

Adjournment Debate

Mr. C. Douglas (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, first I should like to reply to the question having to do with the human rights aspect of the contract to which the hon. member has referred. That aspect of the contract has gone before the human rights commission which has been asked by the minister to look into the matter. I understand that an investigator for the commission has now seen the contract and is preparing a report for consideration by the commission. If the commission finds that any aspect of the contract is in violation of the Canadian Human Rights Act, I would assume that the commissioner, for whom we have great respect as a former member of this House, will take whatever action he feels necessary or appropriate to correct any problems which may arise.

I would point out that there are really two contracts. One is a general agreement between the ministry of posts, telegraphs and telephones of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and a consortium consisting of Bell Canada, Philips of the Netherlands and L. M. Ericsson of Sweden to extend, modernize, operate and maintain the Saudi Arabian telephone system.

The second contract is a five year contract between the ministry and Bell Canada. Its current value is about \$1.1 billion and it is for the operation and maintenance of the telephone system in the kingdom, the construction of certain facilities and the procurement of materials and supplies.

With regard to the second question, I would point out that the minister has not seen the contracts, nor have I. We have, wisely I believe, left the matter to the CRTC, the regulatory body. The issue was raised, of course, at the time Bell Canada was asked to make the contracts public. Bell has submitted that the contracts should be kept confidential because to make them public would, in Bell's view, cause the company to be placed at a disadvantage in future international negotiations. The interveners in the rate hearing, however, told the CRTC that its effective intervention in the rate case required them to be familiar with all aspects of Bell's revenues and expenses, including the potential risk involved in the Saudi Arabian contract.

● (2217)

In order to permit effective intervention while at the same time protecting Bell's international competitive position, the CRTC decided to hold an in camera hearing to examine the Saudi Arabian contracts. This hearing will begin tomorrow. One representative of each intervener will be allowed to review the contracts and then participate in the in camera hearing, to hear evidence, cross-examine witnesses and give arguments at that time. The interveners will have the opportunity to appear before Bell in order to review the contract and make whatever intervention they feel should be made at that time. I am sure the interveners will have an opportunity to ask questions about these agreements during that in camera hearing. By employing the procedure of a closed hearing, I believe the CRTC is rightly attempting to balance the interests of the public and the interests of Bell and its future negotiations.

[Mr. Symes.]

ELECTIONS—REASON FOR PRIME MINISTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr. J. P. Nowlan (Annapolis Valley): Mr. Speaker, Thursday, May 11, 1978, was a day which will go down in parliamentary history as the day when the great election hoax story finally unravelled. It became a question of the chicken and the egg. Basically it was the chicken in terms of the Gallup poll. At that time I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) the question as to whether, in making his decision not to go to the people on Thursday, May 11, in order to provide them with a chance to make some adjudication on his tenure, he was following his own personal creed, which reads as follows:

The only constant factor to be found in my thinking over the years has been opposition to accepted opinions.

In fact, that is the first sentence of the foreword in his own book entitled, "Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Federalism and the French Canadians".

I was taken aback by the fact that Your Honour thought the question was somewhat advanced and somewhat of a frivolous nature. Perhaps Your Honour thought it was a little facetious, since the great announcement came after the Prime Minister had played and dangled Canadians for weeks and months on end. That interfered with the personal lives of many. It cost many thousands of people many thousands of dollars, yet the boy had his day. He played, he dangled, and he decided to pick up the ball and take it home. That one sentence of the book's foreword is perhaps the genesis for many of our problems today. I asked a serious question. I was disappointed that Your Honour cut me off. Fortunately the Prime Minister gave some answer. It was a traverse to the question. He thought it was good that the hon. member was educated.

I am glad to have an opportunity tonight to reiterate this one sentence of his personal creed. It is high time for Canadians of partisan and objective views to become educated regarding his personal creed. He has indicated that the only constant factor is going against accepted public opinion. Many hon. members know about the sales tax in Quebec. Every party in the province of Quebec, every party in this federal House and most of the premiers across Canada say that the stance of the Prime Minister on sales tax is wrong. I am referring to the debate and dispute between Mr. Parizeau and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien). We realize the Prime Minister is wrong and that his government is wrong. Yet going against that public opinion, we will have a pseudo-social credit, social dividend theory to pump money directly into the pocket books of those who can afford to pay the taxes.

Your Honour sits in his chair, I sit in my chair, and other hon. members sit in their chairs. We had the same things two or three years ago during what was then a debate on capital punishment. Again the government said it was to be a free vote, yet government members stood up in a monolithic or, as some people would say, a moronic way and voted as a group against capital punishment.

● (2222)

Never has there been a more definable matter in the opinion of the public. You can debate many of the reasons the public