

The Chronicle

Banking, Insurance & Finance.

ESTABLISHED JANUARY, 1881

PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY

Vol. XXXII. No. 47

MONTREAL, NOVEMBER 22, 1912.

Single Copy 10c
Annual Subscription \$5.00

THE DILLY-DALLY **N**EARLY three weeks ago, on the evening of November 3, a fire took place in Point St. Charles. It was during the period when the city was suffering from a short supply of water owing to the break-down of a pump. For this reason and because a 36-inch main in the neighbourhood burst at the time that the fire began, owing, as is admitted, to imperfect backing, and also because the Fire Chief apparently was not informed of this occurrence, a loss running nearly to \$500,000 was incurred—a considerably larger loss than would have been incurred had a proper water supply been in operation. Two days later, on November 5, the Canadian Fire Underwriters' Association met, and having in mind the several accidents which during the last few months have taken place in connection with the water supply of the City, passed a stiff resolution asking for an expert investigation into the administration of the water works department. On the following day their action was endorsed by the Board of Trade. On Monday, November 11, a recommendation by the Board of Control that they did not think the expert enquiry asked for necessary was sent back by the Aldermen, with the recommendation that the Controllers should report in favour of such an investigation. While no public statement has yet been made, we understand that the Board of Control have now re-affirmed their previous recommendation that an enquiry is not necessary.

This decision, if it really has been come to, is an astonishing one. Does the City Hall imagine that the recent water famine can be classed as merely a "nine days' wonder"? Does the City Hall think that if it dilly-dallies long enough that the patient public will forget, and so there will be no necessity after all for an expert enquiry? Judging by the events of the last few days, the memory of the public will be kept fresh in this matter by the repeated accidents. Twice within the last eight days mains have burst. Again sections of the city have been without water, while others have been flooded and extensive damage done by an excess of it. Neither are the citizens given any guarantee that these events will not occur at the same rate in the future. "Accidents," says the City Hall in its most nonchalant manner when questioned about these matters, and the public who pay the piper are supposed to be grateful for that much of explanation.

In taking up their attitude of hostility to an expert enquiry, do the Controllers wish it to be understood that they intend to continue the dilly-dallying policy which is the time-honoured method of the City Hall in dealing with the water question?

ENQUIRY A **O**F one thing the City Hall can be assured. Neither the general public nor those especially interested in this water problem are satisfied or are likely to be satisfied with the airy explanations which have been given out. What they require is the expert investigation which has been asked for and they are not likely to be contented with anything less than that. While we appreciate thoroughly the excellent work which has been done by the Controllers in many directions, we confess to finding it difficult to understand their action in reporting against an enquiry. If everything in the administration of the Water Department is really first class, if these various unfortunate events which have occurred during the last few months are really unavoidable, an enquiry can do no harm. The investigators will report their findings, and the public will be satisfied if those findings are that the administration is admirable, that nothing else but misfortune has been responsible for recent events. But it cannot be expected that the public will be so satisfied without an enquiry.

It is said that this demand for an enquiry is merely an agitation by fire underwriters, the inference being that as they are interested parties to a peculiar extent, their demand need not be taken too seriously. In view of the fact that at the Point St. Charles fire the underwriters lost many thousands of dollars which, had the water supply been in proper shape, would have been saved to them, they have some excuse for agitation, while during the period of water famine they were carrying enormous lines in Montreal at a greatly increased hazard for which additional risk they have received absolutely no compensation. But in fact the agitation is not confined to the fire underwriters. The Board of Trade are equally concerned, and within the last few days the Montreal branch of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association have joined in with a resolution, urging that action should be taken on the lines suggested by the Underwriters and expressing their opinion, "that the present condition of the waterworks system constitutes a very grave menace, not only to the manufacturing interests, but to the citizens of Montreal at large."

The City authorities cannot claim that the organizations named are not representative of a very large aggregate of influential and important Montreal opinion. We do not believe that the Controllers are really desirous of continuing the dilly-dallying policy of the past; if they are not, an expert enquiry will help them to get away from it.