

Government Orders

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth): Mr. Speaker, I have waited for some time to be able to contribute to the debate on this piece of legislation which, if passed, will have the effect of privatizing the national energy company of Canada, in effect, Petro-Canada.

Petro-Canada legislation was passed in days gone by because the government of the day felt that it was in the best interest of the Canadian public to have a window on the energy market. There used to be a feeling in this country that the resources of the nation belonged to the people of the nation, no matter where they lived. In certain areas such as energy supply and security of supply it was important that the government, through programs or departments or in this particular case through a Crown corporation, have some input and a window on that particular aspect of Canadian sovereignty.

Through the years Petro-Canada has played a very important role in energy development in this country. It started with a lot of criticism from members opposite. It came in at a time when the government of the day felt that it was important to do so. This country has been blessed with a great energy resource, oil and gas, particularly in our western provinces and off the Atlantic coast, although that is not as fully developed as we would like it to be. There was a responsibility of the government to ensure that the Canadian interest was paramount in the development of that particular resource. That was in keeping with the way we used to think about this country. Many of us on this side still think that way, that this country is here for all of us and that it is the job of government to manage, as best as it can, those resources to the benefit of all Canadians.

I want to speak to these three amendments, but I feel I have to give a bit of background. When the Minister of State for Privatization came in with this latest scheme to try to take away something that was uniquely Canadian called Petro-Canada, he met with a lot of criticism. I know that many editorial writers, such as Geoffrey Simpson and many at *The Globe and Mail* and other newspapers from coast to coast, including some of the western papers in places like Alberta, said that this government was proceeding with a plan of privatization of a very necessary Crown corporation, one whose history, I will agree, was very controversial, especially in parts of western Canada. Maybe some of that was for the

right reasons, but perhaps this was not the right time to pursue this particular policy.

If we go back to the late 1970s, particularly 1979, we see that the previous Conservative government, when the right hon. member for Yellowhead was Prime Minister, had a different position on the national energy corporation, PetroCan, every second week. Those Conservatives were going to do away with it during the campaign. Then they came into power and they were not going to do away with it. They were going to privatize it; then they were going to abolish it. They were going to restrict it; then they were going to restructure it because they did not know what in the name of goodness to do.

• (1540)

At one point the current Minister for International Trade, after he was elected to this House in a by-election, took a tour of the west. He was one of those people who thought it was absolutely crazy that we had a company called Petro-Canada in the energy industry.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what happened? It was like the conversion on the road to Damascus. He got back in this place, and he could not say enough good about Petro-Canada and the important role it was playing in ensuring energy self-sufficiency in this country. He loved it. He could not say enough about it.

The current Governor General, in his former capacity as minister in this House, flip-flopped a number of times. When he was a minister, when he had some responsibilities in this place, particularly to the energy sector, he did not quite know what he stood for at any point in time.

We see that members of the government have almost been obsessed with Petro-Canada. In the beginning they got into typical Tory rhetoric that, if it cannot be done efficiently in the private sector, the public sector has no right to participate. That is typical Tory philosophy. We have seen it, particularly so in the last few days while they go in like a demolition derby and break apart national institutions such as CBC. They have gutted VIA. I listened with interest to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Communications today saying something which I am sure the minister of energy or the minister of privatization could have just as easily said about this particular bill on Petro-Canada. He said: "We had to cut it to make it better". It is like saying that we