

Senator Roblin: Thank God the Senate is the exception that proves the rule.

ENERGY

OIL PRICING—GOVERNMENT ACTION

Hon. H. A. Olson: Honourable senators, I should like to ask the Leader of the Government if he can help some of those people who are vitally and even desperately concerned about what is going to happen to the oil and gas industry in Canada.

● (1510)

He will know that I have asked a series of questions over the past several weeks about this. To date, there has been a small amount of information given, but normally we have been told that there is a watching brief until some later day when the government considers it more appropriate to take some action with respect to this matter.

That is the answer I received when the oil price was \$24 a barrel; it is the answer I received when the oil price was \$20 a barrel, \$18 a barrel, \$15 a barrel, and now it is down to somewhere between \$12 and \$13 a barrel on the most immediate month's futures, so I wonder if we can be given some information today as to what action the government is considering, if any.

Hon. Duff Roblin (Leader of the Government): I cannot give my honourable friend satisfaction with respect to his question. It would be, of course, quite out of order for me to try to indicate what the government might be considering. I can only advise when a matter of policy has been decided. That is when I can give the facts to my friend, but no policy change has been decided, so there is no further information I can give him.

Senator Olson: As a supplementary, honourable senators, there are some people whose whole economic base—whether you want to call it a job, or some other term to describe the means by which they receive their income—is eroding so rapidly that it is very difficult for them to see whether or not they are going to make it for a few more weeks, never mind any further into the future than that.

Without being specific, I wonder if the Leader of the Government could tell us whether or not the government intends to help this important sector of our economy, as governments have helped other sectors of the economy in the past, whether that was the agricultural industry, the fisheries industry, the automotive industry, or whatever.

Senator Roblin: I am sure that every government wishes to be thought of as being helpful in dealing with any industrial problem. I can tell my honourable friend that until a policy change has been made, I am unable to provide further information.

Senator Olson: I can understand that, but I wonder whether it is the position of the government that it is going to wait with the watching brief, or take so long that this industry will

become so weak that there will be no chance of its recovering in its present form.

I ask that question because I agree with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources for Alberta when they said at a meeting held approximately ten days ago that the industry will survive. There is no doubt that the pipelines and wells are not going to disappear. But survive in what form? Can the people now involved in this industry look to it as the base of their economic well-being again? Or, is the government going to wait until it is so weak that there is no chance of its recovering for the benefit of those Canadian citizens who are now involved in it?

Senator Roblin: I very much hope that this gloomy projection does not come to pass, but I have nothing to add to my previous statement.

Senator Olson: Honourable senators, can the government give us some indication as to when that might happen? Is it a matter of another two weeks, or another \$5 decline in the price of a barrel of oil, or what is it that is going to bring this government around to realizing that it needs to face up to its responsibility in this matter and indicate that it is prepared to do what federal governments of Canada have done in the past, and that is take their responsibility seriously?

Senator Roblin: I am really not disposed to take my honourable friend's advice, because I remember well that he was the minister in charge of a most important economic portfolio in the previous government when the question of support of or government interference with the oil industry was on the table.

I do not think that the remedies recommended at that time were sufficiently impressive to suggest that his advice should be followed today with respect to that industry.

If he is going to ask me the same question, I tell him again that I am unable to announce policy at the present time. That is the only statement I can make.

Senator Olson: It is not a question of whether or not the remedies that he now rejects—and I think he rejected them some time ago—are appropriate or not. Am I to take it from the Leader of the Government in the Senate that the choice, as far as he and this government can see, is to do what the previous government did, or do nothing? Is that the limit of the ingenuity and imagination of this government?

Senator Roblin: It was not just myself who rejected those remedies. The Senate itself rejected those in its own committee, as my honourable friend knows very well. So, there should be common ground for us in respect of that matter.

In spite of my honourable friend's needling, I am not going to respond in the way he would like me to. I will be my usual informative self and tell him that when I have something that I can tell him, I will, but until I have something to tell him, then I have to decline to answer his questions.

Senator Olson: There is a large number of people in this country who are reaching the end of their rope, and they rely on their elected representatives and others, such as the members of the Senate, to at least take their responsibility seriously