

Adjournment Debate

That is the guts of the report, a committee on a non-partisan basis to call before it bureaucrats to explain their actions, not two years down the road as is the case with public accounts, but now, immediately, a committee not only to watchdog the bureaucrats but also to serve as a burr under a minister's saddle to ensure that things get done, not delayed, waylaid or forgotten. Such a committee also serves the very useful purpose of giving the private sector a place to complain about arrogant decisions by bureaucrats. As it now stands, those who make judgments judge themselves. Is it not about time Parliament had just a little bit of its power to control government returned and asked in a proper forum for detailed answers to questions involving the control of the civil service in its regulatory functions?

The minister's answer did not deal with this vital recommendation of the report. I can only say that if the government intends to keep the whole process of regulatory reform within the secret cocoon of the minister's office and if it is this government's intention to hide the facts from Parliament and to attempt the clean-up in privacy without parliamentary authority and responsibility being considered, then it surely is another black mark on an already tarnished government that prefers to do in secret that which should be done publicly in the parliamentary tradition.

● (2205)

May I have a response to the specific question as to the government's intention with respect to an open policy and allowing parliamentary sunlight into the process, or, as implied by the silence of the President of the Treasury Board, is the process to be carried on secretly and subject to the inertia of the bureaucrats?

Parliament needs answers. Will the government immediately set up such a parliamentary committee, as the report suggests? Will the government allow Parliament to act as a watchdog, as it should? Those are the questions; may I have answers?

Mr. Doug Frith (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, may I just outline at the beginning the hon. member's concerns because I understand he was a member of the task force on regulatory reform. The minister wants to point out that on January 9, which was only two and a half weeks after the report of the committee was tabled, he wrote to his cabinet colleagues identifying a number of specific initiatives in the regulatory field which he suggested be the government's focus for reform during the next 18 months. His role is going to be co-ordinator for the government in order to encourage ministers and their officials to consider regulatory change and to support them in their efforts.

The first aspect of his work program, housecleaning of existing legislation and regulations, is an area in which the minister hopes rapid progress can be made. The first intent is to eliminate unused and ineffective legislation. A bill is now being prepared to repeal obsolete federal legislation, a bill the minister expects to be able to introduce in the near future. He

further urges his colleagues to review and to put forward proposals for legislative rationalization.

The second and very important aspect of our work program, improving the process of regulation, is developed in our work program by a number of specific projects, including looking at the feasibility of an advance notice system, such as a regulatory agenda, applying the principles underlying the SEIA program whenever new regulations are being proposed, finding ways in which federal departments and agencies can improve their evaluation of regulatory programs within the present program evaluation procedures, etc. The consensus process and self-regulation as alternatives to regulation, placing greater emphasis on service to the public and on the relationships between government and its clientele, and implementing proposals already approved by cabinet and designed to reduce the paper burden imposed by federal requirements for records retention are also included.

The special committee placed considerable emphasis on the role of Parliament in the regulatory process. As my colleague, the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Pinard), indicated in the House earlier this month, parliamentary reform is viewed by the government as a very important matter, and work on proposals that might be placed before members is now under way. The advice and suggestions of the special committee are being examined very closely, and I expect as well that every member of Parliament will want at some time to review the ideas presented.

With respect to the third aspect of our work program, selective deregulation, the government will be aided by the final recommendations of the Economic Council of Canada's report, now expected in late spring. Pending receipt of the council's recommendations, I believe there is much that can be done to improve the regulatory process.

In conclusion, I believe the government has moved with great rapidity to follow up on the special advice of the committee on regulatory reform. I hope I can look forward to continuing support from both sides of this House in the implementation of these initiatives. Thank you.

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS—INVESTMENT IN FOREIGN SHIPPING GROUP

Mr. Howard Crosby (Halifax West): Mr. Speaker, on January 15, 1981, I asked the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) to explain the involvement of the Canadian National Railways with the CAST shipping group. In 1980 the minister revealed that the CNR, with the approval and concurrence of the Government of Canada, invested \$50 million in the CAST group.

CAST operates a north Atlantic container fleet and a container terminal at the port of Montreal. These Canadian public funds will be used by CAST to assist in financing the construction of six new container ships, to expand the Canadian container terminal in Montreal and to acquire equipment and services related to the transporting of containerized cargo. According to the Montreal *Gazette* the CAST group, with the