

Bell Canada Act

Canada. I hope it will also raise the appropriate flags in terms of additional corporate concentration and providing certain corporations with an overwhelming powerful mandate when overseeing economic activities in a variety of spheres. We are seeing that in the proposed legislation which was introduced earlier today concerning financial institutions, and it is a similar situation in the telecommunications industry.

Finally, I would ask the Minister responsible to take the matter of the lack of a telecommunications policy in Canada very seriously and place it as a high priority in terms of the legislation which is to be brought forward. It is a matter of critical concern for the reasons which I have outlined. With the introduction of a telecommunications policy, I believe the Government would find that the Opposition Parties would support it with some enthusiasm. A telecommunications policy is badly needed. It is absolutely critical. If we look at other countries of a similar size, we see that they all have a telecommunications policy which is more advanced than ours. It is time for us to update the policy at least to the 1960s, and we should strive to update it to the 1990s.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Are there questions or comments? If not, we will resume debate with the Hon. Member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo).

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I can only stand and say: "Here we go again". What we are doing in this legislation has been witnessed throughout the history of the corporate structure in Canada. We are being faced with a situation which has been repeated over and over again.

Many of the services which have been provided to Canadians began as services which were assisted by the Government and continued by the Government. Our Party feels strongly that these services should continue to be services and not profit-making operations. Consequently, we are very dismayed that the Government has recognized and accepted this corporate power, and is throwing in the additional factor of deregulation. By putting those two factors together in this legislation, the Government is giving Bell Canada an opportunity to make its money-making operations profitable to itself and not to the country.

We can foresee in future years that Bell Canada will tell the Government that it cannot provide telephone service because it is not profitable. Bell Canada will tell the Government that if it wants to continue the service it will have to pay for it. We can look back at the history of Canada and see that this process has gone on before. As the Hon. Member for Humboldt-Lake Centre (Mr. Althouse) and the previous speaker just indicated, the Canadian Pacific Railway is probably as good an example as we have of this particular approach. What this Bill does, Mr. Speaker, is legalize the reorganization of Bell Canada and it is a perfect example of how corporations, which for many years had a monopoly and a guaranteed profit, are permitted to spin off into different fields than their original objectives and to use the profits made in the regulated fields to make huge capital gains and unlimited profits.

• (1130)

I suggest that what this Bill really does is allow Bell Canada to do in the 1980s what the CPR did earlier. Our Party is very disturbed that the Government does not recognize that it has a responsibility to provide the kinds of services which the people of Canada have had at a fairly reasonable rate for a long time. The previous Government regulated those services so that the population was able to receive that reasonable rate. When 20 per cent to 30 per cent of the population using telephones across the country are at the poverty line or below, any increase in telephone rates is likely to make it impossible for them to keep telephones in their homes. If the industry is deregulated, as suggested in this Bill, we will allow the telephone companies by this Bill and the partner Bill, Bill C-20, to charge more for their telephone service and eventually eliminate the opportunity for some people to have telephones at all.

The CRTC was supposed to be a government agency which regulated communications in the country. The present Minister of Communications (Mr. Masse) just last week was very articulate in stating that the CRTC would be doing exactly that and would not only provide the service that the people of Canada want but would listen to them. These two Bills indicate that the people of Canada cannot speak as loudly as the corporations because this Bill is exactly what Bell Canada wants. This Bill is not what the CRTC wants, it is not what the consumers want and it is not even what the Government wants. What we have here is a Bill which gives Bell Canada what it wants.

I suppose there is no better example of corporate control of the Government opposite than this Bill, which is a real testament of the kind of corporate power we have in Canada. Instead of the CRTC regulating communications as it was supposed to do, what we have is Bell Canada taking on the CRTC, the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission, the Bureau of Competition Policy and all manner of people who have intervened in the public hearings. It has seemingly fought them all off and got exactly what it wanted in the area of communications. The Government has backed off and produced a Bill which only legislates what is actually already in place. It allows the Bell Canada Corporation to join Canadian Pacific and the other major companies which prospered heavily while they had a government monopoly. When they had established themselves as one of the corporate giants in the country, they then decided they would take their assets and use those assets to control other areas of industry. They now say: "Well, the service that we were intended to provide is now too expensive and you will have to help us pay for it". I would challenge any Hon. Member of the Government to give us any proof that two years or five years down the road Bell Canada will not come to the Government and say it cannot afford to provide telecommunication services at the price the Government wants it to charge and, therefore, it must have some subsidies to keep its operation going, just as the CPR operates a huge corporation which is very profitable and asks us to subsidize the movement of every train it operates.