

### THE FIRE UNDERWRITERS AND THE CITY RATES OF FIRE INSURANCE.

Another protest has been made by members of the Council of this city against the prevailing rates for fire insurance. It will enable a clearer judgment to be formed as to the exact position of affairs, so far as both the fire underwriters and the City Council are severally and jointly concerned, if attention is given to what passed at a Conference held on 26th May last, between a delegation from the City Council and representatives of the Canadian Fire Underwriters' Association.

The delegation comprised Alderman Laporte, chairman of the Finance Committee; F. Robertson, chairman Fire Committee; L. A. Lapointe, J. D. Couture, and C. B. Carter, K.C. The Conference was presided over by Mr. James McGregor, of the Commercial Union, and 22 fire insurance companies were represented.

Alderman Laporte stated the object of the interview was, to obtain from the Underwriters, in view of certain improvements made in the fire protection of this city and the proposed establishment of a new Fire Station on Commissioners St., also other intended improvements, some assurance as to a reduction from the present rates, there being a general feeling in the City Council that the additional protection now afforded should be recognized by the companies granting some concession, or at least guaranteeing that a reduction would follow these improvements, particularly the establishment of the proposed station, before further expenditure be incurred by the Council.

With regard to placing of electric light and power wires underground in the congested districts of the city, Alderman Laporte stated that, the matter was now receiving special attention by some members of the Fire Committee, and further, that the City Electrician had been requested to fully report on the subject, he himself was convinced that these wires should be placed underground.

In the replies to the above and other remarks it was pointed out that the statements made as to improvements completed were too general, as, so far as the companies had been able to gather from reports to the Fire and Water Committees, only a very small proportion of the requirements set forth in Mr. Howe's report of March 1, 1901, had been carried out. Much of the money which had been expended could only be regarded as for maintenance and towards meeting the growth and expansion of the city. The underwriters generally, regarded the situation in Montreal with dissatisfaction and uneasiness, and as to making any promise or entering into any definite understanding to reduce rates they could only undertake that, when the greater proportion of the required improvements had been completed the subject would be dealt with on the basis of the then existing condition of the protection afforded and the general results of business in this city would justify. If the conditions were favourable an amelioration of rates would undoubtedly ensue.

It was remarked that, the present situation was due to the apathy of the public and City Council in

failing to provide fire protection adequate for a city of the size and importance of Montreal. The protection afforded was inferior to that of cities of equal size in the United States, while climatic and other conditions called for a better comparative service. It was pointed out that it was the duty of the City Council to give serious attention to the conditions by placing the fire preventive service on a footing equal to the growing needs of the city, so as to remove the ever-present fear of a repetition of a fire similar to that of the Board of Trade. Rates would be lowered in response to such action.

Chairman McGregor remarked that, two years had elapsed since the Association put in a report of its Engineer before the Council, showing what improvements were required, since which time the Association had not had any official communication from the City Council. He suggested that, the Council, or Committees, inform the Association in writing which improvements required by the Underwriters had been carried out, upon receipt of which their Engineer, Mr. Howe, would be requested to report, and if the Underwriters found that, unknowingly to them, the most important changes they had asked for had been made, the whole question would receive most serious and careful consideration.

It is quite evident from the position taken by the Underwriters they have been forced into by the City Council ignoring the representations and recommendations made in regard to what improvements were imperatively required to raise the city's fire protection up to the required standard of efficiency. The Underwriters said plainly—so long as the fire protection of Montreal is so defective it is necessary for us to collect rates sufficient to justify us granting fire insurance under such unfavourable conditions, the risk is higher than normal, and the rates must be adjusted accordingly. Improve the fire protection as we suggest and rates will be modified.

It is much to be deplored that the City Council has allowed this serious question to drift for two years without being earnestly and vigorously acted upon. The outlay requisite for providing what the Underwriters deem essential would, if incurred two years ago, have been recoupled to the citizens by lower fire insurance rates. To ask the Underwriters to reduce rates on the bare promise that some improvements will be made is not business-like. Let the work be done as specified then will be the time to request the Underwriters to keep their promises.

Next week we shall publish figures relative to this question.

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SEQUEL TO A DROWNING ACCIDENT.—Following on the death by drowning of a London bank clerk at Shoebury-ness a week or two ago, the Scottish Temperance Life Office has just agreed to hand back the title deeds of the house in which he resided. A mortgage for £600 over the house was granted only two years ago, and as by a clause in the deed, the company undertook to cancel the debt in the event of death, a free home has at once been provided for the wife and children.