

Oral Questions

Energy, Mines and Resources knows that the small change he made before Christmas—made, by the way, after the House had risen so that he would not be subject to questioning here—was very minor in its implications. He left unanswered the question whether or not the government intends any more significant changes to stop the loss of jobs, which I might say is certainly capable of attracting the attention of the 40,000 Canadians who now hold jobs but will lose them by the end of March.

Let me turn again to the Minister of Finance to see if he is prepared to assume his responsibilities in this matter. He will know that the Economic Council of Canada, the C. D. Howe Institute, the Royal Bank, and virtually every major spokesman for the petroleum industry, have indicated that the energy policies being followed by the Government of Canada today are policies which will do very significant damage to the Canadian economy, particularly to any prospects of recovery which we might have as a country. Knowing that the Minister of Finance has read the testimony of other experts in this field, can he tell us whether the government has any contrary evidence to present to Parliament, and if it has contrary evidence which indicates the damage we know is being done to the Canadian economy by this energy policy in fact is not happening, will he present it to Parliament?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the right hon. member referred to a number of spokesmen who have urged the Canadian government to establish a much higher pricing schedule for energy in Canada. It is not surprising that one of the authorities the right hon. gentleman quoted should be the multinational oil companies which would normally suggest the highest possible price for their commodity.

Mr. Andre: The Economic Council of Canada is not a multinational oil company.

Mr. MacEachen: We have already put before the House of Commons the pricing schedule—

Miss MacDonald: For Mexico.

Mr. MacEachen:—in effect for energy in Canada. That schedule has been approved by the House of Commons and it is currently in effect. The Government of Canada undertook that particular pricing schedule for a number of reasons, but mainly to moderate the impact upon Canadian consumers and upon the Canadian economy of very rapid price increases in this country. When the right hon. gentleman is quoting these particular spokesmen, obviously he is urging us to establish an even higher pricing schedule for energy in Canada. We do not intend to do that.

Mr. Clark: Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance knows that the issue is not pricing; the issue is the taxing policies, the regulatory policies and the degree of discretion vested in the government by the national energy policy which is driving investment out of the country. He has confirmed what we all knew: he has confirmed his incapacity for the job of Minister

of Finance in suggesting that numbered among the multinational oil companies of the world are the Economic Council of Canada, the C.D. Howe Institute and the Royal Bank.

I am interested in protection for Canadians whose jobs and security are at stake right now. The minister does not believe the advice he has received. The minister will not tell us whether he has any advice of his own. Will the minister, as the Deputy Prime Minister in the House, let the Parliament of Canada do its job of finding the true facts about the impact of the national energy policy upon jobs, upon industrial growth in Quebec, Ontario and across the country? Will he give a commitment to refer the short-term and downstream impact of the National Energy Program on economic activity in Canada to a parliamentary committee with a mandate to hear witnesses, to subpoena evidence and to establish a factual basis for appropriate revisions to a policy which, in our judgment, is now causing deep damage to Canadians who are worried about jobs, growth and investment in the country?

● (1425)

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition has stated that pricing is not the issue. It seems to me pricing is the central issue with the producing provinces and with the oil companies. It is the main reason being put forward by the companies for the alleged loss of jobs.

The right hon. gentleman has talked about the Economic Council of Canada and he has cited it as an authority. If he reads the report he will clearly notice that the difference of opinion between the Government of Canada and the Economic Council of Canada, as stated in its report, is on this very issue of pricing. The Economic Council of Canada has urged the government to lay on the consumers of Canada higher prices than those proposed in the budget and the National Energy Program. This we refused to do, since we did not intend to adopt the punitive pricing policy which was established by the right hon. gentleman when he was Leader of the Government of Canada.

The Leader of the Opposition wants to have an investigation into the true impact of the energy program upon the Canadian economy. Before the House today is the oil and gas energy legislation, which will go to committee where hon. members opposite may call all the witnesses they desire and examine them on the impact which this bill will have on the economy.

REDUCED OIL WELL DRILLING—EXPECTED JOB LOSS

Hon. Michael Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. I would like to discuss some specific figures, as he will not accept the more generalized statements on expected job losses. Some 38 per cent of the 570 Canadian-owned drilling rigs are now inactive or drilling outside the country. Last year at this time about 16 per cent were inactive. This means there will be 40 per cent fewer oil wells drilled in this country, which will result in jobs not being created in Alberta,