

Mr. Muir: Members of the Liberal Party have said they have the right of God or the right of Allah to govern, and that only they can govern, no one else.

In the coal mines of Cape Breton we once had 6,000 employed; now the number is down to 3,000. There is no reason why we cannot look forward to a work force numbering an additional 1,000 coal miners, in view of the present cost of competitive energy alternatives. It has been my contention for some years that the rail operation at Sydney and between Sydney and Truro requires drastic overhaul. Yesterday the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) spoke—I enjoyed listening to him, although I disagree with some of the things he said—of the great speech which the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) made in Cornwall and his speech in Toronto regarding rapid urban transportation and assistance for transportation. These are just Liberal promises; nothing has come of them.

This assistance could be used, for instance, in Cape Breton where the railway tracks should be relocated outside the city of Sydney. In that way the present bottlenecks within the city would be eliminated and there would be a tremendous saving in the long run for the Canadian nation. Work of this kind has been done here in Ottawa and it could be done in Sydney if the government wanted to get the job done.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): We have a different kind of member of parliament.

Mr. Muir: It seems strange that almost anything can be done in Hull, Ottawa, Toronto or Montreal, but when it comes to the Atlantic provinces, northern Ontario and a number of other places, the money cannot be found. Money is always found for the central strip in our nation. Action of the kind I mentioned by the CNR would provide much needed employment immediately. It would provide work for the steel plants and it would result in further modernization of the Sydney area, which would bring long-term benefits both from the environmental and the beautification point of view.

The minister indicated that he hopes the ten cents per gallon tax will result in the conservation of our oil supplies. For most Canadians it will mean nothing more than an additional expense, because most people in this nation consider the car a necessity and they will continue to drive their cars. This will cost them more because of the increase in the price of fuel. Since many people live some distance from their place of employment, it will cost them more to get to and from work. As a result, these workers will say, "We must have more money to pay for the higher cost of gas. To get the money we must negotiate, and if we do not get it we will go on strike". Indeed, this must be done so often under this government.

If the minister wishes to help conserve oil, why does he not urge the government to undertake the reconstruction of the CN roadbed between Sydney and Truro? I am sure the minister is familiar with Truro. That is the place to which he went at one time to make his famous speech damning the proposals of the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield). On the road to Damascus he became converted and later implemented everything that the Leader of the Opposition had proposed. He stole the ideas of the Leader of the Opposition. Now, however, he is

Excise Tax Act

forced to put in these crazy programs. As I said, he is getting orders from up high but no support from his colleagues. This is unfortunate. I feel really sorry for the minister. I think this is his last budget. In fact, it may be the last of many things for him.

An hon. Member: Let us hope so.

Mr. Muir: If we have more budgets like this we could not stand it. If the minister really wants to help conserve oil, why does he not recommend that the government undertake the reconstruction of the CN tracks between Sydney and Truro? The line between these two junctions is as twisted as the minds of those who produced this budget and this ten cent tax. Those who are forced to take the train between Sydney and Truro face a ride two hours longer than it should be. If the roadbed were reconstructed, straightened, and a double track put in—that is the important thing—it would have the effect of conserving oil because many more people would opt to travel by train. That would mean a real saving in oil and it would also provide work for the unemployed in construction, as well as work in the steel plant producing the required rails.

It is not long ago that my colleague in the adjoining riding made a tour of Africa. We had glowing press reports of the emerging African nations asking for new rails for their railways. It appeared that these orders might go to the Sydney Steel plant. But suddenly we had cutbacks, a softening of the steel market and layoffs. For some time, every summer we were able to put 100, 150 or 200 students to work at that steel plant to make a few dollars to enable them to go back to university. But not this year; they are not working and there have been all these lay-offs. If the minister really wants to conserve oil and to put people to work, those are a few ways to do so on Cape Breton Island, rather than imposing a discriminatory tax which will only lead to greater inflation, more unemployment and more labour strife in this nation.

● (1530)

With regard to labour strife, the minister goes to one part of the country and makes a statement about how bad labour is, what it should do and what it should not do. Then the Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) says something else. Far too many people in this country—indeed, many of them supporters of this government—are all too willing to condemn the workers and the union movements and to blame them for everything from inflation to the weather. These people run around saying that the problems we face are the fault of labour because it is on strike. There are many people in my party who are great supporters of labour.

Mr. Symes: Oh, oh!

Mr. Muir: They have always been supporters of labour, and were so long before the hon. member who just opened his mouth either worked or knew what a labour union was. That poor, unfortunate individual has not even grown up yet; he has never been in a union. I would bet that he has never been on strike, has never been on picket duty and has never negotiated for or served in a union—yet he is the great expert! He does not know what it is all about. I am a former coal miner and active trade unionist.