

Mr. McCain: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that what governments do they can undo. In view of the need, would the Minister of State (Fisheries) consider making very strong representations to the government of which he is a member to reconsider these regulations which are going to impose hardships when the fishermen are reimbursed?

Mr. LeBlanc (Westmorland-Kent): Mr. Speaker, the initiative to trigger this program is very much with the provincial governments, and if the provincial government involved wants a change in the ground rules it should at least make representations to us. I have not heard of them yet.

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PETRO-CANADA

ALLEGED OFFER TO PURCHASE CANADIAN PETROFINA OPERATIONS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Ron Huntington (Capilano): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce. Could the minister report to the House on the reaction of the Belgium directors of Petrofina to the approach by Petro-Can to purchase their Canadian Fina operations?

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): This is the first I have heard of it, Mr. Speaker.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

PRIVILEGE

MR. BROADBENT—MAILING OF INSERTS WITH OLD AGE PENSION AND FAMILY ALLOWANCE CHEQUES

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa-Whitby): Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a question of privilege the nature of which I gave Your Honour notice earlier today. My question of privilege concerns the mailing out, at public expense, of political propaganda by the Liberal party to all recipients of the old age pension and family allowances. This was done in the form of a self-described "Message from the Prime Minister" and was mailed with the most recent family allowance and old age pension cheques to all recipients right across Canada.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

● (1500)

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, a minister or government department might appropriately send out information directly to those affected by describing either a change in a program or a new program. Certainly it should be factual information. I am prepared to concede there are matters of judgment involved. The point is that it is appropriate, it seems to me, for a minister of the Crown to inform recipients of a particular program or changes in that program

Privilege—Mr. Broadbent

and no serious dispute could be entered upon or raised concerning such action.

I submit that the self-described "Message from the Prime Minister" does not in the slightest way fit into this category. It fails completely, in my judgment, to meet this reasonable test. I say this for two reasons. First, it is a general message on the anti-inflation program and has absolutely nothing to do with either family allowances or old age pensions. Second, and of even greater significance, it is, in my most serious judgment, in this form and content blatant political propaganda, in fact, on the government's anti-inflation program. It does not even pretend to be merely providing information on legislative changes. It offers argumentation in favour of those changes. A Liberal member says, "Absolutely". To illustrate my point, I wish to take a few quotations from the self-described "Message from the Prime Minister" to all Canadian old age pensioners and recipients of family allowance. First, in one paragraph in the opening part of the letter he says:

One problem is our own attitude—how we react to the fears and uncertainties of inflation.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that is an argument. There are many economists in this country who would say that is simply hogwash. Inflation has everything to do with structures in the economy, and nothing to do with attitudes. Further on he says:

—powerful groups—

He loves to single out these groups.

—have gone farther, pushing up their price and income demands an extra notch or two as insurance against their fears and expectations of even worse inflation. That is how Canadian inflation has grown.

Again, that is an argument about which there is serious economic and political dispute. Further on, at the back of the Prime Minister's letter, the judgmental attitude becomes even clearer. He says, on a section allegedly to provide information about the salary and wage controls:

Now that the law restrains price increases, it is fair and reasonable to expect restraint in incomes.

Could anything be more judgmental or less a mere description of factual change in the law? Later on in the same section he says:

Furthermore, a federal surtax of 10 per cent will be imposed in 1976 on taxable personal incomes in excess of \$30,000.

When that was announced just before Christmas, we indicated that that in itself is not even a factual description and is very misleading. The tax involved is 35 cents—they did not notice that—for people whose income is \$35,000 or more. I could go on. The fact is that what we have here is Liberal propaganda. I submit this action is an abuse of the power of the office of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and constitutes an intrusion of the privileges of all opposition parties all of whom disagree deeply with at least some of the judgments expressed in the Prime Minister's letter. No opposition member of parliament could mail out, at public expense, such a letter. I submit that the Prime Minister is completely wrong in abusing his office by so doing.

This mailing would cost in the neighbourhood of \$527,589 for the Liberals to produce on their own. That is a minimum estimate of the cost, based on one cent per leaflet which, considering the cost of paper, is pretty minimal—