

I think this is a request for a change of considerable significance to all of us. I suggest we should get the bill as quickly as we can to the committee where we can examine the officers of the company and consider this matter in greater detail.

I will shorten my remarks, Mr. Speaker, as I know other members want to speak. In the debate that took place last session some members drew attention to the advisability of developing and improving the rural service provided by Bell Canada. In respect to the request for authority for new capital let me say that on January 1, 1977, the company started to implement a five-year non-urban service improvement program which, as a result of the regulatory commission's decision, was accelerated by one year. Under this program some 256,000 multi-party line subscribers will have their service improved to no more than four subscribers per line, some less than four but none more than four, over the next four years. This program alone will require approximately \$600 million of capital expenditures during the four years ending 1980.

There is only one further point I should like to make, and that is to draw attention again to the parliamentary process in which we, as private members, are engaged with a private bill like this. A special act company like Bell, although regulated by a regulatory commission, the CRTC, is still required to come back to us to seek changes in its charter by a private bill without the normal legislative process of being backed as a government measure. No other way is provided for changes.

Surely in these circumstances, with a corporation of this significance employing so many people, we have an obligation to work this parliamentary process in such a manner as to move the bill to committee. It is only in committee that the merits of the proposed changes can be fully explored and debated. It is only in committee, not in this chamber on second reading, that the desirable changes, if any, can be made. Is this not the real object of the exercise of a private bill dealing with an established company like this—to examine it ourselves as members on that committee, to follow the implications of its clauses as far as we can, to question the officers of the company on their operations and the objects proposed in this new bill, including the proposal to alter the procedure for the future of amending their charter?

I submit these procedures cannot be done in this House. We dealt with the bill throughout the last session. We have had it before us in these very limited occasions of private members' hour. We are possibly in a short session. In a few months the estimates will go to committee. I appeal, as I did at the beginning, that we use this process of the private bill in private members' hour to move this bill as quickly as we can to committee where we can examine it in the detail it deserves.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Benno Friesen (Surrey-White Rock):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the privilege of speaking on this particular bill. I view it with some interest, because about 15 minutes ago we listened to the hon. member for Waterloo-Cambridge (Mr. Saltzman) speak on Bill C-3 and say that some of the indus-

tries, certainly the service industries, must have a monopoly because the nature of our country demands monopolies. I spoke briefly to the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes) and I appreciate the enlightenment he provided on this bill. He pointed out that essentially the bill would make some fundamental changes to the charter of Bell Canada.

● (1722)

I note with interest that the hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. O'Connell) said that the bill would give more borrowing power and greater flexibility to the Company. I really have no objections to that. I think that we are living in inflationary times and inflationary pressures are on large companies such as this, so they need that extended flexibility. But I really have great concern about a bill that would materially alter the charter of the company in such a way as to eliminate—at least it would appear so—the checks and balances that parliament would exercise over that monopoly.

I believe in free enterprise and I like to see it encouraged. Because I believe in free enterprise I recognize that large companies which become monopolies pose a danger to our entire free enterprise system, and therefore there must be a check and a balance imposed on such an enterprise. For that reason I question the advisability of a bill that would allow changes to be brought in which would alter the nature of the charter and eliminate one of the checks against that monopoly on behalf of the Canadian public.

I notice that the hon. member for Scarborough East said that one of the checks would be that Bell Canada would still have to come before the CRTC for approval of rates, and so forth. That does not give me great comfort because I have made representations before the CRTC on behalf of my constituents and constituents from the lower mainland of British Columbia, and I have cause for concern about the effectiveness of those representations. I am not referring primarily to the representations I made before that body in relation to the CBC in Vancouver but, more immediately and more to the point, in relation to the brief I presented to the CRTC a few months ago when B.C. Telephone Company asked for an increase in rates in our province.

The CRTC went to great lengths to provide an opportunity for the people of the lower mainland in particular to have some input into those meetings and hearings. B.C. Telephone had corporate representatives at each of those meetings and there was an interchange between the private citizens making representations and presenting briefs and the vice chairman of CRTC and officials of the company, and in terms of the operations of those hearings they were beautiful. But when I saw the conclusions of CRTC as a result of those representations—and I remember specifically those made on behalf of, for example, senior citizens who could not afford the increase in rates, and on behalf of all citizens who were not getting the kind of service in terms of the kind of equipment being used there, and break-downs in equipment—I could not derive great comfort from them, nor was I reassured that the CRTC is providing an adequate check on a monopoly.