

Oral Questions

[English]

TRADE

Ms. Catherine Callbeck (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Prime Minister or to the acting Minister of Energy.

A number of companies have indicated their intention to use the free trade agreement to challenge a recent decision by the National Energy Board refusing a number of gas exports to the United States.

I want to ask the Prime Minister what action his government will take if these challenges are successful. What will he do to defend the board whose powers are under attack as a result of the trade deal that this government signed?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the House well knows the rules with respect to hypothetical questions. Naturally, the hon. member would not expect me to answer a question based upon any hypothesis, particularly one as improbable as that.

Ms. Catherine Callbeck (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the same minister.

As we all know, the board is publicly conducting a review of the cost benefit analysis. We also know that the U.S. government is lobbying this government behind the scenes.

The question I want to ask the minister is this. What assurances has this government offered the American government with regard to the powers of the National Energy Board? Will the board's upcoming policy review be an independent and meaningful review, or is it really a foregone conclusion?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the review is independent. It is meaningful. It is Canadian.

If the hon. member is suggesting that some other countries are making Canadian policy on these questions, then she should in the first place have the courage to state that directly and in the second know that she is wrong.

COMINCO

Mr. Sid Parker (Kootenay East): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

The federal government invested \$79 million in Cominco so that the company could upgrade its smelter in Trail, B.C. At the time Cominco said that the main supplier of the zinc to the smelter would be the Sullivan Mine in Kimberley, B.C.

Last Thursday Cominco announced that the mine would be shutting down in two weeks at a cost of 865 jobs to Kimberley. Cominco has refused to give the people of Kimberley a satisfactory explanation for destroying their community.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister this. Will his government, as one of the major shareholders in Cominco, demand that the company come clean with the people of Kimberley as to why they are now out of work while the people of Alaska will be benefiting from the shutdown?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of Regional Industrial Expansion and Minister of State for Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, that mine has been there for a considerable period of time. It has been mined for years and years. They have simply reached the stage where the high cost of operating an old mine at deep depths, with lower quality ores and so on has simply made it uneconomic.

The New Democratic Party, which claims that it is looking forward, has a basic policy in all of these questions: No change. Even if you run out of ore, it would keep the mine open with people apparently digging material that is not worth the cost of operating the mine.

As is always the case, this government is very concerned about the workers. This government will bring to bear all of those safety-net provisions that are available that help those four million Canadians who change work every year in this country.

● (1500)

Mr. Sid Parker (Kootenay East): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Prime Minister. This mine made over \$9 million in profit last year. It was used for getting the loan that the federal government put forward. What is the Prime Minister going to do for this community? This is a single-industry town that requires