

*Inquiries of the Ministry*BRITISH COLUMBIA—REPORTED CLOSING  
DOWN OF HOWE SOUND COMPANY

On the orders of the day:

**Hon. James Sinclair (Coast-Capilano):** I should like to direct a question to the Minister of Justice. Can the minister report any progress on the negotiations for keeping Britannia mines in operation?

**Hon. E. D. Fulton (Minister of Justice):** Mr. Speaker, I am not yet in a position to make any statement, beyond saying it has now been arranged that a meeting will take place in my office on Thursday afternoon, at which time we hope a final decision one way or the other will be reached.

**Mr. Sinclair:** There will be a question Friday morning, then.

## POWER

COLUMBIA RIVER—INQUIRY AS TO ISSUE OF  
PERMIT FOR DEVELOPMENT

On the orders of the day:

**Mr. G. W. McLeod (Okanagan-Revelstoke):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, of which I gave him notice yesterday. Will he advise this house whether or not a permit would be issued by his department for a company to proceed with a power development project on the Columbia river in British Columbia before the question of downstream benefits covering this international river has been settled with the United States authorities?

**Mr. Speaker:** I am not sure what the minister thinks about the question, but it seems to me to be hypothetical and one that should not take the time of the house.

[Later:]

**Mr. McLeod:** I have now revamped my question, Mr. Speaker. Has the government of British Columbia the right to proceed with a power development project on the Columbia river before the question of downstream benefits has been settled with United States authorities?

**Mr. Speaker:** I am afraid the hon. member is still asking a question which is not permitted by the practice of the house. It seems to me it is a question that asks for a legal opinion, and I do not think a minister can be expected to give a legal opinion to the house.

**Mr. H. W. Herridge (Kootenay West):** I should like to ask a correct supplemental question following the incorrect question put

[Mr. Diefenbaker.]

to the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources by the hon. member for Okanagan-Revelstoke. Is it not in Canada's interests that the question of downstream benefits on the Columbia river be decided before any major construction of dams be permitted on that river?

**Hon. Alvin Hamilton (Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources):** I would suggest that is a subject on which we all have opinions. In fact I have mine, and they will be made known in due course.

## POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT

POSTAGE STAMPS—INQUIRY AS TO ELIMINATION  
OF PLATE BLOCKS

On the orders of the day:

**Hon. George C. Marler (St. Antoine-Westmount):** Mr. Speaker, I sent to the Postmaster General a dispatch which appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen* of Saturday, December 7, concerning the elimination of plate number blocks from postage stamps, or sheets of postage stamps. I should like to ask him whether the reason given in the press for the discontinuance of the rather popular practice of printing the plate number is well founded. In order to make the question clear I should like to read just a very short paragraph.

Reason given for the Post Office Department action was that some postmasters were selling "plate blocks" at over face value to dealers and collectors.

I should like to ask the Postmaster General if that is a correct statement of the attitude adopted by his department with regard to this matter.

**Hon. W. M. Hamilton (Postmaster General):** I thank the hon. member for sending me a copy of this clipping. The house will remember that the particular stamp issue in question was discussed here about 10 days ago, at which time I pointed out that arrangements for this stamp issue had been made by the preceding administration. Having said that, may I say that the motivation of the previous administration in dropping the plate blocks is not completely clear to me. However, in discussing the matter with my departmental officials I find that while no direct charge of selling plate blocks at over face value to dealers and collectors was made, the department has certainly had considerable experience in post offices with difficulty arising from collectors who attempted to obtain these plate blocks over the counter.

Perhaps I should say that departmental instructions do not allow the clerk at the