

Railway Act

agency to protect the people of Canada the new board will behave as its predecessor, and will serve simply as an office boy for the companies it is supposed to regulate, the CPR, Bell Telephone and CN-CP Telecommunications. Indeed, I am very doubtful that the new board needs any more power, taking into account its high-priced, competent personnel, although I am not certain they are as competent on behalf of the Canadian people as they are on behalf of the companies that the Board is supposed to regulate.

In the past this Board has failed to use the power given to it to regulate telephone rates. In the past it has failed to use its powers to make the railways companies, in particular the CPR, live up to their commitments. The commitment by the CPR was in a contract which it made with the Canadian government and the people of Canada, a contract to provide adequate railway service. The CPR has now built up other interests and investments, but it should be remembered that these have been based almost exclusively on the grant of some 25 million acres of land, some of it the most valuable land in this country, given to the CPR about one hundred years ago as part of the price of persuading so-called free enterprisers to build a railway across Canada. In the light of this past experience I have no hope that the CTC will use the new powers which the minister proposes to give it to protect the interests of the consumers in this field, any more than it used its power to protect consumers in the past. This being the case I have to say to the minister that at the very least I am rather skeptical about the proposal he is making.

Mr. W. M. Howe (Wellington-Grey): Mr. Speaker, in its outward appearance Bill C-11 might be one of those simple types of bills that are periodically brought before this House to tidy up matters and put certain things into focus. But in view of the statement which the minister has made, it is now clear that it is not a simple bill. It does not deal with a simple matter, but rather with something that is very complex, very sophisticated, and upon which a number of companies are spending a great deal of money.

At first glance it might appear that the bill deals with small, private telephone and telegraph companies which had been getting away with something that should not be permitted. However, from the minister's statement it would appear that the bill concerns important matters of transportation and communication and problems that have arisen

with respect to the use of new types of communications now being employed by so many business organizations. Therefore, the bill is one that requires a great deal of thought and examination.

The authority of the Canadian Transport Commission is to be enlarged, and the explanatory note to clause 3 of the bill reads:

This amendment would extend the non-discriminatory and just and reasonable rules application now "in respect of tolls" to services and facilities provided by a telegraph or telephone company.

The minister did not indicate in his statement to the House whether there had been any discrimination, or areas of dispute or complaint with respect to companies using services being provided by telephone and telegraph companies. I remember that when we were discussing amendments to the Telephone Act a few years ago a little bit of controversy arose between the cable television people and the Bell Telephone people with regard to the rental being charged by Bell Telephone for the services it provided for the cable television companies. Regulatory authority might be necessary in an area such as that.

But, Mr. Speaker, there must be other areas in which discrimination may have been practiced, areas that the minister did not tell us about, because a bill like this is not introduced in this House, all of a sudden without some reason other than that the industry has increased in size and complexity. Someone must have felt he had been over-charged or not properly served, and complaints must have been made to the department, to the government and to the Canadian Transportation Commission, thus making this bill necessary to bring all these companies under the control of the Canadian Transportation Commission.

● (4:40 p.m.)

I do not want to ramble around like the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow), going into railway matters and all types and areas of communications and transportation. However, when the Canadian Transport Commission was established a few years ago we hoped for a tremendous improvement in dealing with problems, but at the present time we wonder whether they have the facilities to investigate questions like discrimination and toll charges. This is a very complex business and if the Commission is going to take these matters under consideration it may be necessary to double the staff and even hire experts to ensure the job is done properly. I