

*Bell Canada Act*

Mr. Fox said that the Government must be satisfied that the reorganization was in the over-all public interest.

The CRTC held its hearings in February, 1983, and many viewpoints were expressed on the issue. On the basis of the briefs and recommendations submitted to it, and taking its own study into consideration, the CRTC made its recommendations on April 18, 1983. It recommended that the proposed reorganization be implemented on condition that certain legislative provisions be adopted to strengthen and clarify the CRTC's power over Bell Canada and its affiliates, thereby protecting the interests of the subscriber.

On April 23, 1983, the Liberal Government announced its intention to study the CRTC's recommendations and draft the necessary legislative provisions to protect the interests of Bell Canada customers. That Bill was tabled, a subsequent Bill was tabled, and we are now speaking to Bill C-13. It has many of the legislative provisions initially recommended by my party. It should be noted, however, that the present Government has introduced significant changes to Bill C-13 which diminish the intent of that legislation.

During the last session, when the previous Minister introduced this legislation as Bill C-19, which by the way died on the Order Paper when this Government chose to prorogue, I had been speaking to my concerns involving many of the issues which had appeared after a long and arduous study and which formed part of the CRTC report tabled in 1983. It is a fascinating document which I think is well worth rereading. Many groups appeared with informed opinions to share with those interested in the improvement of both our telephone system and business systems in general. We are not fully satisfied that Bill C-13 in its present form will bring all activities of Bell Canada under the regulatory authority of the CRTC.

As I said, I have a number of areas of specific concern with respect to this Bill. These concerns include the furnishing of services, the potential for unfair competition in the broadcasting field, the lack of adequate safeguards for an indirect takeover of Bell Canada, and the impact of the divestiture clauses.

I will begin by considering the matter of furnishing service. My dissatisfaction with Clause 6 of this Bill stems from the fact that it fails to recognize that a customer has the right to be supplied with the most efficient and least costly telephone. We must not forget that the telephone is the outside line to the world and it is very important to shut-ins and our senior citizens. If they cannot afford the ever-escalating price of the telephone itself, let alone the service, it would be most unfair. I think the Minister would be the first to agree.

The Bill says that Bell Canada must furnish telephones of the latest improved design then in use by the company in the municipality or territory concerned. That could be anything from the newest of the high-tech touch tone to the fanciest of telephone answering systems. That is not necessarily what all people want. Many of the features are in excess of the

requirements of a basic telephone service. I recall trying to get a plain old black telephone as they were bringing the new telephone systems into this House and I was trying to figure out how to use all this fancy stuff. I would love to have the little old black telephone back in some instances.

● (1630)

I would like to bring to the Minister's attention that one must be mobile and able to go to a boutique to select a telephone. When you order a telephone service, they do not automatically come with a piece of hardware to plug into the wall once the wires have been installed. The consumer must go to the boutique and is often overwhelmed by an array of new fangled equipment. I am sure this can be a very intimidating experience for a frail, elderly citizen who had enough difficulty getting to the shop and must now cope with the modern technology. The telephone boutique does not always have in stock the least expensive but most efficient and effective piece of equipment.

A member of my staff moved into a new apartment. Since the information was not volunteered, she inquired as to what kind of minimum cost telephone was available. She was told that only the most expensive telephone was available. Her choice was either to take the touch-tone telephone which was available or wait six months until the least costly equipment would again be in stock in that particular boutique. The difference in what I pay for my telephone and what this person was forced to buy through Bell Canada is \$8.80 a month. That is a lot of money. It is close to the cost of purchasing cable television on a monthly basis.

I do not think that was the intention of the Minister or Bell Canada. However, those boutiques should carry enough of the least costly phones to service everyone. Consumers have the right to be supplied with the most efficient but least costly piece of equipment. The consumer needs better protection. I do not think that Bill C-13, in its present form, will be instrumental in ensuring a universally affordable telephone service.

The furnishing of services and prepayment is referred to in Section 6(2)(c). The Government has changed this section from the version which appeared in the former Bill C-19. The present version of Section 6(2)(c) provides that if the CRTC fails to prescribe an amount which the telephone subscriber must pay in advance to obtain telephone service, Bell will automatically be able to charge a six-month prepayment regardless of whether the customer is a good or bad credit risk.

The Government maintains that the six-month charge is academic, that the customer will never actually be charged a six month prepayment by Bell because the CRTC will always prescribe the lower amount. If the Government is so confident that the CRTC will protect the telephone subscriber, why does it persist in holding that six-month prepayment clause over the heads of customers? I do not know why that could not have been removed or made more clear.