

Excise Tax Act

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Mr. Chairman, you just cannot run a national tax system on a series of individual situations.

Mr. Rodriguez: Mr. Chairman, it seemed that the minister was saying that he was working in the dark and did not know what the budget figures were. It seems to me that since the government brought in the budget, and is imposing a tax, it should have the facts and figures. I should also like to ask the minister about another matter. It concerns rural mail deliveries. Those people who deliver mail on the basis of a contract with the post office will be faced with the burden of this ten cents tax. Will they be eligible for the rebate?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): No, Mr. Chairman, but obviously they are paid by the post office by the mile.

Mr. Rodriguez: Perhaps the minister is not aware that they work on a fixed contract with the post office. If contingencies such as this arise in the middle of their contract, arrangements have to be made. Is the minister prepared to allow these workers any consideration in respect of the delivery of mail? When they bid on a contract they do so assuming that gasoline will be at a certain price, and now they are faced with this excise tax. Will the minister provide them with an opportunity to get a rebate?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): If the rural postal deliveries are done by independent contractors, as most are, then their expenditure for the purchase of gasoline is a deductible item for the purpose of earning income, and the rebate would be applied. Of course that covers a great majority of the cases.

Mr. Rodriguez: Well, Mr. Chairman, I was wondering about this excise tax and whether the minister had thought about levying another three cents on every dollar bet at the race tracks. Has the minister considered that as a way to raise money? The government now is taking 15 cents out of every dollar bet at the race tracks and I wonder whether the bureaucrats had considered taking another three cents out of every dollar from the bets at the racetracks. There is racing every day of the week in Canada.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): I find that a strange position to be taken by a party which for many years has been opposed to lotteries. In any event I think that tax primarily is provincial.

Mr. Rodriguez: Mr. Chairman, I can say to the minister that such a position is very inconsistent with the philosophy of the New Democratic Party but certainly is not inconsistent with Liberal policy, and that is the reason I asked the question. It is a Liberal government which is imposing this tax and therefore I should like to know whether the minister has looked into this. I just wanted him to say yes or no, and not "go around the rosy".

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): We examined a panorama of options, Mr. Chairman.

● (1540)

Mr. Darling: Mr. Chairman, I should like to ask the minister a couple of questions following those asked by the hon. member for Nickel Belt, who is very worried about the miners of Shebandowin. I assume that since they are miners they have a reasonable income, as compared with the many people who are working for minimum wages and have to drive their cars to work 30, 40 and even 50 miles. We know the minister has received representations about this. Along with all my colleagues on this side I have come to the conclusion that the minister has dug in his heels on the issue.

Perhaps the minister will recall the time when I spoke on July 14 and said I hoped he might reconsider his decision. I even went so far as to say I hoped he might repent. I wonder if he is nearer to repentance and would at least consider something different so far as this ten cents tax is concerned. I believe the figures which I have available state that if a tax of 2.5 cents were imposed on every gallon of every type of fuel, that is, gasoline oil, we would come up with the same amount.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): I could not give the hon. member an answer to that. What we wanted to do was to limit the tax to personal use to cover the deficit so that we could maintain the price on commercial use, home heating oil, industrial uses, use by farmers and fishermen and other pursuits where we need to continue production in the country, at \$8 as against the world price of \$12. For that reason we limited the tax to personal use.

Mr. Darling: The figures I have show that 2.5 cents imposed on all fuel oil would be sufficient. I do not think heating fuel should be considered because the home owner should not be saddled with that tax. I am wondering what percentage of increase would be required on all gasoline used for business purposes as well as for pleasure to make up the amount we need.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): I suppose the assumption is that the hon. gentlemen would be willing to see home heating oil bear part of the price?

Mr. Darling: No, I am referring to gasoline and diesel fuel. At present the government is letting many very wealthy people off the hook on diesel fuel because they are driving Mercedes Benz, Peugeot, or some other fancy cars and they do not pay the ten cents tax. I admit that the minister did say it would be a horrendous problem to catch those guys. I suggest that since they are all so well to do they will probably voluntarily send in the ten cents a gallon to the Minister of National Revenue. I wonder if the minister could give us a ballpark figure for how much would be required a gallon on all gasoline to come up with the amount which the government will get from the ten cents tax, which is imposed on people who can afford it the least in most cases.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): I will try to get the hon. gentleman the figure.

Mr. Darling: I am quite sure the minister has been reading the papers and has already heard how this tax has hurt the second most important industry in Canada, that