

Oil and Petroleum

Mr. Woolliams: I am not supposed to refer to your ruling, but I congratulate you, sir. The amendment merely seeks to change the decision which the cabinet would need to make: we want to make sure that parliament makes the decision, and in that sense it is a safeguard. May I say something about the amendment, its relationship to clause 22 which has already been passed and to clause 36. Am I in order in speaking on clause 36? I wish to speak on that clause; my argument will be germane to this amendment. I should like to ask, sir, whether I may talk on clause 36 as you have accepted the second amendment to clause 35.

The Chairman: The hon. member is asking the Chair to rule on something he has not yet said. That is difficult. The hon. member may refer to clause 36 as it relates to clause 35. If the Chair feels the hon. member is going beyond the latitude permitted, I shall caution him. I think the hon. member can give it a try. I do not think there will be much difficulty.

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Chairman, first may I ask if the minister is ready to accept the second proposed amendment. I suggest that his acceptance would expedite passage of the bill. The minister knows that in the debate on the allocation bill he himself moved a similar amendment. If he will now accept this amendment to this bill, an amendment which will apply in the field of price-setting by the federal government when there is no agreement between the provinces and the federal government, I suggest passage of the bill will be expedited. Debate on the bill has been going on for some time now.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): I agree with the hon. gentleman; debate on this bill has been going on for some time. I am interested in the hon. member's comments about expediting passage. I take it that the converse of his argument is this: if I do not accept the amendment, then I can expect prolonged debate. It seems to me that the hon. gentleman has just provided the best reason why the government should not accept the affirmative resolution procedure. The affirmative resolution procedure would mean that the operation of the law to restrain price for the protection of the broader Canadian community could not take effect until this House and the other place had acted affirmatively to approve the proclamation.

That would mean this: if the hon. gentleman's political friends in Alberta were to decide it was in their interest to go for a price which in the judgment of the Government of Canada was not a fair price, or a price which we felt would not be in the interests of the economy of the country to impose, and if the hon. gentleman's friends insisted on that price, there would be no way for the national government to take action to protect consumers nationally until this House had debated the proposal. The present bill has been before this House for about one year now. Off and on, we have debated it since the autumn. I cannot say how many days of debate there have been altogether on the bill.

This morning the hon. member for Crowfoot suggested it could take us a long time to get this bill through. I therefore ask myself this question. In the event we feel that it would be prejudicial to Canadian consumers to have a price increase go into effect, what assurance can we have that the hon. gentleman and his friends will not do

this again; that they will not delay, as they have so far, for month after month? As I say, the present measure has been before parliament for 12 months.

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Chairman, nobody on either side of the House can say I delayed this legislation. I think it is important legislation and an important principle is involved. It affects not only the setting of energy prices but the setting of the price of other commodities. The minister may have a valid point. I think we always try to see each other's points of view. I suggest that if the proclamation must be approved by the House, debate could be limited. Of course, I cannot speak for my colleagues but I am sure, as they are reasonable men, they would go along with a time limit on debate in the House of Commons. If they agree, I suggest that the minister's argument falls flat because there is nothing about which he need be concerned. I suggest debate could be limited to two days.

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Chairman, the hon. member made some reference to an amendment, similar to the one proposed, being moved in the debate on the emergency supplies allocation bill. At that time a negative resolution had been included in the bill. What the hon. member for Don Valley would do is put in there that the intervention would not be successful without an affirmative action being taken by this chamber. What assurance can we have that there will not be a repetition of the experience which we have already had with this bill, namely, a prolonged debate? That is one of the things that might be considered in this regard if we think the government should have the responsibility of protecting the consumers in Canada.

● (1500)

If hon. members are interested in a parliamentary occasion we might look at something like the provisions of Section 87(4) of the National Energy Board Act, or perhaps even the provisions of Section 11 of the bill I just referred to with regard to a negative resolution. I am not saying that would necessarily be acceptable, but we might consider something along this line. An affirmative resolution of this kind, which could be a continuing block on the action that might be taken in this regard, would be against the interests of consumers in Canada. What could well happen is that this kind of decision might have to be made at a time when parliament is not sitting. In that case there would be no way the government could, by executive act, follow whatever time limit the hon. member suggests.

I am not agreeable to the amendment as put. I would be prepared to consider the possibility of a negative resolution of the kind that has been adopted elsewhere in our statutes. My suggestion might be that while we reflect on that particular proposal, we let this clause stand for the moment and move on to some other clauses of the bill.

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Chairman, as I said yesterday, I would like to pour a little oil on troubled water. If we limit the time to a two-day debate, surely that ends the minister's argument. The minister says that parliament might not be sitting. These economic trends—and I will have something to say about them in a few moments—do not happen overnight. There is a time lapse. If parliament is