

*Adjournment Debate*

Following that response I asked him another question. He said:

Madam Speaker, I will have the representations of the hon. member considered and will give him an answer as soon as possible.

That was a month ago, Mr. Speaker.

Various ministers have been on the record now for one month, six months, or eight months giving bits and pieces of answers, but there has been no action.

On January 22, 1981, I again questioned the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The following is part of his answer:

—might I say that a panel of experts has been set up to look into the matter, notice of which has been communicated to the Nishga tribal chief—

I rose the following day on a question of privilege, making it clear to this House that both those statements by the minister were patently false. They have not been corrected in *Hansard* yet. I think the people of Canada have a right to know what is going on in relation to Amax. Why is the Prime Minister hiding? Why is the Deputy Prime Minister hiding? Why is the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the whole cabinet hiding from this issue?

This is a further statement of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, which he gave on January 22, 1981:

We are trying to find a way to get a scientific review of the project, not a legal one because it is not a legal problem. It is a question of scientific judgment and that is what we are working on.

I have had conversations with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, and I know private citizens have had conversations with him. He is aware that this is a legal problem. He says he is concerned about the expensive legal costs that may accrue as a result of the revocation of the permit at Alice Arm to dump, as no other mining company in Canada has ever, or is at present, allowed to dump.

● (2215)

On January 23 in response to my question of privilege the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development said:

I will endeavour to make a clarification on Monday.

Subject to checking, it was my information that the scientific panel was constituted. It may be in the process of being constituted, which is apparently at variance with what was said yesterday.

Anything could be in process at any particular point in time. Ministers of the government seem simply to stand up and shoot from the hip on any issue any time they want, and then the next day they get up and say they thought it was in process or maybe it is happening. At this point in time I am almost prepared to rest my case. I have gone to everyone with any potential political involvement in this issue within the cabinet, but they all continue to sit on their hands. I believe the question is a very serious one. I am aware that hundreds of thousands of Canadians are personally cognizant of this issue and would like an answer from this government.

As a responsible government, this government should come forward and listen to the different points of view or, at least,

when a minister says he is taking a question as notice in July, 1980, as did the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, an answer should be forthcoming. But I never received a note, a peep or anything. In October the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans again said he would give me a full answer within a week, but he has never given me anything. It is the same with the Prime Minister, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the entire Liberal Party. It is a litany of incompetence and false statements.

I hope whoever rises tonight will have the decency and honesty on behalf of all Canadians to tell us what is going on in relation to Amax.

**Mr. George Henderson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the questions which have been raised on this issue. First, I would like to make it very clear that the suggestion that Mr. John Aird was in some way associated with the decision to approve regulations which authorized tailings disposal in Alice Arm are totally without foundation. There never have been any direct or indirect communications of which I am aware between Mr. Aird and members of the cabinet or their staff with respect to this matter. The decision to allow the deposit of tailings in Alice Arm was taken after a very careful review of data which indicated that this practice could be carried out without jeopardizing the fisheries resource. The regulation was approved with the clear understanding that the mine tailings would be confined to the bottom of Alice Arm at a minimum depth of 100 metres and that salmon and other important fishery resources would not be adversely affected.

Second, I wish to emphasize that we are not insensitive to the concerns which have been raised about this issue by the Nishga and other groups. Officials of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Environment Canada have met with the Nishga to reassure them about the tailings disposal operation. As part of the regulations, a comprehensive monitoring program has been designed to ensure that the tailings behave as predicted. Furthermore, we have agreed to establish a special monitoring board which will involve the Nishga and provincial authorities in reviewing all monitoring information.

Despite these initiatives, some public apprehension still exists. Detailed consideration is being given to identifying the best approach for ensuring that marine tailings disposal, as proposed under the regulations, will in fact ensure that fisheries resources and the interests of the native people in the area are protected.

It must be emphasized that the Nishga are not opposed to the operation of the mine. Rather, they are seriously concerned about the long-term safety of marine resources in Alice Arm. This issue is essentially a technical matter, and for this reason the minister has previously expressed a preference for carrying out an independent scientific review as opposed to a full public inquiry. All options for dealing with this issue are still under consideration, and a decision is expected in a couple of days.