

Bell Canada

I have waited a long time to make these remarks. The people on the Six Nations reserve did not ask me to make them, but I am now putting them on the public record. If we examine the situation in other remote areas of Ontario and Quebec, just to take these two provinces alone, we will find the same kind of hang-ups with Bell Canada. Rural service is not the same as urban service. Something has to be done about this.

● (1752)

If Bell Canada is given carte blanche to expand its investments and enter into new ventures, without being accountable to the House of Commons or one of its committees, and at the same time enjoys a monopoly, then we are not assuming our responsibilities as members of parliament. Bell Canada cannot have it both ways. It cannot be a government sponsored monopoly, and then move into the private sector and expand.

Although I was not present when the hon. member for Regina-Lake Centre (Mr. Benjamin) made his remarks, my understanding is that he indicated the answer was to nationalize. The hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge (Mr. Saltzman) indicated that perhaps it was not the best idea, but if Bell Canada did not clean up its act, the only alternative would be to nationalize it. I am not saying that we should nationalize Bell Canada, although other members of my party believe in that concept. If Bell Canada were nationalized, the cost of buying out that very large corporation might be borne by Canadian taxpayers, and the net result might be higher rates and poor delivery. Crown corporations properly managed by their personnel, and not by Liberal appointees, can make a profit and provide a good service. Further, they are required to take a loss now and then in certain rural and remote areas of the country where private enterprise would never dare to enter.

How can a monopoly have the best of both worlds? Taxpayers are backing up big corporations like Bell Canada, even though it is providing a certain minimum level of service and it is a privately owned corporation that is making a profit. Bell Canada has been given money by an act of parliament through the CRTC. Regardless of the Anti-Inflation Board, that firm has received one increase after another in the past three years. If we are going to provide it with money in this way, it cannot earn money in the private sector as well. If the company finds it more lucrative, obviously it will move more and more into the private sector and less and less toward providing a service to its customers.

It has been argued that if the government goes against "Ma Bell" a lot of shareholders will suffer. The unwillingness to eliminate widows and orphans has been emotionally presented. I am not trying to downgrade or be critical of the orphans or widows of Bell Canada employees; but I should like to point out some of the large companies which have holdings in Bell Canada. Confederated Life holds 63,087 shares; Manulife Diversified has 101,200 shares; United Corporations has 80,142 shares; and the list continues.

Mr. Kaplan: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. How many stockholders or policyholders do these

[Mr. Blackburn.]

corporations have? I am talking about the large stockholders of Bell Canada which have been referred to here.

Mr. Blackburn: We are referring to private investment versus public investment. We are not talking in terms of individual shareholders of other corporations. We are referring to the amount of money invested by large corporations in a private corporation which has a monopoly attached to it. That is what we are talking about.

An hon. Member: Right on!

Mr. Blackburn: In fact, I think the hon. member's question is quite out of order. If the hon. member for York Centre (Mr. Kaplan) is now appearing in this Chamber as a great champion of big corporations backing Bell Canada, I will sit down and let him have the floor. What about the subscribers? Are they not entitled to a choice? We are talking about the shareholders of Bell Canada, the subscribers of Bell Canada, and Bill C-1001. If the hon. member wants to make a speech, as far as I am concerned, he can. I think his constituents will be very upset if he rises and makes a speech right now championing large corporations that have invested in Bell Canada. That corporation is increasing its prices for services to private people, industries and corporations. Perhaps the hon. member should think of that before he rises to his feet.

Mr. Speaker, may I call it six o'clock?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hour appointed for the consideration of private members' business having expired, I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock p.m.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

● (2002)

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed consideration in committee of Bill C-11, to amend the statute law relating to income tax and to provide other authority for the raising of funds—Mr. Chrétien—Mr. Turner in the chair.

The Deputy Chairman: When the committee rose this afternoon clause 6 of the bill, as amended, was under consideration.

Mr. Epp: Mr. Chairman, just before we rose for the dinner hour I was pointing out that, to a great degree, I was in