

Oil and Gas Production and Conservation

I gather that the gist of the objection to the amendment revolves around the concept that if the amendment were accepted it would interfere with the flexibility of the minister to do whatever it is he wants to do. If there is any validity to the point of interference with the flexibility available to the minister, one is entitled to ask why the appointment of people from the public service was included in the bill in the first place. If the minister and the government wanted that element of flexibility which the hon. member for Northwest Territories says is necessary, why did not clause 4 simply provide that the committee shall consist of five members, period, without making any reference to "not more than three of whom shall be employees in the public service of Canada"? If the bill as proposed by the government has any meaning whatever in terms of the constitution and construction of the committee, surely it must mean that there will be somebody from the public service, presumably up to three persons.

The government has decided that it wants the opportunity to have up to three people from the public service on the committee. Having decided this, the government has interfered with its own opportunity to be flexible; it has constrained and confined itself to selecting some people from the public service. Either this clause means that or it is in the bill just as a sop and to pay lip service to the concept that the public should be involved in the functioning of the committee through the public service of Canada. I am inclined to think, after listening to the hon. member for Northwest Territories, that this is only a lip service proposition. The government says: We believe this is a good idea and will say something about it, but we are not really going to do anything about it.

I believe I can draw an exact parallel here. There is in the Liquor Control Act of British Columbia a provision that the liquor control board of the province shall consist of not more than three people. That provision has been in the act since 1954. However, not more than one person has ever been appointed to the board. Reading the provision in this bill I was immediately reminded of the arguments that then Attorney General of British Columbia, Mr. Bonner, and the Premier of that province, Mr. Bennett, put forward in 1954. They argued the same way as the hon. member and said they wanted a degree of flexibility. They said they wanted a board of up to three members; they did not want to specify three, two or one, but up to three so they would have flexibility to appoint people

[Mr. Howard (Skeena).]

competent and knowledgeable in the field of liquor control, liquor distribution and the like. They asked to be given the opportunity to draw people from all sectors of society. That was all hogwash. Their intention was to have only one person on the board, and that has been the situation since 1954.

The same arguments have been advanced by the hon. member for Northwest Territories. As I understood him, he said it would be a bad principle to adopt the idea that we should involve people from the public service in this sort of activity; we would be far better off to draw people from the private sector who know more about this matter, have been involved in it, know the details and are really much more capable in this field.

I do not usually hold too many briefs for people in the public service, especially those in the minister's department, but I think it is rather slighting for a parliamentary secretary to stand up in the house and belittle in an oral way the performance of people in the public service. I thought he would be one of the first to rise and endorse their ability and protect them to the utmost. However, the hon. member says that it would be a bad principle to have people from the public service serve on the committee because they are not competent enough to involve themselves in its work to the extent envisaged when the bill was drafted. I think that goes a bit beyond his authority as a parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Orange: Mr. Speaker, this shows how little the hon. member knows. I am not parliamentary secretary to this minister.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): The hon. member for Northwest Territories, having been one of those gentlemen who worked in the public service of Canada, may have prior knowledge of the abilities of people in the public service. His knowledge may go beyond mine and may have flavoured his views on this matter. The fact is that he has argued contrary to the position of his minister and the government. In the bill the minister says that the government wants some people from the public service serving on this committee. The minister has said the government has decided it wants up to three people from the public service of Canada on the committee. The hon. member for Northwest Territories says he does not want anybody from the public service on the committee, that the government should have enough flexibility to be able to choose whomever it wants. He coupled that concept with an expressed lack of faith in the ability of