

*Energy*

when we could be even more productive than we are in the food and agricultural industry in this country. As I have mentioned, the farmers and the people involved in agriculture have improved their productivity much more than has any other sector of the economy; but it could be even better if the government would help by giving direction. I thank our lucky stars that the farmers have been so devoted to the work which they do in producing food for this country. I fear that very soon we will see beef producers and grain producers going on strike and withholding their products from the market. They might do so in an effort to get some kind of reasonable return for the produce which they are turning out to feed Canadian people and to sell abroad to help reduce our trade deficit. This is one of the few sectors of the economy that is more than pulling its weight. I think the government is a bit hard on that sector of the economy with the increased prices for petroleum products and taxes it has imposed. The situation has become very sad indeed.

● (2040)

Since the Liberals came back to power there have been seven increases in the price of oil. During the election campaign they claimed their increases would be less than those proposed by the Conservatives, and I am sure that promise helped them get elected. The people of Canada relied on that promise. I think I accepted it at one time, but I have learned a great deal about the Liberals in the few months I have been a member of this House of Commons. I know that you cannot rely on the word of political parties at election time.

It is time that the federal government indicated to the people where all this is going to end or when we can expect an agreement on an energy policy in Canada. I do not know of any such agreement at the present time.

Although the National Energy Program is a good idea, it has been bogged down for quite some time. I think we should be gaining more control over the petroleum industry in Canada and, indeed, that was the intent of the National Energy Program. But the federal government's approach has turned it into a disaster. We will not reach energy self-sufficiency in the next decade; indeed, at the rate we are going, we will not reach energy self-sufficiency within the next century, unless something is done to turn things around and give an opportunity to oil companies, provincial governments and members of this House to have consultations with the government. Indeed, in the debates in this House, members have offered good advice on how we could design a more effective policy for Canada.

These problems will plague us for years to come unless this arrogant Liberal government begins to listen to the people. Unless something is done now, we will not have a realistic energy policy for self-sufficiency in the next decade or, indeed, the next century.

The government committed itself to keeping prices under control but it has not succeeded. Increase has followed increase. High interest rates are fuelling inflation and the costs being tacked on to petroleum products are aggravating the situation. I have great sympathy for people living in remote

northern communities and for people engaged in agriculture who have to absorb these costs. They cannot pass them on to anyone. A member of the Conservative party who spoke previously said that the rate of bankruptcies amongst farmers is the highest it has been in the history of the country. That certainly indicates the problems that exist at the grassroots. The government should be paying attention to this and not just take whatever advice sounds palatable to it.

I realize it is confusing for the government when even the economists cannot agree. If we had ten economists in a room and asked for their professional advice, we would quite likely get seven, eight or even ten different opinions on how to solve the problems that face us. Fuel prices are not the only problem; there are many others, such as high interest rates. I do not hold the government totally at fault but I should like to see it take some new directions instead of just trying to run the old systems more efficiently. Perhaps some of the systems that are already in place could be changed, or some of the alternatives that have been recommended could be adopted.

Our committee worked long and hard through last summer and into this year on the new alternative energy report. I hope the government will seriously consider this attractive report and its recommendations for research and development so that alternatives to the hydrocarbons and nuclear power systems on which we are so dependent can be developed. I am sure we could have a wide range of alternatives. At this point we should be trying to establish the infrastructure so that we can make use of such things as hydrous ammonia in some farm machinery and in agriculture and so that we could build more solar efficient homes.

Until this comes about, we remain at the mercy of the large oil companies such as Imperial Oil, Shell, Gulf and Texaco. We have to pay homage to these companies and pamper them because we are at their mercy. We do not have anything else to fall back on. As I said, earlier, I had hoped that Petro-Canada would provide us with an alternative, but that is not happening.

I know that my time is running out, Mr. Speaker, and I will wrap up my remarks now. I had other things to say about the increasing price of petroleum products. Whether this is necessary is not the question—I think all Canadians accept that some increase in the price of oil is necessary, but we would like to know how high they will go.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but the time allotted to him has expired.

**Mr. John Evans (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, it is with interest that I rise to participate in the debate tonight on the opposition motion that deals with a condemnation of the government for "unnecessarily raising petroleum taxes and thereby burdening all consumers, but particularly consumers of heating oil, with prices far in excess of those promised without providing relief to those hardest hit and least able to cope."