

Oil and Gas Production and Conservation

members of any board or commission of government. Furthermore I submit that any responsible government ought to insist that the appointees to any board or committee divest themselves of anything which may lead to a conflict of interest. I therefore urge the minister not to depart from the kind of practice that has prevailed in the public service and in appointments to various commissions.

• (5:20 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. J.-A. Mongrain (Trois-Rivières): Mr. Speaker, the religious training of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), into advocates official or non official confession—he is in the habit of hearing confessions—makes him see vice almost everywhere.

According to his amendment, it is assumed naturally that all members of this committee will necessarily be so weak they will yield to temptation. If we follow his argument, Mr. Speaker, I do not see who could be appointed, because there are many ways of influencing people.

A member of this committee who would own 5 per cent of the shares in another company could no more be influenced than another member who would not have any interest but whom the oil companies, would attempt to influence with gratuities.

So, the argument could be carried to its extreme limit and could succeed in proving that it is impossible to appoint anyone as a member of a committee who could not someday be exposed to temptation. This 5 per cent limit does not constitute a greater temptation than having a powerful company offer a Christmas present to a committee member in return for protection of its interests. Such things do happen. One must believe, however, that there are still honest people left in our society, people who are able to take an oath of office and to abide by it.

Where are we going? I cannot conceive of a committee whose members could not, on occasion, in a discreet way, sell their conscience, to use a current phrase.

I presume that the government will make sure that the people appointed will have provided evidence of fairness and respect towards the charge devolving upon the incumbents.

In my opinion, the 5 per cent limit is not that important. That is the reason why I do not really see the use of that amendment, Mr.

[Mr. Benjamin.]

Speaker, I believe that it is simply futile and gives the illusion of a non-existent guarantee.

Another thing might happen. As was said a while ago, someone hoping to be appointed commissioner might sell his shares and pretend to be no longer involved. However, it is a well-known fact that there are fictitious sales.

To sum up, Mr. Speaker, I would say that we have nevertheless to adopt a policy and trust people to a certain degree or else nobody is honest in our society because everyone may give in to temptation. It is not because a citizen has a 5-per-cent interest that he will be more honest, I think.

I hope that when this government or another one—if eventually there is another one—appoints a commissioner, it would first make sure that the man is honest and able to fulfil the duties inherent to that position. If there does not exist that minimum of trust, we will never be able to find a commissioner capable of assuming such duties.

[English]

Mr. T. S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, I suppose other hon. members enjoyed as much as I did the theological dissertation we just had from the hon. member for Trois-Rivières (Mr. Mongrain). However, it was somewhat irrelevant to the realities of the situation we are discussing in relation to clause 6 of the bill. With regard to the amendment, I remind the house of the accepted practice in respect of members appointed to the cabinet. One can draw many parallels—

Mr. Orange: Will the hon. member permit a question? Is the hon. member aware this committee is a part time committee, not full time? That may have some bearing on the argument about conflict of interest and the comparison with cabinet ministers and members of full time federal government boards. Is the hon. member aware of that fact?

Mr. Howard (Skeena): That is no different from a part time government.

Mr. Barnett: My colleague says it is no different from the part time government we already have. We are doing our best to ensure that one minister has to work full time.

Mr. Chrétien: Don't worry about it.

Mr. Barnett: The question of whether the board is to be a full time or part time board