

*Energy Supplies Emergency Act*

keep coming from the government on this subject, they will not know any more about it in one month or one year from now.

I was intrigued by the statement from the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Macdonald) when he spoke on this bill last Wednesday. Early in his speech he said that as long ago as December of last year, the government had received an assessment of our crude oil situation from the National Energy Board. He went on to state, further, that the government had then taken decisive steps to protect Canadian supplies of gasoline, middle distillates, heavy fuel oil and propane. That was an interesting claim, especially in the light of the present supply position of these products. As we all know too well, there are shortages in all the products, the supply of which the minister told us the government had taken steps to protect. Canadians who are today suffering shortages, especially shortage of home heating oil, may be forgiven if they wonder whether the government deliberately allowed the present energy crisis to develop.

If we accept the government's own statements on the energy situation, we must conclude that they were caught completely unaware by the world-wide energy crisis in spite of the fact that advance warning was given several months ago, if not long before then. On the energy minister's own admission, the government was given an assessment of crude oil supplies and reserves in Canada one year ago. I can only assume that this assessment by the National Energy Board also contained recommendations as to what might be done and what ought to be done to ensure that Canadian consumers would have access to their own oil. I would consider the making of such recommendations to be part of the responsibility of the Energy Board, and if it is not, it certainly should be. It is obvious that information of this sort has not been forthcoming from anyone else in the government.

Mr. Speaker, I sent out a news release last February calling upon the government to acknowledge the fact that an energy crisis was developing and urging that steps be taken to head off a major shortage in Canada of fuel oil and gasoline. This news release was printed in the newspapers in my constituency. I pointed out that there had been longstanding difficulties with respect to the transportation of oil products throughout Canada and that this situation could result in shortages of fuel oil in eastern Canada should supplies from other sources be cut off. Finally, I called on the government to take steps to ensure that Canadian oil would be supplied to all Canadians.

● (1600)

It is a sad commentary on the type of government we have had in the past eight or ten years that I can still make the same recommendations today. I said at that time, and I say now, that what we need right now is a national energy policy, not stop-gap, ad hoc policies designed to get us from one emergency to another. We have been governed for several years in a manner that suggests that we should be satisfied with policies that will get us through crisis after crisis. Every time we turn around, Mr. Speaker, we are called upon to debate crisis solutions and emergency measures, and in every case we have had ample warning to implement policies to head off emergencies and crises. How much longer must we go on in this way?

[Mr. Beattie (Hamilton Mountain).]

The energy minister was in his usual form when he introduced the government's latest energy legislation last week. He talked as though he and his colleagues actually knew what they were doing, but we in this House know better. This bill is just more of the same, more of the stop-gap, short-range, non-action that we have seen over and over again since this government sold out to the NDP in a desperate attempt to hold on to power. Not power with which to govern, Mr. Speaker, but power for the sake of power. As I listen to the energy minister from day to day, I cannot help wondering whether he has been given too big a job. It could be, and it certainly appears to be, a case of giving a person a job that is over his head. When we watch the energy minister backtracking, vacillating, contradicting himself and his colleagues, and generally fumbling his way around in the energy mess, then we can be forgiven for feeling that he is out of his element.

Perhaps the minister has been given too many portfolios combined into one. It could be that energy, mines and resources should be broken up into three portfolios, but even that would not be any guarantee that those departments would fare any better. It is obvious that the minister has been devoting full time to energy, and that mines and resources are being left to their own devices. This poses another threat, Mr. Speaker. This could be the makings of the next crisis. As we know, emergencies and crises tend to overlap these days, and we should be taking steps now to head off a major crisis in the other departments in the energy minister's portfolio. I think the plain fact is that energy minister should pack it in. We have his number on this side of the House, and, squirm as he likes, he will not be able to fool anyone here any longer. The legislation we are debating is clear evidence that the tenure of the energy minister has been a total disaster.

There is another aspect of the energy crisis that troubles me just as much as the alleged shortage of fuel oil and gasoline, and that is the matter of inflation. It appears to have been overlooked in all of the hoopla over the energy shortage, but inflation continues to climb, and indeed it continues to gallop. Again, those people who are hardest hit by inflation are also those who can least afford to absorb the higher costs involved in the fuel shortage. When buying power of the dollar declines and fuel prices climb, it does not take an economist to know that some people this winter are going to be denied adequate fuel supplies to keep warm. Some people in lower income brackets use fuel oil for cooking as well as for heating, and it can easily be seen that for those people the present fuel crisis is very real.

This government is using the energy crisis to play one party against the other in the House, for purely political purposes, and it is callous and inhuman. It is strange, indeed, that this government would ignore good advice from the official opposition at a time when the energy situation could have been kept under control, and to then play games with the NDP in order to try to squirm out of accepting responsibility for the mess they got us into. The government is in fact playing games with the Canadian people. It is playing games with the health and welfare of the Canadian people, and it is no wonder that it was afraid to risk a vote of confidence this past Monday.