

Oil and Petroleum

somewhat disturbing that the minister should dismiss as mere rhetoric the wording of an amendment to the British North America Act, as contained in the Mineral Transfer Act of 1930. That amendment came about as a result of 25 years of political agitation by the people of western Canada, who asked to be treated as equals in confederation and not as colonials living in colonies of central Canada. After 25 years of agitation, under a Conservative government they were able to bring about that amendment to the British North America Act which made Saskatchewan and Alberta the equals of the other provinces in Confederation. I don't think that was any act of great benevolence but, certainly, it was an act of justice.

Now the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources seeks to turn the calendar back to before 1930 and to dismiss as rhetoric the very language of the law. Surely, if any doubt the minister's motives, what the minister has said should put their minds at rest.

Of course the minister went beyond the scope of this clause in his discussion and talked about the necessity of a veto clause. It is argued that under that veto clause, in the absence of agreement the federal government could, or would, in considering its national responsibilities impose an agreement. In his argument he conveniently dismissed two relevant facts. Perhaps we can discuss those when the appropriate clauses are discussed. Let me remind the minister that, for some 18 months, we have been under a price control regime in this country through which the federal government, at its own initiative and without discussion, has controlled the price of crude oil in this country. It has done this without the benefit of this veto clause, without the benefit of this legislation, and without legislative muscle.

Mr. Caccia: What do you mean by saying it was done without discussion?

Mr. Andre: This regime was imposed on September 4, 1973.

Mr. Caccia: But it was done after consultation, and you know it.

Mr. Andre: The hon. member opposite is playing fast and loose with history. He knows that this decision was arrived at after a certain cabinet meeting, after which the cabinet felt compelled to make a statement about inflation because of the noise the previous leader of the NDP had been making that summer throughout the country. The fact remains that a price control regime has been in place for one and a half years. Certainly it has been in place with the co-operation of producing provinces, even though they were aghast, alarmed, and angered by the federal government's taking such unilateral action without the slightest consultation. Nonetheless they co-operated, and co-operate to this day.

No province has given the slightest indication that it will not co-operate. On the contrary the minister has indicated already that his government is prepared to take unilateral action without consultation. No province has yet said it will not go along with the government. They have said, "We will go along." The minister, however, says he must have this veto clause in case agreement cannot be reached. What kind of agreement can you reach in the face

of that veto clause? How can you negotiate staring down the barrel of a gun? What sort of negotiations will go on? The argument is completely ridiculous. Armed with this legislation the government can go to any meeting and say, "We suggest this." If any province dares to disagree, the government could claim there is no agreement. This is how it will be.

My friends of the NDP would never accept that sort of situation in labour-management negotiations. They would never agree to one side having that sort of veto clause. I mean, how can there be consultation and negotiation when one side has that sort of authority? Mr. Chairman, it is patently absurd. The existence of that veto clause would mean that the federal government could unilaterally decide on the price of crude oil and natural gas in Canada. The rest of the bill might as well not be there. The government might as well say, "We are going to control the price of natural gas and crude oil in this country, period." The law gives the provinces no assurance that there will be meaningful negotiation and consultation. After all, consider the assurances the government gave the provinces in the past.

I said a few moments ago that on September 4, 1973, the federal government, unilaterally and without consultation, introduced a price freeze. It was imposed two months after the publication of a document by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources called "An Energy Policy for Canada—Phase I". On page 9 the document asserts that no national policy can be contemplated without the fullest intergovernmental consultation and consensus. On page 58 these words are to be found:

That there can be no effective set of national energy policies developed without the participation of the provincial governments is readily apparent . . . Obviously, policies developed in isolation in Ottawa hold scant hope for success.

We were assured there would be the fullest consultation, that the government understood the constitution of this country, that it recognized the provinces have jurisdiction over natural resources, and that it intended to consult the provinces before taking action. Then, two months later, without the slightest consultation, the minister unilaterally imposed the price freeze and the export tax. We know the whole sorry history after that. Now he says he needs this veto clause, because there might not be agreement. Balderdash!

The existence of this veto clause will guarantee that there will not be discussions, that there will not be negotiation, and that the minister will decide unilaterally, for political reasons rather than for reasons of national security, what the price shall be. That is just plain unacceptable.

● (2020)

In the hope of improving this bill somewhat, we would like added to the bill a short paragraph that might at least remind future ministers and bureaucrats that at all times there must be co-operation with the provinces of production. Under the British North America Act 1930, the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were guaranteed equality with the other provinces of Canada with regard to the administration and control of their natural resources. We would like to see that incorporated in this bill.