

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, June 27, 1973

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMUNICATIONS

BELL CANADA RATE INCREASES—TABLING OF REVIEW BY GOVERNMENT OF CANADIAN TRANSPORT COMMISSION DECISION

Hon. Gérard Pelletier (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 41(2) I would like to table in the two official languages the study by the government of Canada of the decision given on March 30, 1973 by the Canadian Transport Commission concerning Bell Canada's Request "A".

[English]

Mr. Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I understand that the minister has sought to table the decision of the government with regard to the suspension of certain rate increases granted by the Canadian Transport Commission to Bell Canada, which the minister announced on April 6 were suspended by the government. I wish to protest as vigorously as I can the fact that the minister has simply tabled the document instead of making a statement to the House. I remind you, Mr. Speaker, that on April 2 there was a debate on a Standing Order 26 motion which I moved, and the decision of the government to suspend the increases granted by the CTC was announced by the minister in a statement to the House on April 6.

I see no reason in the world, other than a desire not to permit other members of the House to comment, why he could not make a statement today. Even if the statement he has tabled is long and he does not want to read it all, surely he could have summarized it and told us on his feet what the decision of the government is on this matter instead of merely tabling a document without giving members of the House an opportunity to comment on it, particularly when it was important enough for the government to suspend the increases on April 6.

I do not usually rise on points of order suggesting that people are flouting the rights of the House, but if this matter was important enough for the minister to have announced on April 6 the decision of the government to suspend the increases granted by the CTC, it is important enough for him to rise to his feet in the House today and announce the decision of the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Speak up like a man.

Mr. Lewis: It is surely a lack of courage as well as a lack of propriety to use Standing Order 41(2) merely to table a document.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1410)

[Translation]

Mr. Pelletier: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I do not accept the allegations and even less the accusations made by the hon. member. I believe that my only reason for tabling this document is the wish to abide by your oft-repeated instructions to us, Mr. Speaker, namely that statements on motions should be brief and legible.

Furthermore, I am certain that if I had tabled a brief statement, the hon. member who has just spoken would certainly have complained of the dearth of explanations by the government on such an important decision.

The document I have just tabled is not only longer than usual, not for the sake of fancy but of efficiency, it also contains statistical tables which I can hardly see myself reading in a statement on motions.

[English]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, on the point of order which has been raised may I ask Your Honour to consider at least one precedent. Since we did not know this was coming up I have not had the time to look it up, but Your Honour will recall an occasion a few years ago when the then Minister of Finance, the Hon. E. J. Benson, sought to table a document the effect of which was to give one side of an argument with no opportunity for reply. I submit that is what is happening in this case. A document called a review of the government's position has been tabled. I suspect it is the government's side of the argument. In view of the fact this matter was discussed on two days, as indicated by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis), I do not think the Minister of Communications (Mr. Pelletier) should be permitted on this occasion to operate under the provisions of Standing Order 41(2).

Mr. Speaker: The point of order raised by the hon. member for York South and supported by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is, of course, of interest. I recall very well the incident and precedent to which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre alluded. Obviously there are two separate Standing Orders. Standing Order 15(3) provides for statements on motions and makes it possible for members speaking on behalf of parties in opposition to the government to make comments. Standing Order 41(2) states that a minister of the Crown, or a parliamentary secretary acting on behalf of a minister, may in his place in the House state that he