

Oral Questions

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Trudeau: I concede to the hon. member for Northumb-erland that that was a bad start, Madam Speaker. My recol-lection of the calculation I made to reach this statement about "less than half" was that the Tory budget proposed an increase of \$4 for the year 1980—a \$4 increase per barrel in the price of petroleum at the wellhead—and that the 18-cent a gallon excise tax was the equivalent of \$5, I believe.

An hon. Member: Six.

Mr. Trudeau: Closer to \$6 I am told, so if you add half—

An hon. Member: Half?

Mr. Trudeau: Yes, half. If you add five and four, you arrive at nine.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: The Leader of the New Democratic Party can now tell me what is half of nine.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: I will tell him, Madam Speaker. It is 4½. Our price, I made quite clear—and that has been the position of this party all along—would be less than \$4. Therefore, it is less than half of nine.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister has just proved that he can do grade one arithmetic—but that does not take us very far. On a serious commitment, he said the price rise will be less than 32 cents per gallon. That is what the Prime Minister promised. Now he is clearly abandoning that commitment.

● (1430)

On the second question, also in terms of an election promise, the Prime Minister said many times in the campaign that if elected there would be no increase in the excise tax on gasoline. Specifically, on January 3 in this city, he said and I quote:

We will not raise the gas tax and will implement fairer ways to deal with increased energy costs.

Outside the House yesterday, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources said:

The Liberals have never said there will be no increase in the excise tax.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: He indicated, indeed, that the government is now considering an excise tax increase. Would the Prime Minister tell us whether, at least, he is going to keep his commitment on excise tax?

Mr. Trudeau: As to the first part of the question, I would remind the hon. member that his question was that I had said "less than half". Am I departing from that? I have just demonstrated to him that my "less than half" was a commitment we have kept and are intending to keep.

I do not know what the exact price will be yet, but it is not going to be \$9; it will be less than half of \$9. So I am repeating that to him. As to what the price will be in the future, it will depend, of course, on the negotiations conducted by the minister with the various—

Some hon. Members: Excise tax.

Mr. Trudeau: On the excise tax, it was pointed out to me during the campaign by several interviewers that we already had an excise tax. I said, "Yes, of course we have an excise tax; we brought it in to pay the transfer payments to the five eastern provinces". So we are not against an excise tax, and I made this quite clear during the campaign. What we are against is the 18-cent excise tax that this budget was bringing in.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister is factually wrong on both counts. I quoted where he said there would be no increase in the excise tax.

Mr. Trudeau: And that is what the Speech from the Throne said.

Mr. Broadbent: Yet the minister, outside the House yesterday, said they are considering an increase in the excise tax.

Mr. Lalonde: Not this year.

Mr. Broadbent: In reply to the first question the Prime Minister was referring to a price per gallon increase. He said it would be less than 32 cents per gallon—which he has just taken back.

Mr. Trudeau: No.

Mr. Broadbent: It is going to be less than 32 cents a gallon? All right. The last question I have for the Prime Minister is this: During the campaign he complained about the oil companies getting too much of the revenue coming in for our oil and gas resources. Considering that the profit figures released on the weekend show an average increase for the Big Six of 102 per cent in the first quarter, I should like to ask whether he will at least live up to that commitment to do something about excessive profits in the oil industry and force these companies to treat the consumer in Canada with a little more respect.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Trudeau: Once again, on the first part of the hon. member's question, I made a commitment during the campaign which is repeated in the Speech from the Throne: "My ministers do not intend to impose an 18-cent increase in the excise tax on transportation fuels."