

Supply—Transport

the minister he makes an announcement. How many such regional reports are to be made to the minister? I understand there are two, one for western Canada and one for the Pacific coast. Will the minister give consideration to making those announcements when the house is in session?

Mr. Balcer: I think my hon. friend is under the wrong impression. As far as the eastern hearings are concerned, a report of the decision was made by the board and I made the announcement. I do not know what other report my hon. friend has in mind.

Item agreed to.

Board of Transport Commissioners for Canada—
447. Administration, operation and maintenance,
\$1,249,433.

Mr. Benidickson: We are dealing with the board of transport commissioners. I recollect that when the Bell Telephone Company asked for an increase in its rates at one time, this government with an election in the offing, decided to use its power to overrule the board. I think that for a matter of two or three months they did overrule the board. Recently another application from the Bell Telephone Company, which affects users of telephones in Canada, has been dealt with. The cabinet has a chance to overrule the decision. Is there anybody on the front bench who can tell us whether the cabinet proposes to overrule the decision of the board because I understand that one member of the board said that the suggestions in the majority opinion were unconscionable and that in connection with long distance tolls they would impose on the economy of the country something that would not be desirable. Is there anybody who can say whether the cabinet is prepared to do what it did some years ago, namely overrule the board of transport commissioners?

Mr. Balcer: Mr. Chairman, the cabinet will follow the legal requirements. At the present time no appeal has been filed against the decision of the board. Until such an appeal has been filed the government does not have to take any decision.

Mr. Benidickson: Would the appeal normally come from some municipality, or since this involves long distance rates, would it come from an individual? What are the possibilities in this regard?

Mr. Balcer: Any interested party can file an appeal.

Mr. Regier: I have a complaint to lodge in this regard and it is against the board of transport commissioners. They have jurisdiction over the rates charged by the B.C. Telephone Company. I contend this is completely

out of line with common sense. The B.C. Telephone Company ought to have its rates determined by the British Columbia public utilities commission. By hook or by crook, over a long period of years, the B.C. Telephone Company has at long last finally escaped completely any provincial authority or any provincial jurisdiction. My experience has been that the board of transport commissioners in Ottawa accept holus-bolus any argument presented to them by the B.C. Telephone Company. No community or interest in British Columbia has ever had its arguments given any serious consideration by the board of transport commissioners in Ottawa. Immediately upon receipt of a complaint from British Columbia to the board of transport commissioners a letter is mailed out to the B.C. Telephone Company by the board in which it sets forth the complaint. Thereupon the B.C. Telephone Company mails its reply, and this reply has always been accepted in our history as gospel by the board of transport commissioners.

I do not want to be unfair to the board. They may well be able to supervise the operations of the Bell Telephone Company in Ontario. However, they are completely unequipped and unable to supervise the operations of our own B.C. Telephone Company. The sooner they get out of this particular field and hand over to our province the supervision of the operations of our own telephone system the better it will be, and the happier our people will be.

As I said before, I do not want to blame any one individual, but this company has always been treated as a bit of an orphan. I refer now to the assignment of exercising supervision over the B.C. Telephone Company. We pay in our province twice the telephone tolls that many of the citizens of other Canadian cities have to pay. There is now another proposal to increase rates even more. With respect to public utilities, one of the old lessons that was taught to me was that the more users you have the lower the cost per unit of operation, but this is not so with the B.C. Telephone Company. The more little exchanges they establish, and the more they split up existing exchanges the more the rates go up to the householders and to business.

In conclusion, I contend that not only business but every householder in British Columbia will thank this government if it will relieve itself of the responsibilities of supervising the B.C. Telephone Company and hand the whole of the affairs of that company back to the government of British Columbia where it rightfully belongs.

Mr. Benidickson: In practically no place in Canada have we government ownership of