

Emergency Telephone Number

latch on to a good idea and legislate on it merely because it is a good idea. I would rather have the House of Commons deal with those areas in which there is no agreement, and where there is a need to focus attention on items which are current. If the emergency number is being put into effect, then it seems to me quite clear that it is not necessary for us to deal in a legislative fashion with this principle. So, I am opposed to it on that count.

An article was reprinted in a communications publication of June 1972, which was taken from an article printed in the *Bell News* which described the situation in respect of the development of the emergency number in the city of London, Ontario. The way in which this has been put together is interesting, because it eliminates some of the great difficulties which plague the telephone companies in attempting to work out a universal system to provide the service which the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock would have us enshrine in legislation.

The basic problem I believe can be summed up in a short statement. If it were the telephone companies which were operating the emergency number it would be the legal responsibility, presumably, of the telephone companies for the relaying of the message to the proper source. Indeed, one of the problems is, what is a definition of an emergency. Some surprising things occurred when the government instituted the Opportunities for Youth Program and the Local Initiatives Program. There were quite a number of distress centres which were funded under these grants in order to meet the wide variety of emergency needs Canadians had. At the beginning, I thought this was a waste of funds. I did not believe at that time that there was a requirement for such funds to be spent in providing that kind of emergency service. However, it takes very little time to examine the record of these distress centres to realize that indeed they are required, and that there is a need which apparently has been demonstrated.

The needs which these centres have been dealing with have been quite different from the type of needs outlined by the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock. The kind of needs which I think have been focused on by these programs have been those which have to do with the needs of people who are lost, alone or isolated. They phone the distress centres in order to find someone to talk to and to find assistance in dealing with social problems. I wish to draw to the attention of the hon. member that we are dealing not with simply an emergency number system but with a whole gamut of emergency matters which have been identified over the past few years.

When I read the bill for the first time, I thought that the term "emergency" applied to an attempt to find police, fire and other services in the traditional sense of an emergency. That really is not the problem. On the contrary, the problem is to deal with other emergencies which people come upon from time to time. I would suggest, for example, that in the position in which the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) found himself when his party ran out of control late in the night, he could have used an emergency number which he could have called in order to shut them up. If this is the purpose of the hon. member's bill, I will accept it because there has been no unity in that party. At least we have not seen it yet, and if we found it I know this government would be in trouble.

[Mr. Reid.]

Mr. Mather: Mr. Speaker, on a point of privilege, may I say that I wish the hon. member, if he insists on getting his wires crossed in respect of my bill, would not plug me into either of the old-line parties.

Mr. Reid: It may well be, Mr. Speaker, that we should have given your number to the Leader of the Opposition so that you might have been able to help with the voice of sweet reason in respect of what went on last night.

Mr. Dinsdale: There is not much reason over there.

Mr. Reid: There certainly is. We decided to accept the verdict of the people of Canada in October. It is the will of the people of Canada that this is the House of Commons and that the House of Commons should govern Canada as best it can.

Before I get a wrong number, perhaps I should return to the subject of the emergency number. This emergency system which has been set up in London, I think, meets the real needs of the community. I think it is important that the distinction between what the hon. member has proposed, what actually are the requirements, and the way in which the community of London has moved, should be indicated. I do not think it is necessary for us in this country to legislate an obligation upon the telephone companies which is not necessary when there are more important and locally effective responses to the problem which I believe has been properly raised in this House of Commons.

In the article to which I referred, the proposal is that the police and fire departments would be linked to the 911 emergency system. It is to be manned by a number of police constables who will then take the calls outside of those two and refer them to the appropriate agencies. For example, the 911 system will be the emergency answering service for all police, fire and ambulance services in London. But in addition to that it says:

● (1650)

The 911 system will provide substantial benefits for the public. A person who is in need of emergency or protective service will no longer have to remember the number for each agency or which agency deals with his particular problem. By dialling 911 he will reach a central agency, manned by senior police constables and his call will be directed to the proper agency.

That seems to me to be a local response to a local problem. I do not believe that a bill of this type, which tries to deal with local problems on a national basis, is an appropriate vehicle for what the hon. member sincerely wants to do. The article also points out that the initiative for the idea came from a local alderman back in 1967 and that over the years the city of London, through its city council, has been able to develop the kind of program which it required to meet its own perceived needs. It did this with the co-operation of local telephone companies, with the agencies of both the federal and provincial governments and with its own agencies.

It seems to me that while we can encourage the telephone company and the federal government agencies to do this kind of thing, what we really should be doing is going out to encourage the local people, the local communities to set up this kind of system, because the telephone companies are well prepared to co-operate in any way they