

Oral Questions

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): I am glad to hear that such a meeting has taken place. Is the hon. gentleman using his offices as a federal minister of the Crown to insist that a concern which I am sure every member of the House regards as a legitimate one, is satisfied in the amendments which will be brought forward by the government of Quebec, according to the culture minister with respect to Bill No. 1?

Mr. Allmand: I told the President of the Northern Quebec Inuit Association and the representatives of the Cree that I would do everything possible, everything they required, to make sure the agreement was fully protected and that it would not be infringed upon by Bill No. 1. We are setting up certain meetings here in Ottawa to explore other possibilities in dealing with this matter. Moreover, I have agreed not to have Bill C-9 proclaimed until all these issues have been settled.

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HEALTH**REPORT ON ARSENIC POISONING IN YELLOWKNIFE—REASON FOR DISSENT OF DR. BLEJER**

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): My question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. It concerns a report which was tabled, I think, a few days ago on the arsenic poisoning problem up in Yellowknife. One of the consultants involved in that study, Dr. Blejer, who was engaged at the insistence of both the Native Peoples Brotherhood and the United Steel Workers Union, has now dissented from the conclusions of that report, indicating that in his view there is a danger to residents of Yellowknife in connection with the mining there. Would the minister advise us whether he has accepted the general conclusions of the task force concerning the danger and whether he has had an opportunity of contacting Dr. Blejer, an eminent authority in the field of public health, to determine why he has so vigorously dissented from the report on arsenic poisoning in Yellowknife?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, first of all the document involved has not been tabled in this House since it is not a government report but a report from the Canadian Public Health Association. I received a copy and made it public yesterday through a press release indicating my full support for the findings and recommendations of this interim report. A final report will be prepared in a few months by the committee established by the Canadian Public Health Association.

As to Dr. Blejer's comments, I read them in this morning's papers and I noticed the doctor stated he had not received a copy of that report. I would have thought that before making any such comments he would have taken the trouble to get a copy and read it. I do not have any other comments to make concerning this doctor's statement, who seems to make statements even before reading the published reports.

[*Mr. Allmand.*]

● (1450)

[*English*]

REPORT ON ARSENIC POISONING IN YELLOWKNIFE—USE OF COMPANY DOCTORS TO CONDUCT TESTS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, one of the recommendations of the report is that company doctors be used in the process of examining those miners who are working in that particular plant. I know the minister is familiar with the problem at Thetford Mines in Quebec where company doctors were used, and many years passed before miners were found to have asbestosis. Would the minister advise the House if he is in agreement with that recommendation, that there should be company doctors examining their own employees to determine whether there is arsenic poisoning? Does the minister accept the conflict of interest proposition, that it should be either doctors from his own department or independent doctors who conduct these examinations?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, first of all I wish to remind the hon. member that there is within this business concern an established union legally recognized under the laws of the Northwest Territories as well as the management. I imagine the business concern and the union will examine the report and come to their own conclusions about the best way to ensure the employees' health within this concern.

With regard to the hon. member's general assertion, I would like to tell him that I have more confidence in the ethics of the doctors of this country than he seems to have.

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FISHERIES**REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL AID FOR ÎLES-DE-LA-MADELEINE HERRING FISHERMEN—GOVERNMENT POSITION**

Mr. Albert Béchard (Bonaventure-Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Mr. Speaker, on May 19 last, I put a question to the Minister of Fisheries and the Environment drawing his attention to the critical situation of the fishing industry, and especially the herring industry, in the Magdalen Islands, and this for the third year in a row. In his absence, the Minister for Regional Economic Expansion replied that the government was deeply interested in the problem and that, in any event, my concern would be conveyed to the attention of the Minister of Fisheries and the Environment upon his return.

The situation having since deteriorated to the extent where smoke-houses and processing plants are completely for other species without work or nearly so, depriving both fishermen and other workers in the industry of their livelihood, the only one on which they can depend, can the minister or his department, in agreement with the province of Quebec which also has responsibilities in that field, put forward an assistance program to help out that hard pressed population?