

[English]

POSSIBLE RETURN TO CONSUMERS OF OVERPAYMENTS

Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Madam Speaker, as a former member of the parliamentary press gallery, I know about seeing government documents in advance. I just say it was a discourtesy to the House that the press gallery should see it before we did.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Will we consumers just have to lay back and enjoy another two years of being ripped off through price fixing or, if indeed the allegations of wrongdoing are true, will the government arrange to let Canadian consumers get their money back?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I am quite surprised to see that all of a sudden the spokesmen for the Progressive Conservative Party should pose as the great defenders of the consumers. For years they have been known to protect the interests of companies, particularly oil companies, but now that the report of an investigation made under the act is to be referred to a commission or a tribunal, those Conservative members draw conclusions even before the facts are known and condemn the oil companies. I hope their former friends will figure out where they stand and realize that, depending what day it is, they are on one side of the fence or the other.

● (1425)

[English]

DELAY IN INTRODUCTION OF LEGISLATION

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Madam Speaker, my question also relates to this eight-year investigation into a billion dollar rip-off perpetrated by the oil companies. I would like the minister to explain to this House, if he would, why it has taken more than 12 years for the Liberal government to bring legislation before this House which would protect the Canadian people from this kind of rip-off? Frankly, I do not believe he will be able to deliver that legislation within the time-frame.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I realize that the hon. member is new in this House. He does not remember that in 1975 a Liberal government not only introduced but got through a bill to amend substantially the Combines Investigation Act. Unfortunately, due to the slowness of the parliamentary process, which tends to hinder rapid progress, we have not been able to complete the second phase of the act. The questions that I am being asked show that the

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Progressive Conservatives and the New Democrats now agree with my objectives.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

[English]

Mr. Skelly: Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, another interpretation might be that the government did not have the jam to put the required parts together—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Skelly: The movement here to refer this question to the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission is one which is side-stepping the issue. What we really need is protection through strong legislation. I would again ask the minister to give us a date for this legislation. It is more important than many of the issues which are facing the House right now. We want a date.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Mr. Ouellet: Madam Speaker, this new commitment voiced by opposition members makes me more confident than ever that we will be able to achieve passage of the second phase amendments to the Combines Investigation Act. I shall discuss this matter with my colleague who is responsible for the business of the House who in turn will try to arrange, together with the other House leaders, an appropriate date to introduce these amendments. I hope that hon. members will recall the representations made today when the bill is introduced and that they will help the government ensure prompt passage of the bill.

[English]

Mr. Skelly: Madam Speaker, I hope that the date will be tomorrow, when the minister begins discussions with the House leader.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

POSSIBILITY OF NEGOTIATING COMPENSATION FOR CONSUMERS

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Minister of Finance. Since the Canadian people have been skinned over the last decade to the tune of billions of dollars, will the minister undertake to negotiate compensation for the Canadian people, by having the oil companies provide restitution for the money which they have stolen? If the minister will not do that by negotiation, is he prepared to lay before this House legislation to compel the oil companies to make restitution? There is a sense of justice involved here and the consumers must be reimbursed. The moneys recovered could go into the oil import compensation fund to offset the price increases we are facing now.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!