

Energy

minister must be aware that there is something important going on in Toronto today.

I would like to say immediately that while listening to the arguments of the minister, we ourselves had the impression—and any Canadian who has not followed politics in the last few years would also have had the impression—that we were hearing a new minister within a new government speaking about new objectives. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that this government has been in power a long time. I recall hearing very similar comments ten years ago.

An hon. Member: That is not a speech; it is a question!

Mr. La Salle: For the moment, I am not putting a question to the minister. I am beginning my comments. This disturbs the hon. member. I can excuse the absence of the minister convinced as I am that he has important responsibilities. Mr. Speaker, I heard similar comments some ten years ago and this government which was then in power had begun to speak about energy self-sufficiency. I do not forget the practical wish expressed by the minister to the effect that Canada should be autonomous in energy matters. We entirely agree about that, the difference being the means to be used. There is no doubt about it. We had considered and suggested some steps aimed at energy self-sufficiency in the interests of Canadians. Nobody can prevent us from repeating it. This was still clear a few months ago.

● (1650)

However, what happened in the past ten years? This is why we can condemn the government for failing to practise several years ago what they are now preaching. This is not a new problem, Mr. Speaker. The minister mentioned 1974 to 1979. I remember that in 1978 and 1979, for merely partisan reasons, this government deferred general elections on three occasions, thus delaying the implementation of essential steps which are still required to get close to world prices.

I think present members of this House or those who sat from 1974 to 1979 will remember perfectly well that there was a period of eighteen months over which the election was deferred three times before being held in 1979, and the Minister of Finance refused to apply certain increases that were necessary to meet the budgetary requirement for energy self-sufficiency.

I believe we must remind Canadians that that was the sinister doing of the government that is still leading the country at this time. So when the minister talks about his efforts, his proposals, the importance of self-reliance for Canada and less dependency upon foreign countries, there is a ten-year lapse the government must live with and be blamed for and that is what we are going to do. We must recall we have an urgent need of a policy that will enable us to reach and maintain self-reliance.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk more particularly about my province. A few moments ago, an hon. member talked

about Ontario. Others will also take the floor. So I would like to tell you for a few minutes about modern Quebec. In order to do that, one has to acknowledge the clearly economic character of its evolution. It is true that cultural and linguistic considerations have stimulated modern Quebecers in their efforts and that that has caused an acceleration in the evolution of Quebec in the sixties. But let us not allow the acknowledgement of the French fact in Canada to blind us and make us forget about the economic problems which are at the root of the Quebec quiet revolution.

The Quebecers of today and especially the workers aged between 34 and 45 have benefited from a period of growth in North America which gave them a lifestyle their parents had never enjoyed. The universality of education and television placed them before an opened window on the world and consequently, like it or not, they are fully aware of the values currently defended in our times.

Mr. Pierre Laurin, Director of Hautes Études Commerciales, this dynamic Quebecer who embodies so well the virtues of this generation I am talking about, reminds us of this often and proudly. The Quebec entrepreneur, and here I also include our outstanding Quebec women who so successfully harmonize the qualities of the heart and of the mind, the Quebec entrepreneur emerged during the last two decades. Whether a technocrat, an industrialist or owner of a small business already dealing in exportations, or a leader in our labour unions, this entrepreneur, and here I use the word in its largest definition, is much more concerned with the present and the future of Quebec than his grandfather was concerned with its past. Quebecers today are living intensely in the present and are looking forward with great energy to the future. They can afford to do so because they have had the wisdom to weigh the respective merits of a cherished past, a present they want to enjoy fully, and a future they would like promising and secure.

And now, Mr. Speaker, if you will allow me, I would like to get to the heart of the matter we are discussing today, that is energy as a resource, since up until now I have spoken of the creative energy of Quebecers.

Energy has been the key that opened the door to modern day Quebec just as its abundant production led to the industrialization of the province in the nineteenth century. We all recall that the creation of Hydro-Quebec represented an important phase in the evolution of Quebec. The majestic and powerful rivers of Quebec prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that God smiles favourably on my native province. The fact that Quebecers recognized the economic potential of these rivers also fills me with pride. Manic, that gigantic power station which provides energy to Quebec, was created by French-speaking engineers, technicians and workers, which disproved once and for all the shameful misconception about the ability of Quebecers.