

Private Bills

objectively. Legislation of this type involving a request for changes in internal management is usually treated objectively on the basis of the particular question before the house. The problem before the house is not whether the Bell Telephone Company's rates are justified or whether its relationship with Northern Electric is good or bad. It is simply whether approval should be given to a request to increase the number of directors from 15 to 20.

On the basis of the testimony which was given in an objective manner by representatives of the telephone company, as will be found in the fourth report of the committee on railways, canals and telegraph lines we have no right to assume that the company wishes to increase the number of its directors merely in order to satisfy some people who hold large blocks of shares. It could be so, but we have no right to assume it is the case. The hon. member for York-Humber, advancing this theory, told us that large blocks of shares were held by banks, lending institutions and trust companies. I would say: What better endorsement of the company could there be? The regulations protecting the safety of investments and of people's savings are strict, yet trust companies and the like are permitted to invest in the Bell Telephone Company. I think this is something on which the company should be commended. We who are close to the insurance act know that an endorsement of this type is not given to every corporation.

I would appeal to members of the committee to allow this bill to go through. All the grievances which may or may not be justified can very well be aired at the proper time and in the proper place, that is before the board of transport commissioners. If the relationship between the Bell Telephone Company and Northern Electric is not a proper one, then the courts of the land can be asked to make a decision on that question. It is not proper for us to take advantage of the private members' hour to hold up a legitimate request by the company, that in order to modernize its activities in a period of expansion it should be permitted to increase the membership of its board from 15 to 20. So I appeal to the committee to get back to a sense of objectivity and reach a decision strictly on the merits of the case, and on the particular question which is before us.

[Translation]

Mr. Pigeon: Mr. Chairman, the arguments used by the hon. member for Verdun (Mr. [Mr. Mackasey.]

Mackasey) in favour of the Bell Telephone Company of Canada did not convince too many of us.

In my opinion, the fact that this company is not government-owned constitutes an injustice to the people of Ontario, Quebec and elsewhere. It is an injustice because this is an essential public utility.

I feel it is urgent for the provincial governments concerned to take over, not only the Bell Telephone Company, but the other independent telephone companies.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Chairman, I cannot see why some people persist in defending such company. I am not ready to say that the whole administration of the Bell Telephone Company of Canada is bad. Sure there are gaps; but a principle is involved here: such a public utility service should become publicly owned by the provincial governments concerned.

Besides, in the province of Quebec—

Mr. Choquette: May I ask a question?

Do you know that Mr. René Lévesque is in favour of nationalizing the telephone?

Mr. Pigeon: I thank the hon. member. I was precisely coming to this question.

The Catholic farmers' union, at its last convention, recommended that the government of the province of Quebec should take appropriate steps to nationalize the Bell Telephone Company of Canada; St. Jean Baptiste societies did likewise.

I hope that at its next session the Quebec government will introduce a legislation to nationalize the Bell Telephone Company of Canada. Moreover, I am convinced that the province of Ontario will do the same if Quebec acts first.

[Text]

Mr. Brown: Could I ask the hon. member to confine his remarks to the amendment?

Mr. Pigeon: Mr. Chairman, you will decide whether I am out of order.

Power companies of the province of Quebec have been nationalized. Are the people of Quebec worse off for all that?

Mr. Turner: May I put a question to the hon. member?

Does he advocate the nationalization of that company for economic or nationalistic reasons?

[Translation]

Mr. Pigeon: Mr. Chairman, there are both economic and nationalistic reasons. It is dis-