

Bell Canada Act

requested for any lawful purposes. And also to supply applicants with telephone sets of the latest improved design then in use of the municipality or territory. And let us not find ourselves in a situation where there are municipalities with truncated services and communities that cannot make calls to each other, families that cannot communicate among themselves without having to pay up to \$100 a month for long distance calls, and SMBs that are trying to live and grow but cannot do so because of those long distance tolls, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau): Mr. Speaker, I should like to speak to this amendment introduced by my colleague on this side of the House to emphasize that Bell Canada is a corporation which was established pursuant to special legislation dating all the way back to 1880 and which happens to be a monopoly. It stands to reason therefore that any company which is a monopoly enjoys rather special privileges and benefits.

The Hon. Member for Gatineau (Mrs. Maily) has just put the finger on the huge profits recorded by Bell Canada. In my estimation she is quite right to point out that Bell Canada is among companies whose investments are most profitable, and so it is precisely because of its privileged monopolistic situation. This is why I think it must also face up to certain responsibilities. Therefore, the motion to amend Clause 6 at page 2 of Bill C-19 seems quite relevant to me.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister has argued that this clause is nothing more than a repetition of an already existing provision of the act under which Bell Canada was incorporated. So what? The mere fact that Bell Canada could in the past ask for a six-month advance deposit does not necessarily mean that a similar provision has to be included in this Bill.

In my opinion, the amendment under which Bell Canada would have to furnish the service at the lowest possible price with universal access by subscribers is quite acceptable. I will therefore vote in favour of this amendment because I think that Bell Canada has responsibilities towards Canadians, wherever they happen to be within the company's territory.

The Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) was quite right in saying that many people on low incomes or in certain age groups, and she referred more specifically to students who have to move to another town to continue their university training, cannot afford to pay a lump sum representing six months service for having their telephone connected. I think that the clause in the Bill, at the bottom of page 3, that says nothing requires Bell Canada to provide the service if it has not received therefor a tender or payment of the lawful rates semi-annually in advance, is excessive.

I think this provision goes too far and I fail to understand why the Government refused to change this part of the Bell Canada Act.

The Parliamentary Secretary's excuse was that this is how it used to be, but that is no reason why this situation should be allowed to continue. This Bill which is specifically concerned

with a major administrative change involving Bell Canada and its parent company, justifies, I feel . . . Now, under the Canada Business Corporations Act, Bell Canada will have far more freedom, in many ways, than it had in the past.

The CRTC was worried about losing part of its authority to monitor Bell Canada with the introduction of this new entity, which is Bell Canada Enterprises Incorporated, which is now the parent corporation.

Now we are seeing this major change in Bell Canada's operations, I think the Minister of Communications (Mr. Masse) and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister (Mr. Edwards) should have realized that it was perhaps the right time to withdraw this right to charge a fee equivalent to the charge for six months service, or half the annual rate.

I think that in the case of many Canadians, either young students, as the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) pointed out, or older people whose life conditions have changed and who at a certain age must move because the children are married and the family has become smaller, oftentimes older people living alone must change neighbourhood and find accommodation in a place where they must have a telephone installed. In my view, Bell Canada should not expect these older people to pay this basic amount because in most cases they simply cannot afford the expense of having a new telephone installed at home. This is why I support the motion and I hope that, after due consideration, the Government will change its mind and accept this very important amendment.

• (1250)

[English]

Mr. Ian Waddell (Vancouver—Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to participate in the debate on Bill C-19. I should like to speak on this matter as it relates to the telephone system and to security deposits. Also it raises the notion of paying per call later down the road, or the notion of a new type of system sneaking its way into Canada.

I notice that the phone debate, if I can call it that, is no a big deal, like the free trade debate. However, when we look at what affects ordinary people on a day by day basis, we realize that it is an important issue.

I remember my first job in Vancouver as a crown attorney. First I was sent to traffic court. After muddling around there and letting a few people off their tickets as a result of sloppy procedures and so on, I was sent to family court. I will never forget my job in family court. It was to cross-examine about six times or eight times each morning, usually men who were in arrears with their maintenance payments. It was my job to find out the income of these men. Inevitably the same patterns emerged repeatedly; what they paid for telephone, rent, to operate a car, which was always very expensive, car payment, and insurance payment. Eventually there was a little money left over for cigarettes, alcohol, entertainment, or whatever. We were always trying to squeeze a little extra money out of