

Bell Canada Act

Mr. Heap: Or Tinker Bell.

Mr. Gauthier: Or Tinker Bell, yes. This new holding company could possibly compete with, say, cable broadcasters. The Hon. Member and I, as well as Members of the House, know that the extensive network of Bell Canada would probably allow it to get into every home, therefore making things for the cable companies very difficult indeed and possibly very unfair.

The possibility arises, I believe, because Clause 7 of the Bill restricts the expansion but not to subsidiaries. I wonder if the Hon. Member has any opinion or views as to whether Bell Canada should be allowed to get into the cable systems? How does he view that monopoly, because that is what it is, to get into this field of cablevision? I should tell the Hon. Member out of fairness that the CRTC did advise Cabinet to restrict Bell Canada and not allow it to go into the broadcasting field. How does the Hon. Member feel about that?

Mr. Heap: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) has raised a good question and I am very glad to comment on it. The kind of abuse of the trust of telephone consumers now being possible, as suggested by the Hon. Member, is exactly the sort of thing that the present Cabinet and the previous Cabinet of the Party of the Hon. Member, ought to have taken steps to prevent.

When the people of Canada over the past century paid for telephones, and the working people of Canada built telephones, they did not do so with the idea of creating not only a monopoly in the telephone business but a monopoly in the television business. To the extent that many Canadians still believe there ought to be such a thing as competition, Canadians are very uneasy about the monopolistic practices of Bell Telephone. They would be very shocked if Bell Canada, through this legislation, would be able to take over the cablevision business, as the Hon. Member has pointed out is possible. It is certainly a duty of the Cabinet to introduce amendments to this Bill, in line with the recommendations of the CRTC, to ensure that that cannot happen.

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I have a short supplementary question for clarification. I think the Hon. Member clearly understood that it was due mainly to the reorganization of Bell Canada that it is now possible. Bell Canada Enterprises is a holding company which in principle could set up a subsidiary or an affiliate, which I guess is a better word, which would get around Clause 7. This is my question to the Hon. Member. It was not because of the intention of the Government. Bell Canada reorganized its corporate structure allowing it to put out tentacles into certain deals. Would the Hon. Member join with me, and many other Hon. Members of the House, in telling Cabinet that we do not want Bell Canada Enterprises, through its affiliates, to set up broadcasting corporations and, therefore, take over cable companies?

Mr. Heap: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the concern of the Hon. Member. However, he did not understand my response

which was exactly that it was the duty of the present Cabinet, as it was that of the preceding Cabinet, either to prevent the reorganization which created Bell Canada Enterprises or to restrict it from doing such things as monopolizing the cablevision industry.

Mr. Malone: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) asks questions which in essence tend to raise fear when no fear need be raised. He talks about what might be, not about what is proposed. However, setting that aside for a moment, I stand here as a Member of Parliament who represents rural Canada to say that we are pretty tired of being dominated by the kinds of views expressed by the Hon. Member for Spadina (Mr. Heap) and the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier. Rural Canada today receives terrible television reception. My constituency is in a situation where at best we will get one good clear TV signal in the east end of my riding, and my constituency is made up of some 113 various communities. Yet Hon. Members opposite have the audacity to stand here and suggest that we should deny rural Canada the one opportunity we have to be able to watch national events, sporting events and the various kinds of important things which bring us together as Canadians.

Mr. Gauthier: No.

Mr. Malone: The Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier shakes his head.

Mr. Gauthier: You are twisting the whole thing.

Mr. Malone: I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that while the Hon. Member shakes his head, he should bear in mind that the reception of television on the Prairies is unacceptable.

Mr. Gauthier: I agree.

Mr. Malone: And here is an opportunity to bring to those people who provide food for urban people the kind of reception they justly deserve. He ought not to sit there and rally against that opportunity to give fair and equal treatment to other Canadians. I want to hear the Hon. Member for Spadina justify the New Democratic Party's opposing the farming communities of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Heap: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is getting a little fantastic when he suggests opposition between the New Democratic Party and the farmers in any province. The only two points the Hon. Member tried seriously to make were not quite as fantastic but were very wide off the mark. First, he said we should not talk about what might happen but only about what is planned. The fact is that it was the CRTC which warned us what might happen.

Mr. Gauthier: That's right.

Mr. Heap: We should take its warning seriously given our experience of the twists and turns of a company like Bell Telephone or Bell Enterprises. Whatever name it chooses to call itself, tomorrow will be just another name under the same