

time to recognize that there was a precedent in the third reading debate on this bill last night. It was set by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) who spoke upon that issue. It has been referred to in the House today, as well. The precedent has been established that this is part of the issue we are talking about when dealing with third reading of this bill related to Air Canada.

It has been stated that the economic power of Canada is being shifted from central Canada to a centre of gravity somewhere to the west. As that happens, the prairies and British Columbia will become a more important economic and integral part of confederation. We need to recognize that in part we are talking about the concept of national unity.

When we talk about national unity, it is important to note that in a nation such as Canada there can be no such preview to the notion of national unity, if there is no method of national communications or national transportation. Instead of those types of objectives, we have a sense of favouring some areas over others. That is exemplified by the freight rates in this country, which are discriminatory to certain regions, the fact that we have air corridors which are discriminatory to some regions, and that the infrastructure in the whole mode of transportation across this country holds biases against certain areas.

When we talk about the Edmonton international airport, we are not talking about the citizens of the city of Edmonton; we are referring to the entire Northwest Territories, which comprise more than a third of Canada, and we are talking about the northern parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. The hon. member should be reminded that my riding extends 200 miles from the city of Edmonton, and that airport is not serving a local constituency need; it is serving a major, potential economic thrust in this country.

If people had vision as to the future of the nation, they would recognize that Edmonton international airport, if developed properly, would open up enormous economic potential. As much as we would like to underline and underscore the fact that the Commonwealth Games will be held in Edmonton, it means nothing in relation to the potential development of the Northwest Territories, the Yukon and northern Alberta, all of which are relying heavily upon a national air policy that will give adequate service to the Edmonton international airport.

If we look at Air Canada's statistics, we will note that in 1974 the airline lost \$18.7 million.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. It being five o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper, namely, notices of motions (papers), private bills and public bills. As there are no notices of motions (papers), the House will proceed to the consideration of private bills.

Bell Canada

PRIVATE BILLS

[English]

BELL CANADA

Hon. Martin O'Connell (Scarborough East) moved that Bill C-1001, respecting Bell Canada, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications.

• (1702)

He said: Mr. Speaker, this private bill, Bill C-1001, is a measure respecting Bell Canada. It is identical to Bill S-2 which was passed by the Senate of Canada some 11 months ago, in December, 1976. As the House will recall, Bill S-2 was subsequently given first reading in this House in December of last year. Second reading debate began on January 27, 1977, some nine months ago, but did not conclude before the House prorogued on October 17, just a few weeks ago. In reintroducing this bill under its new number, Bill C-1001, I would like to review briefly its four main objectives. Then I want to conclude with an appeal or a plea that the House send the bill to committee as early as possible so that a detailed examination of its objectives and clauses can be made.

Perhaps it would be worth while to remind ourselves of certain basic facts about Bell Canada. One of the least known facts is that this company has a charter which, in effect, is a special act of parliament and the charter can be changed. Many companies seek changes to their basic constitutions as conditions in the economy change, but the charter of this company can be changed only in a special way, that is, by a private bill introduced into this House by a private member, and not by the government. That means that in respect of this major Canadian corporation, some obligation is imposed upon us, as members of this House—not in this instance being led by the government, not in this instance having a party majority behind the government, but simply acting as private members—to proceed as quickly as we can to detailed examination, and the only place where that can be done is in the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications.

Bell Canada is almost 100 years old; it was incorporated in 1880. As we know, it provides telecommunications services and facilities in Ontario, Quebec and the Northwest Territories. In addition, through affiliated companies it supplies telephone and telecommunications services in the four Atlantic provinces. Bell Canada is a Canadian-owned company and it is operated by Canadians. The company has more shareholders throughout Canada than any other Canadian corporation; some 209,000 registered shareholders alone own over 97 per cent of Bell Canada's issued shares.

This, of course, not only reflects the confidence Canadians have in the company as a major Canadian utility, but it also indicates the on-going practice of Bell Canada of raising large sums of money in capital markets by way of issuing common shares. One of the objectives of this bill is to authorize the company to go into capital markets to raise more common shares, to sell more common shares and to raise more capital,