

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, the premise is wrong, unfortunately. I never said this was a study group, and I never said it would report after a period of one year. The question raised by a member of the press was, how long did I expect the consultative committee to stay at work, and I said it might be a full year. This is an advisory committee, which is meeting for the first time next week. I will meet with it within four weeks. It will express to me in time a position on each one of these recommendations Justice Grange has made. We are going to make decisions very, very rapidly.

Justice Grange himself suggested a number of tests and a certain amount of research. The confusion created in respect of the one year is related simply to the suggestion that the committee will go on with these tests and do this research, which may take one full year. However, I repeat that decisions will come much faster than that.

● (1425)

Mr. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, there is no problem about the continuation of tests. The first three recommendations of Mr. Justice Grange have called for the minister to instruct—and he and two of his predecessors have been questioned about this repeatedly for the last several years—the CTC or to request the CTC to act in the same way it did—very quickly—after the Mississauga accident last year with respect to the consist of a train. The CTC acted very quickly then. Will the minister ask the CTC to act under section 227 or section 100 of the Railway Act? The authority is already there to require the railroads to begin immediately implementing the first three recommendations of Mr. Justice Grange.

Mr. Pepin: Madam Speaker, I think it would be unwise and certainly not very polite to the members of the advisory committee which I have created—three of them outsiders to the government—if I were to start announcing seriatim decisions on the recommendations. I will do it in a very orderly fashion. I will receive their views beginning four weeks from now and act quite rapidly, as the hon. member will see, as the proper information is obtained and the proper assessment is made by this advisory committee with respect to each one of the recommendations.

Mr. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, the minister is still copping out. He is still acting like a sponge. Mr. Justice Grange and every recognized authority in transportation, including management, unions and experts in the field, know that technology has been in place for 30 years with respect to roller bearings and for a number of years with respect to hot-box detectors. Recommendations of the railway brotherhoods in connection with marshalling and consist of trains have been put before the minister and his predecessors repeatedly. He does not need another committee.

I would like to ask the minister if he will now call upon his colleagues and particularly the President of the Treasury Board—since Mr. Justice Grange was so critical of the restraint program—to stop the decrease in the number of

safety inspectors, increase the budget of the CTC and increase the amount of training and the number of railway safety personnel.

Mr. Pepin: Madam Speaker, I think any person with his head squarely on his shoulders—that would include the hon. member who is asking this question—would act the way I am acting in this matter. He would not on the basis of his own prejudices, knowledge or whatever decide on the day after the receipt of a document like this which of the recommendations to accept and which not to accept. That would be foolish. What I am doing now is the normal thing to do, and even the hon. member would do that if, incredible as it may seem, he were in my position.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ROLE OF CANADIAN TRANSPORT COMMISSION

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Mississauga South): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport. The minister knows that in 1971, after 36 days of comprehensive hearings into a number of rail disasters, a whole series of recommendations were made. The inquiry was followed up and further reports were made in 1973. The minister knows from reading Mr. Justice Grange's report, which he has had for at least six weeks, that the CTC has been a sleeping policeman. Will the minister make changes in the personnel of the CTC so people can be satisfied that that organization, which is supposed to protect the interests of people generally, in fact works to do what it is supposed to do?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, as the hon. member says, Mr. Justice Grange has analysed all that and has not been, shall we say, very laudatory with respect to the position of the CTC in some of these matters. However, he went on to say that there are preoccupations, which he respects, in relation to the economic viability of some of the existing regulations, and he suggests that the time has come when the onus must be tipped from the economic preoccupation more to the safety preoccupation, that a social change has taken place in recent years. He suggests that the time has now come to incorporate that change in the rules and regulations concerning train transportation and safety. It is difficult in this context to hold a number of people responsible for a change which had not taken place in society as a whole. It may be that the time has come to do that, and that will be indicated by our reaction to the recommendations which Mr. Justice Grange makes.

● (1430)

Mr. Blenkarn: Am I to gather from the minister's answer that the CTC has been more involved in economics than in safety and that it has been in bed with the railways rather than doing its job of looking after the interests of individuals, of VIA Rail and so on? If that is the minister's view, surely it is time that the minister had a little purge.

Some hon. Members: Order.