

Excise Tax Act

the legislation based on the budget resolutions he was introducing? Mr. Speaker, we are still here, and I am not sure how long we are going to be here. As I look at some of these resolutions I believe I can say we are justified in carrying this debate on in spite of the charges of filibuster.

● (2110)

We know the people of this country are desperately concerned about the implications of this measure we are currently debating. The hon. member for Scarborough West (Mr. Martin) speaking in this debate stated that he represents a party which is 100 per cent behind this resolution in respect of the gas tax. Could it be that 100 per cent of the Liberal supporters in this House tonight believe without any reservation that this is a policy which could be justified in the eyes of those who elected them to this House? If so, I am sure we will not hear them because there are many who would be embarrassed if they stood and made statements such as those we have heard from the one or two government members who have spoken, because they know they will have to go back and answer to those who elected them to the House of Commons.

Although there are a number of items contained in this bill, the item of prime importance is the application of the ten cents tax on gasoline across this nation. This brings us back to consideration of the government's policies in respect of energy. If the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Macdonald) and the government want to make Canada self-sufficient in resources and bring down the price of oil for Canadians, I suggest they could not have chosen a worse course over the last two years to achieve that goal. In addition to that, they have introduced this tax.

I would go so far as to say that if the government wanted to make Canada dependent on world energy supplies and ensure that Canada would have to pay high prices for oil and gas, it could not have adopted any better policies than those which have been placed before this House and submitted to the Canadian people. In other words, I believe the government has botched its energy program. It has failed miserably in everything it has tried to do in this regard down through the past months.

Let me illustrate the way in which this whole situation has been bungled. In 1973 Canada was potentially self-sufficient in respect of oil. There were some 334 oil drilling rigs operating in Canada. However, the course the government has followed since that time has driven the oil people out of the country because of its oppressive tax system, its intrusion into the tax field, as illustrated by the National Petroleum Act, the Petro-Can legislation, and the Prime Minister's (Mr. Trudeau) policies of confrontation in respect of taxation, as well as the government's wishy-washy ad hocery in dealing with the very crucial problem of exploration in this country. Because of this, as pointed out by my colleague from Battle River in the debate on Petro-Can last week, one-third of all those oil rigs have left Canada, and oil exploration activity has declined something like 20 per cent since 1974, while production of Canadian crude has dropped 17 per cent since 1974. It appears that the government, having set the stage and having created a problem, is trying to put in place some policy to solve the problem it has already created.

[Mr. Patterson.]

The government claims that exploration for oil is down. This is one of the justifications for the introduction of the bill to form a national petroleum corporation. I say again that this is the reason. This is why we are faced with the situation before us today. The government, which is supposed to be giving leadership to this country, seemingly has dedicated itself to the abolition of the free enterprise, private enterprise, system in this country. It could not resist the temptation to have a contrived crisis and to jump into the private sector with both feet and trample both the consumer and the producer underfoot. Needless to say, the uncertainty created by the government with regard to an energy policy has meant an undermining of the confidence the oil industry has traditionally had in the Canadian industrial environment. This uncertainty has resulted in a substantial decline in activity in Canada simply because the industry could not depend on what the government would do next.

The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources says he is dedicated to the goal of keeping down the price of oil and gas for Canadians. This seems rather ludicrous in view of what is before us at the present time. Where was the minister on the night of June 23? No doubt he was in the House, but I am sure he must have been cringing in his seat as the Minister of Finance announced his ten cents a gallon tax increase, which is diametrically opposed to the principle announced by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. Perhaps we might have an explanation of this. On the one hand we have the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources stating that he wants to keep down oil prices for Canadians, while on the other hand we have the Minister of Finance raising the price of gasoline by ten cents a gallon in one shot.

The situation is not that the oil companies will have more money for exploration but that the government's take from the pockets of the poor, the oppressed, and the already overtaxed Canadian consumer will be increased. So here we have one minister wanting to keep prices down while another overrules him and unilaterally increases them. I suggest this is indicative of the situation in respect of cabinet ministers in this government.

There is a policy conflict. We witnessed this some time ago when there was a conflict between the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) and the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet). They were at each other's throat because one was enunciating a policy that was undercut by the other minister. Then in order to try to smooth over the difficulty the Prime Minister stated that it is a healthy exercise, a healthy symptom, to have disagreement in the cabinet. That was a change from the cabinet solidarity we heard so much about.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): I remember your old Social Credit Party.

Mr. Patterson: That party had some tremendous policies when we were here in times past, and I am glad to see that a great many of them are being advocated by us today. I believe the minister would like to move a little in that direction if he were not held back by his cabinet. I can think of no more oppressive a tax the government could put on the working people of this nation than that contained in Bill C-66. This increase places an unjust