

Canada Shipping Act

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): I would ask for the forbearance of the House so that I may reply briefly to an important question put to me last week by the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow). It is a short answer, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: The minister does not have unanimous consent to reply to the hon. member for Winnipeg North. Perhaps the minister might reply next week.

Mr. Trudeau: They do not want information.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS**CANADA SHIPPING ACT****AMENDMENTS RESPECTING COST OF MEDICAL AND HOSPITAL SERVICES TO CREW**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-10, to amend the Canada Shipping Act, as reported (with an amendment) from the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs.

Mr. Louis-Roland Comeau (South Western Nova) moved:

That Bill C-10, an Act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, be amended by deleting the words "designated by the minister" at lines 21 and 22, page 1 thereof.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I have already spoken on second reading of this bill and I made representations to the committee while the committee was studying this question. The amendment is very simple and it will not take long to explain once more. The situation is this. At present, the Canada Shipping Act provides that a sick mariner can only be treated by a designated medical practitioner. I have argued that the words "designated medical practitioner" must surely be out of date by now.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Comeau: These appointments were, surely, made several years ago; they were probably political appointments. This might have been the reason for improving wording of the kind we find in the bill, but at this point I suggest that any medical practitioner should be allowed to treat sick mariners coming off their ships.

[Mr. Speaker.]

There is one example I can give—I will repeat it, because I have cited it before. I have in mind the case of a sick mariner who lives maybe 50 miles from port. He goes ashore sick and he is treated by a doctor. We should remember that when he lands at the port he can be treated only by a designated medical doctor. When he reaches his home, 50 miles away, he is unable to receive further treatment under the Canada Shipping Act because the port practitioner is obviously reluctant to travel 50 miles to treat him. I say that any doctor should be allowed to treat these sick mariners wherever they live and that the phrase, "designated by the minister" should be eliminated.

● (12 noon)

I know what the Parliamentary Secretary will say in his reply. He will tell us that the bill is to be erased from the statute books within a few months. That is right. The government is proposing that when the medicare legislation comes into effect in all the provinces, this provision under the Canada Shipping Act will not apply. The mariners will be treated under the medicare plans of the various provinces. But this is not the point. The federal government is reneging on its responsibility in this connection. This is a responsibility which the government has accepted, historically. Now, it is simply passing on 50 per cent of the cost to the provinces. The federal government is saying that it will cover only 50 per cent of the cost of the service through its 50 per cent share in medicare. By making only a 50 per cent contribution they are reneging on their responsibility, since at present they pay 100 per cent of the cost of treatment.

This amendment is straightforward and simple. I contend that sick mariners should be treated by any doctor, regardless of port. I will have some things to say on the other amendments.

Mr. Thomas S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the hon. member who has just introduced this amendment is concerned about what is apparently an administrative practice in that part of the country he represents. If the situation there, as he has outlined it, is indeed the fact, then I am in full sympathy with his attempt to eliminate the practice. But I suggest that it is an administrative practice and, therefore it is not necessary to alter the law.

With regard to how this particular part of the law operates in the part of the country