

to a program. What was the U.S. shortfall was the Canadian shortfall, and what was the U.S. problem was the Canadian problem.

We are committed to assisting the Americans whether we like it or not, and I am not trying to indicate for one moment that we would not like to, but this is another measure of the incompetence or the facade of half truths or misrepresentations that have been built up by the government in this whole sorry mess.

On February 5 the minister told the House—this is well after January 24, when the formal application was made, well after January 8, when the informal representations were made to them—the following:

I have received personal assurances from Venezuela that those supplies will continue to Canada.

On February 8 there is further documentation given to the minister, and this time it is personally handed to him by the people of this country. They have an interview with the minister and they tell him the extent of the cutback from Exxon to Imperial Oil. Just by way of coincidence, on the same day, February 8, there is the offloading at the Dartmouth jetty of the first of the crude oil diversion which has been approved some time ago by the National Energy Board to Imperial Oil. Also on that same date the minister told the House the following:

● (2110)

—that there might well be shortages affecting eastern refineries. The corporation which owns these refineries has been making plans—

Certainly they have been making plans. They have been making plans to the knowledge of the minister and his regulatory body, the National Energy Board, and to the specific knowledge of some of the senior officials in the minister's own department. Later the minister said that this particular occasion of February 8 was the first time he learned there had been serious cutbacks and diversion of Venezuelan crude by Exxon.

On February 13, in response to a question posed by one of my colleagues in the opposition, the minister said the following:

—I have every reason to believe that the source of Venezuelan crude will be made available to Canada, based on the undertakings which I received when I was in Venezuela.

Because of these continued misrepresentations made to the House and the public at large, on February 14 we finally decided to take the opportunity to expose to the Canadian public some of the details we had learned. It is no secret from whence we learned the details. Obviously they were learned from another government in the country. We learned of the serious cutbacks which had been taking place as far as Imperial's crude supply was concerned. We exposed it on February 14. On February 15 an Imperial Oil spokesman said they had convinced Exxon that, instead of a cutback of 22 per cent, in effect the cutback itself would be cut back to 10 per cent. Outside of the House the minister said that even the 10 per cent cutback was unacceptable to the Government of Canada.

Energy Supplies

On February 14 the Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council (Mr. MacEachen) outside the House said that the Exxon cutback was intolerable and unacceptable to the Government of Canada, even though a few minutes before the parliamentary secretary to the minister said in the House that he had been unable to confirm our allegations that Exxon was cutting back shipments by 25 per cent.

This is a long and sorry history of either ignorance by the minister of facts which he should have known, or of incompetence by the minister or someone somewhere, if not the minister, or of people who are close advisers to the minister who had been trying to pull the wool over the eyes of Canadians. Time after time we received calm, soothing assurances from the minister and his spokesmen that all was well. Why would the minister continue to do this when it was obvious that sooner or later the true facts of the situation would come to light and the truth would be out? The reason is simple. I believe honestly the minister felt that by shoving this under the carpet, hiding it and keeping it from the light of day, somehow or other the government and the minister would blunder on and blunder through until after an election, when perhaps someone else would have to clean up their mess. It is as simple as that.

As far as the public is concerned, the real crunch in both the price situation and the crude oil situation will occur late next fall or early next winter. That is when the crunch will hit the people of the country, and it will be due to the ineffective actions of the minister and perhaps some of the misleading things which have been said.

What conclusions can we draw from this rather sorry history? Of course the first has to be government policy. Collectively the government has been asleep at the power switch from 1974 to 1979. Virtually nothing has been done to take care of a very foreseeable situation in the country. Granted, the roots of the problem do not emanate in this country as far as the foreign cut-off is concerned, but this has happened before. Almost exactly the same thing happened in 1973 and 1974. At that time we were rushed into emergency legislation. We were cautioned that we had to get the bill through in a hurry because it was needed dreadfully so that the government of the day could take care of any emergency situation which might come along. Luckily we put a time limit on the bill so that it would expire, and it expired.

Instead of reconsidering the entire matter and coming along in a sane and sensible way, at a sane and sensible time to come forward with legislation such as this, the government waited until it was pushed into the very corner, facing a crude oil crisis. It is a shame. The people of the country deserve better than they have been receiving from this particular minister.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lawrence: The issue before the people of the country today is not whether there should be an emergency oil allocation scheme. The issue before the people of the country is the very sorry record of the government respecting this entire mess. That is the issue before the people. Has the government