

days. They refused, and when we organized a local company, they would not sell that company their telephones and compelled it to get other telephones. Then they threatened it with lawsuits.

Mr. BERGERON. And won.

Mr. CONMEE. No, the Bell Company got the worst of it. They had then Canadian patents disallowed.

Mr. BERGERON. I have contrary information from the Minister of Justice on that point.

Mr. CONMEE. They crushed out the local company. I am not finding fault with them for that because other people in their place would probably have done the same. At Owen Sound they did the same thing. A local company started and it was forced to discontinue because the Bell people wanted the monopoly. It would be a convenience for my hon. friend, if he had the telephone of another system in his house, to be able to call up the central and talk to Montreal instead of having to leave his house and go to a pay station in order to get the same privilege.

Mr. BERGERON. We have in Montreal two systems, the Merchants and the Bell—two good systems. The Bell has some 20,000 to 25,000 subscribers and the Merchants have a great deal less, but the price of the Merchants is a great deal smaller than that of the Bell. Now, my hon. friend subscribes to the Bell—let us suppose—and I to the Merchants. I pay less than he does. I telephone to Ottawa, and under this law I am able to hold the line, though he also wants to speak to Ottawa, and though he pays more for his telephone than I do, and is a subscriber to the very company that owns the long distance line that I am holding against him. Is that fair? Is it in the interest of telephone subscribers generally?

Mr. CONMEE. If the hon. gentleman's (Mr. Bergeron's) argument is worth anything, it defeats the amendment. His argument is that a subscriber to another company may discommode a subscriber to the Bell by holding a long distance line. Is not that so?

Mr. BERGERON. Yes.

Mr. CONMEE. Well, it is not necessary to pass this law to have that condition of affairs, for anybody can go into the Bell telephone station and use the long distance line to the disadvantage of the patrons of the Bell.

Mr. BERGERON. No, he is not given a preference over the regular subscribers.

Mr. CONMEE. Why, I am not a subscriber to the Bell and I have been using their lines right along, both in this city and in Toronto

Mr. CONMEE.

Mr. BERGERON. At pay stations?

Mr. CONMEE. Well, what is the difference?

Mr. BERGERON. I can telephone from my office in Montreal for the connection with Ottawa and it will be given to me before it will be given to the pay station.

Mr. CONMEE. I believe it is a case of first come, first served, while under the law as I would like to see it, the only differences being that a subscriber to a local company may have to pay more for the long distance connection than the man who pays more for his telephone by subscribing direct to the large telephone company, and the company owning the long distance line would receive greater compensation to be fixed by the board.

Mr. BERGERON. As a subscriber to the Bell, in the use of the long distance line, I would be given a preference over the hon. gentleman who is not a subscriber. But if this law passes, a subscriber to the Merchants' will have a preference over me, though I am a subscriber to the Bell.

Mr. CONMEE. No, he will not be given a preference—whoever calls first will have the right to the line, but if he does get the preference wherein can there be complaint that refutes the objection. Telephone companies are common carriers of messages, just as railway companies are common carriers of passengers and freight, and the people have a right to say that they shall conduct their business in the carrying of the messages in the way most convenient to the public—of course, without infringing upon the companies' right of property, and nobody is advocating that they should be subject to any hardship, but we say that the whole matter should be left to the board to which we have left matters of railway operation involving very much larger sums of money and more complex questions for adjustment. If there is any reason why this privilege of connection with the long distance line, as provided in this amendment should be given, that reason applies with even greater force to the connection with the local lines, because the service and convenience of the public are more constantly involved. I cannot see how any railway, telegraph, or telephone system can possibly be injured by being given more customers, and more business, and more money. Some hon. gentlemen here have argued that these trunk lines are not paying, and yet they argue that they would be injured by being given more business.

Mr. E. M. MACDONALD. That is not the argument, it is only the hon. gentleman's assumption of the argument.

Mr. CONMEE. That was stated here over and over again—that if the business.