

Government Telephones, The Experience of Manitoba, Canada.

By JAMES MAVOR. (New York: Moffatt, Yard and Company. 1916. Pp. viii, 176.)

The policy of public ownership of telephones was adopted in Manitoba ten years ago. Previously the telephone service in Manitoba had been monopolized by the Bell Telephone Company. The promises of improved service at lower rates, by means of which the people were induced to sanction the policy of public ownership, bear a striking resemblance to those which used to fill the prospectuses, once so familiar to Americans, of the numerous so-called "home telephone" or independent companies, organized to compete with the "Bell." The results in both cases were much the same. As the president of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, speaking of the American independent companies, justly observes in his latest annual report (Report for 1916, p. 50), "There is hardly one of these now in operation whose average book cost is not higher than that of the Bell system, whose rates are not higher than originally promised, and which has not frankly conceded that business cannot be maintained on the terms and conditions of its prospectuses." The same statement can be made with respect to the Manitoba government telephone. Eventually the provincial government, like the wiser American independents, learned the importance of making proper allowances for depreciation and put its undertaking on a sounder business basis than that adopted at the beginning. It is not surprising, considering the general public misunderstanding of the true nature of the telephone business at that time, both in Canada and in the United States, that the provincial government had to learn by experience how to manage the telephone business. It might perhaps have been expected that the governmental system would have made a better showing than the American independent systems, since the government acquired a going concern from the Bell Company, possessed a monopoly within the limits of the province, and hence enjoyed a freer hand in the development of its policies than was possible to the American independents under highly competitive conditions. Indeed the record of the Manitoba government telephone administration does compare favorably with that of many, perhaps most, of the American independent companies. But this aspect of the matter is not considered in Professor Mavor's recent volume.

His book is confined almost altogether to the history of the Manitoba government telephones. It "purports to set forth statements of fact readily susceptible of confirmation." It undoubtedly does this, and the effect is, and, judging from the tone of the author's introduction, was intended to be, a scathing indictment of the conduct of the telephone business by the provincial government. The author desires that the book be judged, however, "not as an attack upon the Manitoba government nor upon its administration of the telephone system, but as a critical narrative of historical facts written from a point of view as impartial as possible." (Preface, p. vii.)

After a careful examination of the volume, nevertheless, the reviewer is compelled to judge it as an attack upon the Manitoba telephone system rather than as an impartial essay in political science. One example of the author's method will serve as well as many. On pages 147-148, he cites the figures of comparative telephone development in Manitoba and in several American states to show that the development is less in Manitoba under public ownership than in the United States under private ownership. Such statistics, he concludes, "effectually dispose of any contention that unrestricted private enterprise could not, and would not, have secured in Manitoba as great a degree of telephone development as has been secured under government control." From these figures it appears, for example, that the development in Manitoba in 1914 was 95 telephones per 1000 population, whilst in Iowa in 1912 it was 171 telephones per 1000 population. But in North Dakota which is not mentioned by Professor Mavor and where general conditions more closely resemble those in Manitoba than do those in any of the states cited by him, the development in 1912 was only 81 telephones per 1000 population. Moreover in 1907, when the telephone had just passed from private to public ownership in Manitoba, the development in the province was 42 telephones per 1000 population, whilst at the same time in North Dakota it was 70 and in Iowa, 151. In 1902, five years earlier, when there was no more thought of public ownership in the province than in the states, the development in Manitoba was 18, in North Dakota, 20, and in Iowa, 60 per 1000 population. All these figures are taken from sources cited by Professor Mavor himself or readily accessible to him. In view of the fact that he cites only the figures most favorable to his contention, and neglects to mention the others, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he is more interested in making out his case against public ownership than in making known the whole truth. In short the book as a whole, re-

garded as an argument against public ownership, is unconvincing; but it is not without value as a record of certain mistakes which governmental telephone administrations, like private companies, would do well to avoid.

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MINOR NOTICES

The Military and Colonial Policy of the United States by Elihu Root (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916, pp. 502), is one of a series of volumes containing the state papers and addresses of Senator Root, and is largely confined to the period while Mr. Root was secretary of war following the war of 1898. The selections illustrate Mr. Root both as a politician and as an administrator. The first part includes addresses of a popular or after dinner variety calculated to win general support for the administration in its colonial and military policies, denounced by its opponents as imperialism; while the second part consists largely of extracts from Mr. Root's reports as secretary of war and indicates the practical problems of administration in carrying out colonial government and in bringing about an efficient organization of the army. In the latter connection Mr. Root's part in the reorganization of the militia and the creation of the general staff and army war college is well illustrated. One of the most interesting chapters is that dealing with the Boxer troubles in China and the voluntary return of the Boxer indemnity by the United States.

The editors, J. B. Scott and Robert Bacon, have increased the value of the book by prefacing each article with a note giving its historical setting, and inserting relevant documents such as the protocols and treaties concluding the war with Spain, the instructions for the military government of the Philippines, the militia act of 1903, etc. There is also an index of some value.

In view of the present agitation for preparedness the book is very timely as presenting the opinion over a period of sixteen years of the man probably best qualified to talk of the military problems of the United States.