

CURRENT TOPICS.

Worthless Express Orders.

If the press despatch stating that a Dawson newspaper proprietor, who also carried on an express business & operated a money order department, has left the Yukon, & that payment of the orders cannot be obtained, is true, the matter should occupy the very serious consideration of the Government & such legislation should be enacted as will prevent the repetition of such frauds. It might be well to provide that none but chartered companies may engage in the business of issuing express money orders.

Amending the Railway Act.

The bill introduced in the House of Commons by the Minister of Railways, the full text of which is given on page 105, should be closely watched by the railway companies. On the motion for the first reading, Sir Chas. Tupper suggested its submission to the Railway Committee of the House, but Mr. Blair would not give any promise that this would be done. It seems only reasonable that a bill of such importance should be considered by that Committee, & that the railway companies should have every opportunity of being heard in regard to it. Without touching on other clauses of the bill, we would specially draw attention to the one which proposes to empower the Railway Committee of the Privy Council to make rules for the operating of the railways, which shall supersede the rules of the railway companies where they differ therefrom. We see no reason whatever for such an innovation. It is of the first importance to the railway companies to operate under such rules as will secure the maximum of safety. No one is so vitally interested in this as the companies themselves. Following the plan adopted in the United States, the principal Canadian railways are already moving in the direction of uniformity. The St. Lawrence & Adirondack & the Northern Pacific companies have been using the standard code of the American Railway Association for some time past, the Grand Trunk & the Canada Atlantic railways have recently adopted it, & the Canadian Pacific is preparing to do so at an early date. And there is every reason to believe that other lines, seeing the advantages of the code referred to, will fall in line, & that within a reasonable time nearly the whole of the railways of the Dominion will be operated under it, which means that they will be using a system evolved by the concentrated efforts of the best operating men on the American continent. The Railway Committee of the Privy Council already has the power of approving or disapproving of the operating rules of the various railways. Anything further would be unnecessary & dangerous. Last year Mr. Blair secured an appropriation for a commission to frame railway operating rules, & he is evidently still going on the same tack, as his bill provides that the Railway Committee of the Privy Council may appoint persons to advise it in the preparation of such rules. No commission that the Committee can appoint will be in any respect as competent as the Train Rules Committee of the American Railway Association. Unless Mr. Blair is prepared to adopt the standard code & make it obligatory on all railways, the increased power which he asks for the Railway Committee of the Privy Council should be refused.

Nationalization of Telegraph Lines.

The preamble of a bill introduced by Mr. Casey in the House of Commons to provide for the establishment of a government system of telegraphs, asserts that the present telegraph rates charged in Canada are unduly high & that as the telegraph lines are owned by private corporations the same rates, etc., are not

extended to the public generally. In speaking on his motion for the first reading of the bill Mr. Casey did not state any facts to justify the assertion that the present rates are unduly high. The local rate of 25c for 10 words, which is in force in every province, & between Ontario & Quebec points east of Sudbury, is a reasonable one when the volume of business it is possible to secure is considered & the night rate of 25c for 25 words is a very advantageous one. The higher rates for longer distances are not excessive when the cost of maintenance is considered. In regard to the second allegation that there is discrimination in rates, Mr. Casey admitted that this was not the case with messages for the general public, & the only fact he could cite was that large newspapers, which take a tremendous amount of press despatches, get a lower rate than small papers which take but few despatches. We fail to see that there is anything unfair in this, on the contrary the wholesale user should have an advantage over the retail one.

Mr. Casey's proposal is that the rates for messages from one part of Canada to another shall not exceed 10c for 10 words & that press messages shall be carried for 10c per 100 words. These rates would apply even from Cape Breton to Dawson. We have no hesitation in saying that a system of government lines could not be made self-supporting at any such rates, & we do not think the great majority of the population, who do not use the wires at all, should be taxed for the benefit of those who do.

What has been accomplished in Great Britain does not apply here. There the civil service is non-partisan, here where every postmaster is appointed for political services the case is very different & there would be a decided objection to allowing telegrams to pass through the hands of such officials. Now the services of the different commercial telegraph companies are manned by the best people that can be got for the work, and as a consequence satisfactory service is performed. With government management it would be entirely different. An example of this is to be seen in the management of the government railways which, no matter what party is in power, are exploited for party purposes & in their services are necessarily inferior to lines under private management, which depend for their success largely on the excellence of their accommodations, services, etc.

Prince Edward Island Telegraph Service.

In referring a short time since to the complaints about this service we pointed out that there are two sides to the question, that the Anglo-American Telegraph Co. is not entirely to blame for the high rates on messages to points outside the Island, owing to the fact that these have to be handed over to other Companies, necessitating the charging of an extra toll, & that the telegraphic business of the Island is small, owing to its population being almost entirely an agricultural one. But there is no doubt that the service is inadequate and that an improvement is necessary. During a recent discussion in the House of Commons several of the Island members complained very forcibly about the service, being supported by the Minister of Marine, whose home is in Charlottetown. The Anglo-American Co. has its head office for the Island in that city, yet it is closed daily at 8 p.m. and not opened until between 8 & 9 a.m., so that no messages can be transmitted during the night. As Sir Louis Davies pointed out, during the South African war the morning paper published in Charlottetown has not been able to secure any despatches arriving later than 8 p.m., & in consequence, most of the trains leaving Charlottetown in the morning, the people outside that city always get their news 24 hours late. There is no doubt such a position of affairs is intolerable, & if the Anglo-American management values its

P. E. Island business at all we would strongly advise it to provide a more up-to-date service by keeping its offices in Charlottetown, & possibly Summerside & Georgetown, open at least until midnight, & to endeavor to make arrangements with the lines with which it connects in New Brunswick so that through rates may be somewhat reduced. Unless the management does this another service will undoubtedly have to be provided.

The impression has prevailed that the Anglo-American Co. has the sole right of landing telegraph cables on P. E. Island, but the Minister of Marine contends that this is not the case. He says that the Co., which was established in 1853, had a partial monopoly granted it, but that this merely prohibits the laying of a cable between Europe & P. E. Island, or between any island off the coast of the American continent & P. E. Island, say from Cape Breton or from Newfoundland, & that it does not prevent the laying of a cable between P. E. Island & the American continent, for instance to Nova Scotia or New Brunswick. If this interpretation of the position is correct there is nothing to prevent competition, save the question of the expense of laying another cable, & whether there is sufficient business to justify it as a commercial enterprise, which we much doubt. But this might be got over by the adoption of wireless telegraphy between Cape Tormentine, N.B., & Cape Traverse, P.E.I., where Northumberland Strait is only about 9 miles wide. The Anglo-American directors, who are in England, will do well to realize the situation before it is too late for them to save their P.E.I. business. The Co. gets a subsidy of \$2,000 a year from the Dominion towards the maintenance of the connecting cable, & the Minister of Marine has clearly intimated that unless the service is improved this will be withdrawn & that steps will be taken to secure another line, possibly one to be built by the Dominion.

Lubricating Oils for the Intercolonial.

Senator Fergusson, of Prince Edward Island, has again brought this question up in the Senate, by moving for papers, &c., in connection with the contract made between the Minister of Railways & the Galena Oil Co. The Senator charges that a representative of the Co. assisted the Minister in an election contest, that the contract was given in return for such assistance, & that the cost of lubricating oils under the present contract exceeds the previous cost. With the political phase of the question we have nothing to do, the party papers can thresh that out, but in the absence of unquestionable evidence in support of Mr. Fergusson's allegation, we have no hesitation in saying that we do not believe it. There remains the question of cost. We have gone thoroughly into this, & find that the Galena Co. offered to supply the Intercolonial with the best quality of lubricating oil, at a cost of 10% less per 1,000 miles than the cost for the year preceding that in which the contract was made, & also offered to allow any additional saving that might be effected by the economical use of oil. If the cost is reduced below the amount named in the guarantee, the Galena Co. does not receive more than the prices named in the contract for its oils, but the I.C.R. gets the full benefit of the reduction, whatever it may be. The Galena Co. further agreed to furnish experts free of charge to the railway to co-operate with the mechanical department in an effort to reduce the cost of lubrication to the lowest possible point consistent with good service. The railway's management is authorized to withhold payment of a sufficient amount of money to make good at all times the Galena Co.'s guarantee. The system of accounting is similar to that adopted on other lines supplied by the Galena Co. The mechanical & supply departments make up statements showing locomotive & car mileage,