

of the Official Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) put it, I think that he was right then, we do not know too well where we are heading. Here is one interpretation that can be given, for instance: This is an indirect way of establishing royalties since a tax which changes constantly, every month, according to international oil prices, becomes simply a royalty, a percentage taken on a natural resource, which according to the constitution ought to be the exclusive property of the provinces. Therefore, I realize why the provincial governments concerned, including the Alberta government, obviously do not agree with the federal government policy in that field. It has also been stated during the afternoon that a policy had to be agreed to all the same in the present situation in order to prevent excessive differentials between oil prices in eastern and western Canada. Of course, Mr. Speaker, it is the duty of the government in the present situation to try and avoid this inequality of treatment among citizens of the same country.

● (2010)

However, if the government intends to use this charge in order to effect this distribution, this balance, we would have to be informed in a much more detailed way so that we know precisely what we are voting on.

I feel therefore that we must have a great many reservations concerning this bill, taking into account the government's apparent eagerness to accelerate things and its failure, as often is the case, to do what it should have done.

What is the reason for the many unilateral decisions? How is it, Mr. Speaker, that the government did not realize how important it was, in a matter of great concern to the province of Alberta, to go and have discussions with the main people involved? This is quite elementary. But no, it chose to act unilaterally and stir up passions. How will all this turn out, nobody knows. And yet, this bill concerns this particular problem. No one knows exactly what will become of it since the provincial premiers' conference on the subject will be held subsequently. The provinces were not consulted; yet a bill has been introduced which directly concerns the provincial governments. As I said earlier, this shows a lack of wisdom. I know the present problem is urgent, but its urgency should not make us lose our heads.

On the other hand, one must admit that the problem would doubtless be solved if there were a pipeline to Montreal. Of course, we would then have less difficulty with regard to oil prices throughout Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I fail to see why it is not possible to transport oil from a western province to eastern Canada. I fail to see why trains of tank cars cannot head from Alberta to Montreal. I simply cannot understand it. Let trains be made up that are one mile, or two miles long, if need be; within a matter of two or three days, the oil will have reached its destination. I fail to see why that should be a major problem.

I do not understand either why the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) said in answer to a question put to him this afternoon that he did not believe that the maintenance of the St. Lawrence Seaway could ease up the oil problem. Yet we know that what is involved now in Canada is an oil transport problem. Therefore we should

Oil Export Tax

try harder to settle the problem where it is. Since a transport problem is involved, let us first solve this problem. Then it will be so much easier to fix the domestic price when we can be sure that the oil is truly Canadian. And that will be done to the satisfaction of all concerned.

These considerations, Mr. Speaker, lead me to express some doubts, since we don't know exactly what is the purpose of this bill, this purpose is very vague. As a matter of fact, it reads as follows, and I quote:

3. (1) For the purpose of obtaining the best return for Canada on the export sale of crude oil while allowing the price of crude oil used in Canada to be determined in relation to the circumstances of the Canadian market—

The clause then stipulates what the requirements will be.

Here the objective of the legislation is spelled out. Canada is to be favoured. Mr. Speaker, every measure we adopt tends to favour someone. The terms are not clear or precise enough, particularly since we are acting in an area where once again unilaterally, it is decided, as it says in the second part of the bill, that 50 per cent of the taxes will go to the provinces concerned.

There is still one thing which can only be settled by the provinces themselves. And, as I said earlier, I do not see at all how at a given moment the problem of Hydro-Quebec or Ontario Hydro taxes could be settled. And since oil is a source of energy similar to electricity, how is it that we are trying, through this bill, to settle some problems which are first and foremost provincial problems? I do not suggest that the government has no coordinating role nor that it should not be concerned with regional interests. Of course, this is its role. But it should not play this role by assuming the rights of regions which, in this case, happen to be in a favourable position because they have this natural resource which is called oil.

This is why I am quite reluctant to approve this bill and I would like to have further clarification on its motivations and particularly on its objectives. Furthermore, we are presented with this bill at a time when we cannot fully appreciate it in view of the fact that we are in the middle of a so-called energy crisis and that we might pass a legislation which, within the next few months, could turn into a bone of contention for the whole country. This is why I wonder whether before introducing such a bill the provinces should not be consulted. The federal government should act only after those consultations as its role implies as a coordinator and not by imposing initiatives. With those few remarks, I do not quite agree with this bill. Perhaps some amendments should be proposed or the bill should be more precisely explained so that we do not take a decision which we would regret in a few months or years.

● (2020)

[*English*]

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, in rising tonight to speak on second reading of Bill C-245, I should like to say how interested I was in the remarks of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) who spoke at some length this afternoon with reference to consultation and commonsense. It seems that when this government is in great difficulty, when they reverse themselves and con-