

THE POLITICAL SCIENCE AND DEBATING CLUB.

THE Political Science and Debating Club began work for this session on November 30th, when Prof. Shortt, the Honorary President of the Club, gave an address on Public Ownership. The speaker did not attempt to treat the question exhaustively—it was much too large for that—but merely opened it out and showed briefly how its various aspects should be judged. In beginning he warned his hearers against being stampeded by comparisons. That public ownership had succeeded in certain lines in Norway, for instance, was no reason why it should succeed in the same lines in Canada, where the conditions are entirely different. And because public ownership had been a success in the Post Office it did not necessarily follow that it would be a success in any other line.

Public ownership in Canada divides itself into three branches, national, provincial, municipal. These phases must again be divided on the question of operation. Does public ownership mean merely the ownership by the public of public utilities, or does it also include public operation?

The question of public ownership is a very debatable one, and must be discussed in detail and with reference to special conditions. It cannot be supported or condemned as a whole. The sample of public ownership most often pointed to is the Post Office. But here there is a peculiarity not common to other public utilities. There is a special reason for the Post Office being a national rather than a private service. There are national interests at stake. It is necessary that every citizen of a country should have some

means of communicating with every other citizen. There are sections in every country where, economically considered, it does not pay to keep up the postal system. But this makes no difference. It is not the business of the Post Office to succeed economically, but to succeed in serving the people. If the service is not self-supporting the government must pay the balance.

Telegraph and telephone systems seem at first sight to be specially adapted to public ownership. There are several reasons why the telephone system especially should be a monopoly. A number of telephone systems in one town is a nuisance. It is unsatisfactory and expensive, as several staffs and several sets of wires must be kept up. The public require that the telephone system be simple, direct and single. The easiest way of securing these necessary qualities is for the Government to take hold of the telephone business. But if by regulation the government can secure the necessary uniformity and can escape the difficulties and dangers of government management it is so much the better.

Railroads are somewhat analogous to the Post Office, yet differ from it in being run on an economic basis. It is, therefore, not logical to reason from success of public ownership in the Post Office to the same success in the railroad business. Neither can public ownership of railroads be advocated on the ground of advantages to be gained in the laying out of railroad systems. The arrangement of Government roads is not always good. That of the Intercolonial, for instance, is about as bad as it could be. The only thing in favor of Gov-