

FIRE MARSHALS' TAX CRITICIZED

Direct Levy on Insurance
Companies Attacked by
Mr. Wm. Proudfoot

FIRES FEWER IN 1917

Objection was raised by Mr. Wm. Proudfoot, the Opposition Leader in the Legislature, yesterday to the Government collecting a direct tax from fire insurance companies for the paying of the Provincial Fire Marshal and his assistants. The House was considering the estimates of the Attorney-General's Department, in which Hon. I. B. Lucas was asking that \$6 000 be passed to provide for salaries under the Fire Marshals Act. The Minister believed that the present method was the proper one to secure the money to pay the expenses of the department. He stated that in the last year there were 3,000 fewer fires and \$4,000,000 less loss from fires, as compared with 1916, before the Fire Marshal was appointed.

Mr. Proudfoot said that his objection was to the method of collecting the necessary money from the insurance companies. He was satisfied that as long as the expenses of the department were met in that way the public would never be satisfied with the investigations. The department should be operated for the good of the general public. He believed that it was a good thing to have the fires investigated and that much could be accomplished by the department.

Hon. Thomas Crawford (North-west Toronto) didn't believe that the people were getting the value of the money being spent on the department, and he didn't think the general public was satisfied. There had been no reduction in the number of fires or in fire losses in the last year.

Incendiarism Believed Rare.

Mr. Sam Carter (South Wellington) believed that the cold weather caused people to burn more fuel than usual, with the result that more fires occurred. He asked if the suspicions that a number of fires were due to incendiaries were justified.

So far as criminal prosecutions are

concerned, the Attorney-General said, the department had not much success in prosecuting supposed incendiaries. However, investigations have shown that many of the supposed incendiary fires were due to natural causes. He agreed with Mr. Carter that many fires in stores were due to neglect on the part of the owners in keeping rubbish in the cellars. This can only be corrected by educational work, and the Fire Marshal has already done much along that line. The Marshal has shown that many fires are due to faulty electrical wiring and equipment. He didn't credit the saving last year entirely to the work of the Fire Marshal's department, he said. Mr. Lucas explained that last year the fire insurance companies had been taxed one-third of one per cent. on their premiums to meet the expense of the department. The Fire Marshal was appointed in 1916, and he has been gradually increasing his staff. The Attorney-General said that none of the officials of the department are in any way connected with the fire insurance companies, being appointees of the Government.

Collection Method Defended.

Replying, Hon. Mr. Crawford accepted the figures as to losses given by Mr. Lucas. He said that the agitation for the appointment of a Fire Marshal was started by the insurance companies and they agreed to pay the expenses. The reason they offered to pay was, no doubt, because of self-interest. The method of collecting the money from the companies he believed was proper. If the investigations are properly done the public will ultimately reap the benefit in lower rates.

Mr. Proudfoot intimated that he would have more to say as to the work of the department and fire prevention later in the session.

Mr. Joseph Edgar (Parry Sound) introduced a bill to incorporate the village of Magnetawan.