

The Budget—Mr. Darling

yesterday I bought unleaded gasoline in my riding and paid \$1.42 for it. Gasoline has gone up in price by 50 cents per gallon. I should like to hear the government refute that. It is well and good to come up with fancy figures, but when taxpayers see today's prices at the gasoline pumps they realize they were sucked in to vote us out of office on February 18.

An hon. Member: Power at any cost.

Mr. Darling: On January 12 at the Liberal campaign college in Toronto the Prime Minister promised to hold the line on government spending. He stated emphatically that under a Liberal administration growth in government expenditure would not exceed the rate of the gross national product. We know what a lot of baloney that was, and that is being charitable.

Over the next four years the Liberals will have total cash requirements of \$12.7 billion more than was projected in the Conservative budget. To meet these requirements the government will have to either borrow more, thus driving up interest rates, or print more money, thus driving up the rate of inflation. By 1983-84, government spending will be \$6.2 billion per year higher under the Liberals than it would have been under a Conservative government.

Mr. Jarvis: Ten billion.

Mr. Darling: My colleague, who is a financial expert and an outstanding lawyer, the hon. member for Perth (Mr. Jarvis), says \$10 billion. I see the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) paying attention but I do not know whether he is agreeing or not.

Mr. Jarvis: He agrees.

Mr. Darling: The Prime Minister promised that the government deficit would be reduced in a phased and orderly fashion. The deficit in 1983-84 will be \$500 million larger than last year's deficit, and \$2.7 billion larger than the deficit projected in the Conservative budget.

The Prime Minister promised to enhance the security of the individual by helping those who need assistance. By the end of 1984, Canadians will have been hit with increases in the price of oil and gas equivalent to over \$1 per gallon. Is this enhancing the security of the poor? Is this assisting those who need assistance? What is the government doing to bring down the rate of inflation so that home owners will not be forced out of their homes because they cannot meet the mortgage payments? What is the government doing to assist small business in this country? Just last week the Minister of Finance told this House there was nothing the government could do about high inflation. The government did not have the resources to initiate any more new programs. Despite the shortage of cash, they are now talking about buying oil companies. One of the suggested companies is Imperial Oil. A recent article in one of the foremost daily papers indicates what it would cost to buy Imperial Oil. I quote:

Analysts put the shares, based on asset value, at \$64 each. If we bid for all of them (and our security law says we must) and got them, it would cost \$10.5

billion. Accountants Touche Ross and Co. figure that we would have to pay \$4 a barrel for all oil reserves to gain control of any company. That would add \$4 a barrel to the cost to consumers of oil, it would add not a single barrel to our oil reserves—

● (1730)

This money, if we have such money hidden under the carpet, should be spent to find new supplies of oil and gas.

Permit me to say something about the new grant program for the conversion from oil to gas or electricity. I commend this idea. It is a good idea. It is the hope of the government that this new program will contribute towards a meaningful reduction in oil consumption in this country over the next few years. The amount of the grant is to equal one-half of the cost of conversion up to \$800, and the program went into effect on October 28, 1980. Regrettably, many of the details of the program have not yet been worked out. Listen to this, for example. The office of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources informed me that application forms for this new program are not presently available for distribution and will not be available until March or April of 1981. Isn't that wonderful?

Home owners who expect to take advantage of this program are asked to retain all the receipts of costs directly related to the cost of conversion. When the application forms are available, they can then apply for the grant. Some will probably have to borrow money from the bank in order to proceed. One would have expected the government to have ensured that application forms were available within a reasonable time.

With regard to retroactivity, there seems to be a great deal of confusion about the program being retroactive. Evidently this is one of the details the government has not worked out yet. I was informed by the minister's office that the program is not retroactive, that anyone who started the conversion process prior to midnight, October 28, is not eligible to apply for the grant. I have been informed by the office of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources that the program is retroactive. Who is right and who is wrong? The persons who began to convert from oil to gas or electricity prior to the announcement of the introduction of the program by the Minister of Finance in his budget will be eligible to apply for the grant, provided the final safety inspection did not take place prior to midnight, October 28, 1980. Who does one believe—the office of the Minister of Finance or the office of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources?

The government has had eight months in which to work out these details. This is just another illustration of the ineptitude of ministers opposite. There is absolutely no question that unless the government makes a concerted effort to have the application forms available within the next few weeks there is no way anyone will receive payment before the end of next summer. It is conceivable that the grant could end up costing people money, particularly if they have to borrow to pay for the conversion.

There is another aspect of the program that is disturbing. It appears the government is so eager to encourage home owners to switch from oil to gas or electricity that it has offered to pay