

Leaders of 1908 protest call on citizens to take out phones

"The company that controls the local exchange is the same one that owns the majority of stock in 40 telephone companies in Indiana and adjoining states. The octopus our people have to fight is not local, but has its tentacles in two scores of cities." *Bloomington Evening World*, Jan. 30, 1908.

After representatives of Bloomingtonians protesting a 20 percent phone rate hike in 1908 had presented the petition and received the news that the management wasn't interested in customer grievances, the leaders of the rebellion concluded that it was time to have a look at the company's books. Still, the officers of the Bloomington Home Telephone Company did



Looking back

By Rose
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take the protest seriously.

During stormy meetings, frustrated Bloomingtonians vented their ire and in the process said some interesting things about local politics. Attorney R.L. Morgan, whose office was on the north side of the square, told the audience at one meeting, "While the citizens of Bloomington have been sleeping on their rights, the City Council has gone on giving away franchises without time limits. The people

must wake up and take an active interest in their city government before they can obtain relief." David R. James, a farmer who said he had moved to Bloomington expressly for the purpose of educating his children in the university, was more blunt. "Gentlemen, I'm a Republican, but since I have come to Bloomington, I have been ashamed of many things the Republican Party has done in Monroe County. It's the same old 'Ring' that you are up against. They tried to ruin your city schools and later attempted to defeat the building of a streetcar line into the city."

Meanwhile, amid all the rhetoric, leaders of the rebellion were keeping the protest on the main track — that of speaking the only language the company investors understood.

Said banker Will H. Adams, "I ordered my phone taken out."

"Enlist for 90 days!" was the cry of the leaders of the rebellion. On Feb. 4, the *World* estimated that by that evening 700 phones would be out. To encourage others, committees of businessmen were organized for the purpose of calling on their fellows in the cause. The committee chairmen were: dry goods stores — Carl Breeden; banks — S.C. Dodds; attorneys — Edwin Corr and Morgan; meat markets — William Bafford; shoe stores — Ed Whetsell; groceries — Easton and Collins; Milers — James Karsell; druggists — John W. O'Harrow; labor — Tom Elder; blacksmiths — Albert Carpenter; doctors and dentists — Dr. Strain; and bakers — A.C. Coyle.

The effort was a town and gown

affair, professors William J. Moenkhaus and Ernest H. Lindley taking an active part. The headquarters for the ad hoc committee was in the then brand-new Allen Building.

Reported the *World*, "War against the Bloomington telephone company was carried on in dead earnest today by citizens under the direction of the citizens committee. Orders went out from S.E. Carmichael's office in the Allen block, messengers came and went, and the place was a scene of business-like activity." The volunteer chore allotted to Professors August Pohlmann and Moenkhaus was one for which they were enormously over-qualified — that of alphabetizing those who had promised to have their phones disconnected.

Next week: The company owners took notice.