

Energy

Mr. Collette: Madam Speaker, every time someone in the House asks me to follow up on a question, I do try to get the answer. There are many reasons for delays. Sometimes the answers required entail a lot of work and expense.

Mr. Beatty: Not in this case.

Mr. Collette: Perhaps certain questions are not priority questions to the particular departments concerned. However, I will look into this matter again and try to get an answer for the hon. member.

I ask, Madam Speaker, that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

Madam Speaker: Shall the remaining questions stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S.O. 58—CONDEMNATION OF INCREASED TAXES ON PETROLEUM PRODUCTS

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands) moved:

That this House condemns the government for again unnecessarily raising petroleum taxes and thereby burdening all consumers, but particularly consumers of heating oil, with prices far in excess of those promised without providing relief to those hardest hit and least able to adjust.

She said: Madam Speaker, last Wednesday the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) moved the adjournment of the House under the provisions of Standing Order 26 to allow an emergency debate on the unprecedented price increase and tax increase on petroleum products. Those increases had been introduced the previous day by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Lalonde). In denying that motion Madam Speaker indicated that she felt this matter would be the subject of debate on an allotted day in the very near future. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, she certainly guessed right.

Because of our deep concern about these steep price and tax increases and because we know they are creating very real difficulties for a great number of Canadians, we in the official opposition are using the first possible opportunity—our first allotted day since Madam Speaker made her ruling—to raise this issue for public debate. Of course, this is what the government should have done because, as the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) knows, and as his alter ego, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, knows, these price increases are in fact tax hikes and should be introduced for debate by the government as is regularly done with taxation measures.

Instead, rather than for once facing up to his responsibilities honestly, the Minister of Finance continues to duck, bob, weave and evade both the implementation and the conse-

quences of his tax hikes. He has become the yo-yo at the end of the Lalonde string. The minister might think it is smart to bob up and down and ignore the financial and personal hardship his measures are creating, but meanwhile hundreds of thousands of Canadians are daily becoming more deeply mired in the slough of despond which his measures are creating for them. They are stuck; they do not have the latitude to indulge in fancy footwork and to sidestep issues as the minister does. They can only suffer and wonder what new blow he will aim at them in their already vulnerable position.

I have just arrived back in the House of Commons from another weekend in my constituency. My weekend was spent talking to people, not to politicians or pundits. I spoke with people who are staggering under the burden of record high interest rates, rampant inflation and crushing energy costs. When my telephone in Kingston rings or when I walk down the streets, I know I will hear another tale of hardship, struggle and, yes, even of ruin. People say to me: "What in the name of heaven is going on up there in Ottawa? Don't they have any idea of what they are doing to us?" Farmers, businessmen, home owners and consumers are fighting just to keep their heads above water. The situation is depressing for them and for those of us who are trying to do something to relieve the situation.

Do hon. members know what was the worst part of this past few days of speaking to these people? It was in knowing that we would return to the House of Commons on Monday and that I and my colleagues would have to face the frustration of talking to a brick wall, for the Minister of Finance listens to the problems of Canadians and reacts to the financial plight of people with the same interest and the same compassion as would a brick wall. I simply do not know what kind or degree of hardship it will take to snap the Minister of Finance out of his lethargy or to keep his eyes open to what the government's policies are doing to Canadians. If only the Minister of Finance would go out across the country and look for himself, rather than cooping himself up for the weekend at a Grit policy conference with a bunch of yes-men and yes-women who are only too willing to tell him he is doing a great job, and if only he would go back to his own riding and ask a few of his constituents how they are doing, how they are making ends meet and what kinds of problems they are facing, then maybe the minister would realize that Canadians are not happy with the government's economic and energy policies and that they are certainly not happy with the minister's cold and uncaring attitude.

The Minister of Finance has been in Ottawa too long and he has been at the trough too long to muster any compassion for the suffering of others. He no longer seems to care. He does not even acknowledge that a problem exists. As he said to me and the House on May 25, as recorded at page 9858 of *Hansard*:

—the increase in the number of bankruptcies compared to the very large number of Ontario farmers is not very great.

That is what he said. I am sure Canadian farmers do not see the situation through the same rose-coloured glasses as the