

B.C. Telephone Dispute

statement to make on the B.C. Telephone Company dispute, which I raised yesterday.

Hon. Gerald Regan (Minister of Labour): Madam Speaker, I have this day in relation to the dispute between the B.C. Telephone Company and the Telecommunications Workers ment accept and what is it going to do about the causes rather than just treating the symptoms?

Mr. Regan: Madam Speaker, I thank the three hon. members who participated in the response to this announcement. In particular I thank the hon. member for Capilano (Mr. Huntington) and the hon. member for Mission-Port Moody (Mr. Rose) for their studied and thoughtful comments on a very serious work dispute. I believe the problem has been a very serious one in British Columbia and that is confirmed by my observations when I was in Victoria and Vancouver in the past few days.

One of the problems is that from the beginning, several months ago until the past week or two, little pressure was put on the union or on the company to come to an agreement. Most employees were still working and the normal operations of the company were continuing. Until then, the people who suffered were those requiring commercial installations in new buildings or those who were moving to new quarters. I am sure all hon. members will have received representations from these people about the inconvenience they experienced. The dispute has escalated, of course.

I think that a utility has a particular responsibility to people who are counting on new installations, to bring a dispute of this type to an end even if in its day to day operations the utility does not feel particular pressure.

The hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman) was rather critical in the question he put, and perhaps was also rather political. That is not helpful in this situation. The hon. member must be aware that the federal Department of Labour has a better record than other departments of labour in such matters. This is not just since I have been in the department but was the case under his own government and under former Liberal governments, because of the abilities of such professionals as Bill Kelly. It must be appreciated that not all problems can be settled. There has to be a willingness to settle before a dispute can be resolved.

I believe we have taken a constructive step today and the two hon. members who spoke earlier agreed. That step could not be taken, however, until, on the basis of the advice of professionals, I judged it to be useful. Sometimes if a special mediator is appointed too early in a dispute, nothing is achieved and proceedings are prolonged. Bill Kelly is a top man in his field.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Regan: I am confident that if anyone can, he will make progress in this dispute.

The other aspects of the question from the hon. member for Fraser Valley West related to inflation, governmental policy

and international conditions. I am sure, Madam Speaker, you would be upset if I were to take the time I need to deal with those questions, so perhaps I can discuss them with the hon. members on another occasion.

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Madam Speaker, I have one question to put to the minister but first I should like to join with my colleague the hon. member for Capilano (Mr. Huntington) in extending our good wishes to Mr. Kelly whose reputation in this particular area is well known. In our view, if anyone can play an effective mediation role in this matter it is Mr. Kelly. There could be no better choice.

The minister mentioned the political comments or criticisms contained in the question of the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman). In that connection I would recommend that the minister read his own comments as reported at page 7071 of *Hansard* which, in my reading, bear a taint of anti-Americanism. I wonder whether that will make the situation in British Columbia any easier. The minister said that B.C. Tel is owned in the United States and was perhaps not as sensitive to the situation in British Columbia as might be desired. There is a taint in that particular comment. I hope the minister will rectify that to some extent, as it is not going to help in the mediation.

Mr. Regan: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro) for his question. I do not believe I can accommodate his desire in the matter. I certainly want to confirm that I do not mean to imply any anti-Americanism. I believe we are very fortunate indeed to have such a great neighbour as the United States.

In the remarks I made yesterday I was reflecting what was being said by businessmen in the constituency of the hon. member which I had the privilege of visiting just before last weekend.

Mr. Nielsen: You had better learn to say it.

Mr. Regan: Yes, I had better. The hon. member may have heard people in British Columbia who are not members of unions say that the problem is not just that this is a foreign-owned company, because lots of foreign-owned companies make great contributions to the country, but that a monopolistic utility which services all the people is owned outside the country and this may be a problem in the long history of difficult relations. That does not mean it is the only problem, or that there may not be some problems involving the union.

● (1530)

What I said in my remarks, or intended to say, and I hope I can make it clear to the hon. member, is that in British Columbia there is considerable concern. I would best serve the interests of the people of the country as Minister of Labour if I call it like I see it in each and every dispute. If sometimes that means I feel there are certain things a union should do to improve its position, then I should say so; and if there are