

Excise Tax Act

demonstrations in front of this building on issues not nearly as important. Such a demonstration today might have brought home to the government just how serious this tax is.

I want to make a few remarks about the bill before us and about the amendment in the name of our leader to give it a six months' hoist. I should like to see it given 106 months' hoist if possible. I had an opportunity to speak in the budget debate on July 4. Nothing has changed since then, and I am sure nothing will change. But somehow those on this side of the House, the responsible side, must get through to the government and point out that this kind of legislation imposes a great strain on the economy. Everybody knows by now that it is simply a tax grab, and the benefits to be gained by its imposition are peanuts when compared to the damage that will be done to the average Canadian citizen.

I pointed out in my earlier remarks that the increase in the excise tax of ten cents per gallon, added to the 10 per cent increase in tax on small boat motors imposed last year, is just too much for a large number of tourist operators to absorb. At times, Mr. Speaker, it seems as though the government sets out to strangle the country's tourist industry. My riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka depends heavily on tourism to maintain a decent economic level and to provide badly needed jobs. I might add that the tourist industry is the second largest industry in Canada today and it will not be too many years before it moves up into first place.

I say to the Minister of Finance and his so-called economic experts that it gets pretty frustrating to stand up in the House day after day, pleading with the government to exercise some plain common sense in drafting these bills. After you have robbed Peter to pay Paul and find that source has run out, you find yourself going back to rob Paul. I am forced to wonder at times, Mr. Speaker, if the government's economic whizzkids draw straws to see what segment of our economy they should try to destroy next.

The minister has not told us what the government plans to do with the hundreds of millions of dollars it will raise from the increased tax on gasoline. All we know is that it will go in general revenue and it certainly won't be used to build roads in Ontario. As far as the increase of \$200 million the government has allotted to the housing budget this year is concerned, all I can say is "big deal". I could use almost that much in Parry Sound-Muskoka alone, Mr. Speaker. But then what would the big cities use to provide housing for the tens of thousands of people who go into the cities every year in search of jobs?

I see that the government also intends to plow another \$285 million into that short-term, make-work project, the Local Initiatives Program. This is really an attempt to pad the unemployment figures. A few thousand people are given a month or two of employment, many of them on useless or even kooky projects, and they are taken off the unemployment rolls for a while so that the government can claim that thousands of new jobs have been created during a period when in fact thousands of people were added to the unemployment rolls.

If the government is so anxious to raise extra revenue that it will invade the tax preserves of the provinces, namely, the gasoline tax, then the Canadian people have a

right to expect the government to use that money on sensible, responsible programs that are designed to solve some of the long-standing problems facing the country. The \$285 million earmarked for LIP projects could be put to better use in a job training scheme which would prepare people to fill jobs with some meaning and some potential for career opportunities. The \$70 million allotted to this type of job training in the recent budget shows the government places a lower priority on career opportunities than on the LIP program. Of course, LIP projects are more fun than training for a career in business or industry. I wonder what the average employer would feel about an applicant for a job who, when asked what training he or she had, could only say his experience amounted to two months on a LIP project.

I turn, now, to a letter I received concerning the excise tax on gasoline. It comes to me from the manager of the Almaguin-Nipissing Travel Association, Incorporated, of North Bay. I think it is self-explanatory.

Dear Mr. Darling,

As manager of the Almaguin-Nipissing Travel Association I have been instructed by the board of directors to write to you and express this association's dismay over the recently imposed increase in the federal excise tax on gasoline.

This area of our country is, as you know, highly dependent on the tourism industry for a healthy economy and this additional burden on the motoring public will most assuredly have an adverse effect on the volume of business done by our tourist operators who depend heavily on a good flow of auto traffic into our area to maintain the financial viability of their operations.

With in excess of 500 tourist operations within our association's boundaries, you can well visualize the effect such a disturbing tax can and will have on the economic wellbeing of our area. It is hoped that this decision will be reversed in the very near future.

I might mention to the minister that when I got up yesterday morning—it was in the home town of our honourable Speaker, Sudbury, where I had attended a banquet—I happened to turn on the television and I listened to that great evangelist, Oral Roberts, speaking. As I was getting dressed, he was talking about a minister who was called on the carpet by his congregation. They said to him, "Pastor, all you are doing is preaching on one subject—repent, repent, repent. We are sick of it." He said, "Well, that is too bad, because until you repent I am going to keep on doing it." I am wondering whether after all the criticism he has received urging repentance, the minister will consider abandoning or at least changing this tax, cutting it by half on the principle that half a loaf is better than none.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): What is half of repentance worth?

Mr. Darling: It doesn't matter. It is something for the minister to consider. I would like to add, Mr. Speaker, that the brunt of the increase will fall on the shoulders of those who are already carrying the load as far as taxes are concerned. However, the real damage is being done to those who can least afford it, the elderly, the working poor and those who require their automobiles in their struggle to find and to hold a job. The government doesn't seem to care a fig about those who are trying to make a living in the tourist business, or those who would like to be able to drive around and see their own country when they get a little time off from their jobs. It would also appear that