

The Petro-Canada fiasco is a glaring illustration of misguided Tory promises and disturbingly incompetent administration. Let us hope that things will improve shortly. I don't want to condemn them at this point; it would be unfair.

During the election campaign Mr. Clark described our national oil agency as a "turkey." He called it a turkey. Coast to coast it was Canada's "turkey" and he pledged to axe it.

All the public opinion polls have shown overwhelming popular support for Petro-Canada. I wonder how Senator Murray, in his former capacity as a national Progressive Conservative Party chairman, and a successful one by political standards, failed to read those polls properly or accurately. Even prominent Conservatives like the distinguished and respected M.P. Bob Coates, the national Progressive Conservative Party president, have argued that Petro-Canada should stay.

The debate on this issue has raged in many circles this summer across the country, but the key man responsible, the energy minister, has for the most part remained totally silent; or totally confused is perhaps a better way to describe it.

In a feature story in *Maclean's* magazine in August, the minister, Mr. Hnatyshyn, earned the dubious headline, and I quote, "The Case of the Missing Minister," for the fashion in which he has abdicated his responsibilities in relation to Petro-Canada as well as on the crucial question of oil pricing policy.

Even newspapers in his home province of Saskatchewan, like the *Regina Leader Post*, for example—

Senator Steuart: A Tory rag, if there ever was one.

Senator Perrault:—which, I understand, urged the election of a Clark government, have used words like "a disaster" and "an embarrassment" to describe the energy minister's sorry performance. We don't want to be unfairly critical here.

Some Hon. Senators: Oh, no, no!

Senator Perrault: But this material must be placed on the record. Despite the prevalent public opinion about Petro-Canada, despite key backbench support for the agency in the Conservative caucus and despite some of the minister's own publicly-stated views, the government seems bent upon the destruction of Petro-Canada.

Canadians are asking why. The reason may have been pretty well summed up by nationally-syndicated columnist Richard Gwyn. Writing in September under the headline "Cabinet Sold Out Part of its Energy Policy to Look Tough," Mr. Gwyn had this to say:

The inner Cabinet's decision was close.

It must have been a dramatic meeting you had, Mr. Leader.

The inner Cabinet's decision was close. It might have gone the other way had not the government already had to back away as far as it could from its promise to move our Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, had not Sports Minister Steve Paproski mused aloud how it might not be such a bad idea, after all, if Ottawa continued to run Loto Canada, and had not Finance Minister John Crosbie similarly talked in public about how promised tax-cuts may not be implemented in his first budget.

[Senator Perrault.]

Mr. Tough Guy!

After all that softness, the inner Cabinet felt it had to be firm on Petro-Canada . . . To prevent the government's political credibility from corroding, the inner Cabinet Ministers chose to cast away one of their instruments of energy policy. Instead, all they accomplished was to corrode the credibility of their political will. They wanted to appear strong. They acted weak.

That was Richard Gwyn in his nationally-syndicated column across Canada.

An Hon. Senator: Prejudice!

Senator Perrault: I can only suggest that Mr. Gwyn has quoted Conservatives very favourably on a number of matters in the past. And the same Mr. Gwyn urged Canadians from coast to coast to vote for this government. Now you attack his credibility and logic, honourable senators. Was he wrong as well in May? That is a consideration which should haunt you.

Honourable senators, I had intended to speak at length about Petro-Canada, but I think that a longer debate should be held in this chamber on a future occasion to talk about this issue and to talk about whether this agency is serving the interests of Canadians and whether or not this mad drive to destroy Petro-Canada is in the public interest.

I want to say that Canadians now own a national petroleum company whose aim is to ensure that Canadians will have the supplies of oil and natural gas needed in the years ahead. It is a company that makes sufficient profit from conventional involvement in the industry to achieve its goal without excessively burdening the taxpayer.

It always interests me, regarding some of this Conservative philosophy, that they love to go across the country talking about how inefficient governments are, and they say, "Why, every government corporation loses money. Everyone knows that." Then all of their proposals are to privatize only those government operations which make money and to leave all of the unprofitable and marginal operations still to be supported by the taxpayers to limp along on government subsidies so that at some future time they can say, "Well, we are a free enterprise party. Look at those government corporations. They can't turn a profit."

I think that is grossly unfair to many of the operations which have been developing and thriving under government ownership or with partial government support.

That does not mean to say that Liberals are at all opposed to the privatization of certain companies; but there has to be consistency with respect to this policy, and we urge the government not merely to retain all of the money-losing propositions and burden taxpayers with them and sell off the money-making ones to the private sector. There must be an even-handed policy.

Petro-Canada has the power not only to find future energy supplies in Canada but to negotiate with foreign countries for an assured supply of imports.