

31. The bill was debated on that day, and on February 3, 4, 7 and 10. I bring that to the minister's attention so that he cannot accuse the opposition parties of holding the bill up for any great length of time.

Another matter I want to mention is the 10-cent federal gasoline tax imposed by the government a little over two years ago, supposedly to conserve energy and provide funds to control the price of oil within Canada. That did have some merit, but this tax has hit hardest workers from rural areas and many other people who have to drive long distances between their homes and their places of business. This extra 10 cents amounts to a considerable sum over the course of a month.

A good many persons drive to work in my constituency of Parry Sound-Muskoka, as I have mentioned on several occasions. Some drive as much as 100 miles to and from work each day, five days a week. With the price of gasoline today, this extra 10 cents creates a real hardship for them. I am well aware that many business people, truckers and those engaged in commercial operations, have to pay the 10 cents, but they can deduct it as a legitimate business expense. But not the poor man who has to drive daily to work. If this kind of person did not drive a considerable distance to work, he would probably be on unemployment insurance or, even worse, some form of welfare. This is why I feel this particular tax creates hardship for people who can least afford to pay the tax. I bring this matter to the attention of the minister and I hope something will be done about it.

I should also like to point out that the tourist industry has suffered greatly this year. To some extent, this can be blamed on the high cost of travel due to current gasoline prices. Since this tax was imposed, the government has been requested on many occasions to reduce it. In fact, I believe at one tourist convention in the past few weeks it was recommended that the government reduce the tax from 10 cents to 3 cents, and I am hoping that the government will look with a sympathetic eye on that recommendation. After all, the tourist industry is very important.

I will concede to the Minister of Finance that if he should reduce the 10 cents tax to 3 cents, he would lose a lot of money. Within the year a staggering amount of money is collected through this 10 cents tax. But I am sure the minister will agree that it is like casting your bread upon the waters; although you might lose money by reducing the tax, a great number of additional tourists would come to this country, and those who save 10 cents on a gallon of gasoline will spend the money and help the economy anyway. In other words, the minister will get this sales tax back in additional revenue. As I say, it might bring additional American tourists to Canada, and heaven knows, we certainly need them. Tourism has been down drastically this year.

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the hon. member a question? I like listening to him because he offers some concrete proposals. The only question I should like to bring to his attention is this: If we reduce the tax on gasoline, what

effect would this have on the conservation of energy in Canada?

Mr. Darling: So far as energy conservation is concerned, I am sure—and I bet the minister is sure—that probably not 100 gallons of gasoline less have been sold. People are still using their cars. There could be the odd Sunday driver who stays at home, and that is fine because it will make the highways a little safer. But I point out to the minister that this extra 10 cents tax is a real drain on the resources of a lot of people.

The minister represents a rural riding, one that does not have a buoyant economy. I am well aware that the minister has serious problems in his riding, and in this respect that is good because he may be a little more sympathetic than if he represented a riding composed of blue-eyed Arabs in Alberta or one of the Toronto ridings. I say it would be a wonderful idea to reduce this tax to 3 cents or to cut it out entirely. There is not a hell of a lot of gasoline saved, anyway. People are still driving their cars on journeys, the great majority of which are necessary.

Because Canada is such a vast country, many people have to drive great distances to work. We are not a country like Holland or Belgium, countries with 1,200 people or more to the square mile. As I have already said, in my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka over half the people drive a considerable distance. I see the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) across the way. He originally came from North Bay and is familiar with the city. A great many people who live 35 or 40 miles south of North Bay drive into North Bay five days a week to their jobs, and they are fortunate to have jobs there. But 80 miles a day amounts to quite a gasoline bill at the end of the month. Therefore, I hope the minister will give serious consideration to this point.

High taxes and non-competitive wage rates in Canada are also having a serious effect on our communities and on companies which are competing directly with United States manufacturers. The situation has become very critical in the past year, so serious in fact that many small manufacturers of automobile parts have either gone out of business or have moved their operations to the United States. I am hoping that the new Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Horner) is taking steps to rescue this particular industry before it ceases to exist in Canada or almost fades away. I was pleased and relieved to hear him say during an interview, or it could have been during a speech, a few days ago that he was aware of the serious situation and was hopeful that something could be done. I hope he will come up with some concrete solutions instead of vague and non-committal statements.

In my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, 122 jobs have been lost at a plant just south of Parry Sound in the township of Foley. This plant had a total of 222 jobs, 122 of which are being phased out. Some members may have seen reference to this on a television program last night and again this morning on the "Canada A.M." show. This points out the seriousness of the situation. These are jobs which are permanently lost.