

Petroleum Administration Act

Mr. Waddell: That is socialism. That is what we stand for and that is what we support.

Canadians know that this country has great potential. They know they can own their own homes. Canadians know they can and should have a job and that they can live a good lifestyle. They are prepared to make some sacrifices. They know that the price of oil and gas must go up. They are prepared to make some sacrifices but they demand that they be fair, just like the provinces demand that the federal government act fairly toward them. The ordinary people in those provinces demand that the government act fairly, that the great mass of people do not bear the burden of these oil and gas prices as is the case under this policy. This policy is a sham when we get down to the average person. That is why we in the NDP have brought forward this motion today to challenge the government, to ask for the revocation of the Petroleum Administration Act and to debate its energy policy.

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I seek the floor to participate in this debate. I cannot resist asking one question of the member opposite. He indicated he would permit questions and I think technically he does have a minute left. The question I wish to ask calls for a very short answer.

He was telling us how much guts the NDP had in the energy area. Those were his exact words. Then he said that people in the west expect parties to take positions nowadays, and that was going to be characteristic of what would happen from now on so far as the NDP was concerned. This is a debate about energy prices and that is what I will talk about. The Conservatives had the misfortune, when they were in government, to be exposed, to lay out their prices. We have laid our prices out for the next four years, which is what I will be speaking on. I would like to ask the hon. member, who stands as his party's spokesman on energy, what is the price schedule the NDP stands for? Would he have enough guts to take a position on this before the Canadian people if the NDP were in power, if socialism were prevailing, with Premier Blakeney looking on and being quoted so favourably by the hon. member? I will talk about the four energy prices, the four gasoline prices for each of the next four years. What are the NDP's prices?

Mr. Waddell: I would need 40 minutes to reply. But I can give you three words: lower than yours.

Mr. Kaplan: I hope Premier Blakeney is listening since the NDP has not been very forthcoming with regard to their price schedule. Now they have made it clear that if they were in power the provinces would find prices controlled by the federal government. The hon. member has indicated as much. He has also indicated that their prices would be lower than the prices set by this government. I do not think that is very realistic, and that is what I want to deal with in the time before royal assent is called for.

● (1630)

As the hon. member opposite was speaking, I listened for something with which I could agree because he is an agreeable fellow, but the only thing with which I could agree was his

idea that it would be better not to be operating under this act unilaterally but to be operating by way of agreement with the producing provinces. It has been the objective of this government to try to reach agreement with the producing provinces. The hon. member opposite says that he would not have given up hope of agreement. But at a certain point the government did give up hope and proceeded unilaterally. It proceeded unilaterally for a peculiarly Canadian reason and a peculiarly Canadian objective. Of all the countries in the world we are the one, and maybe the only industrialized country which can set out a schedule of prices for the next four years to help in a meaningful way with the industrial strategy which the hon. member himself regards as so valuable. We can tell the participants in the Canadian economy what energy prices will be over the next four years.

What other country can do that? Italy, a country recently wracked by disaster, is a complete importer of its oil. It cannot have a debate like this and set energy prices as we can. Other western European countries cannot do so, but we in this country can, and should.

The NDP spokesman warned the Canadian people—and I thought it was very forthcoming of him—that energy prices do have to go up. It is worth nothing, even though we have a measure of control, that energy prices must go up. They must go up, for the very good reason that energy costs are going up. As we all know, our present energy mix with respect to oil is derived from three sources. One is imports, and one is high cost non-conventional sources. In those two categories we do not have very much choice about the price. We pay the market price or we do not get the product. We pay the necessary exploration, production and transportation costs for the non-conventional sources. Canadians have to understand that we do not have much flexibility in that regard and that those resources have to be paid for on the basis of a demonstrated cost. The third source, over which Canadians as a nation do have control, is the conventional energy source. We know that is declining, but it is a major part of our energy mix now.

It is a part over which the country has control constitutionally and to which this legislation is addressed. Naturally, we would have preferred, and it would have been better, to be operating on the basis of agreement. I do not think hon. members opposite can demonstrate any fault on the part of the government for our inability to reach an agreement. The hon. member tried to blame it on the fact that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has been travelling outside the country—on very legitimate public business—but he knows perfectly well that if the Prime Minister had been present in the House or in the country, that would not have changed the preference expressed by Alberta not to embark upon face to face ministerial or prime ministerial negotiations at this time but to have exchanges by officials. That is Alberta's preference. In view of that, I do not see how the hon. member can criticize the Prime Minister's trip or this government for moving unilaterally to establish a framework within which an industrial strategy can unfold, a strategy which he indicates he welcomes as much as this government does.