

Excise Tax Act

be doing a great favour to the trucking industry and the agricultural industry and also to the Department of National Revenue. It would certainly streamline and modify the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures that will otherwise have to be followed. I hope the minister will clarify this point so that we can further consider all the amendments we may be advancing to future clauses.

Mr. Benjamin: Madam Chairman, I want to congratulate the hon. member for Red Deer on this amendment and welcome hon. friends to my right back to the fight. I cannot understand why the advisers to the minister did not realize the implications of clause 1 when they were drafting the bill. As a matter of fact, I cannot understand why the minister accepted their advice. The dummy that advised him on this one should be fired tomorrow—even today. The bill exempts farmers and fishermen who, in several of the provinces, use gasoline as described in the amendment—“which has been marked by any dye, agent or other substance under the authority of a provincial statute.”

Since they are exempted already in this legislation, I do not understand why the Minister of Finance and the Minister of National Revenue want them to apply for rebates. Think of the administration costs involved in processing the tens of thousands of applications. Think of the thousands of complaints members of parliament will get from farmers and fishermen if the rebates are late, and the trouble they will have trying to get extra copies of receipts and bills to submit in support of their applications.

All the minister has to do is agree that gasoline as described in the amendment should be exempt from the tax at the point of the 20 refiners and 13 importers. There would then be no necessity for the farmers and fishermen to apply for a rebate on gasoline that has been “marked by any dye, agent or other substance under the authority of a provincial statute.” Alberta and Saskatchewan have these exemptions. I believe this is also the case in British Columbia, Quebec and, I think, Nova Scotia. In any case, five or six provinces have these exemptions and mark the gasoline with a dye agent or other substance.

● (1450)

Why would the minister want people to buy the gas that is exempt, under provincial statute, from gasoline tax, pay the ten cents a gallon excise tax and then turn around and apply for a refund, when he could eliminate all that administrative effort by just accepting the amendment? He would be exempting that gasoline at the source. It seems to me eminent good sense. I do not know why we should try to be so helpful to the government on a bad piece of legislation, but since we are conscientious, hard working members of parliament we will be as helpful as we can to the Minister of Finance.

I would like to hear whatever logical reason the minister can give this committee as to why he would want to unnecessarily duplicate the effort if he could eliminate the necessity for applying for rebates by accepting the amendment. If he is worried, as the hon. member for Timiskaming said, about policing at least five and maybe six or seven of the provinces which have exemptions on marked or dyed gasoline, and already have the machinery in place

[Mr. Mazankowski.]

for policing any violations for bootlegging of purple gas or gas that is marked for some specific purpose, I am sure that he and his officials—the Minister of National Revenue in particular—could arrive very quickly at understandings, agreements or regulations at the federal-provincial level that would include, in the provincial policing of these exemptions, policing pertaining to the excise tax.

In the case of undyed or unmarked gasoline which would be used in a farm truck, when a farmer has other than a farm licence plate and he is doing commercial trucking, he must use gasoline that is unmarked or undyed and he will have to pay the ten cents a gallon. But if he is in a commercial enterprise as spelled out in the legislation, he will be eligible to apply for and get a rebate when he satisfies the Minister of National Revenue that he has provided sufficient and proper evidence. So there is no problem on that score.

A farmer who has a truck with a commercial licence rather than a farm licence plate, and buys orange or red gas for it, is still eligible for the rebate because he is in a commercial enterprise and he hauls grain, cattle or agricultural products for someone else, not for his own farming operation. He is treated in the same way as any other commercial or business enterprise. But for the purposes of the farmer's own farming operation, whether it is his tractor, half-ton truck or his bigger truck, by exempting purple gas or any marked or dyed gas the minister will have eliminated the necessity for applying for rebates. We must remember that there are over 300,000 family farm operations in Canada, and goodness knows how many tens of thousands of fishermen who may be using purple, marked or dyed gasoline in their boats.

I am sure the Minister of National Revenue could forget about adding the 200 or 300 people to his administrative staff to process the applications and send out cheques for rebates if this amendment were adopted, unless of course one of the purposes of the bill is to help solve unemployment. But if that is one of the purposes, the minister should say so. Perhaps we would have some sympathy for this measure, although I do not think we would even then. Surely to goodness, if for no other reason than administrative good sense and efficiency, and to obviate what I predict will be a whole host of letters to members of parliament who have farmers, fishermen, or both, in their ridings to equal the number of unemployment insurance letters that we get in the middle of winter, reading, “I applied for a rebate on August such-and-such and it is now January and I have not received it. Why can't I get a rebate on my boat or truck?”

The minister should ignore the idiots in his department who drafted this bill and accept an amendment that is eminently sensible. Perhaps the minister could stand up quickly and say he will accept the amendment and thus shut me up, at least on this amendment. If there are some hon. members in this place who are still in a hurry, accepting this amendment would speed things up a little, at least on this clause.

Madam Chairman, I submit to the minister very seriously that the thrust of the legislation he has put before us, even though I disagree with it, can be better served if he eliminates the need for applying for rebates for those who are eligible for exemption. It seems to me that it is so