

The Economy

period but in depth. We could call public servants as well as ministers before us and assess which programs were relevant, the direction they were taking and whether there might not be a better way in which their purpose could be achieved.

If we pass our most important problems to bureaucrats and task forces we are simply going to drift along. For example, there is no one in the country who believes that the road show of Pepin and Robarts will save confederation. It is a bureaucracy. A nation, I have always thought, is a matter of spirit. No one believes there is likely to be any fundamental change in the way government carries out its business unless parliament gets to the root of it. As things are, there is no way in which we can help the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) with his costly programs. We cannot help him unless parliament has an opportunity to examine these programs.

I do not speak in a partisan way when I suggest the reason a lot of these programs have gone off the rails is because we have reached the point in Canada at which the only body examining the operations of government is the Treasury Board; it is not an independent body, it is the government examining itself. It is time things changed, and the appointment of a select committee as we suggest is one of the ways in which this process can begin. We all know a general election is coming soon and that we are unlikely to see any procedural reform in those circumstances. But we should not lose sight of the part parliament can play in changing our approach, in changing our way of governing, in making government accountable, in—

An hon. Member: Filibustering.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): The hon. member over there no doubt suggests that the way this House operates is by the government proposing and the opposition filibustering. What both he and I must consider is the relevancy of this institution to the needs and problems of the country. The unfortunate thing is that too much is done behind closed doors in Canada and not enough is done on the floor of the House of Commons with respect to matters which affect the Canadian people.

● (2122)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude-André Lachance (Lafontaine-Rosemont): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief to allow my colleague from the NDP to take part in the debate. When I read the motion introduced today by the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. Clark), I was particularly surprised—although the motion deals with four different matters—by the second paragraph. And for the benefit of the discussion, I take the liberty of reading again that second paragraph. I quote:

... that a special committee be struck before February 28, 1978 to consider:

.....

(2) methods to limit the growing and undemocratic use of regulations;

Mr. Speaker, I was amazed at the word undemocratic because it shows the lack of ethics in the opposition. Mr.

[Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton).]

Speaker, the opposition should know, especially their leader, that regulations in Canada are not an undemocratic exercise. This exercise originates from the power which is given by the House and by legislation to the executive so that it can set up the details of its implementation.

Mr. Speaker, it is one thing to talk about an excessive number of regulations and that is debatable, I agree. But when they say that regulations are undemocratic, I do not quite see the point. I do not intend to enter into an academic argument to show that regulations are part of our institutions to the same extent as laws or other areas of concern of the institutional activity in Canada, but still I wanted to stress some principles. One cannot include in a motion which otherwise has some merit a word such as undemocratic about a government function which has endured through time. Mr. Speaker, regulations are the privilege of the executive, but again they stem only from the powers which are conferred by legislation passed by the House in the first place.

And I remind the opposition that this power can be used only if the House has first of all conferred its powers; as long as it has not done so, this power cannot be used.

Mr. Speaker, my second point concerning regulations consists in the analysis of its function. Is the opposition saying that the legislative power in Canada, that is this House, and accessorially the Senate, should deal itself with all the regulations? This would mean that all members of this House would have to be experts in all endeavours of daily life, and we all know that this is impossible. I would like to give a few examples of cases where I believe that it would not be a good thing for the House itself to discuss the details of regulations.

Let us take for instance the Fisheries Act. Is the opposition suggesting that each year the House of Commons should discuss quotas, the general control of fisheries, catches and permits? Mr. Speaker, we would talk about fisheries for the whole year. The Fisheries Act provides a structure within which the executive is responsible for issuing regulations for its application. Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is normal and that no one would question the validity of this function.

Here is another example, Mr. Speaker: the radioactive products and materials legislation. Is the opposition implying that the House should study all the cases of materials or products giving out dangerous radiation and that the House should study every one of the products which will eventually be prohibited? We are not experts in nuclear energy; we are not experts or scientists in radioactive materials. This is another example, Mr. Speaker, of a situation where the experts, through regulations, can do a much better job than we can within the context of legislation which provides general guidelines.

Mr. Speaker, here is one last example: the navigation legislation which makes the government responsible for regulating navigation safety, shipbuilding specifications and ship equipment. Mr. Speaker, is the opposition trying to make us believe that it is anxious to study every detail concerning navigation? Mr. Speaker, how can we—264 members in this House—go into every detail of the navigation legislation?