

*Oral Questions*

are laid off, the more productive is a business. It seems to me that instead of rewarding companies which lay off workers, the Government should realize that Inco has made its wealth on the backs of the workers and that this company has a responsibility to the community to make alternative employment available.

Awards should be given to Inco the day it stabilizes its employment and provides for secondary mineral development in Canada. In the meantime, the silver medal ought not to go to Inco but the Government should distribute silver medals to all laid off and retired workers of Inco as they are the real winners in the productivity sweepstakes.

**ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**[*English*]**COMMUNICATIONS****REPORTED PUBLIC OPINION POLL ON TELEPHONE RATES**

**Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister and deals with the Government's survey to determine just how big will be the telephone rate increase the Government plans to foist on Canadians. This is a very bizarre way to test our pain threshold.

The telephone is the lifeline to the outside world for senior citizens and shut-ins. The telephone is the life-blood for small businesses and charities. Can the Prime Minister justify even contemplating the doubling of the rates for basic telephone services for small businesses, senior citizens, and people who are too ill to leave their homes? How can he justify spending taxpayers' money to promote such an unjust and unfair plan?

**Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (President of the Privy Council):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Communications will be in the House momentarily.

**Some Hon. Members:** Here he is.

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** Indeed, my colleague is here right now. Possibly he can carry on and finish the beginning of a very excellent answer.

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications):** Mr. Speaker, this question which refers to a survey by Decima Research, ordered last spring by the Department of Communications, does not in any way alter the responsibility of the CRTC which is to set telephone rates in Canada. The survey is part of a series of studies ordered by federal-provincial committees and by the CRTC to provide the broadest possible base and a maximum of information for defining a Canadian

telecommunications policy that will be in the interest of Canadians.

[*English*]**INQUIRY CONCERNING GOVERNMENT'S POSITION**

**Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal):** Mr. Speaker, considering that the Minister just sent back a decision by the CRTC—

[*Translation*]

—I would like to know, and my question is directed to the same Minister... Last year, Bell Canada's profits were around \$940 million. The elderly have received pensions that are below the poverty line.

Considering these figures, could the Minister explain why he is considering a plan that will increase the cost of local telephone services to consumers by \$720 million?

**Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications):** Mr. Speaker, since it is not the Government's responsibility to set telephone rates in Canada, it will be a pleasure to refer your question to the CRTC, for consideration.

[*English*]**REQUEST THAT MINISTER REJECT POLL FINDINGS**

**Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal):** Mr. Speaker, I find it fascinating that the Minister is turning over the CRTC's questions. The Minister's actions speak much louder than his words. I would remind him of his secret cabinet document.

I would like to know why the Minister undertook such an expensive poll. Now that he has done so, will the Minister reject that poll and reassure all Canadians that there will be no increase in local telephone rates this coming year?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Marcel Masse (Minister of Communications):** Mr. Speaker, it is not for me to reject or to confirm a survey. I can discuss the methodology used in the survey. However, as long as the answers were given in accordance with the methodology used, I cannot approve or disapprove of the way Canadians respond to a survey.

Furthermore, the Government promised last spring to review our telecommunications policy in Canada. We have approached this issue bearing a number of basic principles in mind, including that of providing Canadians with a universal service at reasonable cost. This review of our telecommunications policy is being carried out with the provinces, who have a major responsibility in this area, and an important phase in this review will be the federal-provincial conference next February.