

Oral Questions

I should again make it clear to the House and to the country that there is no immediate answer today to a possible oil supply shortage problem which was caused by the failure of the former government over ten years to put plans in place which would provide energy self-sufficiency for the country. This is not a problem which was created six months ago. This is a problem which was created in the last ten years, and it will be resolved only if there is support in the House for the kind of measures we are introducing which will allow Canada to be in a position to supply our needs from our own resources, rather than following the Liberal position of leaving Atlantic Canada, Quebec and Ontario dependent on unstable, unreliable foreign sources.

● (1425)

PLANS TO DEAL WITH POSSIBLE OIL SHORTAGES THIS WINTER

Mr. Roger Simmons (Burin-St. George's): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Simmons: I, too, would like to ask a question of the Prime Minister in the absence of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. I say to him that whatever the origin, or how old the problem is, what the people of eastern Canada would like to know is what will be done this winter. It will be cold comfort otherwise. My questions are directed toward that end.

In light of the announcement of the Iranian cutoff to Gulf Oil, and in light of the numerous reports that the domestic oil supply situation, especially in eastern Canada, has been steadily worsening, is the Prime Minister still persisting in saying that domestic oil supplies for this winter are, in the words of his Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources—and I quote—“tight but manageable”; or is the Prime Minister now finally prepared to admit to the very real prospect of shortages this winter? Is the Prime Minister prepared to admit, now, to the very real prospect of shortages this winter and to the need to have a plan in place to deal with these shortages?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, let me, first of all, welcome the new member to his place in the House. I do that on behalf of members of all parties. Second, let me say that I am sure that he, as an Atlantic Canadian, will not share the view of the hon. member for Outremont—

An hon. Member: He does.

Mr. Clark:—that a policy being announced by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to look at the possibility of contributing to the energy security of Atlantic Canada through the use of tidal power is, to quote the hon. member for Outremont, “pie in the sky”. That might be a central Canadian attitude; it is certainly not an Atlantic Canadian attitude.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Clark.]

Mr. Clark: I can indicate to the hon. member that, as I have said, Gulf is reasonably confident that it can make up its supplies from other than Iranian sources. We have received an indication that no diversions are expected from other companies supplying Canada. We are looking now for other supplies which might be available on an emergency basis.

To come to the last question, the National Energy Board has now, as a result of increased consumption in Canada and some other activities, come to the conclusion that there may be limited shortages this winter in Canada. As a consequence of that, it is our intention to appoint members to the Energy Supplies Allocation Board by the end of next week. We very much regret that the failure to plan ahead on the part of the former government has left Canada exposed, particularly, Atlantic Canadians.

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, on a supplementary to the Prime Minister, I am not sure he got the message as to the point of the question. It is to find out if he realizes that there is a problem, a concern in eastern Canada about oil supplies. I will try it one more way for him.

In view of the unthinkable hardship that the unplanned-for oil shortages will mean for Canadians—and, again, particularly eastern Canadians and those in the Atlantic provinces—is the Prime Minister prepared to stick by his latest commitment made just moments ago? I understand he made one in the House on November 6, albeit somewhat under duress at the time; but he made another one in the last few moments, that the Energy Supplies Allocation Board will be appointed in the next week. Do we have the firm undertaking of the Prime Minister now that that will indeed be the case, or will he renege as he did on his earlier promises?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I realize precisely the problem which exists in Atlantic Canada. The problem in Atlantic Canada is that the people of that region have been left by the Liberals to rely upon Iran rather than being put into a position where Canadian consumers can be relying upon Canadian supplies.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1430)

Mr. Clark: If there are shortages anywhere in Canada this winter, those shortages will be a direct result of the failure of the former government to plan ahead and to put in place an energy self-sufficiency policy.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark: We are determined to stop Canada's reliance upon the irons of the world, and to build a policy of Canadian self-sufficiency. That is the policy we are following. With regard to the problems caused by the former government, they have to be addressed by this government now. I repeat that it is the determination of the government to put the board into