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## Meters and Economy

The Bell Telephone Company of Canada has an application before the rate-fixing authorities for certain changes in the rates which it is permitted to charge for different classes of its services in different kinds of territory. The application appears to involve a very considerable increase in the amount charged to the clients of the telephone company for their telephone service; and it will require, and will doubtless receive, the closest scrutiny on the part of the rate-making authorities. The element in the application, however, which has excited the greatest amount of hostility among the classes affected is the introduction of what is known as the measured rate. Canadians have never been accustomed to paying for their telephone service in proportion to the use which they make of it, and the idea of being compelled to do so has evidently come as a painful shock to a great many people.

It does not by any means follow that because an absolute flat rate is the system to which we are accustomed it is therefore the ideal system for the sale of telephone services. There are important considerations on both sides. There can be no doubt whatever that the flat rate system is conducive to reckless and extravagant use of the facilities afforded by the telephone organizations, for purposes involving no real benefit to the users. There are plenty of households in Canada in which juvenile members, and sometimes the senior members also, employ the telephone for hours on end for purely frivolous conversations which they would not dream of conducting if a telephone conversation cost a definite sum of even three or four cents. It would be no great hardship to anybody, and a considerable relief to the telephone organization, if this wasteful habit were discouraged and eventually suppressed. A very similar laxity exists in the use of business telephones, not, however, usually on the part of the persons who rent and pay for them, but on the part of their employees. It has not hitherto been worth while for business houses to establish and enforce any strict regulations against the use of the telephone by their employees on their own private business, except perhaps at times when the

entire set of wires at the disposal of the business house is likely to be required for business purposes. No loss would be involved if this additional kind of extravagance in telephone usage were also put a stop to.

On the other hand, the adoption of the measured rate system must be made dependent upon proof that the system can be operated equitably, efficiently and without undue irritation. Very much depends upon the mechanism of which the telephone company can avail itself for recording calls. It is of the highest importance that that mechanism should record only those calls which are successful in reaching their object—that no charge should be made for calls which produce only a "line busy" report or a "wrong number" connection. It would not, we think, be unreasonable if the company were required to furnish upon request a daily statement of the calls charged up against any instrument whose owner has reason to think that he is being overcharged, in order that the customers' task of checking up the charge may be facilitated.

The flat rate system of charges for public services is characteristic of the American continent and other new communities. It is characteristic of communities where men's time and energies are too valuable and too much needed for productive purposes to be freely employed in keeping count of small sums. The flat rate fare for urban transit is almost universal on this continent, but it would not be tolerated in Europe, and it is by no means certain that it will remain indefinitely the most appropriate system for America. We are too busy and too careless to measure our water supply, and as a consequence our per capita consumption of water is many times that of the average European city; we flatter ourselves that this is because we are cleaner and more addicted to the use of water for brightening our gardens and assisting our mechanical processes, but it is very largely due to our enormous wastage. We cannot continue indefinitely to be as extravagant with the forces and materials of nature and with the use of our mechanical appliances as we have been in the past. We shall have to learn by degrees to pay for the things we use in proportion as we use them,—and incidentally to save money in proportion as