

Petro-Canada Act

city was a vibrant part of the country. It was an engine of economic growth. Jobs were being created all over this country because the industry was buying products.

Mr. Irwin: Why don't you use the Heritage Fund to bail them out?

Mr. Wright: Don't be so naive.

Mr. Hawkes: The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources singlehandedly has done more than anyone to drive this country into depression and recession.

Mr. Waddell: He made an agreement with Lougheed.

Mr. Hawkes: I have heard hon. members opposite express concern on behalf of unemployed people in their ridings. I think their concern is genuine. Every member of this House is bothered by an increasing unemployment rate, but do we in this chamber accept responsibility for having caused it?

Mr. Gimaiel: Speak for yourself.

Mr. Hawkes: It is not an accident. It has been caused by a mix of misguided and ill-founded policies. The consequences of those policies were not thought through.

In the committee this morning the New Democratic Party joined with us in our concern about the impact of the petroleum compensation charge on jobs, on consumers and on people on fixed incomes. Members of the New Democratic Party should share some of the responsibility for the decision made in December 1979. That decision was to put the present Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources in charge of energy. That decision was to put the present Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) in charge of finance. That decision taken by the NDP in December 1979 was to put in place the policies which are driving Canadians out of their homes, driving Canadians off their farms, driving Canadians out of their small businesses and driving Canadians out of their jobs. That was a decision the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party together took in December 1979.

It is prophetic to be standing here examining Petro-Canada today, a day on which members of the Liberal Party stood in this chamber and voted to give the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources the authority to raise the price of a gallon of gasoline 52 cents after he and members of his party fought an election saying 18 cents was too much. Surely there must be a point where politics stop, common sense begins and the welfare of the Canadian people becomes our primary concern. In the midst of a recession I hope that we have come to that point.

● (1720)

In that context, Mr. Speaker, we must consider whether we want to give \$5 billion more to Petro-Canada. We must also examine whether we want to take it away from other potential uses, such as health care, job creation and education, and turn it over to a board of directors that apparently is not known to anyone. Who is on this board of directors? Do hon. members opposite know? What do these people know about running an oil company? Are they campaign managers, appointed civil

servants with other responsibilities or are they people knowledgeable about what is a very difficult and technical business?

In the public accounts committee I asked whether there was anybody on the Petroleum Compensation Board who had the background, training and experience necessary to compete successfully for a position as a crude oil buyer. The answer was that there was not. At that moment I felt a small twinge of sympathy for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and for the cabinet. They have received advice on that program from people who do not have the background or experience that would make them reliable sources for the kind of information that is needed by a minister who is willing to listen and to act. When any of us receive flawed information, then the possibility of making a bad decision is increased immeasurably.

May I suggest that that is the difficulty that the Liberal party has always had in regard to energy policy, Mr. Speaker. Members of that party do not come from regions where large numbers of people are employed in the industry, and their friends, their neighbours and the people on the street in their constituencies do not work in the industry.

If I could draw an analogy, let us suppose we had an automobile compensation charge which worked the way the petroleum compensation charge does. In that case the federal government would decree that every car and truck sold in Canada would carry an extra tax of \$2,000. It would then say that all importers of cars and trucks should be given \$2,000 per vehicle. In other words, put it on all vehicles then give it back, and more, on the imported vehicles. Imagine what it would do to the Canadian automotive industry if all of a sudden a tax was charged on every automobile purchased and then that money was then given back to the foreign car companies.

The analogy to oil is not complete until we get to the numbers involved and find that some kinds of Mexican crude is 40 per cent cheaper than Canadian. In reality, the Canadian is the cheapest one but we are buying the Mexican crude and using our taxes to subsidize it and make it cheaper. How would hon. members opposite feel if that practice were applied to automobiles or shoes or snowmobiles? The money is being taken out of taxpayers' pockets in order that the government can give it to foreign competitors. This makes their product cheaper than the Canadian one. That is the logic of the petroleum compensation charge, Mr. Speaker.

I notice the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) has come into the House—

Miss Bégin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member has suggested that I was just coming into the House. It is now 5:25 p.m. and I have been here all afternoon. I do not see why by innuendo he links my name with his criticism of the government.

Mr. Hawkes: By definition, I thought any cabinet minister was someone who belonged to the government.