

B.C. Telephone and Telegraph System

I commended the members of that committee when they made that recommendation to the house for the objective approach that they had made to this problem. I should like to think that in the consideration of these important matters I would be able to continue to commend hon. members for adhering firmly to the principle that they themselves recommended to this house. If they do that, they will find that we shall make very considerable progress in developing responsible social measures for the people of this country whom we all want to help.

Mr. Knowles: Will the minister permit one question?

Mr. McIvor: I want to ask one question.

Mr. Fulton: We are not in committee.

Mr. Knowles: Is the minister for or against an increase in old age pensions?

Mr. Martin: There is no one in this house who is not as anxious as the hon. member to do what they can to improve the welfare of any segment of our population.

Mr. Knowles: Where does the minister stand?

Mr. Noseworthy: I want to ask the minister what answer we are to take back to the old age pensioners who are now literally starving on \$40 a month?

Mr. Martin: The answer to take back is this. The hon. gentleman can point out that in addition to the assumption of full responsibility for people 70 years of age and over the federal government is now being assisted in what it is doing for our aged citizens by supplementary payments that are being made in the province of British Columbia to the extent of \$15, in the province of Alberta to the extent of \$15, and in the province of Saskatchewan to the extent of \$2.50. I would say that if my hon. friend really wanted to, he should examine the extent to which all provinces are bearing their share in the matter of supplementary assistance.

BRITISH COLUMBIA TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH SYSTEM

Mr. E. D. Fulton (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, perhaps we should leave this interesting debate on old age security where it now lies. Hon. members from the C.C.F. party and Social Credit party have had their answer, but I am quite sure no one could advise them as to what interpretation they put on the answer given by the minister. I must say that it did not seem to me to deal very specifically with their questions; but I want

[Mr. Martin.]

now to deal with another matter which is of concern to the whole province of British Columbia.

Mr. Martin: Sometimes the best way to water a garden is not to put water on it.

Mr. Fulton: That is a profound observation.

Mr. Knowles: The minister is all wet.

Mr. Fulton: I want to bring forward a matter which is of concern to a large area of the province of British Columbia, namely, the sale and transfer to the Canadian National Telegraphs and the British Columbia Telephone Company respectively of the government telegraph and telephone system in that province.

The government telegraph and telephone system serves the central and northern areas of the province and some portions of Vancouver island. For some time we have been trying to obtain from the Minister of Transport (Mr. Chevrier) a full statement of the position which is going to result from this sale and transfer. The minister has indicated to us from time to time in replying to questions that he feels himself not in a position to give any details on it for the reason that negotiations with the purchasers are still continuing. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that, according to the last information I have, the transfer is going to be made effective as of April 1, just one week from today.

The reason I am bringing the matter forward now is that there are matters which are giving very great concern to the public generally served by that system as well as to the employees of the system, and it would seem to me to be a rather hollow discussion if we are not to have any details or are not going to be in a position to make any recommendations as to the points that should be covered in the terms of sale or, alternatively, if we should find that these features are not covered, and we are not going to be in a position to make any protests until the transfer is made. If we are going to make protests and carry on a discussion after the transfer has taken place, at a time when the chance of effecting adjustments and obtaining satisfaction with respect to these points has gone by, then it would be a hollow discussion. It is for that reason that I raise the matter now, although I appreciate the obvious difficulty the minister finds himself in while negotiations are in process.

I suppose the negotiations are of a character that might normally be regarded as private, and it is difficult to make public the details of what you are actually negotiating at the time the negotiations are taking place. But I raise the matter now for the further purpose that the minister may know,