

Excise Tax Act

The increased cost of gasoline resulting from these measures should encourage motorists to make their driving habits more efficient in terms of saving gasoline. This should not, however, be left totally to the price mechanism. Accordingly, the appropriate departments of government and the Office of Energy Conservation have already been meeting with the motor vehicle manufacturers of Canada and their association. Discussions are proceeding on alternative ways to improve the over-all fuel economy of automobiles sold in Canada, with particular reference to changes in design and the establishment of performance standards. Both improved driving practices and better operating characteristics can make significant contributions to needed fuel conservation. The increased cost of gasoline will also encourage the use of public transportation, thereby helping to relieve the growing congestion in our cities.

The minister refers to our cities, but what about the people in our rural communities who do not have the opportunity to use a public transportation system such as we have in Ottawa or in Toronto? We do not all live in Toronto, Ottawa or Montreal; we cannot all step on the subway, take two transfers and get to work. What is the minister talking about in this regard? Does he make any provision for those who live in areas like the Nickel Belt in northern Ontario and other parts of the country to have some sort of public transportation system that is reasonably efficient? No, he is not going to do that. He is talking about the people in the cities, but there are a lot of people who do not live in cities. By improving the facilities in the cities you encourage more people to come into the city, thereby multiplying the problem. That is a phony reason.

The minister well knows that price increases do not necessarily result in conservation, and the record of the petroleum companies would indicate that they do not. If that were true, people would not eat as much when the price of food increases. That certainly is not the case. The price of a barrel of oil was \$2.90 in 1971 and is \$6.50 at the present time, yet in 1971 the refiners produced 51,581,854 barrels and in 1975 they will produce 68,222,687 barrels. So even though the price has increased drastically, consumption obviously has not been affected.

It seems, in fact, that only the rich can afford to drive their cars because they can afford the extra ten-cent tax. I suggest the conservation line of reasoning is nothing more than a poor excuse. Has the government devised any efficient public transportation system for small communities such as those in my riding? Will the government provide the funds so these small communities can provide public transit? The minister has not touched upon that subject at all. It seems to me he has put the cart before the horse. He should first provide the funds so the municipalities can put in rapid transit. Once you have rapid, economic transportation, then you can adopt conservation measures which are realistic and do not hit the small communities hardest.

When we look around us we see that over the years this country has been organized and built around the use of the automobile. We have only to look at the structure of our cities to see how this has happened. We need only to look to where the shopping centres are built. They are all built on the outskirts, with huge parking lots. This tends to encourage the use of the automobile. The drive-in theatre has become part of our community life. We now have drive-in restaurants, drive-in banks and even drive-in churches. So in fact the use of the automobile has become a part of Canadian life.

[Mr. Rodriguez.]

It seems to me we have allowed the automobile industry to determine the consumption patterns in this country. We have allowed that industry to set our way of living and the health of people on the North American continent. The minister now, with one fell swoop, puts the burden on people who must use the automobile, not as a luxury item but as a means of getting to and from work. I suspect most of the driving done by motorists today is not done for recreational purposes but mainly as a matter of convenience in doing business or travelling to and from work.

It seems that we have also encouraged people to seek whatever enjoyment they may find in the community by the use of the automobile. Many people use their cars to go to and from their cottages. The trailer industry has become very popular in the last few years. Ours is a mobile society and people do move around. Workers cannot afford airline fares and they do not fly around the country on their holidays. These people drive their cars, with a little tent trailer hitched on the back. This minister, with his high tax, has hit at the recreation of the working class people of this country. Certainly the rich will not be affected.

● (1640)

It was interesting to see the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner), on the program "Question Period" the other day, say that he drives a government car for business but that as a family man he uses a station wagon because it is the smallest car with which he can get by because of the size of his family. He earns a fair wage of about \$60,000 a year. A station wagon probably gets 15 miles to a gallon of gasoline. What is the poor man with the same sized family supposed to use? Can he get by on anything less than a station wagon? The minister says that he can get by on a station wagon, and in effect he is saying he can afford it. What does he think the working class people of Nickel Belt and similar places are to use? Are they to use Volkswagens or even bicycles?

Have we forgotten the election of 1974 and the Liberal promises? If hon. members do not remember those promises, perhaps I should read them. On June 17, 1974, in Toronto, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) announced a \$270 million program to aid public transit: a Liberal government would pay 100 per cent of the cost of Canadian-made commuter vehicles and 50 per cent of the cost of platforms and stations. The government would also pay 25 per cent of the cost of Canadian-manufactured vehicles for public transit within cities. Encouragement and assistance would be given to smaller municipalities in the creation of new transit systems. Canadian industry would be encouraged to develop passenger vehicles, and experimentation with new transit systems would be assisted by federal financing of demonstration projects.

On June 18, 1974, the Prime Minister announced in Cornwall, Ontario, that a Liberal government would take responsibility for rail passenger service out of the hands of Canadian National and Canadian Pacific railways and entrust the task to a new Crown corporation. The corporation would run high-speed rail services in heavily populated areas such as the Windsor-Quebec City corridor, introduce luxurious trans-continental excursion trains and establish a super bus service between medium-sized cities. The Liberals also promised to set up a national