

Private Bills

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the hon. member to take into account the fact that it is only 6.30 now and that there is always a possibility that all the bills to which he has referred might be passed and adopted by seven o'clock. If he wishes to extend the private members' hour I would suggest to him that the motion be made and considered at that time.

The house in committee on Bill No. S-26 respecting the Excelsior Life Insurance Company—Mr. Stanbury—Mr. Batten in the chair.

Clause 1 agreed to.

On clause 2—*Powers, privileges and liabilities.*

Mr. Howard: Mr. Chairman, we made an exception and referred this bill to the miscellaneous private bills committee, in other words, to another committee than the one set out in the standing orders. When it was considered in the miscellaneous private bills committee on two occasions, I believe consideration was given to the question of the foreign ownership of this company. I think we cannot let this clause pass without making reference to some statements which were made earlier by the Prime Minister and to one which was made just yesterday by the Minister without Portfolio who heads the cabinet committee dealing with foreign ownership of companies in Canada, a matter of tremendous concern to all of parliament.

Perhaps I should go back to the time a few weeks ago when the Prime Minister, in a nation-wide television broadcast, made a great issue about declaring the policy of his government with respect to foreign ownership of companies in Canada, if not by direct statement then by leaving a very clear impression that he and his government were in favour of steps to bring industry in Canada under the control of Canadians and to remove as quickly as possible the element of foreign ownership of companies in Canada.

When the Minister without Portfolio said yesterday that he hoped that the matter of foreign ownership of Canadian industry would become a major issue in the next election, his statement had an even more direct bearing on the bill that is before us now. I am not looking toward an election at the moment and trying to involve myself in it, but I do say, as has been said on many occasions in the past, that we have an undeniable obligation to the Canadian people to look seriously at the matter of foreign ownership of our industry and to look seriously at the Excelsior

Life Insurance Company which is being considered at present. Not long ago the Prime Minister replied, in answer to a series of questions in the house, that the insurance companies act contained the same provisions with respect to foreign ownership as are contained in the Bank Act. It was a bit of a surprise to most of us because we did not appreciate that all insurance companies in Canada came under the proscription that only a certain percentage of them were permitted to be owned by other than Canadians. It was for this reason we raised the matter in the standing committee when considering the Excelsior Life Insurance Company. We raised the matter of foreign ownership of this company, and if my memory is correct the figures given were that this company had 70 per cent of its share capital held in the United States. If my memory is faulty, the sponsor of the bill can correct me.

• (6:30 p.m.)

Even though the insurance companies act to which the Prime Minister referred earlier contains provisions which limit the degree to which life insurance companies may be owned by foreigners, the provisions of that act do not apply to the Excelsior Life Insurance Company primarily because it became a United States owned company before the coming into force of the amendments to that act in 1964-65.

Without reading the relevant sections of the insurance act, I want to make reference to the fact that if we were to add a few words to clause 2 we would bring Excelsior Life under Canadian control. I submit that the period of five years has been used on two other occasions when dealing with foreign ownership of financial institutions of this country. It seems that five years was established as a reasonable period of time to permit Excelsior Life Insurance Company to become a Canadian owned corporation or, in effect, lose the full power of foreign ownership. The amendment that was sought to be moved in committee was ruled out on a technicality. Incidentally, the technicality could be objected to because I have looked up the rules and have sought advice on the matter. No objection was taken in the committee because it was obvious the hon. member for Timiskaming would need a seconder for his motion from one of the other parties because the New Democratic party had only one member on the committee. Since he was unable to secure a seconder, there was not much point in attacking the validity of the ruling of the chairman at that time. Consequently he let the matter proceed,

[Mr. Stanbury.]