



Senior chairman Omond Solandt: Looking ahead

these deliberations will be published in the Commission's final report.

It would have been surprising if such a disparate group did not continually refer back to the sinking of the Ocean Ranger in developing its points, and it was here that some interesting disagreements took place. Of these, the criticisms of the owner-designer of the lost rig, aimed at the classification societies responsible for seeing that rigs are designed and built according to regulations, were perhaps the sharpest. Despite these disagreements, however, things at the August meeting went well and with relatively little acrimony — a testament to the assembly's professionalism, and to its shared concern for the lives of the men who work on those isolated, often perilous platforms. It escaped no one's notice that the very act of hammering out a new safety regime to govern the industry could not but further illuminate the causes that sent the Ocean Ranger to the bottom of the sea.

To mediate disputes and to ensure the absence of bias, the Commission chose its chairmen from outside the oil industry. The senior chairman, Dr. Omond Solandt, a retired senior scientist, shared the podium with Ronald Hemstock, president of the Canadian Council of Professional

Engineers; Gordon MacNabb, president of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC); Dr. Ara Mooradian, senior vice-president of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL); and Dr. Ted Hodgetts, a professor emeritus at the University of Toronto. These men chaired sessions that featured talks from a variety of experts drawn from the oil industry. Their diplomatic skills were needed on several occasions, particularly during the question periods — which too often gave over to long statements of position rather than to queries of the speakers. But despite the appearance of what NSERC's MacNabb called "defensive mechanisms" and Hodgetts described as "tensions in the community," the mood of the assembly was upbeat. It seemed committed to its role of giving the Commissioners something of lasting value.

In the keynote speech that opened the Hearings, oilman-engineer Gordon Harrison said that the technology in place was just fine, and that here they were dealing with a human problem. Harrison's solution

*Workers aboard a drill platform. According to co-chairman Ted Hodgetts, any safety regime is "simply the discipline imposed upon the actors."*



was to put a single top manager in charge, solely accountable for the entire operation — the kind of "monomaniac with a mission," in Harrison's phrase, who runs most successful companies. The erosion of accountability in large engineering projects, Harrison said, could likely be traced back to the collapse of Scotland's Tay Bridge a century ago. The disaster claimed 75 lives and was blamed on Sir Thomas

### One oilman wanted "monomaniacs with missions" to solve safety problems

Bouch, who had designed the structure, supervised construction, and controlled the quality of materials, and who even took charge of maintenance after the bridge was complete. According to Harrison, the "database of technology" had simply become too large to let any one person, even an acclaimed master builder like Bouch, handle the whole job alone. Technological complexity had ended the age of such "renaissance men." Thereafter, Harrison explained, governments relied on compliance with formal codes and regulations rather than on the direct personal accountability of the people involved to ensure safety. Today, the responsibility for safety in the areas of design, operation, and maintenance "is virtually impossible to tie down."

Harrison's clear, no-nonsense solution to the safety problem was challenged by a number of people over the next three days, notably by AECL's Ara Mooradian. Harrison's thesis, however, helped crystallize what was easily the most productive session of the proceedings — the discussion on the meaning of 'accountability.' On the final day, during the chairmen's summaries and an open discussion from the floor, the proceedings began to develop a consensus.

Clearly, much more data on the environment were needed, both to forecast weather accurately and to