

Oil and Gas Production and Conservation

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard): The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I was about to say that if it was only a point of order I would be in full flight, but I am called upon to deal with the substance of a bill which has been looked after by others of my colleagues. It makes me feel as though I am in the role of a parliamentary secretary. My friend the minister has had experience in that role, having been called upon to handle something which had been put forward in someone else's name.

It strikes me that this amendment is clear; it speaks for itself and should commend itself to the house. It proposes certain changes in subclauses 1 and 2 of clause 4 of the bill. The wording of the amendment has already been put on the record but I believe that in order to make it intelligible it would be a good idea for me to read the two subclauses as they now stand in the bill and then read them as they would appear if amended as proposed by my colleague from Battleford-Kindersley. Subclause 1 of clause 4 now reads as follows:

The Governor in Council may establish a committee under the direction of the Minister to be known as the Oil and Gas Committee, which shall consist of five members, not more than three of whom shall be employees in the public service of Canada.

Perhaps I should stop there and return later to subclause 2. With regard to subclause 1 we are suggesting that the words "not more than" after the words "five members" should be deleted, whereupon subclause 1 of clause 4 would read in this way:

The Governor in Council may establish a committee under the direction of the Minister to be known as the Oil and Gas Committee, which shall consist of five members, three of whom shall be employees in the public service of Canada.

Having read the subclause as amended, thus showing the change which would take place, I think the point becomes clear. As the government has presented this matter this committee of five can have up to three but not more than three members who are employees in the public service of Canada, but it could have fewer than three. There could be two, there could be one or none. In other words, the committee could be overloaded with people from the private sector or indeed could be composed entirely of persons from the private sector.

• (4:20 p.m.)

We do not think this is good sense. We believe that the matters with which this oil [Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

and gas committee will deal are such that the public interest should be clearly paramount at all times. That is why we feel that, if there is to be a committee of five, three of them shall be employees in the public service of Canada. This will make it clear that not more than two members can be persons brought in from outside, or from the private sector.

I understand that when this bill was before the standing committee this proposal was made and rejected. The government used the argument that the oil and gas committee was essentially a technical committee, and that most of the competent technical people are to be found in the private sector. However, later on during the discussions of the committee it was admitted in respect of another matter that the question is as much one of judgment, as much one of public policy, as it is of technical expertise. We think that should be a primary consideration, and that this committee appointed under the authority of the minister should remain clearly one in which the public interest is fully protected. That is why we feel the subclause should be amended in this way.

The motion which I am now presenting has another part to it, namely, the part which would amend subclause 2. May I follow the same pattern I have already used by reading subclause 2 the way it now reads, and then the way it would read if this amendment were accepted.

Clause 4(2) reads:

The members of the Committee shall be appointed by the Governor in Council to hold office for a term of three years, and one member shall be designated as chairman for such term as may be fixed by the Governor in Council.

After the proposed amendment, if it were to carry, that subclause would read:

The members of the committee shall be appointed by the Governor in Council to hold office for a term of three years, and one of the three members in the public service shall be designated as chairman for such term as may be fixed by the Governor in Council.

The subclause I read as it would be if amended makes clear that point which I think should commend itself to the house. We believe that the leading role, which is generally filled by the chairman of a committee, should in this case be retained in public hands. If the clause were not amended, in other words, if the clause as it appears in the bill were to pass, it would be possible for one of the non-public people, or one of those who are not from the public sector, to be made chairman of the committee. We think the