

Thus, remedial measures have only been effected to the extent of the messages that previously passed through the State of Maine being now partially conveyed by a line running some way into Canada. The only other of the various reforms pointed to that has been seriously followed up is that of reduced rates for deferred messages. Though strongly advocated in the report of the aforesaid Cable Communications Committee, no notice was taken of this recommendation until within the last two years, during which period it has been under close official consideration. The Postmaster-General is said to have endeavoured throughout to bring about the innovation; but let us remember that this would be amongst a thousand and one other things that require his attention, and that the present has been a particularly strenuous year at the Post Office—partly on account of the forthcoming telephone transfer. It is understood that certain of the more important foreign nations have been difficult to persuade in the matter. Possibly, too, some opposition has been experienced at the hands of the companies concerned (over whom the Government have but little actual control as things stand at present); for though they are supposed now to be favourable as a whole to the change, this was apparently not so at the time of the Cable Communications Inquiry.\* Be that as it may, when the 1st January of next year comes round a very long time will have passed before this reform has been brought about, and that fact is only in common with experience in similar matters. For this, I need scarcely say, we have only to thank the cumbersome system of Government that has been handed down to us.

In my opinion, as I have said on previous occasions, we require a Commission, or Board of Control, to effectively deal with the subject of Imperial telegraphs in all its aspects, with representatives of each of the departments concerned, including delegates of the oversea dominions, but free from the ever-changing trammels of party politics.† It might even be found worth while to make room on such a Board for one or two individuals who happen to have had something to do with telegraphy and cable-work in its different aspects. Some people may consider that international telegraphy could not be satisfactorily attended to by this plan. I reply, "Empire before the rest of the world."—(Hear, hear.)—Moreover, surely the Empire as a whole should have a say in the matter of international telegraphs, and not merely the United Kingdom. As things go at present, reference can only be made by the Post Office to the various departments in the course of laborious and time-taking correspondence.

In other countries experts are usually called in over special subjects. Here we pay a very high and well-deserved tribute to our Civil servants and to their general training for the extremely varied duties they are called upon to perform—sometimes of a special and, indeed, expert character. Certainly, if time is an insurance of careful and ripe deliberation, our method may, in the end, prove highly commendable.

#### *The New Position.*

So far, by way of introduction to my theme, I have only been recounting the suggestions that have been made for improving our system of cable-communication, whilst reviewing what has been done towards carrying them out. Let us now turn to matters more immediately bearing on the title of my present address; and I am afraid I shall have to show you that, from a national standpoint, the position is very much worse than it was before.

It is, I suppose, fairly well known now throughout the City of London that something like three years ago the Western Union Telegraph Company of America became absorbed with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company—both colossal concerns.‡ With this amalgamation the former company was imbued with new life, directorially speaking, and a little later it was suddenly discovered that they (the Western Union Company) must withdraw from the Atlantic Cable "pool," in which they had been partners with the Anglo-American Telegraph Company and the Direct United States Cable Company, on the plea of such a pool being contrary to the Anti-Trust (Sherman) Act, which had recently become part of American law.§ The effect of this was that the Western Union land-lines in the United States ceased to be available as a connecting-link for the British companies.

All this is said to have put the Anglo Company and the Direct United States Company into a tight corner, whereupon the Western Union Company proceeded to make certain proposals, first to the former, and afterwards additionally to the latter. After lengthy negotiations, these proposals eventually took shape by both companies becoming absorbed with the Western Union Company, to whom their cables are to be leased for a term of ninety-nine years. For national purposes, you may say these two British companies are wiped out by the transaction. Moreover, as you probably know, the same applies to all the various cables between the United Kingdom and Canada, let alone the United States—i.e., not a single one of the thirteen will now be under British control, even though all were made and laid by our countrymen. Are we so ready to abdicate at one stroke the position we have gained as pioneers by dint of considerable enterprise? We might as well renounce our colonies at once, and consider Canada but a part of the United States of America. Such an act of telegraphic abdication could be better understood indeed if universal brotherhood, rather than the rivalry of nations, were the order of the day.

It is often said that England is gradually becoming America; and, perhaps, some would regard this as another happy matrimonial alliance between the Old Country and the new.

\* No reduction on the ordinary messages was then agreed to under any pretext, but an increased tariff suggested instead for messages of an extra-urgent character. The answer given to question 578 (Blue-book Cd. 958) shows pretty clearly that the associated companies were at that time unwilling to adopt deferred rates; whilst an absolute proof of the desirability of the plan is to be found in the answer given to question 578.

† A permanent Commission of this character might conceivably, in due course, work out an all-round Imperial tariff of a sufficiently practicable order.

‡ This is about to be followed by the absorption of the Western Telephone and Telegraph Company of America.

§ This followed a little after a new Western Union cable had been laid without landing-rights being applied for till later. These landing-rights were eventually granted without any special conditions being obtained.