

I note with sadness that the president of the commission which granted this increase to Bell Canada is the Hon. Edgar Benson, former minister of finance. Whatever one may say about the Canadian Transport Commission, I plead with the minister and members of the government to realize that the ultimate responsibility for protecting the public interest lies with them. The act places that responsibility upon them. Section 64(1) of the National Transportation Act reads in part as follows:

The governor in council may at any time, in his discretion—

Let me point out this is not in the discretion of the Canadian Transport Commission; it is in the discretion of the governor in council. It continues:

—either upon petition of any party, person or company interested, or of his own motion, and without any petition or application, vary or rescind any order, decision, rule or regulation of the commission, whether such order or decision is made *inter partes* or otherwise, and whether such regulation is general or limited in its scope and application; and any order that the governor in council may make with respect thereto is binding upon the commission and upon all parties.

There could not be more clear language. The act in fact says, I suggest, that the initial responsibility for regulating these rules lies with the Canadian Transport Commission, but that the ultimate responsibility for protecting the public interest is placed on the government of Canada by the section of the act to which I have just referred. I plead with the government not to abrogate its responsibility in this case. I plead with the minister and the government to carry out its duty under the section I have read, because there is no reason for this increase.

I appreciate, as I indicated by a question this afternoon and as I indicated to the minister in conversation on the subject this morning, that it would take time for the government to make a final decision. I hope it will be a decision to rescind this unconscionable increase in rates which the CTC has thoughtlessly given Bell Canada. I appreciate this will take time. The government cannot easily do something about a decision of a body given the power under the act. The government needs to have a full study made, not only of the decision but of all the material that was placed before the commission, so it can justify whatever decision it will make.

Because I appreciate that, I suggested to the minister in my question this afternoon and in my conversation with him this morning that the government ought to immediately suspend the application of the CTC decision pending a final decision of the government on the order made by the commission. If the government takes a week or two to make its decision, by that time the new tariffs will be in effect and I suggest at that point the government will be caught and will not be able to act where it might easily want to act after studying the decision and all the relevant material.

It seems to me there is clearly a *prima facie* case to question the action of the CTC. It seems there is clearly an initial reason for wanting time to study the material, in order to act upon it in accordance with the authority given the governor in council by the section of the act I have read. In order to give itself the time necessary, I see no reason in the world why the governor in council could not, within the next week or so, make a decision to suspend

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the application of the order of the Canadian Transport Commission pending further study of the entire matter.

The CTC has obviously been intimidated by this large corporation I submit that the government must not permit itself to be intimidated by this huge, monopolistic corporation in Canada. I suggest, also, that it is time we served the interests of the people of Canada instead of the interests of Bell Canada. As I said earlier, the time has long passed when a halt should be called to this constant demand by Bell Canada for more and more from its customers, the people of this country. Now is the time for the government to act along the lines I have suggested.

**Mr. J. R. Ellis (Hastings):** Mr. Speaker, in speaking to the motion of the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis), I do not intend to plead on behalf of this party for relief by the government. It has been our task, which has proved to be ineffective, to plead with the government in respect of other issues. Our efforts in this regard have proved that the government is insensitive, not only to the pleas of the opposition but to the pleas of the public.

• (2020)

The recent approval by the CTC of the application by Bell Canada for rate increases is yet another example of the contradictory and convoluted non-policy of the government with regard to combating inflation. In the February 19 budget address, the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) adamantly claimed that the 1973 budget was designed to reduce inflationary pressures in Canada and to offset the effects of past inflation. He implored business, labour and the professions to “exercise price and income restraint”. Yet the Liberal government has failed to offer any specific guidelines or policy proposals to implement and enforce their budget goodies. The increases allowed Bell Canada, and others under the CTC’s jurisdiction, are so large and out of proportion that there can be no relationship whatsoever to any reasonable price guidelines as advocated in the February 19 budget speech.

I find it interesting that there was placed on our desks a short while ago a green document from which I should like to quote a small portion which I find very interesting. It reads:

The present federal regulatory body for telecommunications carriers is the Canadian Transport Commission (CTC) which derives its authority from the National Transportation Act, the Railway Act, and the special acts of incorporation of the undertakings subject to its authority. The CTC either does not have, or has not in the past exercised, authority over a number of matters that are dealt with in subsection C below.

The powers of the CTC are suitable only for the broad economic regulation of a particular corporate entity and are not related to any statutory national policy and objectives—

I repeat the words “are not related to any statutory national policy and objectives.”

—such as the vital importance of east/west communications to the sovereignty and economic prosperity of Canada, and to the preservation of its social and cultural identity.

It goes on to say that the recent criteria for the exercise of regulatory authority require the commission to ensure that questions in respect of tolls shall not subject any particular person or company or any particular description of traffic to any undue or unreasonable prejudice or