

today to move these various amendments on behalf of my hon. friend.

The one which is now being presented suggests a minor but important change in clause 7 of the bill. Clause 7(1) now reads as follows:

A majority of the members, including one member who is not an employee in the public service, constitutes a quorum of the committee.

Our proposal is to add the words set out in the amendment. If the amendment were adopted, clause 7(1) would then read:

A majority of the members, including one member who is not an employee in the public service and two members who are employees in the public service, constitute a quorum of the committee.

I believe the wording of the amendment, particularly when incorporated into the text already in the bill, makes its purpose very clear. As it now stands, a quorum of this oil and gas committee could be achieved by the presence of two of the non-public servants and only one of the public servants—this is on the assumption that the committee is made up of three members of the public service and two from outside it.

However, as hon. members are aware, the house did not accept our amendment to clause 4 which would have done something with regard to the number of public servants who must be on the committee. It is possible under the bill as it now stands for three, four or even five of the members of this committee to be from outside the public service. If there are as many as three, then, of course, the three outside members can constitute a quorum of the committee under 7(1) and do the work of that committee. But even without such a situation obtaining it would be possible under this clause for the quorum to consist of two of the non-public service members and only one of the public service members.

It has been our contention throughout our consideration of this legislation that the government is giving too wide a scope to those who come from outside the public service. We think this is pinpointed right here in the clause before us which is written in such a way that the non-public service members could direct and control the work of the committee.

As hon. members are aware if they have studied the bill, particularly clauses 8, 9, 10 and 11, this oil and gas committee is not some ladies' aid society, if I may be pardoned for using that phrase. It is a very important body which has the powers of a court of record.

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Indeed, it has powers equivalent to those of a superior court; it can make all kinds of findings and its determinations with regard to questions of fact can be binding. By a certain process its orders can be made orders of the Exchequer Court of Canada. In other words, without taking the time of the house to read the clauses I have referred to I am making the point that this is an extremely important committee. Accordingly, in the light of our conviction that the public interest should be dominant in this legislation we have already objected to the composition of the committee and we now object to the wording with regard to the quorum which would make it possible for non-public service members to form a majority of the quorum and thereby to control the work of the committee.

One of the objections I can foresee coming from hon. gentlemen opposite, the minister and his parliamentary secretary—

Mr. Chrétien: He is not mine. He is the hon. member for the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The minister is not as well off as is the hon. member for Battleford-Kindersley. In any case, the minister or the hon. member for the Northwest Territories may try to tell me that if we were to specify that there must be two members who are employees of the public service present to form a quorum we might be making the arrangements unworkable because there is no requirement in clause 4 that there be two members of the public service on the committee. Subclause (1) merely provides that there cannot be more than three public service employees but it does not fix any particular number, nor any minimum. However, I can hardly imagine hon. members opposite using this argument, because by doing so they would be admitting it might be in the mind of the government that the committee should be set up with two, one, or even no members from the public service of Canada.

Therefore, because of the general position we have taken that the importance of this oil and gas industry to Canada is such that the public interest should be predominant I urge that the house accept this amendment to 7(1) which would make it read:

A majority of members, including one member who is not an employee in the public service and two members who are in the public service, constitutes a quorum of the committee.

Mr. R. J. Orange (Northwest Territories): The arguments put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles)