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LABOR CONCERNS.

As was promised in the Speech from the Throne the government have introduced in the Legislature an important Bill relating to industrial matters. It provides in the first place, for the establishment of a Bureau of Labor Statistics, the duties of the Commissioner of Labor being among other things to collect statistics and other information relating to industry and commerce, as well as to inquire into and report upon the social and sanitary conditions of the working classes, their homes and the places in which they are employed. He is also to see that all laws relating to labor are strictly carried out, children, minors and women being specially provided for. He and his deputy are, for the purposes of their office, empowered to enter all places which they may see fit and are aided by the enactment in every possible way in the attainment of their object. For the above purposes the province is to be divided into districts, in each of which will be a Council of Conciliation before whom all complaints shall be brought by the Deputy Commissioner of Statistics, whose business it shall be to adjust with the aid of the Council all disputes as far as possible.

This departure in this Province is following legislation that has worked with greater or less success in the United States and Australia, and in many instances and particulars has been found to be exceedingly useful as well to the artisan classes as to the mercantile community and the employers of labor. Of course in some cases it was only to be expected that interposition of this kind should be a failure, but on the whole real good has been accomplished in this way, and the Government deserve credit for the action they have taken. The measure as laid before the members shows not only considerable interest in but knowledge of the labor question in its various phases, the subject have been apparently well studied. It may be remarked here that at one time the labor element interested in the late Wellington strike would, according to report, have been fully prepared to submit the issues to arbitration, but as things were the gulf between them and their employers seemed to be impossible of being bridged that way, and so the controversy continued with all the pecuniary loss and individual suffering that were entailed.

To all appearance, the measure is not only a good one but it is well timed, as we are on what many of us believe to be the

threshold of a prolonged period of industrial development, all obstacles in the way of which it were well to have removed as far as possible in advance. But to secure this it will be for the Government, in appointing the officials provided for or who may be necessary, to see to it that they are in every way well qualified; that not only are they practical men—not politicians—but that they have the courage to do that which is right and just between man and man, without any considerations of fear, favor or affection. This much secured, the work to be done will be very much simplified and rendered more capable of successful accomplishment.

FIRE PROTECTION.

Considerable writing is being done in the papers specially dedicated to insurance matters to the claims advanced on the part of some municipalities that fire underwriters should be made to pay an extra amount of taxation in view of the special benefits that their business derives from a good water supply and a well manned and well equipped fire protection service. It is, however, pointed out that the theory and practice of underwriting is to make the premium charge according to the risk undertaken. But, on the other hand, the companies claim that they pay for every improvement in the fire protection service by scaling down the premiums which, with every addition, fire insurers are not slow to demand. In connection with this subject, we are pleased to notice that the fire wardens of the city of Victoria have reported in favor of a number of improvements and additions to the local service which will involve a direct outlay of something like \$20,000 and an annual charge for running expenses of between \$1,000 and \$5,000. This is unquestionably what is wanted, and it is to be hoped the city council will endorse the report and that without delay, as there are portions of the city which are but one remove from not being protected at all. It must be distinctly and unequivocally stated that with the men and appliances at his command, Chief Deasy has done wonderful work, for though the water pressure is very light it is seldom that a fire is allowed to make any headway. Indeed, Victoria has had a remarkable immunity from heavy fire losses.

But, while speaking on the subject of fire protection, the experiences of the cold spell cannot fail to have convinced many people how utterly inadequate is the water supply. To prevent their taps and water pipes freezing, many householders not having proper "cut offs" have been compelled, as an alternative to a complete freezing, up with the almost inevitable accompaniments of bursts and floodings, to keep their taps running day and night, thereby reducing the pressure indicated at the City Hall to only a trifle better than nothing, while on the upper levels there has been scarcely any water obtainable. The sooner something is done to remedy the existing condition of things the better. It would have been difficult, if not impossible under existing conditions, to have enforced the provisions of the by-law in regard to the constant waste of water while the cold weather lasted, but between the present time and next winter, the

Water committee might devise some means of having the house service so overhauled and improved that there shall be no reason or excuse for the continuation of the practice which, under the exceptional circumstances, has been allowed to prevail. It should be seen that the necessary "cut offs" are attached to every service and every one should be notified, either by circular or advertisement, what is his duty in the matter, and to its performance he should be strictly held. But, as has many a time been pointed out, the time has arrived when Victoria must have a very materially augmented water supply. She is no longer the small, comparatively stand still town which she was when the Elk Lake system was inaugurated and carried out. It is—all things considered—inadequate for present and the immediate future requirements, and it requires no stretch of imagination to appreciate the fact that if we are possessed of any foresightedness at all, we must begin and that at once to increase and improve the supply, no matter whence we obtain it. It will certainly involve heavy expenditures, but they can never be undertaken at a more fitting period than the present.

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S FISH TRADE.

Commenting on some of the announcements that are made in certain of the Pacific Coast papers as to the special advantages they possess for the development of an extensive fish trade with the east, the *Victoria Times* remarks: "British Columbia has even a better chance than California to engage profitably in a continental fish trade. The colder waters produce a finer quality of fish, and the cooler climate affords better facilities for handling them. Our fishermen have this one marked advantage, of access to unlimited supplies of halibut, which is perhaps the very finest large fish found in American waters, salt or fresh. There can be no obstacle in the way of a great fish trade between the coast of this province and the great inland cities; unless it be the cost of transportation. Quick and cheap transit is one of the essentials, and it is one which the railway companies will find it profitable to provide."

This transportation problem is the embarrassing one, no matter the side of the American boundaries from which the Pacific Coast resident hails. There are over three thousand miles of transportation to the Atlantic seaboard on railways which either pool their business or otherwise have some kind of an understanding among themselves, and which, moreover, on the one hand have contrived to control the rates of the Panama Railway, leaving as the only actual competitors the slow service by vessels that are compelled to round Cape Horn or the Canadian Pacific Railway. This latter company under all the circumstances, not unnaturally regulates its rates by the consideration of what the business will stand and secure to its share of the trade. Quicker and cheaper transportation is what is wanted by the whole of this Pacific Coast, and if Jim Hill and the Great Northern, or the enterprise formerly known as the Canada Western will step in and supply the requirement, the better for them and the better for existing lines of business, and for those industries that we are now to be so capable of almost unlimited development.