

B.C. Telephone and Telegraph System

6. The new owners agree to inspection of the area from time to time as may be deemed necessary or desirable by the federal government to ascertain if the conditions of this agreement are being met.

Mr. Fulton: For what term is the right of inspection expected to continue? Would that be a permanent thing?

Mr. Chevrier: This is a general condition as set out in the proposal for the agreement for sale. No time has been mentioned there, but I suppose it will be worked out in the agreement. I am not able to answer that. A series of discussions were then held between the government, British Columbia Telephone Company and Canadian National Telegraphs. I can say here and now that the discussions with the B.C. Telephone Company have been conducted on a very satisfactory plane. For instance, the B.C. Telephone Company has informed the department that it is willing to take over, as of the effective date of the sale, all of our people then engaged in telephone work in the British Columbia division and who were employed with the telephone service. There would of course be a provisional period of not more than nine months and if during that time the ex-government employee's services are satisfactory he or she will then become a full-fledged employee of the telephone company.

The company has stated further that in no case will there be a reduction in salary and that in the majority of instances there will be an increase. We thought that was a very fair offer.

Mr. Green: Could I ask the minister whether there is any provision for super-annuation?

Mr. Chevrier: I am coming to that.

Mr. Fulton: I think that is very fair too.

Mr. Chevrier: With reference to existing services, the company is undertaking to provide telephone service to all points served by the facilities which it is purchasing, such service to be at least the equivalent of what was given by the Department of Transport. The company wishes to commit itself only to the provision of such additional service as it considers reasonable.

My hon. friend asks: What about super-annuation, etc., and I suppose that includes seniority. There then followed a series of discussions having to do with those matters. I think that in so far as seniority is concerned the position is a satisfactory one because the British Columbia Telephone Company has indicated to us that they have a collective bargaining agreement with their employees. To the question which was asked of them, in these words:

Will seniority rights apply on a local or system basis?

[Mr. Chevrier.]

The reply by the British Columbia Telephone Company was:

Seniority rights will apply on a system basis consistent with Article XII of the British Columbia Telephone Company agreement with federation of telephone workers, which reads:

"Arrangements of staff shall be made on the basis of ability, seniority, merit and service requirements. Seniority, under all circumstances, shall be given every consideration."

And then, with reference to superannuation, I might say that the matter is a pretty complicated one, and it would take a great deal of time to discuss it in detail now. I believe however I can put it in this way, by saying that none of our employees—and I am speaking now only with respect to British Columbia Telephone—will lose super-annuation benefits from the federal government. Employees entering the service of the British Columbia Telephone will be brought under their plan; and from the letters I have seen and read I believe I am safe in saying that their plan is an even better one than we have in the Department of Transport to cover government employees. I say that because the wage rates are higher. That is, I believe, on the subject of super-annuation, the arrangement that the telephone company intends to put into effect and which, in so far as I understand the situation, I feel will be a satisfactory one.

Now, then, the other point raised by my hon. friend was that of Canadian National Telegraphs. I have been unable to give the house any information in the matter, because it was thought that if first we could dispose of the arrangement with the B.C. Telephone Company, we could then proceed to enter into a detailed discussion with Canadian National Telegraphs. It has not been possible to do that until this week. The officials of my department are this very day in Montreal discussing with Canadian National Telegraphs the points I am now relating in regard to the telephone company.

They are discussing not only the question of employees that will be taken over, not only the question of salaries which will be paid, but also the matter of seniority, super-annuation, and all such other matters. Therefore I am not in a position to make a statement in so far as that is concerned, other than to say that I am hopeful that Canadian National Telegraphs would not want to place themselves in a position of inferiority vis-à-vis British Columbia Telephone Company, in so far as the treatment of our employees is concerned. I know that I have already in my conversations with the president of the Canadian National Railways brought to his attention the importance of dealing with these people on a fair and equitable basis;