

**Senator Roblin:** Honourable senators, as I have not yet read the statement, I do not believe that I should make too extensive a comment on it. But, naturally, if I get the news that the Premier of Ontario has a constructive role to play in the negotiations, as I am sure he has, then it is very welcome. We will need all the help we can get to devise a plan that fits the needs of the Canadian people, and undoubtedly that gentleman can be an important contributor. I would point out to my honourable friend that there is at the present time a meeting of officials who are seeking a way to define the relative roles that the spokesmen for the federal and provincial governments will play in this whole procedure, and I am hoping that that will be agreed upon before long. No doubt Premier Peterson's views will be closely examined when those recommendations are being compiled.

**Senator MacEachen:** Honourable senators, I thank the Leader of the Government for his comment, and give him notice that I intend to return to the subject tomorrow. I draw to his attention that the report to which I referred appeared in the *Toronto Star* of February 18. Possibly the Leader of the Government will have an opportunity to read that report; I may then direct my questions to him on the subject tomorrow.

**Senator Roblin:** I thank my honourable friend for his notice. I certainly will read the report and if it is possible to comment on it further tomorrow, I will be pleased to do so.

## ENERGY

### OIL PRICING

**Hon. H. A. Olson:** Honourable senators, I should like to ask the Leader of the Government a question, which is a continuation of the questions that I have been asking for some days, in the faint hope, perhaps, that the government will assume its responsibility and have some "made in Canada" policies rather than simply standing idly by and watching an important sector, namely, the energy sector—the gas and oil sector—becoming subject only to political decisions that are made outside of this country; and inasmuch as the March futures for crude oil slipped below \$15 earlier today, down to \$14.77—I believe the figure may have gone even lower since then—it means that the gross returns from sales of crude oil are now below 50 per cent of what they were three months ago. Therefore, I ask the Leader of the Government: Can I give some hope to those people who are vitally involved in this sector that the government will soon face up to its responsibility?

**Hon. Duff Roblin (Leader of the Government):** Honourable senators, my honourable friend should take note of the fact that often there are two ways of looking at a problem. In terms of the oil industry in Canada, the point of view that he is putting forward reflects a very serious problem to them—there is no question about that—but when one looks at other sectors of the economy—indeed, with our trading partners, on whom we depend for so much—the changing price of oil is a bonanza. It promises to reduce inflation; it promises to reduce the rate of interest; and it promises to increase the gross national

product of those nations that are favourably situated in this matter. So it is not altogether a matter of gloom and doom. I admit quite freely that the problem is different in the province of Alberta. I suggest that my honourable friend wants a made in Canada policy. He had a made in Canada policy three or four years ago when the price of oil started to go up, and I do not think that anybody now thinks that that was a very good idea. Perhaps my honourable friend does, but most people, I think, would agree that it was not a good idea to try to isolate Canada's economic structure in this important matter from what was going on in the wide world. It did not work very well. As I said to him the other day, and I guess I will continue to say to him for some time, because, obviously, he is going to pursue this matter every day, I am not at all satisfied that government intervention in this matter is the correct course to follow at the present time. It is certainly not the course that is being followed at present in other important oil producing countries such as the one to the south of us. Therefore, I think we should be cautious before we accept his invitation to intervene in this particular matter.

● (1410)

**Senator Olson:** Honourable senators, I thank the honourable Leader of the Government for his answer because, whether it was "advertent" or inadvertent, the revelations from that were substantially greater than anything we have had to date. I remember that only a day or two ago I asked him very directly if the government viewed these rapidly declining oil prices to be economically positive for Canada. Of course, the leader has indicated today that at least he, if not a larger number of members of the government, believe that there are a large number of positive economic considerations flowing from the declining oil prices. I am sure that the oil industry will be keenly interested to know that that is the kind of thinking to be found within the government.

However, the other part of the answer—and I did not ask the leader because I know that it would lead to a highly unsatisfactory answer—is whether or not the government intends to re-instate all the provisions of the National Energy Program as outlined in October 1980. I am not so foolish as to ask such a question, nor was I asking it. However, it seems to me that government policy at the federal level could include made in Canada policies that do not necessarily parallel what was involved in the previous policy, and that is what I am asking. Will this government face up to its responsibility and try to do something that will show respect for the fact that one sector—an important sector—of our economy will be in very serious difficulty unless some change is made? Will those changes be made by the people who are supposed to be leading this country, or is the government simply going to stand by and let political decisions made outside the country determine what the future of that sector will be?

**Senator Roblin:** Honourable senators, I must go back to the first part of my honourable friend's question when he adverted to the general effect of changing oil prices and to my statement. He will recall that I told him a few days ago that in looking at this matter there were pros and cons, that some