

Energy Supplies

second reading and in the debate on motions at the report stage, but then he capped it off with a dumb closure motion, when the Tories obviously had already caved in and chickened out. The whole exercise was totally unnecessary as we probably could have saved a day or two in any case.

In 1973 we had something of an energy crisis. We heard a great deal about it from all sides of the House and, of course, from all over the world. We were reminded very forcefully at that time about our vulnerability in the supply of oil. Although it was referred to as an energy crisis then, and to some degree it is now, both occasions have given us the opportunity to re-examine our dependence on foreign multinational oil companies, and to re-examine our dependence on other producing countries.

During the previous energy crisis the NDP had the balance of power in Ottawa. We forced—and we take credit for it and pride in it—the Liberal government to set up Petro-Canada as a Crown corporation. That government really did not believe in it. There has never been a Crown corporation set up by any so-called private enterprise party in which that party believed. The Liberals did it, however, on occasion to bail out some bankrupt friends, or as a last resort, desperation effort, but not because they believed there was any intrinsic value in a public corporation that is publicly and accountably owned and controlled by the public through its parliament. They really did not believe in that, but they did that because they had no other choice. They could not rely on the private sector, the multinational corporations, to serve the interests of the Canadian people, or to put the interests of our nation ahead of their own corporate interests. That was the case then and it is the case now.

Since then, however, the Liberals have not used Petro-Canada as an instrument of national policy as the situation then and now demands. While the government has been paying some lip service, has made some gestures, and has gone through some motions in respect of Petro-Canada, the Conservatives on the other hand say they will scrap it if they form the next government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Benjamin: I am glad to hear some one or more of them indicate agreement. There are arguments for and against private enterprise, and arguments for and against public enterprise, but surely even when we think we are winning the argument, or losing the argument, there are times when we are faced with a situation in which we grudgingly have to admit that when a multinational corporation can endanger our nationhood and undermine the security of petroleum supplies in our country, the arguments for public control and public enterprise in the interests of the nation as a whole have to outweigh the arguments for private enterprise. I use that word advisedly because they are not private, they are very ingrown and select; they are more than private, they are nation states in the costumes of private free-enterprise corporations.

[Mr. Benjamin.]

This is an obsession against some kind of public endeavour, at a time when Petro-Canada is the only major oil company in Canada not foreign owned. It is the only major endeavour—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Benjamin: I see the hon. member for Battle River (Mr. Malone) shaking his head. I know what he is thinking. He is thinking about those little, minuscule independents drilling holes in the ground, carrying out geophysical surveys and what not. I have been very closely associated with them and I know that when it comes to international petroleum operations, other than Petro-Canada, we do not have a private corporation in the petroleum industry that is Canadian owned. The ones we have do not count for anything in international petroleum circles. The major petroleum operations in this country are not Canadian. They operate under the direction and in support of their head offices in their home countries. They cannot do otherwise, and I do not blame them for that.

If you or I, Mr. Speaker, were the head of Esso or the Canadian sector of Gulf or Texaco we would not act any differently, particularly if that is what we were paid to do.

Those who did not learn from the history of 1973 are re-living it again in 1979. Social unrest in Iran has resulted in Canada being denied over 100,000 barrels of oil per day which we normally import from that country. There is nothing new about that. If one thinks back to 1958 and to 1963 one will remember a couple of revolutions in Iraq, the fourth largest oil producer. There were warnings sounded then, warnings from people in the private enterprise oil industry in North America. This has occurred in country after country, either violently or peacefully; unrest and revolution.

Exxon, the giant that owns Imperial, announced it would divert 25,000 barrels of oil per day, a piddling amount in the total picture, that had been coming from Venezuela for allocation through Esso to Canada. If Esso, the child of Exxon, was a good Canadian corporate citizen, and if Exxon had any thought about having its child act like a good corporate citizen in Canada, the problem would not have arisen in the first place. But they, quite naturally, are going to protect their own interests, the interests of their customers in the United States, and the interests of the United States before they will consider the interests of the customers of their child in Canada.

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The behaviour of this multinational oil corporation headquartered outside our boundaries is quite natural, and I have never been under any illusions in that regard, but perhaps my friend from Battle River has. It is the very nature of the animal.

What it means is that Canadians, whether it was through the minuscule Canadian companies or whether it was through this parliament and the government, were left helpless, gasping for air. It meant that the Canadians in Atlantic Canada and eastern Quebec would have their oil supplies cut, not by some Canadian oil company—it was not western Canadian oil—but under the direction of a foreign corporation headquartered in