

Government Orders

privatization a couple of weeks ago during which Petro-Canada was not even addressed.

Mr. McDermid: She was invited and I can give you her name.

Mr. Harvey (Edmonton East): Her name? His name was Norm.

In any event, I wish to turn now to the pertinent question before us, which is the second reading of the bill for Petro-Canada's privatization.

For the first time in more than a decade Canadians are experiencing an oil price shock. I should note that about six years ago Albertans started experiencing an oil price shock, but it was a different kind of shock. It was a collapse in the price which, in fact, cost somewhere between 25,000 and 40,000 Albertans their jobs. As that was the other kind of price shock, the price shock of a declining price, the rest of the country did not notice much.

Now we are experiencing the generally accepted definition kind of oil price shock, that is, prices are rising rapidly and now exceed 60 cents a litre virtually everywhere. Furthermore, most observers expect they will keep on rising. Many Canadians fear, not without cause, that unscrupulous multinational energy companies will take advantage of the current situation to reap windfall profits at the expense of Canadian consumers.

As well, it is now public knowledge that this House's own Standing Committee on Environment is about to present a report recommending a 20 per cent cutback in CO₂ emissions from their 1988 level by the year 2005.

I know of no one who believes such a target can be met solely through the gentle workings of the market. Virtually every sane person is of the opinion that to achieve such an essential goal, government intervention is required.

And what is the government's response in the face of these two major new elements in Canadian society?

This Conservative government is going to privatize Petro-Canada. What is more, it is going to sell it off at a huge loss to the Canadian taxpayer and it is going to increase foreign ownership of the Canadian energy industry in the bargain.

Mr. McDermid: Wrong.

Mr. Harvey (Edmonton East): Far from retaining a public enterprise that can ensure Canadians are treated fairly in the energy marketplace, the government is going to toss our one remaining Canadian major to the same rich and powerful few who control the rest of the industry.

Furthermore, it is going to throw away what is potentially one of our best vehicles for positive environmental action for moving Canada away from being one of the world's most irresponsible wasters of energy toward a more environmentally responsible energy future.

Welcome to the 1990s, Mr. Speaker.

Why should Canadians fight the privatization of Petro-Canada? What does it mean to Canadians?

Let me put the matter this way. During the 1973 oil crisis, New Democrats argued long and hard that the country needed a national oil company to serve the interests of Canadians. In effect, we argued that since there was no bus service, in other words there was no public utility supplying gasoline to Canadians, and taxis were too expensive, in other words relying on other mostly foreign concerns to meet our needs was getting very costly, we needed to buy a car of our own, our own oil company.

Faced with widespread concern for energy security during the Middle East oil crisis of the early 1970s, the Liberals were forced to agree. The country got its car, Petro-Canada. Unfortunately the Liberals, manipulated nationalist sentiment and added shiny chrome and paint and a lot of expensive gadgets.

But the real tragedy of the Liberal government was that it could seldom muster the courage to take this new car out on to the road and when it did, it was quite clear that it did not really know where to drive it.

Then came the Mulroney Conservatives. They are blinded by their marketplace religion, the public interest be damned. They pathetically place virtually all of their faith in the magical goodwill of huge powerful American oil companies, most of which have a documented history of gouging Canadians.

The Conservatives have always hated Petro-Canada and their policy now is the equivalent of yanking open the hood on that car, slashing the hoses, snapping off the spark plugs, and banging on the engine with a sledge hammer.