

Bell Canada

disadvantage in any respect whatever. I suggest that we are subjecting all the people of the area governed by this monopoly to a particularly discriminatory rate increase. The government obviously is unwilling and incapable of fighting rising inflation. Its persistent refusal to meet with business representatives or the provinces to outline policy guidelines shows a decided lack of forthrightness and initiative.

As recently as March 28 this year, in reply to a question asked by Mr. Stanfield about wholesale price increases and the government's intention to implement new measures—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Would the hon. member please refer to hon. gentlemen who are members of this House by position or constituency rather than by name.

Mr. Ellis: I stand corrected, Mr. Speaker. I was directing attention to a question asked by the Leader of the Opposition about wholesale price increases and the government's intention to implement new measures to control inflation. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) replied:

I have no policy statement to announce today on that matter.

We have had no policy statement since then having to do with the control of price increases. The day after the budget was presented, with the plea of the finance minister to business, the government's spending estimates were introduced for the fiscal year 1973-74. These showed an increase of almost 15 per cent over the previous fiscal year.

We would strongly recommend that the government take advantage of the power vested in it by law and review the decision of the CTC to increase rates for Bell Canada. One of the facts I find so interesting is that originally, as I understand it, the CTC was developed to protect the consumers' interest; in other words, to defend the public from increases by bodies which had powers unaffected by the normal question of competitive rates.

I recall an occasion many years ago, while I was mayor of a small city, when the Association of Mayors and Reeves decided to object to similar rate increases. However, the association did not have the financial base upon which to argue in respect of the decision of the CTC to give Bell Canada an increase. When the provinces object to such increases, frequently they have difficulty in finding sufficient money in their budgets to oppose an increase, simply because Bell Canada with its army of lawyers, economists, and so on, is extremely well prepared and well financed to fight such a battle.

I suggest that this applies not only to the CTC in respect of Bell Canada but also to freight rates, telecommunication and transmission rates which the CTC also controls. So far as that goes, we have the present government not using the authority it has to hold in check other regulatory bodies, such as the National Energy Board, the CRTC, and others. These bodies, seemingly, grant increases whenever asked and the government does not provide an opportunity for the public as a whole to object to the increases.

Corporate law is becoming very complex and the individual Canadian is not equipped to appear before the

[Mr. Ellis.]

CTC and present his views in a manner that could overcome the rhetoric of the legal staff of Bell Canada or other large bodies. So we find that the government has increased its spending and is allowing its own regulatory bodies to increase rates without any guidelines whatever. We feel the government must recognize the state of the economy for what it is and, furthermore, must introduce effective measures and guidelines to combat increasing inflation, particularly in areas under its jurisdiction.

[Translation]

Mr. Léonel Beaudoin (Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to comment on the motion before us this evening requesting the immediate cancellation of the rate increases granted Bell Canada.

The matter is very serious because we are grappling with a company that has virtual monopoly, in Quebec and Ontario, on all that is called "telephone". People are therefore the slaves of any of the company's decision because they cannot switch over for service to another company when costs are too high.

I congratulate the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) for having introduced a motion on this matter this afternoon. The terms used are, to my mind, quite accurate; it reads in part as follows:

... the decision of the Canadian Transport Commission to grant Bell Canada almost all the rate increases it requested in its application A and the need for the government to suspend the application of the decision immediately and to consider rescinding it as unacceptable and contrary to the public interest.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is most important because it reflects, I think, what all Canadians believe. I am sure the hon. member for York South thought of all Canadians this afternoon and specially of those who have a hard time making ends meet. Through this motion, he appeals to all, and particularly to those who are responsible for this Commission and have the power to authorize or refuse the increases requested by Bell Canada.

Everyone in this House knows that for the last six years Bell Canada—

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

• (2030)

[English]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Nipissing (Mr. Blais) wishes to rise on a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, I have obtained a copy of the French text of the resolution if I understand the hon. member addressing the House, he is referring to a resolution to rescind decisions relative to increases whereas the resolution does not mention rescinding but actually calls upon the government to suspend application of the decision immediately in order to consider rescinding it.

[English]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The dividing line is a little thin, as I read the resolution in both English and French, and I think the hon. member should be allowed to make his argument. So I recognize him again.