

*Excise Tax Act*

which produces a very palatable wine. We no longer have to drink Cawtaba after which you will tackle anything or want to climb a pole. I think all hon. members are sympathetic to the reduction in that tax, again allowing good wine to be the basis for a satisfactory repast. It has been said much better by poets, but I want to say it is a requirement for a good meal.

● (2040)

For many people in my area it is a requirement that they have gasoline for their automobiles. The amount of driving could be reduced with something that has been kicked around in this debate, namely, public transportation. Maybe the price of gasoline should be two dollars a gallon. Maybe we should not be using gasoline at all. Maybe we should be using our diminishing reserves of petroleum for purposes other than motoring. But this fits into a different category from the ten cents increase which the minister tells us will be used as an equalization payment. That argument sounds good; he says the payment will help provide equalization as between east and west. But there is no equalization within the various areas.

Take the area in which I live. Gasoline is ten cents cheaper 100 miles south of me and ten cents cheaper 100 miles to the north.

**Mr. Lawrence:** Beer is the same price, though.

**Mr. Peters:** I hear one hon. member asking why.

**Mr. Lawrence:** No. I said beer was the same price.

**Mr. Peters:** The reason is that there has not been a price war in the middle. There has been a price war at both ends but none in the middle, so the oil companies are able to take full advantage of their position by maintaining a fairly high price.

I note that funds have been provided to Petro-Can, a corporation which conceivably could play an important role in the equalization of gasoline prices. This agency could buy an interest in the seven major oil companies or, better, it could buy one of them and set the price by competition in the distribution of gasoline. If the minister wanted to take this course he would have to provide a suitable amount of money to enable Petro-Can to go into business. But he did not. I understand the agency has been financed with a sum of \$100 million and I do not think it would be possible to buy many retail distribution centres for that. A much larger amount would be required.

Some hon. members, particularly those who support the government, are not really interested in all this. These are days of majority government. When we have a majority Liberal government, the cabinet is always right. On the other hand, when there is a minority government, the cabinet has to look seriously at all these things and consider all the implications.

In a minority situation the Liberal Party caucus has a great deal of influence, but when the government has an over-all majority one does not find many backbenchers disagreeing. I was surprised when the hon. member for Welland (Mr. Railton) got up the other day and made a speech. That speech made it almost a certainty that he will never become a parliamentary secretary—almost a cer-

[Mr. Peters.]

tainty that he will never get any promotion. He has to weigh a consideration of that kind against whether or not he will be elected in his own riding on the strength of the representations he makes. I give him full marks for standing up and discussing a subject in which he is interested, one in which he has played a considerable role. I think he had an obligation to do so. Then there is the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River. We shall probably find out more about that situation.

**An hon. Member:** Tomorrow.

**Mr. Peters:** I don't think we shall find out much tomorrow; I believe it will be some time before we get any more information.

I make the assertion that backbenchers in the government party are not really exercising the determination they say they are, that they are not really making any representations on behalf of their constituents on this important subject—the imposition of an excise tax on gasoline. They are doing it exactly as they always do under a majority government. Frankly I believe the hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River is an exception because he comes from Northern Ontario and has a specific interest. But the rest are sitting on their hands and going along with whatever the cabinet decides. It is a little like General Bullmoose and General Motors—whatever is good for General Motors is good for the country.

It seems to me the minister has a point in his favour if he can extend these concessions he says he intends to make to self-employed people, doctors, farmers, owners of commercial enterprises, fishermen and others, though we are talking here about a sizeable number of people in a diversity of occupations. If we, federally, can make this kind of exemption, why cannot we at least extend it to working people who use their automobiles to drive to their places of employment?

**Mr. Béchard:** Are you implying that farmers and fishermen don't work?

**Mr. Peters:** I am not saying that farmers or fishermen don't work. But I am saying that there has always been a hassle when it came to commercial fishermen and farmers getting provincial rebates on the gasoline they used. I do not think farmers, for example, have ever got a rebate from the federal government before. If the minister intends to set up a bureaucracy to deal with this sort of thing then at least he should be willing to extend its activities so as to cover the case of ordinary working people. Frankly, I do not know how this could be done easily. I do not know how he will deal with all these applications from private individuals—farmers, fishermen, self-employed. It has always been very difficult in the case of the province of Ontario, and the provinces are considerably closer to the people than is the federal government.

All of us in Ontario remember purple gas—the gas was coloured because it carried an exemption, and it was not supposed to be used in the wrong vehicle. But we are setting up a huge bureaucracy to cover this ten cents tax rebate, and while I think this is the wrong way of doing things I suppose we might as well go as far as to exempt those who need gasoline to go to work. It would not be