

Bell Canada Act

They were up 34 per cent over the figures for the first quarter of 1983. Clearly the company is not doing too badly.

I gather the shares of Bell Canada are one of the more respected shares and that they are held by a number of people. However, we must recognize the fact that there is another kind of shareholder. I am referring to the subscriber who does not have any choice in areas covered by Bell; only Bell instruments and lines are available.

The subscribers are also investors because their money was used over the years, not only to help provide profits for Bell Canada, but to provide Bell Canada with the money necessary to expand and develop its subsidiaries—Northern Telecom, Bell Canada International, Telesat Canada, Bell Northern Research, Tele-Direct, and Bell Communications Systems. Those subsidiaries have been funded in part by those subscribers-investors.

We are not only reorganizing Bell. We are reorganizing the subscribers. They will no longer be investors in the system; they will be just subscribers. It is a real shame. The Government—and I gather that it was supported by the former Liberal Government—will now go ahead with this option. It is similar to what the Liberals did years ago in respect of the CPR when it allowed the company to divest itself at the ultimate cost of transportation services.

I look forward with interest to the remainder of the debate. I encourage Conservative Members to join in, to state their case, and to fight on behalf of consumers. However, in closing, I remind them that only Quebec, Ontario, and the Territories are covered by Bell Canada. Let us not forget that there is B.C. Tel, owned by the people of British Columbia. There is the Alberta telephone company which is owned by the people of Alberta. There are the telephone companies in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Kenora, Thunder Bay and the Maritimes. These are public utilities which use their revenues to provide services.

● (1640)

These revenues are not for the lining of pockets or for the development of private sector corporations which can be spun off out of a regulatory regime. They are public utilities, utilities that Conservative Governments in the provinces I have named dare not tamper with. In this respect we have only to consider the Province of Saskatchewan and the backtracking it did during the election in terms of the possibility of selling off part of Sask Tel. The Government knew that it would not survive on that issue.

So I say to Members across the way that what they should be looking at if they really want to provide service and stability to the consumers of Bell Canada is instead of chopping it up into little pieces, perhaps it should be kept as one company and moved into the public sector to remain that way.

Mr. Howard McCurdy (Windsor—Walkerville): Mr. Speaker, considering the significance of the legislation which is before us, I am surprised that Members of the Government are

not taking the opportunity to express themselves in defence of this Bill. It is a Bill that affects an important component of Canadian life. As I understand it, Canadians are the most frequent users of telephones. The telephone is an extremely important aspect of the way in which Canadians stay in contact with one another, do business with one another and keep families together over large expanses of land. If this is a good Bill, then it must justify, in my view, a strong and vigorous defence of the contribution that it will make to the improvement of Canadian life in terms of telephone service. That must surely be the justification for the Bill, at least I assume that it is. However, the silence of government Members gives rise to doubt.

A couple of months ago my wife was complaining to me about the fact that our telephone was just not functioning. In fact, it stopped working one Saturday morning. We called up Ma Bell, said that our telephone was not working and could someone come to fix it.

Mr. Boudria: Thursday of next week?

Mr. McCurdy: No. We were told to give a call the following week and they would see about Thursday of the week after. The company finally got around to fixing the telephone. By God, you could pick it up in your hand and hear static as well as voices. I suppose it could be said that it worked twice as well as it did before in that we heard twice as much noise. We called up Ma Bell to have the telephone repaired again. There were problems here because when we did this the person on the other end of the phone could not hear us for the static. Thus we had to use someone else's telephone once more. Mr. Speaker, would you believe it, our telephone still has static on it. Some people might not realize that these types of experiences which many of us have with a service for which we pay so much in terms of excessive deposits and other inconveniences is a result of the reorganization of Bell. These experiences are but examples of future problems which users will face as a result of this reorganization.

What has happened is that the profits that have been generated for Bell by consumers are now being used up by a voracious conglomerate which stalks our land and, indeed, the world, gobbling up other corporations such as TransCanada Pipelines, Daon Development, British American Bank Note, Ronalds Federated and Case-Hoyt. It is a hungry animal being produced here. It lives on an infinite diet of profits.

The Bill before us is like a birth certificate or a baptism certificate. It is a piece of paper which legitimizes this monster, this new conglomerate that will produce no new services. It will not produce any new jobs for the people who have fed its appetite in the past. We know that the Bill is a repeat, a slightly improved version of a Bill first introduced by the Liberals.

At first, the Liberals fought the creation of this beast. When the Quebec Superior Court approved the new structure the Liberals fought against it. They eventually gave up. However, they didn't do so without a good fight first. We do not see the