

Let me read into the record a few short paragraphs from what was said before the committee, and to facilitate cultural communication let me do so in my second language:

[*Translation*]

MR. HAWKES: That is correct. But you are a member of Cabinet. You give us as your excuse in here that there is no money, and I say there is lots of money, \$70 billion, \$80 billion is being spent. It is a question of priorities. I believe members of all sides of this committee would prefer to see money in the voluntary sector; prefer to see money in hospitals, rather than money into service stations—

MADAM BÉGIN: No. I am sorry. I will stop you right here.

MR. HAWKES: —and that I think is where the government is going wrong.

MADAM BÉGIN: Job protection for me is key and comes first, and that is job protection.

MR. HAWKES: Buying service stations is job protection?

MADAM BÉGIN: Yes. I am very sorry, but making sure that a company continues happens to be called job protection.

[*English*]

That is a quotation from the evidence before the Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs on December 7. The Minister told the Committee that the Government's priority was to create or protect Canadian jobs. The comments relate to the use of a Crown corporation to purchase service stations at a cost of \$650 million. I refer to the purchase by Petro-Canada of British Petroleum. The Minister indicated it was the Government's choice to purchase these existing service stations rather than provide more money for the support of families, senior citizens and medical care. She said the Government was doing this to protect jobs. Where is the evidence that jobs needed protection in the area of service stations? Where is the evidence that the purchase by Petro-Canada will, in fact, protect those jobs which were not threatened in the first place? Surely that is a distorted sense of priority.

Day after day during the Question Period we have heard the Minister of Finance say the Government is going to spend \$1.8 billion on job creation. I suggest the Government could have spent this \$650 million on job creation had it not purchased these service stations. The money could have been put into job-creation projects, used for pension increases or to increase Family Allowances. Instead the Government purchased these existing service stations at this time when we are experiencing a \$24 billion deficit. Minister after Minister has stood in this Chamber and told us the Government does not have the money to do those things that are socially correct and just. This perversity of stubbornness boggles the mind.

A few days following that statement in committee by the Minister I handed out a sheet to all Hon. Members which indicated a hidden subsidy to Petro-Canada last year of \$512 million. That hidden subsidy does not appear in the Main Estimates. That amount was given to this one Crown Corporation so its executives could fly first class and its employees could have plush offices with thick carpets and fancy new equipment. There are enough savings to be found from that one Crown Corporation to make this Bill unnecessary. The Government would not even have to consider cutting the pensions of senior Canadians because sufficient control of that

Crown Corporation would provide enough savings to the Government.

• (1650)

The Auditor General has told us about several hundred other Crown corporations that are out of control. We can find specific and clear subsidy to those Crown corporations in the Main Estimates which amounts to approximately \$2,000 million. Yet we are debating a piece of legislation that proposes to take a few dollars from the pensioners' pockets and make it harder for them to buy nutritious food or enjoy any kind of recreation. It is asking seniors to make the sacrifice and lead the fight. It is focusing its attention on making a saving which will amount to \$100 million a year at the most. In the meantime, there are \$2,000 million in subsidies to Crown corporations alone. The logic of the Government is perverse.

In terms of economics, the Minister is making a spirited defence about the need for pensioners to lead the fight on inflation and be soldiers in the war against inflation. She stood in her place some 20 minutes ago to say that inflation is at 9.8 per cent. While we are pleased to see inflation coming down, it is decreasing even before the six and five cap is being put on pensions and Family Allowances and other benefits. Inflation is coming down because there is a surplus of money which people are not borrowing. Jobs are not being created and people are not buying cars, furniture or homes. Consumer confidence has been destroyed. There is a surplus of goods which is causing inflation to come down. Since inflation is decreasing before the six and five, why do we need it? Why is it necessary to attack pensioners and families? The Minister's argument that this is a necessary element in the attack on inflation is destroyed by her own admission that inflation is coming down when none of these caps exist.

After we discuss this Bill today and tomorrow and then go home for Christmas, surely the delay before we return gives the Government an opportunity to reconsider these measures. It simply does not need to bring back the Bill before the House, and then we can proceed as we should with full indexation for pensions and Family Allowances for those people who live on or near the poverty line. These are the people all Members of Parliament should be concerned about. The solution to the majority of their problems is for the Government simply to do nothing and let the Bills die. It can make use of the energy of its backbenchers and its Cabinet Members to review the \$2,000 million subsidy to Crown corporations, the hidden subsidy of \$512 million to Petro-Canada that does not appear on the books and review the expenditure pattern of the Government. It will find large amounts of money which it can use to help the people in this country who need it and take that money from those who waste it and spend it unproductively.

I hope the Government and the backbenchers of the Government Party will reconsider its intentions during its caucus meeting tomorrow with respect to these Bills. The Government can find the money elsewhere; it does not need to take it from the pockets of pensioners and families.