

FIRE PREVENTION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Organization of a Provincial Body Completed at Representative Meeting—Appoint Officers Later

The campaign against fire, the needless cause of a great economic and industrial loss annually in British Columbia, gained further impetus when at a meeting held in the Board of Trade Rooms, on Wednesday afternoon, October 2nd, "The British Columbia Fire Prevention League" was successfully launched. The meeting was a representative one, delegates being present from not only the city but from other centres of the mainland and also from Vancouver Island.

Hon. J. W. deB. Farris, attorney-general, occupied the chair and in the course of his remarks stated that while the government was seeking to curtail the necessary expenditures they also realized the need for increasing rather than diminishing the activities to prevent fire loss. Never was there a time, he said, when such a course was so essential. Mr. Farris paid tribute to the board of underwriters for stimulating the activities of the government along these lines and for giving every possible assistance to the government to prevent fire loss. So far as the government was concerned, the chairman did not want this movement to be too much under the control of the provincial authorities. He did not think it was right for the men interested in the scheme to lay all the burden of the working out of it upon the government.

Top-Heavy with Machinery.

There was plenty of machinery with which to work out the fire prevention campaign, he thought. In fact, Mr. Farris stated that the trouble with the province was that it was top-heavy with machinery. It had a small population but machinery enough for many times the number of people. He also referred to the fact that Ontario had started a movement similar to the local one.

That a large percentage of the annual fire loss in the province was attributed to sheer carelessness was the opinion expressed by H. G. Garrett, superintendent of insurance. The critical stage had been reached and steps must be taken to arrest the severe drainage on the resources of the province through this loss. He believed that it was largely a psychological problem and therefore the solution was to stir up the minds of the people.

R. J. Douglas, of the Vancouver Board of Trade, in the course of his address, stated that the government would do just as much as the people demanded it. The first question, he said, that the people asked when they read of a big store or factory being burned: "Is it insured?" They forgot that they themselves were indirectly called upon to pay the insurance.

Annual Loss Very Heavy.

Steps were being taken by the government to conserve the food supplies and commodities of the country, declared J. L. Noble, secretary of the Vancouver Island Fire Underwriters' Association, but nothing had been done to prevent the great loss from fire. Mr. Noble quoted figures showing that the annual loss in the Dominion ran into many millions of dollars while in the United States the loss was away up in the billions. Increased and more efficient fire departments was not the remedy, he said, neither were the fire insurance companies doing the work; but it could alone be done by a general instruction of the public along fire prevention lines. There was a great contrast between Canada and the European countries. Here, a fire was thought to be merely a misfortune, there it was a crime. In Canada, the people tried to extinguish a fire, in Europe they labored to prevent it. In the United States there had been formed the National Council of Defence recently to combat the loss by fire. Mr. Noble said that of the total number of fires in the Dominion, 90 per cent. were due to carelessness. The government, he stated, would have to be behind any movement that was started to combat fire loss and the authorities would have to back up anything that the league brought before the people.

Would Cut Insurance Rates.

Some of the delegates expressed the belief that there should be a reorganization of the present insurance system. C. G. Palmer, representing North Cowichan, thought that something new should be started. Fifty per cent. of the money collected on insurance went to pay expenses, while the balance went into the treasury to pay losses. The people

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should be interested in the movement and it should be pointed out to them that by being careful they would then have to pay a lower insurance rate. Mr. Palmer would make fire insurance a municipal matter putting the business in the hands of municipalities and doing away with insurance companies and expense. Thos. Turnbull, New Westminster, declared that insurance companies were a monopoly. The public had no control with regard to insurance rates and he thought that any city or municipality that spent so much on fire fighting apparatus and equipment should have something to say with regard to the amount of the rates. Mr. Turnbull suggested that the insurance companies should be combined into one organization and come under the class of public utilities.

Organization Resolution.

The following resolution for the formation of the league was passed upon motion of F. A. Brodie, of the British Columbia Manufacturers' Association, and C. G. Palmer, of North Cowichan: "Whereas for some years past there has been a great loss of life and property by fire in this province, involving needless waste of our resources, and a continuance of such loss is a matter of the gravest concern, particularly at the present juncture, when food, material and supplies of every kind are necessary for the successful prosecution of the war: Be it resolved that an organization be created under the title of the British Columbia Fire Prevention League, whose objects shall be: To awaken the people of the province to the serious waste and loss caused by fire; to prevent the occurrence of fire; to inculcate the necessity for more careful habits on the part of the public; to generally adopt any means for the attainments of these ends."

Committee to Choose Officers.

When the question of election of officers arose it was decided to leave this in the hands of a committee composed of Hon. Mr. Farris, who was chosen as hon. president; H. G. Garrett, superintendent of insurance; J. L. Noble, R. J. Douglas and P. G. Shallcross, president of the Vancouver Board of Trade. This committee will also name the eight members of the executive committee and it was decided also to leave with the executive the question of financing the league's activities.

Among those present at the convention were the following: W. L. Foster, Mainland Fire Underwriters; Robt. B. Spears, Rotary Club, Victoria; W. F. Stewart, vice-president of the Mutual Fire Insurance; Wm. Townley, manager of the same company; Chris Spencer, of Spencer's, Limited; A. R. Wright, of the Ladysmith Fire Department; D. Gardiner of the North Vancouver Fire Department; James Plester, Rossland; J. R. Algar, New Westminster; Mrs. R. C. Stoddard, Local Council of Women; A. W. Woodard, vice-president of the Mainland Fire Underwriters; W. F. Ing, New Westminster; A. N. Wolverton, secretary of the Vancouver Apartment House Owners' Association; Mrs. T. H. Wright, W.C.T.U., of British Columbia; Mrs. W. A. Clark, of the Women's Canadian Club; Chas. S. Richmond, Burnaby; Thos. Turnbull, New Westminster; J. H. Watson, New Westminster fire chief; John Parkins, Nanaimo fire chief; Alderman W. J. Ferguson, of Nanaimo; J. F. Moffatt, the fire chief of Vernon; and Fred. A. Burgess, president of the Mainland Board of Underwriters. A. E. Goodman is acting as secretary of the newly formed league.