

*Supply*

this leads me to the next point which has to do with the Point Aconi plant in Nova Scotia.

First, last spring there were the concerns expressed by the federal fishery officials there about the plant. Then the Minister of the Environment made his first public commitment in Halifax at the end of May and said that he will take action on it.

Then the matter was referred to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans for public review and there was backtracking on the part of the Minister of the Environment on his original statement in Halifax. Finally, in the fall there is the announcement that Point Aconi will not have a significant impact on the environment, and the matter is shelved.

Mr. Speaker, let me take you with the time available to the Alcan smelter. We are informed by fiat from the government that there is no need for a public review of the expansion of the Alcan project. This is the word from the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. No explanation is given. We were only told that the criteria are being met.

Some 10,000 and more people have threatened to go to court to block this project. How does this government intend to act in light of this particular situation? How does this government implement its own concepts that it is elaborating and that it is putting forward in this debate today when it comes to the reality of issues be they the Alcan smelter, the Point Aconi plant, the Rafferty-Alameda, the Oldman River dam and its elusive, ambiguous silence on James Bay 2. I would like an answer to those questions.

• (1720)

**Mr. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard):** Mr. Speaker, there is little doubt that the political process in Canada has lost credibility. It has certainly lost credibility because of the actions of all of us in this House. It has lost credibility because there is a government in power which has clearly ignored the wishes of Canadians. It has lost credibility because the government in power has lost control of the public agenda.

As well, there is another reason for the state of the democratic institutions in our country, and it is that we now have in the nation a population which is so far ahead of the government in its understanding of the evolution of the world, society, and the problems that the world faces, as to make government largely irrelevant. No better example of this can be given than the debate that

is being held today and the failure of the government in power to defend the integrity of the need and the integrity of the environmental protection process in the land.

This began some time ago. It began when the government engaged itself in a process of consultation, leading to the eventual publication in the next couple of months of the Green Plan, a process of consultation that was by and large a farce, a process of consultation which has largely been condemned.

Then we go on to the Point Aconi decision in which the Minister of the Environment allowed himself to be bamboozled by the Minister of Fisheries. We follow that with the failure of the Minister of the Environment to support the conclusions of the committee on the environment of this House, in calling for a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. And then, we come to that which members opposite have quoted at much length today, and that is the new Environmental Assessment Act, Bill C-78, an act which is a clear weakening of the existing guidelines.

The hon. member opposite said that he wanted to get on with the bill. It is not the opposition that is preventing us getting on with discussion of the bill. There has been a multitude of occasions for committee hearings; we should be much further ahead than what we are. We are caught in the government's agenda. Indeed, those discussions would be further along than they are if this government had not lacked the political will and the understanding of the ecological disaster that looms before this country.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have Rafferty-Alameda. The government says that it cannot revoke the licence. The minister says that he has legal opinions which say that he cannot. Now it may occur rarely but there are occasions, and we all know it, when legal opinions are not so much a reflection of the law but they are a reflection of the will of the person who is asking for the opinion.

If this government is unable to come up with a clear legal opinion that says it cannot revoke the licence, I would suggest that it is because that suits the government's agenda and it is not a reflection of the state of the law.

Members opposite say that the dam is required, perhaps it is. On the other hand, if it is required, one must wonder why the initial environmental evaluation that was done in 1989 said that it was not. But the issue here is simply not whether the dam is required or not, it