

Oil and Petroleum

food production, we must have energy because energy is an essential input for agriculture.

There is hardly a town in western Ontario today which does not have a sign welcoming industry to the town and saying there is abundant, reasonably priced energy available.

Let us suppose the Canadian price of crude went to \$11.70 in western Ontario, and natural gas perhaps doubled or tripled in price. Some of these industries then might be non-competitive in the export market. I can hear members on the opposite side asking the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce what he intends to do about this situation. I do not think that is fair. I think that if members really care about these industries in their ridings, they will say that this bill should pass.

I think, also, that surely members from the Maritimes must have a difficult time in respect of their conscience when they think about this bill. Certainly, if the price goes up to \$11.70 for crude it will affect the industrial base of the Maritimes and their employment picture. If this bill is withheld, it will place in jeopardy the jobs of many people in the Maritimes. I believe that members of parliament were elected to do more than filibuster a bill that is in the best interests of all the people of Canada. I am sure that the citizens of the Atlantic provinces who sent Conservatives here expect more from them than that. The hon. member for St. John's East, the Conservative consumer affairs critic, makes a sincere plea on behalf of consumers daily in this House. We can imagine what he would have to say if the price of gasoline and heating oil jumped dramatically. He would be asking for a parliamentary inquiry. But why does he not stand up now and say that this bill is good legislation for Canadian consumers?

● (1550)

I say, again that the government is not opposed forever more to a freeze on the price of western crude. They are committed to do as good a job as possible, in consultation with the producing provinces, to gradually increase the price of natural gas; but this must be done by mediation between the consuming and producing areas. In case of a deadlock in the situation, a mediator is necessary. I would warn members from eastern Canada on the opposite side not to get sucked into the argument that they must feel sorry for the multinational petroleum companies. These companies have made millions and millions of dollars from the resources of Canada. The Minister of Finance has given them as good a—

An hon. Member: Who said that?

Mr. Milne:—tax position as any industry in Canada. If you want to side with the argument to put them in a better tax position than any other industry in Canada, at the expense of your constituents, that is your prerogative. But that is what is at stake in this bill. In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I should like to ask hon. members opposite to think twice about filibustering this bill. Members from Ontario and eastern Canada have most to lose. On July 8, the voters were concerned about energy in eastern Canada and were perhaps concerned about the representation they were getting, so some seats changed. Voters are not very

impressed with a party that filibusters a bill, and they have very long memories.

It is interesting to note that the Premier of Ontario and the minister of energy for that province are more concerned about the interests of the people in eastern Canada than the Conservative members elected to the House of Commons. I should think the Premier of Ontario has enough problems and concerns of his own without carrying the argument for eastern Canada on this issue as well. Only two out of 25 Conservative members from Ontario have spoken on this bill. The others have continually yielded the floor to members from the west. Also, the two who spoke did not take a position on the bill. Surely, in fairness to their constituents they should be putting their concerns on record.

The federal government intends to consult the provincial governments on the future price of natural gas to assure a return to producers and not to sock it to the consumers with a tremendous impact. Hon. members opposite should be very concerned about how industries and agriculture in their ridings could absorb a sudden rise in energy prices. The official opposition is on record as saying they will filibuster this bill. I think I can say, on behalf of the government, that we feel this bill is important to the majority of Canadians and we are prepared to tough it out as long as the opposition wants to sit here, because this bill must be passed; we think it is that important, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Chairman, the hon. member who has just resumed his seat made reference to filibustering this bill. This is a very important piece of legislation and I, for one, am not going to be deterred from discussing it because someone threatens that if it is not passed quickly the price of oil and gas will be doubled. In the first place, there is an agreement that the provinces should hold the price to \$6.50 until the end of June, so that part of the price structure is already fixed. My concern is that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources has said repeatedly that the price is going to escalate to the international price. That is what the hon. member ought to be worrying about, rather than this bill. When the bill is passed it will simply put into effect the price structure that has been in place for some time and will continue because of the agreement reached with the provinces.

In the budget debate I suggested that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources would be wise to withhold this bill from the House and committee of the whole until after the meetings of the ministers of finance on December 9 and 10. I still believe that. Until there have been discussions between the Minister of Finance and the provincial treasurers to see if a way can be found out of the present impasse, it will be very difficult to get agreement on the bill.

I stated the position of this party when the bill was presented to the House. The New Democratic Party supported the bill because it believes in a two-price system and in an export tax. This party believes the revenue from an export tax should be used to compensate for imported oil so that there is a uniform price across the country. Any money left in the fund ought to go into a capital fund for either the province or the federal government to search for