

company starts to dump the effluent into the inlet on April 1, especially keeping in mind that the Utah Mines problem in British Columbia was exactly the same situation, and ten years later we are finding out that everything said by the scientists hired by the companies has turned out to be false? I want an answer to that.

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): I doubt if I can match the hon. member's level of indignation.

Mr. Fraser: You are darn right.

Mr. LeBlanc: I would hope to match, however, the level of his information. If his only source is the hon. member for Skeena, I would really suggest that as a former minister of the environment he might want to check his facts again. The reality is that I have looked in the records to see if there was unusual haste in the judgment that was made preceding the order in council which gave the permit to the mining company. I have found no evidence of this at all. It was made very clear when the permit was issued and the order in council was passed, that on judgment of the scientists who had reviewed this situation they felt this type of tailings deposit was acceptable.

Some months ago, I asked for another review, and I was given the same answer. But in order to remove any suspicion from my department, I then, with the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Minister of the Environment, sought out three distinguished non-governmental scientists, an oceanographer and biologist, to undertake a scientific assessment to review the conditions attached to the permit, and the monitoring and to give me their opinion.

I regret that this endeavour has met with delay because the issue has become one of public inquiry and not of scientific review. I agree with what my colleague, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, said. It is a scientific problem, not a legal problem. My hope is that our conversation with the Nishga will succeed and that we might convince them that public hearings by a scientific panel of non-governmental people is the best route. If they recommend an inquiry, of course I will be happy to look at this.

Mr. Fraser: Madam Speaker, that is just the biggest pack of garbage I have listened to in the House on environmental matters for years.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Fraser: Given the fact that the principle here is whether or not the Government of Canada is committed to public hearings on these matters, how can the minister sit in his seat, or stand on his legs, and say that the secret directives changing the government's own regulations is justifiable? You have set up the environmental assessment review procedure and you have done an end run right around it. If this kind of disgraceful thing—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Oral Questions

Mr. LeBlanc: Madam Speaker, I wonder if I am at the National Arts Centre, rather than the House of Commons.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. LeBlanc: The order in council was passed, and I have checked it and reviewed it again. Like all orders in council, they are passed as recommendations to the minister, then being accepted are proclaimed when and if the time comes to proclaim it. I have seen nothing unusual. In fact I have suggested—

Mr. Fraser: You have seen nothing unusual about it.

Mr. LeBlanc: Perhaps if the hon. member would listen, he might learn something.

Mr. Fraser: I know more about this than you. That's why it hurts.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The idea is to allow the minister to give his answer. If the question was posed, you need an answer.

Mr. LeBlanc: I think that I made it very clear, in the official release which accompanied the proposed names of the scientific panel, that they were perfectly free to hold public hearings, to focus on the issue, and to give all the information that was available. That is still my view.

* * *

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

BRITISH COLUMBIA COAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT—REQUEST FOR PUBLIC HEARING

Mr. F. Oberle (Prince George-Peace River): Madam Speaker, my question is not unrelated to the one which has just been the subject of an exchange between the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the hon. member for Vancouver South. It is directed to the Minister of Transport and is with regard to the commitment to proceed with the development of Northeast Coal. Even though details are sketchy, we know that the federal government is involved to a very large extent, financially and in other ways, with this development.

Has the minister given thought to establishing a type of public hearing similar to that held in connection with the pipeline in northeastern British Columbia, to arrive at a set of socioeconomic conditions which will protect the people, give people information about the project—people in the area, I am talking about—and also allow them to have some input into the manner in which this project proceeds, so that their legitimate concerns and aspirations are met?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I would certainly look at this idea, but I am under the impression that if such an inquiry should be held, it should be held by the provincial authorities. The minister of state for economic development confirmed that the environmental