

from the prairie provinces against the proposed two-cent increase in the price of gasoline, effective to-day, would the government be prepared to reconsider its action and rescind the order permitting such an increase?

Right Hon. J. L. ILSLEY (Minister of Finance): This is an increase in the maximum price which may be charged for gasoline, and was the result of an order made by the wartime prices and trade board. However, since the withdrawal about January 1 of part of the subsidies paid on importations of petroleum it has been well known that this increase would necessarily follow.

I should explain to the hon. member that the subsidies were by no means entirely withdrawn; that from now on currently we are paying \$3,500,000 a year in subsidies which all goes in reduction of the price of petroleum products in the prairie provinces, and that no subsidies are payable in respect of similar products in other parts of Canada. It was our feeling that if we are ever to reduce our subsidies with a view to eventually getting rid of all of them, to continue to pay very large sums for the subsidies which would be necessary in this particular area would not be justified. Therefore there was a partial withdrawal of the subsidy resulting in this price increase.

I have had so much correspondence about this matter and so much consideration has been given to it already that I am afraid I cannot promise the hon. member any reconsideration.

GOVERNOR GENERAL'S SPEECH

The house resumed from Friday, March 15, consideration of the motion of Mr. Fernand Viau for an address to His Excellency the Governor General in reply to his speech at the opening of the session.

Mr. JOHN BRACKEN (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday last His Excellency read to us the government programme for the session. On Friday a motion was made for its approval. The debate on that motion affords hon. members an opportunity to discuss not only what has been outlined in the speech from the throne but any other matter that may be regarded as of importance. But before I proceed with the subject matter of my remarks may I refer to the fact that since we last met here two among our members have been signally honoured by His Majesty the King: the Minister of Finance (Mr. Ilesley) and the Minister of Justice (Mr. St. Laurent) have been made members of the imperial privy council. I wish in all sincerity to extend to them both my most hearty congratulations. I know of no two men more worthy of that high honour, and I know of no honour

[Mr. Zaplitny.]

the bestowal of which has been more acceptable to or more generously received by the Canadian people.

My remarks this afternoon will not be brief.

An hon. MEMBER: Hear, hear.

Mr. BRACKEN: I am glad I have one supporter. Before I get through I shall be making recommendations that the debate on the speech from the throne be shortened, but to-day I am not going to practise what I preach, because I expect it will take about two hours to persuade this house that it should shorten the debate.

First I shall touch upon the subject matters mentioned in the speech from the throne; then I shall deal rather briefly with the business side of government. After some discussion of the procedure in this house, I shall refer to a matter that has been of very great public interest in this country during the last few weeks, namely, the espionage charges. I shall close with a discussion of foreign relations, a question which has an important bearing upon our success in dealing with our own domestic problems.

The speech from the throne indicates that a high level of employment is the fundamental aim of the government. I am sure it is the aim also of every hon. member in this house. But, is the government achieving it?

In these days it is the duty of the modern state so to organize its economy that every individual able to work and desiring to work shall have an income from his efforts commensurate with his contribution and adequate for a reasonable standard of living.

In spite of all its promises to give full employment the government is failing to do so. The records of the bureau of statistics indicate that as of the middle of February last there were more than 250,000 unplaced applicants registered with the national employment service across Canada. The number of live claims for unemployment insurance was 145,000. The number of unemployed veterans drawing out-of-work benefits was 37,000. In addition there are still in the armed forces large numbers of men not engaged in productive service, and there is an unknown number of unemployed who are not registered. In these days of astronomical figures these amounts may not impress this house, but when I say that in the thirties, in the ten years of the worst depression this nation ever knew, the average number unemployed was about 450,000, these figures do become impressive. The plain fact is that Canada now has an unemployment problem of serious proportions on its hands.

The whole reconversion programme has bogged down. It is not a reconversion programme; it is a status quo programme, a