

Bell Canada
PRIVATE BILLS

[English]

BELL CANADA

The House resumed, from Thursday, November 3, consideration of the motion of Mr. O'Connell that Bill C-1001, respecting Bell Canada, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications.

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, when we closed off last Thursday I was discussing the social responsibility of Bell Canada with regard to its subscribers. I wish to review briefly what I said. When Bell Canada was given the monopoly for telephone service in this country there were some provisions. One was that they would be subject to regulation with regard to their capitalization; that is, they would have to come to parliament whenever they wanted to increase their capital. From the day they received the right to monopolize telephone service in this country, particularly in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, they have worked consistently to de-emphasize the controls, little as they are, which parliament exerts over the company.

Bill C-1001 is a perfect example of Bell Canada attempting to escape even the puny examination of parliament in terms of increased capitalization. They are going to try to escape the scrutiny of members of parliament as they go merrily on their way accruing for themselves greater profits, greater growth and greater control in their particular field and related fields.

I am absolutely opposed to this bill. As the representative of the constituents of Nickel Belt, I would be derelict in my duty if I did not point out to Bell Canada that in my area there are still cases of ten families on one line. I would be derelict in my duty if I sat down and allowed the hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. O'Connell) to have his little bill so that he could run across to the Senate and get it passed in one day, after which I would have to face my constituents and they would say to me, "How is it that there are still ten families on a line? Why did you let Bell Telephone have its way?"

● (1702)

I intend to use all the opportunities available to me. This is one of the few occasions on which a backbencher has an opportunity to say, "Hold it, boys. How are the people of Canada going to benefit from this bill in terms of the service they receive? How will this proposal to increase capitalization lead to better service?" The vice-president opened up the books the other day to show me the schedule under which it is proposed to improve non-urban service. I looked in the schedule for places in my constituency, and I could not see any. I asked him why Nickel Belt was not in there somewhere. "Oh," he said, "you must be in the third quarter of 1982." Well, Mr. Speaker, my response to that is he had better take this bill and come back with it in 1982. After we have been given this improved telephone service in my riding, I am prepared to go along with the bill. However, until that time I

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

cannot say, in good conscience, to the Bell Telephone company, "Yes, you can increase your capitalization." Suddenly, the Bell Telephone company, like St. Paul, is aware of—

Mr. O'Connell: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It relates to the date the hon. member has given—1982. This is the second time I have heard it in the debate. The CRTC, the regulatory body, has ordered the company to direct itself to a rural improvement program over four years ending in 1980. It applies to the hon. member's area as well as to others. It is not 1982—and this is not a matter for parliament; it is a regulatory matter not dealt with in this bill.

Mr. Rodriguez: I wish the hon. member for Scarborough East would not try to filibuster this bill by getting up continually to raise spurious points of order. I am glad he raised this point, though. It shows how important it was for some regulatory body to point out to the Bell Telephone company that it had a responsibility toward subscribers in rural areas. One might have thought this would have been one of their first concerns. Why should it be necessary for the CRTC to tell them this? I suggest it is because the corporation has no social responsibility to the people they serve. It has one concept in mind, which is to maximize profits, minimize regulations and keep on growing.

That may be a legitimate goal for Bell Telephone, just as it is legitimate, I suppose, for INCO to get to Guatemala first. But is it a legitimate goal for Canada? I say that what is good enough for Bell Telephone, INCO and Falconbridge, is not good enough for Canada. We have to set our own goals. The goal of this party with respect to Bell Telephone is service, and we have long held that from a philosophical point of view Bell Telephone company ought to be under public control so it can provide the kind of service which we think is desirable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. gentleman, but the time allotted to him has expired.

An hon. Member: Let him go on.

Mr. Rodriguez: I am prepared to do so.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): I had not intended to take part in this debate, but I was persuaded to do so by the eloquence of my hon. friend from Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez). Since he has persuaded me, I thought I would spend a few minutes talking about the merits of public ownership, because I happen to come from a province of which my hon. friend from Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) was the premier and at that time he undertook to put the telephone system there under public ownership. I want to argue that the same thing should be done with regard to Bell. We should not tolerate a telephone system in this country whose main objective is to make a profit for its shareholders without really caring about the service it provides.

It is only normal that in the case of a company whose primary objective is profit, one should see a deterioration of service in rural areas. It costs more to provide service to rural areas than to the larger centres: maintenance is more difficult