

American Telephone Company Head Wants Wires Given Back to Owners Soon

In an effort to restore the telephone systems of the country to the owners, so that the service may be carried on as before the war, Theodore N. Vail, president of the American Telephone company, and G. W. Robinson, president of the U. S. Independent Telephone company, are urging the members of the new senate and house of representatives to end the government control of the companies. The last day of July, 1918, President Wilson took control of the telephone systems of the United States, to supervise them until the end of the war. Now that the war is over, the owners are anxious to again control their companies, and according to them, if the systems are not soon restored to the owners, there will be great deterioration in the service.

The following is the letter of the two telephone company presidents to congress, explaining the situation: Washington, D. C., May 19, 1919. To the Members of the Senate and House of Representatives:

On midnight, July 31, 1918, under the authority of congress for war purposes, the president took supervision, possession, control and operation of the telephone system of the country and has since operated them. The war has practically ceased. The public press is strongly demanding, the general public and the owners of the telephone properties are urging, that they be returned as speedily as possible, that former conditions may be restored and more satisfactory service be afforded. The president and the postmaster general have announced that this will be done as soon as adequate arrangements be provided for receiving and advantageously operating them. It remains only for congress to enact such legislation as speedily as possible.

The expenses of these systems have largely increased during the past year for wages alone at the rate of more than \$20,000,000 per annum.

This was inevitable and necessary by reason of larger proportional increases by the railroads and industries of the country. The revenues are inadequate to care for such increases and the deficit of the government on that account to date is large and steadily increasing. The postmaster general ordered that steps be taken to secure adequate revenues, but contentions with the regulatory authorities of the states, not yet settled, have prevented such adjustments.

If such conditions continue, necessarily the credit of the operating companies will be impaired, proper expenses cannot be met, the best operating forces cannot be retained, needed extensions and satisfactory service cannot be provided. A deterioration will ensue which in some localities may threaten a recurrence to public ownership of operation in order to care, even inadequately, for public needs. By prompt action congress can prevent this contingency.

Just and speedy settlements should be made for all properties taken under the existing law, that such balance now in the possession of the government may be restored to assist in the upbuilding and extension of the various systems for better

public use. The conditions and regulation of operation should be clearly defined so as to permit the companies to re-establish and maintain a satisfactory service with reasonable rates without discrimination and procure the benefits of legitimate competition. The principal operating companies of the United States are vitally interested in co-operating with congress and the officials of the government to accomplish these results.

(Signed),

Theo. N. Vail,
President American Telephone and Telegraph Co.

G. W. Robinson,
President U. S. Independent Telephone Association.

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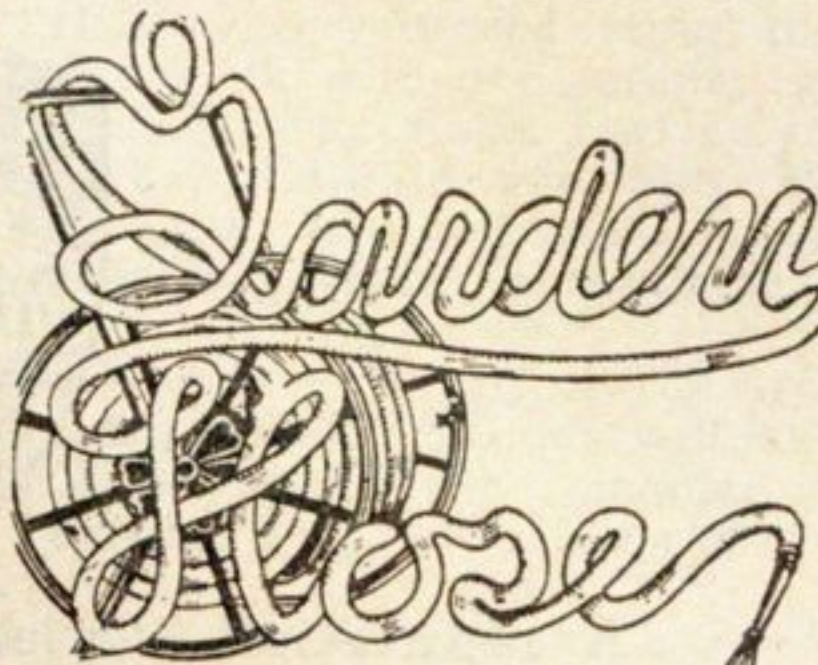
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