

*Petro-Canada*

role in the petroleum investment picture at a relatively early stage in its life. Do these statements not seem somewhat contradictory, Mr. Speaker? It seems the government has ensured itself of being an accurate forecaster no matter which turn events may take.

The minister speaks of those countries from which we import crude oil, and says each one has its own state oil company. I wonder how many private companies are now allowed to operate in competition with them. Also, I wonder how significantly the people in those countries have benefited from state ownership of the industry. Why should we buy with our tax dollars, even at the minister's so-called reasonable price tag of \$1 billion, something we already have in our possession? I do not understand this logic and I would be grateful if the minister could explain it to me. Am I the only member in this House to whom this kind of logic is completely illogical?

**An hon. Member:** Yes.

**Mr. Elzinga:** Is there any logic in paying out three times the value of a service one already enjoys? Is there any logic in establishing an unnecessary Crown corporation? Is there any logic in creating yet more bureaucracy? Are tax dollars so abundant that we have one billion of them to waste? I think not.

The minister went on to say that his "emphasis on long-term planning is deliberate and necessary". What a lovely ring that phrase "long-term planning" has to it. Nevertheless, the ring sounds rather hollow when the hon. gentleman goes on to assure us that the petroleum venture will be undertaken in the "full realization that hazards and uncertainties await us". Does the government really plan, in the long term, to embark on a venture which is fraught with risk and uncertainty? It sounds very much as though this is the case, bearing in mind that these are the words of the minister himself, presumably the most knowledgeable person in the field of energy, mines and resources. When I hear about long-term planning filled with hazards and uncertainty, I am not very confident about the outcome of that planning. It seems reasonable to assume that long-term planning should have a much more solid base than risk and uncertainty.

I must say I was impressed by the candour of the minister when he warned us that the establishment of a national petroleum company would not likely lead to early and spectacular results in terms of energy development and financial success. It occurs to me that for a billion dollars or more we might have been allowed a few such illusions. After telling us why the change in domestic and international energy affairs made it necessary for the federal government to get into the act, the minister went on to laud private companies. It did not mean, he said, that the government finds that Canada has not been well served by private enterprise in the petroleum industry. To use his words, private companies "have generally worked vigorously to develop our oil and gas resources, to create transportation systems for them and to refine and distribute oil products efficiently." The privately-owned Canadian oil industry, he added, has a good record of technical and managerial innovation.

[Mr. Elzinga.]

● (1650)

If the minister truly believes that private industry has done such a first rate job, why does he feel it necessary now for the government to step in and create another Crown company? Does he really feel that such a corporation can improve on this good record of technical and managerial innovation? The minister says that the government does not feel assured that the private sector can be relied upon to mobilize all the enormous amounts of capital which will be required to secure energy development for long-term Canadian needs. May I ask why he feels that private enterprise cannot be relied upon to do so, especially having given us his glowing account of its past achievements?

When the minister tells us that he believes the majority of Canadians will derive a great sense of pride, satisfaction and confidence in owning a portion of this Canadian industry, is he saying that Canadians prefer to have their industry owned by the government rather than by private enterprise? Is he saying that the Canadian people prefer public ownership? I think he is taking an awful lot for granted if that is how he interprets the preference of the citizens of this country.

The minister should ask the people of Saskatchewan how much pride and confidence they felt when the provincial government took over so much of the industry, with such disastrous results. The losses ran to millions and millions of dollars and these industries either had to be abandoned or turned back to private enterprise in order to make them viable. In the meantime, new industries bypassed Saskatchewan and established themselves elsewhere, unemployment increased and taxes were raised. An exodus of residents of the province then ensued. I would doubt that the people of Saskatchewan felt much satisfaction in that debacle.

If the government wants to get into the role of businessman, it should look closely at its record, past and present. I suggest it is less than efficient in that role. A number of instances of that inefficiency have been pointed out by other members, and if one needed some pretty concrete evidence of the government's success as an employer, one would only have to listen to some of the many hundreds of government employees who have been striking, who are striking and who will be striking. We need only look in our own front yard during the last few weeks to see some concrete evidence of the discontent of many thousands of government employees. They have been right outside the House telling us in a most visible way that their wages did not compare to those being paid to employees in similar job situations in the private sector of the business world.

Of course we want as high an employment rate as possible, with stable prices and little regional disparity in income and living conditions. However, when the government does take a direct stand in the production and distribution of goods and services, the track record is not very glowing. All we need do is take a look at the postal department today. How can the government explain away facts like Air Canada suffering heavy losses while CP Air makes a profit and provides better service on a more restricted budget? Government-operated enterprises have not been renowned for their efficiency, either by way of profits or by way of services. Is it the intention of the