

Commencement Thesis
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The Telegraph System of the United States.

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No invention perhaps has exerted greater influence in the shaping of our modern civilization, than the electric telegraph. It has bound the world together, into one whole making possible the daily press and carrying on the methods of modern business. It is like the nervous system of the animal body; messages are sent back and forth between the most remote part of the body with lightning rapidity. At our present time man in our great industrial and commercial centers is enabled to feel the world's pulse throb daily, which makes it possible to determine the best course for him to pursue in a business sense. The telegraph is a medium through which intelligence is transmitted by electricity. The telegraph has become thoroughly engrafted into our modern civilization that it has become an indispensable factor in the world's welfare. This great invention belongs to the United States and is of recent origin. On May 24 marks the 53^d anniversary of the first message "What hath God wrought" sent over the first line constructed for commercial purposes.

The honor of this great invention is bestowed upon Prof. Samuel F. B. Morse; he came from educated parents by whose counsel he was carefully guided. In 1810 when he had reached the age 19 he graduated at

Yale college. His chosen profession was that of a painter, in which line of work, he has gained some renown. He spent three years in Europe in study and in executing important commissions. In 1832 he returned from Europe, and while on board the ship fully through a conversation on electricity he conceived the idea of the electric telegraph. The greater portion of his time on the voyage was spent in making and drawing plans for telegraphic instruments. Shortly after arriving he began work in constructing telegraphic instruments. After having shown his instruments to scientific societies and prominent citizens he exhibited his works to the president and members of congress in one of the rooms of the capitol; but it was not however until in February 1843 when congress appropriated \$30,000. to test the capacity and usefulness of the system.

The first line of wire was constructed along the Washington and Baltimore R. R. where it was thought to prove most practicable. The wire was to be laid in the middle of the road bed, incased in lead tubing; but after seven miles of line had been laid, it was discovered that the insulation of the wire through the process of manufacture had been destroyed; the plan was abandoned and the wires were then put on poles. The work was carried on from both ends. On May 2nd 1844

the public trial took place, and two days after despatches reporting the proceedings of the National Democratic convention held in Baltimore were sent over the new line successfully. The results of this new, astounding and rapid conveyance of intelligence won over public opinion to the side of the new invention. Congress soon after appropriated \$8,000 for the management of the telegraph and put it in charge of the Postmaster general. A tariff of one cent was laid on every four characters. The government control of the telegraph passed into private hands.

In May 1845 the Magnetic Telegraph Company was organized to build a line from New York to Washington, which was the first step in the establishment of the vast system that covers the civilized world.

The telegraph from this time on to the present time has been owned and operated by private companies, with the exception of few military lines.

Numerous rival companies have sprung up in this country, but their existence at least the major part of them was comparatively short. They were bought out or forced out of business, by what is now known as the "Western Union Telegraph Company" which of late years has become one of the most gigantic, powerful and abominable telegraph monopolies in existence.

It exercises through its audacity greater authority than the Czar of Russia; its power is tyrannical. It assumes in a sense dictatorship over the American press; shaping and influencing the opinions of the American people. Its gross discrimination in favor of certain classes and individuals, by overcharges, intentional delays, false market reports &c have rendered it odious. The influence it sways in building up certain localities or tearing them down; the high charges for messages in general; the low pay to employees and long hours; the corrupt practices it plays in the political arena are calling down upon the system the condemnation of the people. Our present telegraph system is now attracting public attention more than ever before.

As soon as the American people are thoroughly awakened to the wrongs perpetrated upon them, they will resent and act. They were convinced that slavery was wrong and a menace to civilization; they arose in their might and destroyed and abolished the monster evil. But now a greater evil overshadows the welfare of this nation, more dangerous and destructive to the human race; the slavery of the masses to corporate rule. I still have faith in the American people; the thought of liberty is not dead; as soon as the conscience of the people is awakened to their danger a halt will be con-

manded and monopolistic power will be trailed and stamped into the dust. The only remedy will be, that private ownership must give way to public ownership.

For years strenuous efforts have been made for government ownership. Several of our postmaster generals have insisted on a postal telegraph, and that it should be owned and controlled by the government. Investigations by congressional committees point favorably to public control. Bills from time to time have been introduced into congress in regard to public franchise of the telegraph. The chief stumbling block as Prof. Frank Parsons puts it has been the imaginary rights of the great corporations which now control telegraphy in the United States.

Nearly all the great nations of Europe own their telegraph systems. Australia has government control. The experience of the nations having government ownership, is that cheaper rates are obtained, better service secured, lines are more universally distributed, employees are better paid, and the net profits instead of going into private hands go into the national treasury.

The constitution of the United States sanctions public ownership, since the constitution provides that congress is authorized to establish post offices and

post roads. The supreme court interprets this to mean that congress "may transmit intelligence in any form and by any means." The government being the agent of the people, should take means to that end; promoting the interest and welfare of the people at large.

That the evils of our present system are great is beyond question. Private companies do not aim to extend telegraphic facilities to all localities but only to the best districts, and look forward to selfish ends, while on the other hand public ownership aims more for efficient service to the public as a whole regardless of dividends. The liberality of the government in its distribution is shown by its 70,000 post offices in contrast to the 2,000 telegraph offices in the United States. The private charges of America are more than double those of Europe under public control. According to the 10th census the per cent of profits to cost is 2.9% in Europe and 29.5% in the United States.

Prof. Frank Parsons in one of his papers in Arena magazine Vol. 15. gives three reasons why rates are higher in this country than in other countries under government control, they are as follows: "1st needless expense, 2nd illegitimate expense and 3^d overgrown profits."

According to a high electrical authority, if recent inventions were adopted it would cost about 50 cents

a message of 1000. words from New York to Chicago, a service which now costs ~~\$~~31% over "Western Union line". In view of this statement it seems evident that the government under a good civil service regulation could sustain public control under a five cent rate. From the various facilities and high charges it follows that only a very small portion of our people are enabled to use the telegraph. Pres. Green of the Western Union says: "that only a million people use the telegraph at all and that 46% of the total business is purely speculative — stock jobbing, wheat deals in the future, pool rooms &c. 34% legitimate trade, about 12% of the business is press business, and 8% of the business is social."

Again private companies are subject to watering their stock. The Western Union reports its stock at 95 millions. It claims 190,000 miles of line, 800,000 miles of wire and 21,360 offices. Prof. Parsons claims these figures to be false, he says three fourth of the offices are railway offices and maintained by the railroads. The total land plant in actual operation under Western Union control is probably less than 100,000. miles of poles and 40,000 miles of wire and the larger part of this is not in good condition.

It is claimed our employees, are illy treated, they

being subjected to long hours and and on an average to low pay. Fidelity and merit are of little value to old operators. One generation of young operators succeeds another. Our telegraph system has been likened to "a great press where life and energy are crushed out of thousands of young men and women and coined into gold for industrial aristocrats". The Western Union states its loss by the great strike of 1883 as being \$709,300. Under private ownership there are no special inducements for employees, but everything for gold. Petitions of grievances are ignored, and the petitioners are black listed and discharged; strikes seem to be their only alternative.

In Great Britain under government control, appointments are made by competitive examination. Promotions are due to merit. Length of service gives increase of pay. Permanency of employment is assured during good behavior and efficiency. Also provision is made in case of sickness, disability and old age. Still further operators are given a pension after a certain period of service rendered; each succeeding period of reached entitles an increase of pension. A service of ten years entitles an employee to a pension equal to one sixth of his salary; a service of twenty years one third of salary; thirty years one half of salary.

and forty years service is entitled to a pension equal to two thirds of his former salary. The hours of labor are eight per day and seven per night, and six days in a week. The salary for first class labor being about \$950 or \$80 per month. The policy there is to increase wages while in the United States the tendency is to decrease them.

Poor service, such as slowness of sending messages inaccuracies, insufficient facilities and failure to guard secrecy of messages &c. has caused much complaint. Letters have been known to reach their destination before telegrams which were started earlier.

Carelessness in the disclosing of important political messages caused Mr. Wilson in 1894 to say: Suppose I transmit a confidential telegram relative to political matters of importance to myself. In the general judgment of the people of the West such news as that now leaks like a sieve.

Prof. Simon Newcomb says: "that the telegraph service in the U. S. is the poorest in the world".

Prof. R. T. Oly says: "that the contrast between the service in this country and the service in Germany is most painful to one who has lived in both countries."

In the language of Prof. Frank Parsons "We have seen that private monopoly confers upon private individuals

and corporations the power of exacting payments beyond the value of the service rendered, the power of exacting tribute, the power of taxation without representation and for private purposes, a power that is of the very substance of despotism, a characteristic attribute of imperialism, the right hand of tyranny."

The evidence in favor of public ownership as shown by the leading European countries and elsewhere is conclusive. Belgium, Holland, New Zealand tried private ownership, but it is now supplanted by public control. France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland began with public ownership and still continue under it and desire no change.

The telegraph in the U. S. is still in private hands, despite the public dissatisfaction, expressed in a multitude of bills, petitions, speeches, investigations and memorials that have besieged congress for half a century.

That public ownership is advantageous to the general welfare of the people and nation as can be demonstrated by the results and general satisfaction given in countries having government control, in contrast to countries under private ownership must be conceded by fair minded investigators. From the records and statistics it

is shown that under public ownership better service and cheaper rates are secured.

There is no reason why the United States could not have public franchise of the telegraph, if the people so desired and pressed their claims. The telegraph system would then become a counterpart of the post office system, for which the constitution makes ample provision. Rates for messages will be reduced to a minimum, the per cent of social and business messages will be increased against messages of a gambling purport. The press will be more free and untrammelled in its expressions and opinions. Discriminations in favor or against individuals, towns, cities, and localities in general will cease. Employees will be better paid, and worked fewer hours. Promotions and increase of pay will be due to merit, fidelity and long service in contrast with inexperience and cheap labor.

Rapid communication is essential to commercial transactions and to the general welfare and as the telegraph is a natural monopoly it should belong to and be operated by the general government.