

Oral Questions

ACTION TO HALT PRESENT PRACTICES

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, the report makes two points that have absolute and clear relevance to the present. The first is that the practices are continuing, and the second is that the report says that not only are the practices continuing but the dominance of the majors is even greater today than in 1973. Considering that there were massive rip-offs up to 1973, and they are continuing—there is no reasonable ground for supposing anything other than that—why is the minister not taking some action now to stop the continuation of these rip-offs?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I want to remind the hon. member that the government took its responsibility in initiating an energy policy for Canada. The very reason that this party was so much in favour of Petro-Canada and that we so vigorously opposed the Conservatives when they wanted to dismantle Petro-Canada, was that this government and this party knew it was important to have a player there, to have a window on this industry, an honest broker in the field, to make sure that the consumer would be protected. In this way we will at last know what is going on in the industry. I think the government has already started taking its responsibility in this regard, not only to protect the consumer but to make sure that this industry is Canadianized.

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, the minister took a long time to give a completely irrelevant answer, and he knows that. It is totally irrelevant. The Canadian consumers who are being gouged right now want to know not what effect Petro-Canada will have in the future, we know all about that, but what benefit they are going to get now from this government that is just setting up the oil industry to take whacks at, and is getting political gain, but not doing anything about the price gouging.

Just 48 hours ago the oil companies raised their prices between two and three cents per gallon more than they needed, piggy-backing increases, thus adding millions of dollars of windfall profits to their already excessive profits. Will the minister do two things now? Instead of just talking about what would happen in the future, will he call in the heads of the oil companies responsible, the big four in question, and say to them, "We, the Government of Canada, want you to roll back that two or three cents increase and, in addition, roll back a few more cents to make up for the 25 years of gouging?"

Mr. Ouellet: Madam Speaker, in answering a question yesterday I indicated to another member of the New Democratic Party that this question has been brought to my attention by my colleague, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, and that my department was looking at these recent increases by two oil companies. I want to assure the hon. member that we will indeed be looking at this question and will take any remedial action that can be taken under the circumstances.

COMBINES ACT

QUERY RESPECTING INTRODUCTION OF AMENDING LEGISLATION

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine East): Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Considering the criminal burden of proof which is provided under the Combines Investigation Act for predatory pricing and monopolistic practices, is it not a fact that there have been very few convictions for charges under the present law? Also, is it not correct that under the present law there are not adequate remedies for what has been pointed out in the report of the director? In view of this, when will the minister bring in amendments to the present legislation? Will he do it in this session?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I fully agree with the hon. member that it is urgent to amend the competition legislation. I have already told the House that I want to introduce those amendments at the earliest opportunity. Yesterday I suggested that the parliamentary leaders meet to discuss this topic and, should both sides of the House be prepared to proceed rapidly, I would be the first one to hail such an agreement.

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[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

GARRISON DIVERSION PROJECT—SUGGESTED TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER AND U.S. PRESIDENT REAGAN

Mr. Charles Mayer (Portage-Marquette): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister about the recently announced additional funding for the Garrison project in North Dakota. I was glad to see that the motion presented under Standing Order 43 which was moved by my colleague, the hon. member for Lisgar, was adopted. In addition to the \$4 million, another \$3 million has been left over from the previous year, so that means there is an additional \$7 million to be spent on the Garrison project. We are concerned that each dollar spent adds impetus to the completion of that project. Would the Prime Minister not only raise this issue with President Reagan when he is here next week, but raise it as a priority item when we get to that part of the agenda which deals with things that are of mutual concern to our two countries?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Yes, Madam Speaker, I have indicated before that this will be very high on the agenda but I am happy to have the unanimous support of this House to a motion moved by the Conservative Party and supported by the Liberals—

An hon. Member: And the NDP.