

VANCOUVER UNDERWRITERS PROVE CHARGES

Fire Department Showed Lack of Supervision—Misleading Remark in Council's Findings

The findings of Vancouver city council, which were the outcome of the recent fire investigation, have been printed in *The Monetary Times*. In reply to these findings Mr. C. R. Elderton, on behalf of the fire underwriters, has addressed the council as follows:—

"In the council's report regret is expressed at the lack of evidence the underwriters were able to produce to substantiate the charges made.

"The resolution of your council authorized an investigation into the organization, discipline and efficiency of the fire department, and we beg to submit that the evidence given before your council proved, up to the hilt, that every one of our charges in the above regard was thoroughly justified. Taking the various headings seriatim:—

Matters of Organization.

"For the past four years Chief Carlisle has been persistently endeavoring to secure your authority to engage the services of district chiefs, whose duties would be to co-operate with the chief and assistant chief, and, in the event of a large fire, to superintend the operations over a given area.

"Both Chief Carlisle and Assistant Chief Thompson stated it was 'absolutely necessary to have more supervision at large fires,' which fact has, for some years, also been apparent to the underwriters.

"Again, the chief and the assistant chief have both impressed upon your council the imperative necessity for more men, because the apparatus, at certain times of the day, goes to fires about half manned, but, notwithstanding their pleadings and warnings, their requests have been ignored, and nothing has been done.

"Chief Carlisle, and Assistant Chief Thompson are experts employed by the city to operate the fire department. If they are incapable they should be dismissed, but, if they are responsible officials, their recommendations should be given the fullest consideration, and when they ask for men to fill the various positions their reasonable requirements should be conceded.

Discipline and Efficiency.

"In his evidence Assistant Chief Thompson said that at the 'Wood, Vallance & Leggat fire 'he could not be on the three sides of, and inside, the building at the same time.'

"The lack of supervision was admitted, and it was evident that smoking and loitering were indulged in when the assistant chief was not at given points, during the progress of the fire. For this reason Chief Carlisle, and Assistant Chief Thompson went on record as favoring the appointment of district chiefs.

"As was unquestionably admitted at the enquiry, the fire brigade is handicapped in the following vital respects:—(1) Lack of supervision. (2) Lack of men to handle the apparatus. (3) Lack of experience among a large number of the firemen. (4) Lack of equipment in respect to water tower, fire boat, adequate water supply on False Creek and Burrard Inlet, and smoke helmets. (5) Lack of training in smoke drills.

"No less than eighteen men were temporarily disabled by smoke at the Wood, Vallance & Leggat fire, out of a total of seventy engaged, and Chief Carlisle admitted that even a first-class fireman was practically useless without a smoke helmet. Nevertheless, although daily called upon to fight fire and smoke, the brigade does not possess even one helmet, and Chief Carlisle admitted having been lax in his duty in not recommending the council to purchase this essential part of the brigade equipment.

Should Have Fire Boat.

"So far as the cost of a fire boat is concerned, we think the expenditure would be justified in the eyes of the rate-payers, because, except from the water, there is no better way of properly attacking fires, which might occur at any time in the waterfront warehouses, which, unless checked, might easily start a serious conflagration. One of the aldermen suggested a line of hydrants on the wharves, but these would be of doubtful benefit, owing to the narrowness of the wharves.

"The chief and assistant chief have repeatedly warned the city council that in not giving the fire brigade the necessary men and equipment, they seriously impaired its efficiency, and at the investigation plainly told the council that they had been lax during the last two years in equipping the department.

"Under the circumstances the underwriters appreciate the delicate position of the council in being the defendants, so far as they, the underwriters, are concerned, and the jury at the same time, but from the perfectly clear evidence, which is a matter of record, we feel that we were justified in bringing the charges, which have been proved beyond question. Notwithstanding your remarks in this connection it is obvious from paragraph 'seven' of your findings, that you quite agree with us, and we shall watch with particular interest the result of the council's efforts to rectify a dangerous situation demanding prompt action.

Figures of Premium Income.

"It was with surprise and great regret that we noticed the misleading statement in the council's report to the effect that 'The Fire Underwriters declined to give the council a return of their premium income for the city of Vancouver.'

"We did not decline to give this information, which obviously could not be secured from over one hundred companies, with their head offices in the south and east at a moment's notice, but, in any case, the mayor had previously ruled out any enquiry into the question of rates, which was irrelevant, because the investigation was in regard to the organization, discipline and efficiency of the fire department. The council's statement is exceedingly unfortunate and unfair, and can not but react against your honorable body, for the records of the evidence are available to prove that we are correct in our contention, and the council's statement entirely wrong.

"In conclusion we would like to state that our interest in this whole matter is not only the interest of underwriters as such. Many of us are old residents of the city, and have our share in the civic burden. As property owners, we are concerned in the conflagration hazards which threaten the city from more than one point.

"We feel that the citizens are living in a fools' paradise, and will receive a rude awakening unless the fire department is brought up to the highest point of efficiency compatible with the financial position."

GLOBE AND RUTGERS COMPANY'S SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Globe and Rutgers Fire Insurance Company, of New York, subscribed \$50,000 to the first Canadian war loan, \$50,000 to the second loan and \$100,000 to the third loan. They are converting \$50,000 of the first loan into the present loan—not \$25,000, as previously mentioned. The Canadian head office of the company is at Montreal, in charge of Mr. J. W. Binnie.

MARCH FIRES

Sydney, N.S.—March 29—Mr. L. P. Christie's business block, occupied by Mr. Steckler's furniture and clothing business; Mr. J. Pilkington's dry goods; Messrs. Cramotte and Campbell, meats and groceries; and Mr. J. W. Pilkington, jeweller. Loss, \$20,000.

Crediton East, Ont.—March 30—Post-office and Mr. J. S. Motz's residence. Insured.

Ford, Ont.—March 30—Canadian Chalmers Motor Company. Loss, \$200,000. Cause unknown.

Collingwood, Ont.—March 30—Northern Navigation Company's steamer Germanic.

Hamilton, Ont.—March 30—Barn rear 150 Locke Street North; Kerr and Coombs' foundry; Mr. H. Cliff's residence, 23 Barton Street East.

Richlea, Sask.—March 29—McLaughlin Company's elevator.

St. Catherine, Que.—March 30—Mr. D. Juneau's stable, etc. Loss, \$5,000.

Toronto's bank clearings for the week ended March 29 were \$49,102,167 and for the same period last year \$37,162,673 and in 1915 \$30,059,517.