

clause. They include all those that were there before the bill went to committee as well as those that were added in the committee. The clause would then read:

No member of the Committee shall have a pecuniary interest of any description, directly or indirectly, in any property in oil or gas to which this Act applies or own shares in any company engaged in any phase of the oil or gas industry in Canada.

We think that is the way this clause ought to read. We believe, even with the proviso added in the standing committee that allowing for the possibility of people who own up to 5 per cent of the shares in any company dealing in oil or gas to sit on this oil and gas committee is to put people in the way of temptation, is to invite trouble, and is to provide almost openly for a conflict of interest.

I know it is argued that 5 per cent is a low figure. But we are well aware that that much of an interest can be a major financial holding in companies operating in this field. We think there is no point in recognizing, as the clause seems to do, the problem of conflict of interest and then saying, "Oh, it is all right for members of this committee to hold up to 5 per cent of the issued shares of any company in this field."

It was argued in the standing committee that the stricture in the clause to the effect that no member of the committee shall hold any pecuniary interest in any company covered by the act could be interpreted in such a way that most conflicts of interest would be avoided. To argue in such a way is, I suggest, to ignore the very close interdependence of the large oligopolistic firms in the oil and gas industry.

Because we think that to allow the committee members an interest of up to 5 per cent in any company in this field creates a conflict of interest situation and because the words I noted do not cover this situation in the kind of world we live in today in which we see huge, international complexes, we think the matter ought to be taken care of. That is why we seek to move an amendment to clause 6 asking that the clause stop after the word "Canada". We ask that a period be inserted at that point and that the rest of the words in the clause be deleted.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I wish to try to persuade the minister to accept this amendment. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has talked about conflict of interest, something that everyone in this house is

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aware of. It has been a long-established tenet that members of government boards or commissions in Canada and other countries shall not be open to any conflicts of interest. In the United States particularly the members of the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Trade Commission and similar bodies are required to divest themselves of pecuniary interests in any organizations, companies or enterprises which may be affected by decisions of the board or commission in question. This requirement protects not only the public but also protects and safeguards the members of those boards or commissions. These people are placed above suspicion, the idea being that there should be no opening as a result of which suspicion may be created.

I know that there are many competent and highly technically trained people in the oil and gas industry who may be extremely valuable to the minister. No doubt he will want to use their services. Under the provisions of this bill their remuneration is to be set by the minister and the cabinet. The minister may think that passage of this amendment may mean that almost all the people he may want to appoint will be ineligible for such appointments since many of the people employed in the gas and oil industry hold shares in companies operating in that industry. Anyone who is asked to accept an appointment under the minister will, if our amendment is accepted, have to divest himself of his shares in the oil or gas industry. If these people are interested in serving the public they will serve on the committee if the remuneration they are paid is reasonably good. Surely the minister is as anxious as anyone else to make certain that those sitting on this committee are above suspicion. If our amendment is accepted the members of the committee will not only appear to be clean and above suspicion but they will be clean and above suspicion.

The clause as it stands in my opinion seeks to countenance something that I though had not been practised for many years. What the clause seeks to countenance has not been countenanced in appointments to government boards and commissions under federal and provincial jurisdiction. I think the minister is expecting too much. He may be putting the people on this committee from the private sector of our economy in an impossible position.

I hope the minister accepts the amendment. I submit it is one that ought to apply to the