

Taxation

Mr. Ian Waddell (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak for the NDP on third reading of this bill. However, I ask myself, how many times over the past 18 months have we debated energy, indeed this bill, in one way or the other? I debated this bill on May 13 and February 18, 1982, and in a number of speeches before that. That indicates to me that in some way we could reform this institution so we could have shorter speeches and better debates. Look at this place this afternoon. We have a few tourists in the gallery and a few members in the House. If we wanted to debate energy we could concentrate it in a smaller area, with quicker resolution, and generate some interest in it. I bet many people do not understand this bill because it is complicated. However, once you go through it you find it affects every one of us because it places taxes on all of us.

I wonder if anyone listens to these speeches. I am not going to give a long speech today because I do not think many people will listen, certainly not the government. You can talk until you are blue in the face and they change very little of their legislation, although they did change one aspect of this bill which I will come back to. But I wonder if the people listen, Mr. Speaker.

Before you rule me out of order, I might wonder that aloud. I know our speeches go right across the country by cable television, and I suppose out beyond those TV cameras people are watching. So I ask those people out there, if they are watching, to contact me. Send a letter to Ian Waddell, House of Commons, Ottawa. They do not even need a stamp. I would like to get their views on what they think of this particular energy bill and the National Energy Program.

I know this is rather irregular, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Siddon: It sure is. It is called grandstanding.

Mr. Waddell: —but I would like to see whether we get any particular reaction. Likely not, but we will see.

Let me just go through my speech, and with respect to the hon. member from Newfoundland over there, I will mail him a copy. There are four aspects to this bill. First of all, it changes the price of gas consumed domestically so it affects everyone who uses gas. Secondly, the bill brings in what is called PGRT and IORT, the petroleum and gas revenue tax and the incremental oil royalty tax. That is a mouthful, but they are really taxes on the industry resulting from the deal between Ottawa and the producing provinces. Thirdly, the bill touches on the National Energy Program; I want to discuss that from the point of view of the consumer and producer, and where we are going with the NEP. Finally, I want to talk about some positive options, about where I think we can go.

This country is in a real mess, Mr. Speaker. It is in real trouble. It is up to the parties and members of this House to get down to business and stop some of this nonsense which has been going on in Ottawa in the past couple of months—the what I call almost fascist tactics on the part of the official opposition, the Conservatives, and the incredibly negligent inertia on the part of the government. I want to offer what I

think are some positive options and I invite the other parties to offer their suggestions.

Mr. Kelly: How long did you stall C-48?

• (1610)

Mr. Waddell: The hon. member asks how long we stalled Bill C-48. We fought for Bill C-48, which dealt with energy in the Canada lands, in the north and offshore, so that we could obtain job spin-offs for Canadian workers. Goodness knows they need those jobs today. The hon. member will get his chance to discuss the bill with which I want to deal now.

The first item I want to discuss is the change in gas taxes. In fact it means that there is an excise tax on gas consumed inside the country. The government threatened to put a tax on gas going outside the country as well, but it backed off largely as a result of the position of the combined opposition in the House and the position taken by western provinces. It was a wise move to make, but it put a tax on gas consumed internally.

I raised this matter yesterday in the House when we were in Committee of the Whole on this bill. I asked the minister what it would cost individual Canadians and how it would affect those who cannot afford to pay, such as senior citizens, people on fixed incomes and poor people. These taxes are hurting those people. I am receiving letters from my riding and I am meeting with people in the east end of Vancouver. For example, people have come into my office and said that their hydro bills are going up much more than the cost of living or the pension they are receiving from government. They have asked what can be done about it. I put that question to the minister and he said that the government gives senior citizens a cost of living increase on their pensions which makes up for it.

I did some research last night and found that it does not make up for it. In my home province of British Columbia there have been the following increases in the price of natural gas. In November, 1980, the rates went up 13.6 per cent because of the federal excise tax on natural gas which we are debating. In May, 1981, it went up 6.1 per cent due to the Canadian ownership tax. In July, 1981, there was a 5.7 per cent increase due to an increase in the excise tax. In August, 1981 the wholesale price rose 25.5 per cent and operating costs rose 5.1 per cent. In February, 1982, the excise tax increased 6.1 per cent and the wholesale gas price rose 1.8 per cent. In April, 1982 British Columbia operating costs rose 4.5 per cent and the price increased by 11 per cent. My source is British Columbia Hydro.

It is clear that there has been a substantial increase in the price of natural gas to consumers in British Columbia. Also it is clear that 31.5 per cent of the increases in British Columbia since 1980 is attributable to the tax which we are debating today—25.4 per cent was due to the excise tax and 6.1 per cent was due to the Canadian ownership rate. The minister is wrong when he tells me that the price of natural gas was increasing at the same rate as the cost of living. In fact, energy prices are going up dramatically more than other prices generally. This is hurting people.