

Energy Conservation

What an example we are providing for Third World countries which are experiencing tremendous problems as a result of energy shortfalls! We have a government that is unwilling to conserve, to try to tighten its belt or do anything about our energy needs. It is not making it clear to the Canadian people that we have to conserve. Significantly, and most importantly, overutilization of energy is having enormous economic consequences for our country. I think every member of parliament knows the dramatic situation which is occurring with regard to our balance of payments.

Canada is operating with the largest deficit in its balance of payments history. One of the reasons for this great deficit is that we do not any more have our natural resources to export. More importantly, we are importing a large portion of the energy we have to use. With the opening of the Montreal pipeline there will be even less energy to export, and as far as our balance of payments situation is concerned we will have less revenue generated. The solution is not necessarily to export, but to import less, and the way to do that is to use less. The way to use less is to have a meaningful conservation program in this country.

One of the many charges which could be laid at the feet of this government is the fact that in spite of what has happened around the world, in spite of the dramatic situation developed by the OPEC countries, in spite of the fantastic deterioration in our economic position, the government has not deemed it necessary to start any kind of conservation program. It has never taken to the Canadian people the proposition that in our own interests and in the interests of generations which will follow us, we must do something to conserve the use of resources in this country.

There can be no greater indictment of a government that, in spite of the situation around the world and in spite of a negative report by other countries, we are doing nothing about conservation. In spite of what is going on all over the world, in this country we are increasing the use of our energy by about 8 per cent per year, when other countries are doing a commendable job of trying to reduce energy consumption. It is the height of irresponsibility on the part of the government that it has not taken to the Canadian people the responsibility of trying to do something about energy conservation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gillies: Of the many things with which one could charge this government—apart from lack of leadership in almost all areas of economic policy—when the chips are really down and when history is written, one of the things historians will ask is, where was the government when there was a chance to conserve some of our great natural resources? They will say that they did not care, they did not take the matter to the Canadian people, they did not ask the Canadian people to do something about it. That is an indictment this government will have to live with for a long, long time. And it will not be simply a political indictment, because it is much more than that. The indictment which will come down on this government from our children and our grandchildren will be that we wasted our resources at a time when we should have been conserving them. I hope the government will take very seriously the

[Mr. Gillies.]

charge that it is doing nothing about energy conservation. The Canadian people want the government to give some leadership in this area so that we will not all have to face the charges which will otherwise be made in the years ahead.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Don Valley (Mr. Gillies) has rendered a useful service to this House and to the people of Canada by placing his motion on the order paper and drawing attention to the failure of the government to implement an effective energy conservation program. The fact is that for many years this country has faced the threat of an oil shortage, to which fact the government has been consistently indifferent. Now that threat has become a reality. This year we will be 100,000 barrels a day short of self-sufficiency, and the estimate is that by next year we will be falling 300,000 barrels per day below self-sufficiency. Yet we go on merrily as though our oil and gas resources were limitless and so far the government has done nothing effective to deal with this serious situation. If we do not do something soon, we will be compelled later to take Draconian measures such as the rationing of gasoline and home heating fuels, which could be a very serious problem indeed and very difficult to administer.

The Government of Canada, along with a number of oil consuming countries, signed an international energy agreement in which, among other things, Canada promised, along with the co-signers to endeavour to reduce energy consumption by 10 per cent. The fact is, of course, that our demand is still going up. A few years ago our consumption was about 1.4 million barrels per day, it is now up to 1.7 million barrels per day, and the estimate put out by oil companies is that by 1980 it will be 2 million barrels a day. Therefore, we can hardly blame our fellow signatories to the international energy agreement when they say that there appears to be a substantial gap between principle and practice and that the Canadian cabinet appears to have accepted the goal of conservation without recognizing the need to implement the goal with specific actions. That is a damning indictment of any government, particularly when it comes from a group of nations which are struggling with the problem of oil shortage.

It is true that the government introduced an energy conservation program on February 6, a program introduced by the previous minister of energy, mines and resources. Those of us who replied at the time the minister introduced that program said it was going to be very largely a public relations effort. That is what it turned out to be. Money spent, in the main, has been spent on advertisements, pamphlets and commercials on radio and television. The public was told that there were 100 ways to save energy and to put money in its pocket. People were told to turn down thermostats and to wear sweaters. They were even told to take fewer baths. I assume that members of the cabinet set an example by scrupulously accepting that admonition. That probably explains why this government is in such bad odour all across Canada.

• (1530)

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): They are all stinkers!