absence, to his parliamentary assistant. What action, if any, is proposed by the government to preserve and to maintain the Canadian Cheddar cheese industry as a market for surplus milk? My question arises out of an article appearing in the *London Free Press* on Saturday morning.

Mr. Robert McCubbin (Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I should like to assure the hon. member for Middlesex East that everything that can be done will be done. We had the cheese and the dairy men in here discussing the matter with us some weeks ago. As this is a matter of government policy, it will be announced in due course.

FLOOD CONDITIONS**LAKE LEVELS—PELEE ISLAND**

On the orders of the day:

Mr. H. O. White (Middlesex East): I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Fournier). In view of the impending disaster owing to high lake levels, does the government intend to take immediate steps to prevent Pelee island from being entirely covered by water?

[Mr. St. Laurent.]

Right Hon. L. S. St. Laurent (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a general impression that whenever there are flood waters anywhere in the country there is on the federal government a responsibility to see that no damage is done or that whatever damage is done is repaired.

The other day I tried to point out to one of the hon. members that that is not the responsibility of the federal government. Floods in the various provinces are primarily the responsibility of the local authorities. Whenever it happens that there is a catastrophe of such magnitude that the local authorities feel it is beyond their power to deal with it, they apply to the federal government for assistance. There have been three or four cases in which the magnitude of the catastrophe was felt to be such that it took on a national aspect, and the federal government co-operated with the local authorities in an effort to alleviate the consequences to the individuals who had suffered. But unless the flooding of Pelee island can be attributed to some works for which the federal government has responsibility in connection with navigation or navigable channels, it is not primarily a responsibility of the federal government.

There have been many requests for inspections by officers of the Department of Public Works in connection with the floods that are occurring at this season of the year. Those inspections are being made for the purpose of ascertaining whether the disasters are in any way attributable to works for which the federal government is responsible. But that is as far as we can go under the present constitutional distribution of responsibilities.

If there is a situation at Pelee island which can in any way be attributed to federal works, I am sure that the engineers of the Department of Public Works will investigate the matter and make an appropriate report to the minister of that department. But if it is something which is not attributed to federal works but is rather a calamity arising out of the course of nature, then only if the local authorities, through the provincial government, made representation that the consequences were such that the provincial authorities were not capable of taking care of them, would the federal government feel called upon to consider whether they should recommend to parliament that the matter be treated as one of national magnitude.

Mr. Brown (Essex West): I should like to ask a supplementary question of the Prime Minister. Has Ontario asked for aid in the Pelee island, Detroit river and lake St. Clair