

• (2220)

The government's relationship with Bell is almost familial. It is incorporated by the government; it is federally regulated and the government is Bell's largest customer and as such has a vested interest in the quality of service provided and the rates it charges. Tax rates are determined by the government and the government has the ability to end the system of fast write-offs for capital expenses by Bell which serve to reduce its profits on paper.

Bell is the recipient of massive amounts of government assistance either directly or indirectly through its subsidiaries. For example, we know that the Export Development Corporation has Northern Electric Corporation as number two on its list of beneficiaries. Northern Electric is a subsidiary of Bell and it has received roughly \$90 million from the government, which is roughly 10 per cent of the total given by the Export Development Corporation. In due course, Mr. Speaker, I will be asking that the government provide the House with a list of the amounts of money given be the Canadian taxpayer to Bell Canada. I think the public is entitled to have this information.

What I am seeking tonight is assurance from the minister that the government regards its role as regulator and supervisor of Bell seriously, that it will investigate thoroughly the concern I have relayed and that it will not hesitate to overrule the CTC if the award given Bell in the form of a rate increase is contrary to the best interests of the Canadian public.

Adjournment Debate

[Translation]

Hon. Gérard Pelletier (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that the government really cares about the protection of individuals and telephone users.

Indeed, as he mentioned himself, it is because of section 64 of the National Transportation Act and because of the powers that this section gives the cabinet to overrule decisions made by the Commission that I decided not to recommend to the government to intervene because that intervention—in the event of a possible second intervention by the governor in council—would place the government in the position of both judge and jury.

Like the hon. member my department received complaints from individuals and forwarded them diligently to the Commission, insisting that they be given the greatest attention. In conclusion, I should like to say that the idea of a government or department intervention in the business of the Canadian Transport Commission seems to me to be worthy of consideration.

This is why in the paper on a national communications policy—the publication of which was announced in the Speech from the Throne—we express the firm intention of bringing before the House proposals which would bring back some balance in the legislation and would allow the Minister of Communications to make representations to the Transport Commission or any other body responsible for regulations in order to fulfil the mandate of the Minister of Communications which is to protect as directly and immediately as possible the interests of telecommunication users.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.25 p.m.