

B.C. Telephone Dispute

statement. I will accept a question from the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman).

Mr. Wenman: Madam Speaker, what proposals does the minister have to alleviate the conditions that caused such tremendous demands. What responsibility does the government send the following telegram to Mr. Gordon MacFarlane, chairman and chief executive officer of B.C. Telephone Company, and to Mr. William Clark, president of the Telecommunications Workers Union:

This has reference to the collective bargaining dispute between B.C. Telephone Company; Canadian Telephones and Supplies Limited, and Telecommunications Workers Union. As you are aware, there is a growing public intolerance to the effects of this lengthy dispute which has been made clear in the many representations and expressions of concern conveyed to me by telephone users in the province of British Columbia. I am equally concerned over the length of time this dispute has dragged on and am of the view that a settlement can and must be reached at the earliest opportunity in the interests of all concerned B.C. citizens who depend upon the use of this important utility in their every-day lives.

Accordingly, this will advise that I am appointing Mr. William Kelly, senior assistant deputy minister of the department's federal mediation and conciliation service, as a mediator. Mr. Kelly is well known to the B.C. industrial relations community given his involvement over the years in settling major disputes on the west coast. With your co-operation I am confident he can assist in bringing an early resolution of this dispute. Would you and Mr. Wm. Clark, president, Telecommunications Workers Union, please arrange to meet with Mr. Kelly at 2 p.m. on Friday, February 13 in Labour Canada's Vancouver office located at 750 Cambie Street, Seventh Floor.

Hon. Ron Huntington (Capilano): Madam Speaker, I was not aware that the minister would be making a statement on this very serious labour dispute in the province of British Columbia which is putting the citizens of that province to great expense and inconvenience. It is a serious issue. The last word I had on the matter when I was in Vancouver not too many hours ago was that there was little to mediate. The last offers were on the table and no move had been made on either side.

With the minister appointing a very well known and very able mediator, Mr. Kelly, who I am sure has the blessings of this House and of God on high, I hope the deadlock can be broken and some kind of sanity brought to bear on this issue. We are dealing with a public utility in the form of a communications system which is under attack. We are dealing with the seizure or the interruption of private property.

We in this House have an obligation to begin discussing the causes of alienation and antagonism which develop between management and organized labour. I am troubled by the fact that people in these highly organized, high leverage positions dealing with large corporations seem to forget all about the 55 per cent to 65 per cent of the workers in Canada who are unorganized and who are being left further and further behind.

Above and beyond the mediation which is necessary between labour and management in this monopoly situation, I believe this House of Commons and particularly the government should begin giving serious concern to the lack of leverage of those in uneconomic positions of leverage in the private, small and medium enterprise sector. A serious social issue is developing; it is the issue of maintaining some kind of standard of

living in what is developing into a double digit inflationary economy. I ask the Minister of Labour to seek the counsel of his colleagues to determine whether the wider sector of the Canadian work force can be considered as these high leverage positions are mediated by his department.

Mr. Rose: Madam Speaker, I congratulate the Minister of Labour for not only intervening at this time to settle a long-standing and very serious social and technological squabble, but also for appointing to the position of mediator a very respected negotiator, Mr. Kelly. We in British Columbia realize the severity of this series of lockouts, sit-ins and strikes. It is a disreputable example of what can be described as less than adequate or less than acceptable labour-management practice in our province, and it is certainly nothing to be emulated.

● (1520)

I agree with the previous speaker that we should do everything in our power to settle this and prevent such things from happening again.

This is not just a matter of B.C. Tel versus its workers; it is a revolution in the telecommunications industry brought about by chip technology and the other things that have the potential of displacing thousands of people in that industry and in the clerical industry in the years ahead.

I would say this dispute has poisoned the atmosphere in a dozen or more communities in British Columbia and it is time it was stopped. There has been delay in installation, poor service, bitterness, hostility, all of which cannot be allowed to go unchallenged or unresolved.

I think everyone knows that in previous mediation efforts the union has shown itself to be flexible in that it has reduced demands in an effort to reach a settlement. The same flexibility has not been forthcoming from B.C. Tel, which is a subsidiary of an American giant. An American management is dictating Canadian labour practices and the service that will be given to Canadians. That is an intolerable situation in an independent country.

May I close by saying that even in the provinces of Alberta and Manitoba which have Conservative governments, and in Saskatchewan which has an NDP government, telecommunications and telephone companies are under provincial control, ownership and jurisdiction. That should also be the case in British Columbia.

Mr. Robert Wenman (Fraser Valley West): Madam Speaker, the minister has taken a very direct course of action in this case but once again we are experiencing crisis management. When a situation becomes intolerable to all parties and action is taken, that only treats the symptom. I wish the minister had gone slightly beyond that symptom in his statement.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I wonder if the hon. member is going to ask a question. As he knows, only one speaker from each party is allowed to respond to the minister's