

Oral Questions

Were the original counsel replaced by the present government and, if so, why?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, it seems to me it ill behoves the hon. member to be criticizing the minister for not being hawkish enough when it comes to applying the Combines Investigation Act against a particular industry. The House will recall that it was those hon. members opposite who, not so long ago, were attacking the minister rather ferociously, accusing him of being somewhat hawkish as regards the sugar industry. He certainly did not have the support of hon. members opposite.

Mr. Lawrence: If I remember rightly, that was an illegal action as well on the part of the minister.

QUERY RESPECTING INTRODUCTION OF LEGISLATION

Hon. Allan Lawrence (Durham-Northumberland): Now that we have the minister here, I wish to put to him my final question about the inevitable delay in the procedure now being followed by the government in the matter of the oil pricing report and the very genuine anger that it will create among the general public who, according to the report, have been ripped off to the tune of several billions of dollars on their gasoline and home heating fuel oil bills over the last several years. To the hard pressed car and home owner this is no small matter—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Lawrence: In the light of these reported illegal massive profits to the oil industry and the oil companies, the government must surely now be ready to announce some new regulations, new legislation, a new pricing policy, to ensure that the average Canadian, the person on the end of the hosepipe, is getting a fair deal. My question to the minister is, where is it?

● (1420)

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I am surprised that the hon. member, who was the former minister responsible for my department, does not know the responsibility of the Director of Combines and Investigation. The question he asked today is very surprising because it is clearly written in the law that it is the option of the director to decide what route to follow. Indeed I support the director in the decision he made.

Mr. Lawrence: Madam Speaker, I am afraid I was not getting through to the minister. I was not asking him about the past, but about the present. The people have been ripped off by the oil industry; something must be done. What will the minister do in respect of new regulations, new legislation, or a new pricing policy?

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I have given the hon. member an opportunity to ask an extra question. I would expect him to be extremely brief.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I thought he was.

Mr. Lawrence: I always am, Madam Speaker. Where is the new pricing policy which will prevent further actions of this type taking place over the next two years, while this matter is dragged out by the government for a further length of time?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ouellet: Madam Speaker, I think that the hon. member is jumping to conclusions. He ought to know that pursuant to the act the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission will hear the evidence submitted by the Director of Investigation and Research; but it will also ask the companies involved to express their views. Quite aside from that investigation which is going on, the Canadian government wants to improve free competition in this country, not only between oil companies but in all sectors generally, and to ensure that competition is fair and correct. We have stated that we would soon introduce amendments to the Combines Investigation Act, and I am impatient to see whether the members of the Progressive Conservative Party will lend us their support when the bill is introduced.

[*English*]

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO COMBINES INVESTIGATION ACT

Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Madam Speaker, I want to express our disappointment that the government did not provide members on this side of the House with such an important report in advance of today's question period. It is a discourtesy to the House to have to rely on second-hand information.

Can the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs assure the House that the amendments to the Combines Investigation Act, which he said he will introduce in the next session, will prevent this kind of consumer rip-off from ever happening to Canadian consumers again?

[*Translation*]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, I would like to refer to the comments of the hon. member who first voiced his concern because he had not received the documents he wanted to have. I can assure him that at the same time this afternoon at 4 p.m. all those documents will be made available to all members on both sides of the House, to the news media in the press gallery, and to all interested parties. This seven-volume report will not be made public before 4 p.m. this afternoon because the chairman of the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission wanted to follow a procedure whereby documents such as these are not released to the public before the stock markets close.