

*Bell Canada*

continues to get these rate increase. In the years 1970 to 1977 Bell was granted rate increases totalling \$416 million.

In 1978 Bell is asking for a 20 per cent rate increase, which, if approved, will give Bell some \$399 million additional, on an annual basis. That would mean, for example, that telephone subscribers at Toronto and Montreal, who are paying the current rate of \$8.15 a month for basic telephone service, would see their telephone bill go up to \$9.80 a month. Compare that to a government telephone system in Manitoba where subscribers in Winnipeg are charged only \$4.90 for the same kind of telephone service.

We say that there has to be much closer scrutiny by the regulatory agencies of these kinds of rate increases, and one of the opportunities, the rare opportunity that parliament has to examine this history of rate increases and the workings of the regulatory commission is through debates such as this, when Bell is required to come before this Chamber in order to get amendments to its act of incorporation.

We have also complained in the past—I do not have time to go into the details—of how the subsidiaries were not taken into account. For example, there is Northern Telecom and its profit structure in the CRTC determining the rate increases for Bell. But most of all we have been concerned about the rural service, or lack of it, as I have mentioned earlier.

I have raised, through debate in this Chamber examples of people in the smaller communities outside my riding in the district of Algoma who have made direct representations to me and also to Mr. Bud Wildman, the MPP for the area, who complained they had not had good telephone service or affordable telephone service from Bell Canada. I am happy to report that through many discussions we have had with executives of Bell, not only related to the content of this bill but to the problem of rural service, we have won some major improvements for rural subscribers in northern Ontario. We have noticed an acceleration in the reduction of the number of parties on a rural party line. I think, for example, of Prince township within my riding where, by 1979, they will be reduced to four people on a party line. That does not mean that all is well because we still have examples of individuals facing ten-party telephone lines or even more, or people facing telephone bills running into the hundreds of dollars annually in order to get a telephone line to a rural community.

What disappoints me most is the silence, throughout this debate that has gone on for over a year, of many of the Liberal and Conservative members who represent rural areas, who could have used this opportunity to bring before the public and Bell the examples of the poor service in their constituencies as well. I notice in particular, regarding the complaints that I received from the riding of Algoma, that the hon. member for Algoma (Mr. Foster) has not participated in this debate, and I regret that.

As I said at the beginning, Mr. Speaker, we have won major concessions from Bell Canada in the amendments that have been announced today. This has only come about because of determined opposition by the members of the NDP caucus in not allowing this bill speedy passage as was originally hoped. I

[Mr. Symes.]

consider it a major victory for the telephone subscribers of Bell Canada. It means that on future occasions we will be able to debate and examine in this Chamber the operations of Bell, and demand of Bell that, in return for any future consideration of amendments or what-have-you, we expect good service at affordable costs. I wish to commend the member for Scarborough East for bringing in these amendments. I look forward to discussion of them in committee and to calling witnesses, in particular the CRTC, so that we can examine the implications of this bill.

I would like, in conclusion, to thank my colleagues who, every second Thursday, were loyally here to debate this bill. I thank, in particular, those outside the House who have assisted us—Dr. Robert Babe, Mr. Gary Steeves, Action Bell Canada, and the many hundreds of people who either called or wrote us giving us examples of poor service, and encouraging us in this debate to get the needed amendments that we now have achieved.

I look forward to having this bill moved to committee, and I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the New Democratic Party is in agreement that we move the bill to committee for further study.

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In view of the statements that have just been made by the hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. O'Connell), and by my colleague from Sault Ste Marie (Mr. Symes) it is clear that we are prepared to let this bill have second reading and be sent to the appropriate committee.

There is standing against the second reading motion, however, an amendment that would give the bill a six months' hoist. Since we are willing to let the bill go to committee, I wish to say on behalf of the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt), as well as on my own behalf, since we moved and seconded that motion, that we would be prepared to ask the consent of the House to withdraw that motion so that we can go directly to the vote on the main motion. This is proposed in light of the excellent agreement worked out mainly between the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie and the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) on the one hand, and the hon. member for Scarborough East on the other.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier):** Hon. members have heard the request of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). Is there unanimous consent that the amendment be withdrawn?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

Amendment (Mr. Leggatt) withdrawn.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier):** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. Members:** Question.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier):** Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.