

Oil Substitution Act

I have many other things to say, Mr. Speaker, but unfortunately my time has expired. I am, sure that other Members like our colleague who took the floor a moment ago, the Hon. Member for Ottawa West (Mr. Daubney), have very interesting comments to make about this measure.

[English]

Mr. Ernie Epp (Thunder Bay-Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, it is not with joy but with a realization of the importance of this matter that I rise to continue debate in opposition to the motion before us.

Mr. Malone: What is it?

Mr. Epp (Thunder Bay-Nipigon): To end debate on a Bill designed to put an end to the Canadian Home Insulation Program and the Canadian Oil Substitution Program. With the majority the Tories have they know they can carry the matter through without any difficulty.

In rising to speak in opposition to that motion and in order to keep the debate going, I do so very much in the awareness that this is a very important matter to our constituents who are watching at home. They are listening with a lively interest which I fear Private Members and Ministers in the Government do not have. One of the regrettable things about a Government with a large majority is that it has a sense of omnipotence. Given whatever vision it may have of the future, it can seek to achieve that vision without regard to the needs of the Canadian people.

I am very strongly opposed to this motion. The motion under debate before this motion should have carried. That was a motion for a six-month hoist of the Bill, which would have allowed the Government, together with the Canadian people, to do what is so badly needed. It has become quite clear that at the very least what is needed is some extension of the Canadian Oil Substitution Program which would allow people to make the conversion to natural gas.

I approached the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Miss Carney) on this quite early on, when it became clear that constituents of mine were not going to be able to make the conversion given the sudden imposition of a deadline of March 31. Other Members have indicated since then, in the debate on this Bill, the kinds of difficulties which have arisen in their ridings for the businesses concerned as well as the home owners who want to make the conversion and find that the time left is too short, particularly in the winter when it is impossible to make these installations. Propane tanks, which would allow temporary conversion to get people into the program, have been snapped up and there simply is no means available for people to take advantage of the program.

It is for that reason that some extension of time is absolutely imperative. The decision of the Government to vote down the six-month hoist motion was a denial to my constituents and those of other ridings of fundamental justice; that is, their right to get in on an important program and achieve a conversion which would be to their advantage and the advantage of the country.

Whatever the situation may be these days when we seem to have enough oil and a potential supply which has to be held back, surely we all realize that this is a temporary situation. At some point in the near future, if we continue to be profligate consumers of oil, we are going to run into the most terrific supply difficulties. Everyone knows that. I cannot imagine that Conservative Members from the oil-producing regions of the country are not aware of that reality. To cut off a program which was designed to encourage conservation of that important resource is something which should be rejected for the most fundamental ecological and economic reasons.

We are now faced with a final vote which the Government knows it will carry, and that is one of those displays of arrogance which Governments can fall heir to. In this case it is a display of arrogance based on short-sighted economic thinking and financial reasoning which I think the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) has already begun to appreciate.

● (1250)

Members of the Liberal caucus have been focusing on some of the difficulties that arise here. The decision of the Government to reduce the deficit was laid out for us last November. That has been periodically reasserted in recent days. If you set out to reduce the deficit by taking action which slows down economic activity, the effect is to increase the deficit because of the nature of the programs which this country has long enjoyed and is determined to continue enjoying. The petition on unemployment insurance presented at the economic summit last week showed that the Canadian people are united on the importance of these programs. The Government knows that there are very limited possibilities of touching these. The end result of trying to deal with the deficit directly is to increase it.

Some of us have that fundamental understanding, but if it exists in Conservative circles it is muzzled these days. The muzzling of Members of the Government who know better deserves a little exploration. It is abundantly clear that investment by the Government is a good thing. No one can question the fact that investment by the Government in the Canadian Home Insulation Program and the Canadian Oil Substitution Program made the country more efficient in the use of fuels.

Mr. Malone: Higher taxes.

Mr. Epp (Thunder Bay-Nipigon): If it takes higher taxes or borrowed money, it is still an investment which makes the country more efficient. People who are convinced that we must continue to cut back should study the circumstances of British Columbia. Eighteen months of that strategy has been enough to demonstrate how you can drive a people close to their knees.

We do not need the wisdom of 1929 in this country. We need the wisdom of 1939 which recognized that, with a great challenge and the available resources, we could find the will. The country may have been borrowing money three or four years later, but people were employed. Taxation was applied to the working people and the enterprises employing people and prosperity was achieved for the country. That wisdom brought us triumphantly through a war and built this country to the