

It should also be noted in this whole question of the way in which the large, multinational oil companies operate that in the United States, for example, charges have been laid against U.S. oil companies involving the bilking of U.S. consumers of billions of dollars. The massive investigation centres upon the rapid rise in prices during the Arab oil embargo and also on schemes involving fraud. These schemes may have resulted in overcharges to the U.S. consumers of billions of dollars, as I have said.

These are the same companies upon which this government depends for information when making policy respecting the supply and pricing of oil in Canada. As a matter of fact, it was just recently revealed that Imperial-Esso donated something like \$235,000 in campaign contributions to political parties in Canada. I can assure the House that the New Democratic Party received not one plug penny, and we would not have taken one plug penny from these companies either. This leaves only two parties in this country that benefitted from the largest of the multinational oil companies, in this particular case Exxon or Imperial Oil.

I wonder why they put up this kind of money, Mr. Speaker. I suggest we have been seeing why. Stories have been coming out of Washington about why they pay money to political parties in places like South Korea and Chile. The reason is that they want favours, they want protection and this is part of their lobbying technique to obtain benefits for the shareholders of these corporations.

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I always enjoy hearing the economic theories of the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), but I think we are supposed to be debating the government's proposal to put an excise tax on gasoline. I wonder whether the hon. member would explain the relevance of his comments to the proposal of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) to increase the excise tax on gasoline.

Mr. Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I was hoping that a Tory or a Liberal would ask that question. It is fairly obvious that one cannot go on sticking one's head in the sand; one has to look at the situation as it is. My hon. friend must realize that when you start passing laws in this country that fall very heavily on the working class, you seek the motivation behind those laws. The reason is fairly obvious and I shall come to it in a minute.

There is no reason for the minister to introduce this kind of regressive legislation that will only fall very heavily upon one class of people. I am pointing out that in fact the minister is taxing the working class people of Canada through a decision based on trust vis-à-vis the multinational oil companies, which I am trying to show have in the past bilked, and probably still are bilking, the Canadian people. I am pointing out that we cannot continue to rip off the Canadian people. These are companies upon whom we must rely for our future oil reserves and to whom we look for solutions in becoming self-sufficient in petroleum. It is like asking the underworld to provide us with community protection in place of the police.

This is not a progressive tax at all. It is very regressive because it hits very hard a certain segment of the population. The minister comes from a nice urban riding somewhere in Ottawa, not from Nickel Belt, a riding that is

Excise Tax Act

about 170 miles across, with very small communities. The people there travel 40 or 50 miles to work. In my area most people work at Falconbridge or at International Nickel. We cannot, of course, take the smelters to where they live, so they have to travel to work in their cars every day. Some of them travel 120 miles a day.

● (1630)

The reason they cannot move into the city to be closer to their work is that they cannot afford the cost of living in the city. A piece of serviced land 55 feet wide by 120 feet deep in the city of Sudbury today sells from \$15,000 up to \$60,000, depending where in the city it is located. The cheapest you can buy such a piece of land is \$15,000, and there is no way the average worker can pay \$15,000 for the land then build a \$20,000 house on it. So in fact they are priced out of city living. These people move to smaller communities outside the cities where land is cheaper.

The minister now comes along and slaps these people down with this ten cent per gallon tax. Even if they form pools, and they do, they cannot claim the fuel expense including this excise tax. They must use their cars or vehicles to get to and from their work, in much the same way as a doctor uses his car in the pursuit of his profession. There is no difference in the use of the vehicle, but the doctor is able to write off this tax of ten cents a gallon whereas the worker cannot.

I have received many letters from my constituents about this matter. Perhaps the minister is not concerned about this, but he ought to be. Maybe he listens to all those flunkies who sit in his department giving him advice, but let me remind you that those flunkies make \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year and can afford to pay this increase. The working people in this country have their members of parliament here to tell the minister how this tax will affect them, but the minister does not listen to us. He has brought forward this bill containing the ten-cent per gallon regressive tax on the working class in this country.

This tax has previously been described in the House as a cruel tax, and I suggest it is a very cruel tax. The people who work in northern Ontario in my riding, at INCO, for example, earn \$8,600 a year on average. They have to heat their homes longer in the winter, from about mid-October to May. They have longer distances to drive. It is no wonder they are not prepared to accept the pittance offered by the companies for whom they work. No wonder right now in northern Ontario the construction industry is to be tied up, because in fact this kind of increase forces the workers to take a very aggressive position in order to survive.

This is the same minister who has been travelling around the country talking about wage controls. He has an awful lot of gall to do such a thing. The working class pays and pays and pays, and that class will pay again in respect of the unemployment insurance bill this government intends to bring forward. It is the working class who will have to pay for those who do not work. That is a very cruel way of equalizing taxation in this country. It is not progressive, it is extremely regressive. The second reason the minister gave in this budget for this ten-cent excise tax is to be found at page 2 of his speech where he states: