

the president of the Fort William Board of Trade, last month, affords ample evidence that municipal ownership in Fort William is not the dismal failure which the Free Press commissioner would have us believe. The president says: "The town has now invested in its municipal franchises nearly \$400,000, which I am pleased to report have just closed another successful year. The waterworks plant shows a surplus of nearly \$2,000 and with the proposed slight increase of rates there is no doubt that the electric light plant will in the future have as good a showing. The telephone system is giving universal satisfaction, and only requires the loyalty of the ratepayers to make it one of the most successful franchises. The battle now being waged around municipal trading by mammoth trusts and greedy monopolies can only have one effect, viz., the awakening of the public to the immense benefits that follow in the train of properly managed municipal ownership of public utilities."

It is also well to bear in mind that even if it could be conclusively proved that municipal ownership had resulted in financial failure in a few cases, it would be no better argument against public ownership than the failure of individual companies, which are of almost daily occurrence, would be against the carrying on of business by private corporations. The fact remains that with an equally efficient staff and capable management a municipality paying only $3\frac{1}{2}$ or 4 per cent. on the actual cost of a system, must in the natural order of things, be able to give service at lower rates than corporations having to earn 8 per cent. on a capitalization which includes nearly 50 per cent. of "water."

PROPOSED BOILER INSPECTION ACT.

In the Ontario Legislature, a bill regarding the "Inspection of Steam Boilers and Steam Threshing Engines" has been introduced by A. G. MacKay, member for North Grey. The motives of the framer of this bill have no doubt been the best, for his desire is evidently to lessen the loss of life from accident, but the ultimate effect of any legislation along the lines proposed may be to increase rather than diminish such loss of life. It will provide safe loop-holes for the clever man—whether maker or user of engines or boilers—who can and will evade the Act, it will shift the responsibility for accidents from the shoulders upon which it should rest and permit those really culpable to escape, and it will prevent many a perfectly competent man from operating agricultural engines. It is not clear, however, whether the Act is limited to agricultural engines, and in this, as in many other respects, it is vague.

Section 5 defines the qualifications of an inspector as one who "must have had such experience in the manufacture of boilers as to enable him to properly perform his duties." He may be utterly ignorant of an engine and how to run it, but so long as he has worked in a boiler shop he would pass. The duties of the inspector are also indefinitely described, and where they are defined they betray a plentiful lack of knowledge on the subject. One of the inspector's duties, for instance, is "to see that the arrangements for delivering the feed water are such that boilers cannot be injured thereby." This is rather hazy. Another

duty is to see that a fusible plug is inserted in the crown sheet. As most boilers of this class in Ontario are of the horizontal tubular type, in which the crown sheet is directly over the fire, which would prevent the fusing of the plug till there was no water left in the boiler, it will be seen that the instructions are rather irrelevant to the conditions. So the instructions for keeping the water at a proper level in upright boilers are quite inapplicable to other types, for which there are no regulations whatever. One section provides that in the making of a boiler any person who drifts a rivet hole is liable to a fine of \$200, a penalty double that for using a boiler after it has been condemned by the inspector. In other words, a defect which may not affect the safety of a boiler at all, is visited with a penalty twice as great as that of the worst offense possible—that is the use of a boiler that is known to be dangerous. How is the Government to reach an offending boiler maker who is in an Ontario shop to-day and in Quebec or the United States to-morrow? These are a few only of the weak points in the details of a measure whose first principles are unsound.

Before proceeding further with this measure, we would commend to Mr. MacKay and the Provincial Government a study of the British act dealing with such matters. We have on previous occasions shown how admirably the British act works in practice, simply because, while leaving every man unhampered as to the way in which he will conduct his business, it fixes the responsibility exactly where it belongs. This is common sense as well as justice.

Under the British act the onus of responsibility as regards the condition of a boiler rests upon the boiler owner. He has to see that it is in such a state as not to be a menace either to his employees or to the public. There is no interference on the part of the Government with the owner or user until an explosion takes place when it steps in, holds an investigation, fixes the responsibility of the explosion on the right person—whether the maker, owner or user—and mulcts him in costs. These costs do not relieve the boiler owner or user from his liability at law to his employees. On the contrary, the finding of the Court is considered the basis of an action at law against whomsoever is found at fault.

The law works out in this way: Notice of an explosion, stating the locality, the day and hour, the number of persons injured or killed, the purposes for which the boiler was used, the part of the boiler which failed, and the extent of the failure, must be sent to the Board of Trade [which in Great Britain is a Government department], by the boiler owner or user, within twenty-four hours of the occurrence. A preliminary enquiry is then held, and if the Board sees fit a formal investigation may follow. This enquiry is made by commissioners, one or more of whom must be a competent independent engineer or engineers appointed by the Board of Trade for the purpose of the enquiry only. These commissioners have the power of a court of summary jurisdiction, and the scope of their enquiry can reach back to the time the boiler was built. It covers the boiler owner, the user, the engineer, or others in the employment of the user, the person whom the owner or user has employed to inspect his boiler, a boiler repairer, a second-hand dealer