

Canada Oil and Gas Act

We all know the result since it was broadcast on national television that night. When put to the test the leader of the Conservative party, the then prime minister, said he could not do that. He refused to do that. He was prepared to do anything verbally or by way of ifs and proposals, but given the clear request of the Premier, in public, in front of television cameras and journalists, he said quite categorically that he could not do that. He could do anything but commit himself in writing to what he was attempting to convey verbally to the people of Newfoundland.

It seems to me that if we are considering events in history, if we are going back and talking about the Tory record on this particular issue, then we must keep in mind that given the one opportunity to put their money where their mouth was, given the opportunity to correct the record and to give a firm undertaking to the government of Newfoundland on this issue, they reneged and backed away from it. They refused quite explicitly, not by implication only but quite explicitly, to be part of any such arrangement. Is there anyone in this House who will deny that, Mr. Speaker? Is there anyone here who does not remember that day when the then prime minister of Canada said quite categorically and publicly that he was not prepared to put it in writing at the particular time?

Mr. Wilson: Give us the reason why.

Mr. Simmons: If there are whys about which I am not aware, and if there are reasons, there is a great deal of opportunity for members opposite to place them on the record. What I am saying here today is that the two spokesmen from the Tory opposition who spoke in this debate this afternoon carefully avoided any reference to that particular issue because it is something which they would like to forget. Newfoundlanders do not so easily forget that kind of misrepresentation.

Mr. Wilson: Tell us the whole truth.

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, Newfoundlanders do not so easily forget that kind of deception.

Mr. Wilson: The minister agrees that it is a total distortion.

Mr. Simmons: What is a total distortion, Mr. Speaker, is what the then prime minister tried to perpetrate on the people of Newfoundland. The Premier of Newfoundland, to his credit, called his bluff. He called his bluff two weeks before the last general election. If the Tories' policy has changed on this subject, then I am not surprised. In the last two weeks their policy has changed on the postal dispute. The hon. gentleman for Yellowhead said two weeks ago that he was against a legislated return to work. Suddenly his party has ramrodded him into the reverse position. That is not strange. I call to mind Jerusalem and other issues on which they changed their minds.

Mr. Nystrom: What about PetroCan?

Mr. Simmons: We can talk about Petro-Canada and a number of other issues. I am not surprised if they do a flip-flop on this one. They are used to doing flip-flops. Perhaps they

have now found a way to weasel and flip-flop out of this particular offshore issue as well.

Mr. Wilson: Why does the minister not take him aside and tell him what is right or wrong? Total distortion.

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre (Mr. Wilson) will have an opportunity to tell us what he knows about distortion when the time comes. I have given him a couple of examples which he might want to elaborate on. I invite him to elaborate on the Jerusalem issue, Petro-Canada, the postal dispute and the Newfoundland offshore. These are just starters while he is preparing his notes. His party sits on both sides of the fence, depending on the day of the week, the convenience of the moment or the votes they are trying to garner. We all know their record on this particular issue. My advice to him is that if he keeps sufficiently silent about these issues they will go away, along with the embarrassment caused by them.

Mr. Siddon: Let us hear something positive.

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I am listening but I do not hear much that is positive.

Mr. Siddon: You have the floor.

Mr. Simmons: I am glad to hear I do have the floor. Perhaps the hon. member opposite would honour that for a few moments and allow me to say a few words on this particular bill. If he does not want me to respond further to his colleagues, the hon. member for St. John's East and the hon. member for St. John's West, and if it is too embarrassing to look at the loopholes they have allowed themselves, I will throw away the rest of the notes I have with respect to their comments and I will come to the gist of the matter, which I hoped they would have spent more time on.

The hon. member for St. John's East talked about deleting the references to Sable Island and the offshore waters. Thus, by implication, he would leave out the coastal provinces altogether. He would leave out the north altogether. In the process he implies that somehow this would strengthen the case, both legally and politically, made by Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and other coastal provinces in respect to their adjacent coastal waters. In fact, the deletions which are being suggested by the hon. member for St. John's East would do nothing more than weaken Canada's claim to sovereignty over these waters to the 200-mile limit. If effected, his deletion would have the net effect of weakening Canada's claim to sovereignty while at the same time doing nothing whatsoever to address the problem he seeks to address.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but the time allotted to him has expired.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise in support of the motion which has been presented by my good friend and colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath). I think it is a very fundamental and