

Borrowing Authority Act

Canadians, in their wisdom, said, "No, thank you". The older generation remembered the Bennett days, and the younger generation could not understand a policy which, as pointed out in the support papers to the budget, would result in a level of unemployment of 11 per cent, 12 per cent or 13 per cent. That is as I remember the document.

An hon. Member: Read it again.

Mr. Mackasey: The hon. gentleman is a little excited. The support papers of the budget predicted a much higher level of unemployment than that which prevailed when the government of the day took its place. The minister at that time explained that it was unfortunate that it would create a terrible burden but that it was a natural reaction to the policy of his government in the short run. However, he said, "Cheer up, in the long run we will all be better off".

What was the big issue in that election campaign? I know that in the area I represent it was not so much an increase in excise tax on gasoline, although that became the big issue. After all, there had been precedents for excise tax. If I recall correctly, there was a seven-cent excise tax in place. Perhaps I may be forgiven if I am a little rusty. I have not been around for four or five years, but if I recall correctly there was an excise tax of seven cents, and I do not think the average Canadian would have been too concerned if that was increased. Canadians were angry because it was increased to provide money for a mortgage interest deduction scheme. However, more particularly in my riding what made the difference, and what made people vote for the Liberals and against the Conservatives, was who that excise tax was levied against.

For the first time in Canadian history a government imposed an excise tax on the gasoline being used by the farmers of the country, which was a discrimination. For the first time in history there was an excise tax on the gasoline being used by the fishermen of this country.

An hon. Member: Tell us about the rebate.

Mr. Mackasey: The rebate comes to the same thing. How could hon. members opposite expect people who travel 15, 20 or 25 miles to work by public transportation to accept an excise tax on the gasoline used by public transportation?

An hon. Member: You are going to do the same thing.

Mr. Mackasey: I am sure hon. members opposite did not realize that the excise tax applied even to the transportation of handicapped people.

Mr. MacDonald: Terrible.

Mr. Mackasey: I can only commiserate with the backbenchers who had to live through those days. Somebody in that party had to be extremely insensitive to apply increased excise tax to those categories I have just mentioned.

Mr. Paproski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I know the hon. member would not want to mislead the House,

because he is one of the finer members in this chamber, but I want to bring to his attention that there was a tax rebate for any person who was disabled, as far as the excise tax on gasoline was concerned.

Mr. Mackasey: I know that there was indeed a rebate through the income tax, not only for disabled people but also for anyone who had to pay increased excise tax. That was recoupable through income tax. I simply say that hon. members opposite did not sell that concept very well. However, that does not in any way, shape or form change the fact that for the first time taxes were imposed on farmers and fishermen, and for the first time an excise tax was imposed on public transportation. If disabled people were being asked to recover it somehow through their income tax, and half of them have no income tax to recover it through, it was at best an insensitive application of an excise sales tax. There might have been some justification. After all, the government has ways and means of discouraging the use of automobiles for unnecessary purposes.

If the government felt that the money should have been directed to people to help them with their mortgages, so be it. That was the policy of the government. The point I am getting at is that the Canadian people realized that, sure, some day they are going to have to pay considerably more for gasoline, but they did not think the method of application of that excise tax on gasoline should have been so insensitive.

Normally hon. members opposite would have been sitting on this side of the House for four or eight years. That is the normal pattern of politics in this country, but the reason they are not sitting on this side of the House can be summed up in one word: insensitivity. They were insensitive in applying increased excise sales taxes to the farmer. I recall people saying in my community, "I do not understand. No matter what the price of fuel is, no matter how difficult it is to live with these interest rates, we have no choice but to use gasoline in our daily work; we have no choice but to use gasoline for our tractors, our trucks and our automobiles."

● (1640)

I cannot understand why the hon. member for Joliette failed to understand the anger in the rural community when people realized for the first time that, in the eyes of the government, their use of the tractor was not that necessary in the economy of the country. So they showed their collective anger on February 18 in the most legitimate way it can be done in a democracy, namely, by voting against the government and voting a new government in.

So long as the opposition members want to devote most of the time in the question period and in their speeches rationalizing the policies which led to their defeat, that is great for us. It means they do not have time to come up with new ideas, new principles, or new concepts or to show that they have learned anything from their defeat. As a matter of fact, one of their most laudable traits, a positive trait, to me, of the minister of finance of the day or the prime minister of the day, was to say, "If we are re-elected, we will bring back the same budget without any change. We have learned nothing. There is nothing