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## The Canadian Engineer.

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### THE TELEPHONE ENQUIRY.

The Postmaster-General is to be congratulated on the progress already made by the select committee on telephone systems now sitting at Ottawa. In the short period the committee has been in existence, some 500 pages of valuable and instructive testimony has been secured. Among the points brought out by this evidence the following are worth keeping in mind: That there are already a large number of rural telephone systems in Canada being operated by small companies and co-operative associations at a cost which is a revelation when compared with what the Bell Telephone Company demands for the supply of a similar service; that these rural systems require connection with the local exchanges in the adjoining villages or towns, also with the long distance lines, and cannot obtain these facilities, except on terms which are prohibitive; that municipal telephony, so far as it has been tried in Canada, has been a success, financially, and also as regards the number of subscribers, and quality of service given; that the long distance rates are excessive, and that the Bell Telephone Company has entered into agreements with nearly every railway company in the Dominion, and at least one navigation, and one cartage company, for the purpose of creating a monopoly in the use of telephones, by preventing subscribers to other systems from having connection with the offices of these companies.

By far the most important evidence is that relating to the operation of independent and co-operative

systems in those parts of Ontario and Quebec, which the Bell Telephone Company has apparently considered of such minor importance as to leave them entirely outside its zone of operations. In each of these cases it has been shown that after the Bell Telephone Company had been approached, and prohibitive terms demanded, those interested had set to work and established a service in their own locality, with the most satisfactory results. These systems have cost from \$35 to \$50 per telephone for installation, and the expense of operation and maintenance has been so small as to be hardly worth considering, in fact, the tolls paid by non-subscribers is more than sufficient to meet these contingencies.

Very interesting and important testimony was given by Dr. J. T. Demers, manager of the Bellechasse Telephone Co., which operates about 1,200 miles of lines in Quebec, starting at Cap a la Baleine, in the County of Matane, and going up to St. Jean des Chaillons in the County of Lotbinière. The company has 1,300 subscribers, its principal exchanges being at Levis, Montmagny, Rivière-du-Loup, and Rimouski. At the last named place the "Bell" had originally an exchange of 33 subscribers, but so strongly entrenched was Dr. Demers' company that the great monopoly was threatened with ruin unless it sold out to its small competitor, and the "Bell" handed over the system for \$2,000. The Rimouski exchange has now 120 subscribers. Farmers in this company's territory obtain a service over the whole of their own county for \$12 per annum. The rates in the towns and villages are \$15, \$20, and \$25, according to the number of counties in which the subscriber requires connection. As an illustration of what might be done in regard to a cheap long distance service the witness stated that between Levis and Rivière-du-Loup, a distance of 155 miles, his company charges 25 cents for five minutes conversation, while the "Bell" charges its subscribers 60 cents for three minutes. The Bellechasse Company's line is a copper metallic circuit, and the service between these points is in every respect equal, if not superior to that of the "Bell." So successful has this company been in its operations that a seven per cent dividend has been paid each year since its inception, and Dr. Demers stated this year he anticipated a net profit of fourteen per cent.

This enterprising French doctor has certainly given a practical demonstration that there is more money in telephones legitimately handled for the public benefit, than in medicine.

Ex-Mayor Dyke, of Fort William, also gave important testimony regarding the municipal exchanges at Fort William and Port Arthur, but as the descriptions have already been given of these systems in the Canadian Engineer it is unnecessary to repeat the details here. This witness stated that municipal telephones in these towns are an unqualified success, Fort William having 500 subscribers, and Port Arthur 540, all paying. The number of families in these towns