

*Railway Act*

massive federal deficit that our Government inherited from the previous administration. However, the ramifications of this measure encompass much more than the moneys cited.

When the Government is presented with an alternative which can render a public service more responsive to the needs of those served while at the same time reducing the burden on the taxpayer, I think we would all agree that it is the duty of the Government to assume such a measure. The implementation of such a measure will serve as an effective demonstration of the Government's resolve to place many of its operations on a full cost-recovery basis, and this in itself is part of the larger task of restoring financial responsibility in the country. I believe that Bill C-4 has much merit and that it deserves the full consideration and support of the House.

As I pointed out at the beginning of my speech, many people may not quite understand exactly why we are doing what we are doing at this time and why the measure is under the Railway Act. Let me point out that Canada has something of which to be very proud in the telecommunications industry. We have been the leaders in the telecommunications field and I am sure we will continue to be. We must also make sure that consumers are protected. I would like nothing better than not to have any regulations at all in some of these areas and to let the free enterprise system take its course. Whether the telephone system is an essential service or not is debatable, but I think many of us consider today that it is. We have to remember that the telephone system has to be available to the citizens of Canada, and we want to make sure it stays that way. That is why our Government will be taking steps from time to time to make sure that monopolies, such as the telephone systems, are regulated and that people will have an opportunity through the regulatory process to make sure they have their say about the operations of the monopolies.

I think we all realize that the telephone system was inaugurated in Canada, although the Americans sometimes like to take that credit away from us. It has been a great service to us at a reasonable cost. Under this Bill consumers will have the opportunity to hear from the CRTC, and if it opposes the regulations how the formula for rates will be worked out.

As I mentioned, the \$6 million that we will recover under this Bill may not seem like much with the deficit that we have, but the deficit is heading in the right direction. You may recall, Madam Speaker, that when our Government took over the deficit was running at an extremely high level. We have been able to bring it down to the neighbourhood of \$32.5 billion through a tremendous effort on behalf of our Government. We should be applauding Canadians in many areas for their help. We have asked the farmers to help with cost recovery. We have asked the voters to help with cost recovery. Now we are asking the regulators of the telephone service to be involved in cost recovery. I think that is only fair. Those are just some of things we are trying to do.

Let me add that we can telephone from our homes to almost anywhere in the world. Most of us can dial directly, although in some places we still have to use operators. It is a marvel how

the system works. I do not understand how it works. Maybe some other Hon. Members know more about how the system works, but it certainly works. Other countries do not have a telephone system that works as well as ours. We are very proud of our telephone system in Canada and we should remain proud of it.

Our Government will continue to watch the purse strings, making sure we are getting our fair share of revenue, but not forgetting those people who have to use the telephone service on a regular basis. As Members of Parliament we hear from our constituents often about the telephone system, the Post Office and many other problem areas that exist today. I do not think we hear as many complaints about the telephone system as we do about other agencies. The system in operation in Canada today is one of the best in the world and people recognize that. We do not have that many problems with the telephone service, at least not where I live in the beautiful area of Essex-Kent. We still have some services which are not part of the Bell Canada system: one of the few left in the area. We still have a central—

● (1240)

**An Hon. Member:** Do you still have the crank?

**Mr. Caldwell:** Yes, we still have the crank on the phone; one long, three short. Perhaps in Vancouver they still have the central operators where one long and three short means something. That was our old phone number many years ago.

I do want to say that I hope we have the support of the House. We would like to get this Bill through. It is not a Bill which will shake the rafters of the country, but it is an important step in this Government's effort to make sure people know where we are going in communications, and I hope we get quick passage.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne):** Questions and comments?

**Mrs. Finestone:** Madam Speaker, in light of my colleague's comments, I want to tell you that I still have a country phone with one long and two short. The Hon. Member made some remarks with respect to the pride he feels as a Conservative in that his Party founded the CBC. I would be anxious to hear his reaction to the remarks of the well-known, highly-respected journalist and broadcaster who has given so much to our country, both in its oral and written history, someone we all respect and admire. I refer to Pierre Berton. I would like to quote from an article in *The Sunday Herald* of October 19, and I would then like a response from my hon. friend. The article says:

Tories killing CBC: Berton

The Conservatives are slowly but surely killing the CBC and other cultural agencies that spawned a strong Canadian culture in the last 30 years, says author-broadcaster Pierre Berton.

"Television is our most important Canadian institution because it provides the glue that holds us together," he said Friday.

"It's our new national dream just as the railroad once was."