

pany had the right to use the long distance line of the Bell Telephone Company, a subscriber would have to wait three or four hours. Is that fair to the subscribers? Our hon. friends see nothing but the Bell Telephone Company; but it is the subscribers who would suffer if you passed this legislation. My hon. friend from Grey (Dr. Sproule) says that it pays the long distance line to have these connections. If it pays, why do not all these companies combine and build a long distance line. The Bell Telephone Company started with very little capital. In 1881 their capital was \$500,000. If these hon. gentlemen have so much love for the farmers of Canada as they have professed in the last two days, let them form a company and subscribe the capital among themselves and build a long distance line, instead of coming here and trying to force the Bell Telephone Company, which has spent millions to establish long distance lines all over Canada, to give every little local company the use of those lines. After they have built that system, and have given Canada probably the best system in the world, it costs them a good deal to maintain it. A few farmers agree among themselves to have a telephone system, and they string their wires on trees, on fences, and on the corners of houses; and every little company of this kind in the country, with instruments perhaps 15 years old, is asking for connection with the Bell Telephone Company. If we pass this legislation, we will do something that is unjust, and instead of increasing the efficiency of the telephone service, we shall do it a great deal of harm. I am in favour of private initiative not only for the Bell Telephone Company, but for every other, and the telephone more than anything else should be a monopoly, but it should be controlled. In my own county the farmers asked the Bell Telephone Company to establish offices for them, and the company immediately did so; and to-day, I think in every parish in my county there is a telephone office, and the charges are not exorbitant and the people are perfectly satisfied. The Bill before us provides that the telephone service shall be controlled by the Railway Commission. I have confidence in that, but I say we should not go any further than that. We shall be making bad legislation if we allow all these little companies in the country to use the long distance line. We will not only injure the service of the Bell Company, but we will do no good to the smaller companies.

Mr. BOURASSA. I would not have taken any part in this debate, but for the argument of the hon. member for Beauharnois (Mr. Bergeron). He has spoken of his experience, and I will speak of mine. Undoubtedly the people who founded the Bell Telephone Company showed considerable business spirit, and they have made money,

Mr. BERGERON.

which I do not begrudge to them. If the people of Canada at that time had realized how important the telephone would become, they would not have granted the Bell Telephone Company the powers and privileges which they did; and it is just as well for us to realize now that before long in any civilized country it will be as absurd to have any kind of private control over the telephone as it would be now to hand over the transmission of the mails to a private company. There is no doubt that telephones as well as telegraphs will have to be controlled by the state before many years pass. It is just as well that we should realize that, and not become advocates of the Bell Telephone Company, or of this or that company, be it large or small. We should view the question from a national point of view. It may be that it is a little outside of the question in debate, but I think that everything which tends to the unification of telephone communication and to bring about a uniformity of transmission over long and short lines, is a step towards the solution of this problem which this parliament will be forced some day to adopt. So far as the Bell Telephone Company is concerned, my experience is this, that if it suits their interest they will give communication, but if it does not suit their interest they will refuse communication. They refused communication on the north shore of the Ottawa for many years, although there was only a gap of 35 miles to their line with Montreal, on the ground that there would be congestion of business. Two small companies were formed. At first the Bell Company disdained them, saying that there was no money to be made by them; but after a time they found that these companies were extending their service and would probably reach Ottawa, and then they came and immediately completed their line. The reason they had given during fifteen years for not building that line fell to the ground, because they found that it was to their interest to prevent the extension of these two small lines. After these two lines were established in the county of Labelle the Bell Telephone Company refused to have any communication with them, and it took us twenty years to get connection. The duty of this parliament is to render it impossible for the Bell Telephone Company to prevent the establishing of communication everywhere, and the easiest possible connections between their lines and other lines. No doubt from the point of view of the Bell Telephone Company the argument of my hon. friend from Beauharnois is right. Any new industry in the country will no doubt be established as a private enterprise at first; but when it becomes of national importance, the interests of the people at large must prevail over the interests of those who have invested their money in a private corporation. We must