

FIRE UNDERWRITERS AND MONTREAL CONTROLLERS.

Council to be Asked to Over-ride Controllers' Refusal to Institute Investigation into Water Department—Statement of Controllers.

As announced exclusively in THE CHRONICLE of November 22, the Montreal City Controllers have re-affirmed their previous decision not to recommend the expert investigation into the administration of the Montreal City Water-Works Department asked for by the Canadian Fire Underwriters' Association, the Montreal Board of Trade, and the Montreal branch of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association. We understand that the Underwriters have now appealed to the City Council direct, asking them to over-ride the decision of the Controllers and to sanction the enquiry asked for. It will be remembered that a month ago the Aldermen showed themselves to be in favor of the proposed enquiry, sending back the first recommendation of the Controllers against an enquiry with the advice that an enquiry should be recommended.

The Controllers seek to justify their action in again refusing the enquiry in a lengthy communication which has been sent to the Canadian Fire Underwriters' Association, the text of which we subjoin. The Controllers can hardly be surprised if those concerned find their explanation anything but a satisfying one. The document is largely concerned with the aqueduct extensions now being carried on, and to this extent "begs the question," for from the outset of the discussion of this matter, following the Point St. Charles fire on November 3, the Underwriters, the Board of Trade and the Montreal branch of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association have been concerned primarily with the general administration of the water-works department and not with the question of the aqueduct. What they have wanted and what they still want, is to get at the underlying causes of the recent water famine in Montreal, and of the extraordinary series of accidents to pumps and mains which have taken place this year; to find out, if it is possible to find out, who or what was responsible therefor, and to discover if there is any reasonable guarantee that these accidents will not recur with monotonous regularity for an indefinite period.

The Controllers demur to an investigation on the ground that it would "certainly bring about a considerable disturbance in the working of the department." Was there ever so feeble an excuse—it is apparently intended seriously—for not taking action?

The Controllers say that the engineers "always provided against the possible requirements." We note this statement with pleasure, but how is it that when one pump broke down, there was a water famine for several weeks? Doesn't constant provision

against possible requirements include a supply of reserve pumps in case of accidents?

The Controllers say "Is it not deemed sufficient only to inquire into the cause of the accident and *where need be, to place the responsibilities therefor?* This is what has been done by the Water Department." Where have the responsibilities been placed? Nowhere in particular? If not, the public would be interested to hear the details.

The Controllers say that two new pumps of 12,000,000 gallons each, for which tenders are now being called, shall be installed next summer. If they are so installed, the job will be accomplished much more quickly than similar jobs have been accomplished before. What guarantee have the citizens that the pumps will be installed in the time stated?

The Controllers' apparent opinion that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds" in connection with the City's water supply is, in fact, hopelessly at variance with the opinion on the subject of the majority of citizens. The citizens' profound dissatisfaction has been effectively voiced by three representative bodies and it is to be hoped that the Council will in this case over-ride the Controllers and start the investigation. If the administration of the water department is really admirable, well and good. The investigators will report their findings, and the public will be satisfied. But the public is not likely to be satisfied with anything less than an expert investigation.

TEXT OF THE STATEMENT.

The statement sent to the Canadian Fire Underwriters' Association is as follows:

"1. The demand of investigation contains no specific complaint, and therefore this would lead to an unlimited investigation, which would certainly bring about a considerable disturbance in the working of the department, which at the present time requires all the care and attention of its employees in carrying out their duties.

"2. The Board of Commissioners have a statement in hand, of which they can give copies to any interested parties. This statement or tableau shows in chronological order all the important demands made by the engineers in charge of the Water Works since 1904, and the results obtained from such demands.

"An examination of this statement or tableau will show clearly that, not only were the engineers not neglectful in providing for the wants of the department as they came up, but they also always provided against the possible requirements. The same statement or tableau shows, also, in the same manner, that proper provisions were made by the engineers for requisite requests as to pumps and boilers.

THE NEW AQUEDUCT.

"3. As concerns the aqueduct properly speaking, the same statement will also show the zeal and competency of the engineers, for, on the 5th January, 1904, the superintendent made his first report, calling attention to the necessity of studying the enlargement of the aqueduct, which had become insufficient.

"In March, 1905, the first appropriation of \$2,000 was voted by the council to engage the necessary technical assistants to help the department engineers in the study of the project, and the works for carrying out this programme were commenced in October, 1907, that being the date of beginning of the work of construction of the lateral conduit.

"No time was lost after the completion of this lateral conduit to begin the works of enlargement of the aqueduct, which were started in September, 1909."