

Adjournment Debate

plan is concerned, I am afraid that the CBC's accomplishments fall quite short of the corporation's original objectives.

However, all is not lost, provided we act quickly. In this respect, I am very pleased to know we will be able, in the future, to avail ourselves of the opportunities which the Minister of Communications (Mrs. Sauvé) mentioned last Friday. Yet, I should like to know whether the corporation intends to take advantage of the new developments in satellite technology to provide all Canadians with a first television service in their mother tongue. I feel we have talked long enough about it, the time has come to act, and I hope that the Secretary of State (Mr. Roberts) or his representative will be able tonight to assure the House that the CBC will spare nothing and co-operate fully with all the other government agencies to satisfy their craving for national unity which is particularly felt by small minorities almost everywhere in this country.

● (2207)

Mr. Robert Daudlin (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, the Broadcasting Act states emphatically that "all Canadians are entitled to broadcasting service in English and French as public funds become available", adding that "the national broadcasting service should be extended to all parts of Canada, as public funds become available". The CBC's accelerated radio and television coverage plan, which was approved in 1974, provides for over 600 engineering projects. The scope of this project has exhausted the resources of the corporation and imposed heavy demands on the suppliers of equipment.

It would be impossible at this time for the corporation to implement another program which could lay a further burden upon its resources. The accelerated coverage plan is expected to be completed within two years. Planning for the extension of coverage once the ACP is in operation has already begun, so that it is possible to draw up a plan which will take advantage of the impetus given by the ACP in extending CBC services to communities of less than 500 people. The development of that plan is in its first stages, but if it were approved, it could well serve as an extension to the ACP for taking up where the other will have left.

Let me recall that the formula used to set up the priorities for the ACP comprises six factors. One of them is the cultural isolation which weighs very heavy since it is important to see to it that the minority group concerned will get the service in the required language from the early stages of the implementation of the plan. Mr. Speaker, I would very much like tonight to give the hon. member the figures he is asking for. I am sorry that I do not have them, but I will let him have them as soon as they become available.

[English]

COMMUNICATIONS—BELL CANADA CONTRACT WITH SAUDI ARABIA

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, I want to pursue this evening a question I asked the Minister of Communications (Mrs. Sauvé) on May 11 concerning Bell Canada and its Saudi Arabian contract. We are entering another chapter in the long history of Bell's appearances before the CRTC for rate increases, this being one of the largest Bell has asked for. Part of the consideration regarding whether a rate increase is justified, of course, is the profitability Bell is experiencing, the kinds of contracts and undertakings Bell is entering into, how that relates to the company's profitability and, hence, its demands for a rate increase.

Not the least of all the factors which must be taken into consideration is this large \$1.1 billion contract to supply telephone systems to Saudi Arabia. There are two things that worry me. First, some evidence has come to light that in negotiating this deal Bell Canada may be violating the Canadian Human Rights Act in the sense that it may be barring women and Jews from becoming involved in the contract work for Saudi Arabia.

● (2212)

When the human rights commissioner asked Bell to provide him with a detailed copy of the contract so that he could determine whether this was the case or not, Bell Canada declined to do so. I find this reprehensible and an affront to the commissioner. I hope he does not have to go to the length of pursuing this matter in the Federal Court. That is why I asked the minister, who has authority over the CRTC which is currently hearing Bell's application, to cause that hearing to be suspended until the company complies with the request of the human rights commissioner. I believe that is an effective way of getting the company to respond to the commissioner's request so that conformity with the Human Rights Act passed by this parliament may be assured. The minister said she would look into that suggestion.

The other aspect of the contract which worries me concerns the fact that details of it may not be made known to the interveners at the CRTC hearing. We have heard that under this \$1.1 billion contract Bell is paying some \$88 million to unknown Saudi Arabian interests; there is no explanation as to the use being made of this money. Given the record of Atomic Energy of Canada and many United States companies in their dealings with third world countries, the spectre of political pay-offs or kickbacks comes to the fore. I do not want to see Canadian telephone subscribers facing another rate increase because Bell—or any other company—is greasing palms abroad in order to obtain a contract. I think it is in the public interest for the contract to be made available at the CRTC hearings; we know that the commission will see it privately. I would appreciate a reply from the parliamentary secretary with regard to what action the minister is taking on these two fronts.