

Oil Substitution Act

the most logical reaction of oil-consuming countries that are trying to protect themselves against foreign controlled price fluctuations? It was to reduce demand in order to reduce consumption and also, and especially, in order to force down the price of oil on the international market.

I remember attending meetings with representatives of the OECD countries in Paris two years ago, where I found that the industrialized countries, in other words, the biggest oil consumers, were trying to align projects in order to try and reduce their dependence on OPEC with respect to oil prices and oil supplies. Debate centred constantly on the strongest and most basic weapon to deal with the anarchy on the oil market, and it was to reduce demand. And that is what most industrialized countries have done, with a great deal of success. We must not forget that in Canada, among the programs that have made a vital contribution towards reducing consumption, we have had the Canadian Home Insulation Program and the Oil Substitution and Conservation Program, in addition to new Canadian standards aimed at reducing the consumption of gas on our highways. This finally produced the degree of co-ordination we have among oil-consuming countries today, and, interestingly, resulted in the present situation where we are seeing a drop in world prices which was, of course, aided and abetted by the arrival on the market of large quantities of North Sea oil. Nevertheless, it is essential that in the years to come, all countries that are big oil consumers introduce policies aimed at controlling oil consumption.

It is unfortunate that this Government should now be trying to terminate these programs before the date on which they are due to expire. I think this is tantamount to abdicating an essential responsibility that all industrialized and oil-consuming countries should have to introduce measures to ensure that world oil consumption is reduced to minimum acceptable levels.

Terminating these programs prematurely will, of course, have other disadvantages. These programs had been very well received by all Canadian consumers. There has been an unending stream of applications for grants at the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources which dispenses the grants. Contractors have backlogs of home insulation jobs and home heating conversions for Canadians who want to convert from oil to gas or other forms of energy. All of this proves that the program has been a tremendous success, and at the same time, that Bill C-24 does not meet the expectations of Canadians. Canadians want these programs to continue, and that is the reason for that unending stream of applications to the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

Mr. Speaker, I represent a riding in downtown Montreal, where average incomes are far from high, where people live in homes that are often between 60 and 100 years old, which are poorly insulated and thus difficult to heat, so that heating bills are high and on top of that, people do not really have the money to pay those bills.

This program is very popular in my part of the country, because it saves people a lot of money. Mr. Speaker, there are old houses in the southern part of Montreal that are not insulated at all, because it was not customary to do so at the time they were built. Today, we find that by bringing these houses up to the insulation standards of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, we are actually cutting heating bills in half. This is of considerable benefit to the people living in these old buildings, in other words, to the consumer.

Another thing—once these houses have been insulated with the help of Government grants, and once heating bills have been reduced, there is an increase in general comfort. These homes have become more comfortable to live in because they are warmer in the winter and better insulated and sealed.

The program has been very successful for the reasons I just mentioned, and Canadian users of the program have now realized that the program was necessary. When Members go back to their ridings on the weekend, people ask them: Fight for this measure as much as you can. The Government must not terminate these programs now. They must be allowed to continue.

That is exactly why our Party is opposed to Bill C-24. We think it would be the wrong decision to make.

We must not forget that the consumer who receives a grant under these programs, who insulates his home or changes over his heating system so as no longer to be dependent on oil, is getting long-term protection—in fact, protection for the lifetime of his home—against rising oil prices. It is an insurance policy. People are aware of the security that insulation or conversion provides.

Mr. Speaker, I have more questions for this Government.

What are we going to do with the enormous gas reserves we have in the West and in the North? They are there. They guarantee us a secure supply of gas for future decades. Why should we not continue to encourage Canadians to convert their heating systems from oil to gas, since we know that as far as liquid oil is concerned, we are trying very hard to find new oil but are having tremendous problems? As for gas, our potential is tremendous, and we should keep on encouraging Canadians to convert to gas.

In the province I represent, we have an abundance of electric power. Why should we sell this power to the U.S. if we can consume it here, once we have converted our heating systems?

● (1240)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is the House ready for the question? The Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Keeper).

[English]

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate. I think