

Bell Canada

is silly to have competing corporations. You cannot help but be a monopoly if you are in the telephone business. In many ways, Bell telephone is a kind of government within a government. This is really important. Like governments, they cannot please everyone. The difficulty is that Bell does not recognize that it is unique. Sometimes they say they understand it. My feeling, from talking to people in Bell, is that they have not sufficiently recognized the kind of responsibility that goes with being big, with being a monopoly and with having to please everyone as governments in fact try to do but not always successfully. Like governments, all kinds of things get heaped on their head by virtue of the fact they are like that. Bell wants to operate and be a business like other business, when in fact it is not a business like other businesses. This is the critical difference and why Bell gets itself into far more difficulties than is necessary.

I started my remarks by saying there are many things about Bell for which we should be happy and grateful. However, when Bell starts to behave in the way it does, it never seems to put its best foot forward. If it does, it winds up with that foot in its mouth.

● (1732)

One senses a feeling of resentment among Bell executives that they should have to go to the House of Commons and ask for the powers they feel they should possess. But Bell is in a very special position. It is not a business like other businesses because it is a monopoly and because it plays a social role in our society. Telephones are no longer a luxury, they are a necessity, a public service. In this situation Bell should be prepared to explain in some detail the reasoning behind its requests and to answer rationally to the House of Commons. Bell Canada is almost a government within a government. It should recognize its social responsibilities and be prepared to subject itself to the same kind of examination as, for example, government agencies.

Some people talk about nationalizing Bell Telephone. I do not want to nationalize Bell Telephone. But if the corporation argues that it is only a private organization whose only concern is to satisfy its customers and its shareholders—and I believe an effort is made to do this—then all those responsible will find themselves in trouble. If the company were to recognize its special responsibility I think it would do very well when it came to the House of Commons to ask for certain additional powers, and so on.

I believe the company has a very good case to make in terms of its expansion. I, for one, believe that if Bell is open about things and is subject to the scrutiny of the House of Commons, there is no reason why it should not expand into other fields. However, I am reluctant to see it expand in the absence of some justification for such a course. Bell executives want the House of Commons to give the company a blank cheque with which to do as it pleases.

Perhaps the actions the corporation has in mind are good, but we should not be called upon to accept this automatically. It sometimes happens that the severest criticism voiced in the

[Mr. Saltzman.]

House of Commons is directed against Crown agencies and other instruments of public policy. If my hon. friend from Regina-Lake Centre, whom I admire greatly, thinks that nationalizing Bell is likely to solve all the problems, he need only look toward AECL, or Air Canada, or some of the other agencies which have been the subject of attention from time to time in this Chamber. There is no guarantee that bringing industries under nationalization will automatically make things better. What makes agencies responsible to the public purpose is the fact that the House of Commons can scrutinize their operations.

I realize it is a nuisance for a private corporation to be obliged to come to the House of Commons where, for example, my hon. friends from Northern Ontario can ask questions about their constituents getting adequate telephone service. They bring up the case of constituents living two miles or so from a telephone line and ask why they cannot be connected to the service without having to pay very large sums of money. Well, we are trying to help not only the service from person to person but from province to province and from region to region. We do not say to a person that because he was silly enough to live outside the main centres of population he should be deprived of the services of hospitals, of television, education and so on. I am sure Bell Telephone executives would agree that a person should not be left without hospital services—from what I know of them, they are decent, humane people. But when it comes to telephone service they take a different view, though access to a telephone might be just as vital in some circumstances as access to a hospital. They say, "If you want to get a telephone it will cost you \$2,000 to spring a line because we are not in your district."

We say that a company in the position of Bell Canada has a special social responsibility, but I know what the answer would be. It would be along these lines: "If we accepted such a responsibility it would be unfair to our stockholders or to telephone users in other areas, because people in those other areas might be paying more for telephone service if we extended uneconomic lines to people living in more remote areas."

I am sure that people in Waterloo-Cambridge, for instance, are already paying out money to help those in other areas of Canada. And they are happy to be doing it. That is part of being a Canadian. We had a flood in my area a few years ago and we were helped by people in other communities. That is what being a Canadian is all about. This is what we find so hard to get through to the consciousness of Bell Canada—the idea that it is not a business like other businesses. If the corporation insists on taking the line that it has responsibility only to its shareholders then it will invite the kind of answer given by my hon. friend from Regina-Lake Centre who says, "If that is the situation we shall have to nationalize the company." It is an understandable response.

In some ways Bell behaves like a government and it has to be treated like a government. Governments have always complained that the opposition wants to criticize their actions too much. Consider the system of dealing with estimates in the House. There are some advantages about the new system, but