

Bell Canada

I have always said, Mr. Speaker, that the socialists in this country are the real friends of small business. To prove this all one needs to do is look at the telephone rates. Business telephones cost \$11 in Regina and \$26 in Halifax. Who is the friend of the small businessman?

Mr. Parent: What about Toronto?

Mr. Nystrom: Someone says "give us Toronto". In the city of Toronto a private subscriber pays \$7.45 a month for a telephone.

Mr. Parent: That is less than Halifax.

Mr. Nystrom: It is less than Halifax, and that proves my point. Toronto is a big city with some 1.4 million telephones. Because there are so many telephones, you can afford to provide service at a lower rate than you can in Halifax. You do not have this kind of consideration with the publicly owned telephone system. You do not discriminate against people who live in smaller centres. Under the free enterprise system—or the so-called free enterprise system, it is not free at all—the smaller the centre, the higher the rate and the worse the service. This is one more good argument why the telephone system should be nationalized, and it is why I am not going to facilitate passage of this bill.

In Montreal there are roughly 1.4 million subscribers. Surprisingly enough, the rate in Montreal is exactly the same as in Toronto, \$7.45 for private subscribers, and \$22.10 for business telephones. So again the big city gets the better deal because it has the volume. Small centres have to help subsidize subscribers in big cities, and they help subsidize the profits of a large corporation.

Let me turn to other cities, such as Winnipeg. In Winnipeg there is a publicly owned telephone system, as the hon. member for St. Catharines (Mr. Parent) knows. There are 237,000 subscribers. Incidentally, this telephone system was set up many years ago by a Conservative government and it has been run very efficiently. In 1976 the rates in Winnipeg were the lowest of any city in Canada. I am sad to say that they are even 10 cents lower than the rates in Regina. The Winnipeg rate for private subscribers in August, 1976, was \$4.90, and \$11.65 for business telephones.

What is the situation in St. John's, Newfoundland? I am sure that if this corporation had any feeling for people in Newfoundland, it would make sure that the people there had telephone service at a very low rate. In St. John's there are roughly 46,000 telephones.

Mr. Douglas (Bruce-Grey): But what is the comparison in capital investment there?

Mr. Nystrom: I am talking about the rate charged. In St. John's, Newfoundland, the people are charged \$8 a month. Business telephones cost \$23 a month. In Newfoundland, of all places, Mr. Speaker, people are charged more for telephones than people in Montreal or Toronto! Surely to goodness this is

[Mr. Nystrom.]

another argument for public ownership of the telephone system in this country.

There is a privately owned telephone system in Vancouver, with about half a million subscribers. The charge for a private line is \$8.05, and \$24.20 for a business telephone.

Let me now turn to Edmonton, that great free enterprise province of the Conservative party. There, "Peter the Red" has a publicly owned telephone system. I notice that the one Conservative in the House is not even reacting to my comments. The rate in Edmonton for residence service is \$5.80, which is the third lowest in Canada, with \$5 in Regina and \$4.90 in Winnipeg.

Mr. Parent: What is the rate in St. Catharines?

Mr. Nystrom: I do not have the rates for St. Catharines with me but I am willing to bet that the rates there are a lot higher. If the hon. member wants to defend Bell Canada, then he can rise in his place when I am finished.

In Sherbrooke the rate is \$6.20 for private subscribers, and every single city which has a private telephone system has higher rates, in many cases 70 per cent to 80 per cent higher, than the rates charged by publicly owned telephone systems such as those in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta. If the members of this House are interested in serving their constituents by giving them a telephone service at the lowest possible cost in these days of high inflation, high unemployment, and a depressed economy, they should join us in arguing that Bell Canada should be nationalized so as to serve the people of Canada better. This company should not be owned by a few shareholders who happen to be fortunate enough to have a few bucks in their pockets, possibly because they inherited those bucks from their granddads or their fathers. Let us take a look at some of these people who own Bell Telephone, some of these little old widows and orphans of the Conservative and Liberal parties who support this great free enterprise system in Canada. We find that the shareholders are large companies, and there are not many widows involved.

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Let me refer to a number of them on this list I have, which includes Associated Investors Ltd., with 2,400 common shares of Bell Telephone; Canada Life, owning thousands and thousands of shares; The Canada Permanent Investment Company with some 5,000 shares; Canada Permanent Pooled, 10,000 common shares.

An hon. Member: And who owns those companies?

Mr. Nystrom: Who owns the shares of those companies? I suppose they are owned by other companies.

Then we have on the list the Canada Trust Investors Equity owning 15,000 shares; we have Canada Trust R.S.P. owning 62,000 common shares of Bell Telephone; we have Canadian International Investor Trust owning some 12,000 common shares; we have Commercial Finance owning 9,200 common shares; we have Confederated Life owning 62,400 shares, and