

*Excise Tax Act*

Why have we said that this tax is a regressive tax? We have said it is a regressive tax because it hits hardest a particular segment of the population. It hits hardest the segment of the population for which this government does not provide an opportunity to handle the regressive nature of this tax. For example, it hits very hard those Canadians who work. They do not all work in urban centres; many work in rural areas. Many members of the House are aware of this type of constituent. These people are hit hardest because they must use their vehicles to get to work. It seems to me there is no provision in this bill for these individuals to claim a rebate of the money they spend on this excise tax.

The hon. member for Scarborough West (Mr. Martin) said the other day that one of the government's reasons for bringing in this excise tax was that when they were considering how best to compensate persons who live on the east coast of Canada, in terms of the price of petroleum, they considered that if they placed a tax on all citizens of Canada it would be discriminatory to those who live in urban centres and do not own a car; the people who fall into that category are mostly poor Canadians and they would be subsidizing those who own and drive automobiles. Surely that is not a very good argument for the purpose of this bill, because the government, through the income tax system, has a way to compensate poorer Canadians who do not own cars and who may have to subsidize other Canadians. Surely a system could be designed, through an income tax measure, to ensure that such Canadians would not, in effect, subsidize other Canadians who own cars.

For whom, in fact, does the government provide a rebate in respect of this tax? It provides it to doctors and lawyers when in the pursuit of their work. I suggest that the miners in my area are just as important to the nation as are doctors and lawyers. I have often heard it said that if we had fewer lawyers we would be further ahead. I hear a comment from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Cullen) who is a lawyer. When I look around and see all the lawyers here, it seems to me there is a fraternity involved in preparing the laws of this country and therefore there might be a conflict of interest.

People in this country who live and work in areas such as mine, who must heat their homes for longer periods in the year, who must drive long distances to work, will be seriously hurt by this tax. I say it is an iniquitous tax. It is very unfair. That is the reason this party is fighting so vigorously against this juggernaut of a government that is trying to push through this measure. It seems to me that the income tax system ought to be used by a government to create equality of income in the society. The income tax system is a means by which we can try to remove some of the disparities that exist among Canadians. This kind of tax is regressive because in effect it does not do that; it makes the gap wider between those who have money, those who earn high salaries, and those who because of lack of ability or lack of opportunity earn less. It seems to me that in effect that is a good argument with which to condemn this bill as being iniquitous.

● (1600)

There is one other point I want to make. We have a country whose development was either deliberately  
[Mr. Rodriguez.]

planned around the automobile or it was allowed to develop in that way. This country is very large and we have developed, as a society, around the automobile. We are a very mobile society and we have let the automobile industry make us more and more dependent on the automobile as a mode of transportation. The people are hooked, they are wedded to that means of transportation. To realize this one only has to look at the various social outlets in our society. We have the drive-in theatre, the drive-in restaurant, the drive-in bank and even the drive-in church. We notice the developments on the outskirts of cities where large shopping plazas are built, and in those shopping plazas one finds miles and miles of parking space provided for the benefit of those who use their cars to get out of the city to do their shopping. It seems to me that I have never seen a shopping plaza which would provide the opportunity for a public transit system, for buses to come right to the doorstep of the plaza. These plazas are self-contained and surrounded by huge parking lots, all in the process of encouraging the use of automobiles by the Canadian public.

Once having wedded the Canadian people to the automobile, the government moves in with taxes such as this one to suddenly try to persuade Canadians that they should not use automobiles for travel but, rather, should use the public transit system. We have pointed out time and time again that it seems the horse is being put before the cart. The government does not provide many of our small and medium-sized cities with funds with which to build fast, efficient and economic transit systems. I have pointed out that, in effect, by not doing so the government is deliberately creating a problem for many working Canadians without giving them the opportunity to solve the problem in a way in which the government finds acceptable, namely, public transit which is fast, efficient and economical. I believe the government should be condemned for that.

I sat around last summer listening to all the great speeches made during the election campaign when the government promised funds for municipal governments to provide public transit systems. The government has put on this excise tax without having first provided communities with the opportunity of establishing a transit system. This is the case in Sudbury and the surrounding areas.

It seems to me that this bill stinks, and I say that for very good reason. Indeed, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) has said transportation is in a mess. When we start talking about public transit systems, it is rather interesting to note that we have embarked upon this kind of regressive taxation. For example, at present there is no passenger car on order by either the CNR or the CPR. The cars run by these two companies are decrepit and inadequate for a passenger service, yet not one passenger car is on order with any manufacturing company in North America.

It seems to me that the CNR is the only state-owned and operated railroad company in the world that has no railway cars ordered for the coming year. As I understand it, it will shortly be drawing up its winter schedule and more than likely will be cutting back its passenger service. Indeed, the passenger service between Sudbury and