

FIRE MARSHALS ACT AMENDED

Mr. Proudfoot Objects Without Avail to Certain New Terms

FIRE LOSS FOR 1918

Number of Incendiary Blazes Not So Large as Supposed

Strong opposition to certain provisions of the Government bill to amend the Fire Marshals Act developed in the Legislature yesterday when the bill was given second reading. The same objection was raised by the Liberals when the bill was considered in committee of the House. Mr. William Proudfoot, the Opposition Leader, urged that the Crown Attorneys of the Province be the officials to take the evidence where an investigation was being made by the Fire Marshal, instead of the latter. He contended that the change was in the interests of fair play, experience having convinced him that witnesses before the Fire Marshal or his assistants did not always get a proper hearing. Hon. I. B. Lucas, the Attorney-General, would not, however, accept the change proposed by the Opposition, and Sir William Hearst declared that the Fire Marshal was better qualified to get out all the facts about a fire than a Crown Attorney.

Previous Duties of Fire Marshal.

In discussing the bill Hon. Mr. Lucas said that up to the present the chief duties of the Fire Marshal had been to collect statistics concerning fires and to make investigations when necessary. Although there had been few cases where criminal action had been taken, the investigations had had a good effect.

The number of incendiary fires was not as large as the public believed. The fire loss in Ontario last year was \$14,856,000, which was higher than that of 1917, but substantially lower than that of 1916. The act contemplates the Fire Marshal entering more actively into the duty of fire protection work, the general idea being to co-operate with the municipalities. It will permit the Fire Marshal to go into a municipality and in the general interest order the removal of a building. The department hopes to have the assistance of the Fire Prevention League.

"Are you compelling inspection?" asked Mr. Sam Carter (South Wellington).

Mr. Lucas replied that it was the intention to co-operate with the local authorities in inspection work, which would be under the direction of the Fire Marshal.

Mr. William Proudfoot protested against the freedom permitted the Fire Marshal in examining witnesses in making an investigation. While the intentions of the officials were of the best, the insurance companies sometimes used the investigation to make a defense in case action is entered against them. As a remedy he strongly urged that the Crown Attorney be authorized to make the investigations.

Marshal Best, Thinks Premier.

Sir William Hearst replied that the special knowledge which the Fire Marshal had made him better able to bring out all the facts in connec-

tion with a fire than the Crown Attorneys.

Mr. Proudfoot retorted that practical experience had shown him that the witnesses were often treated as if they were guilty of some offense. Mr. J. C. Elliott (West Middlesex) strongly supported the contention of Mr. Proudfoot.

Mr. Lucas refused to amend the bill, as requested by the Opposition.

A bill to provide for the better regulation of mines and mine-workers was introduced by Hon. G. Howard Ferguson. It permits of a tightening of the regulations governing the operation of mines relating to safety, ventilation, etc.

The Budget debate will be continued to-day.

NEW LAWS COMING FOR CONSOLIDATED SCHOOLS

Withdrawal Not Permitted to School Boards, but Government Not to Force System on Local Sections

Legislation to provide for consolidated schools will be introduced in the Legislature at an early date, the Government having practically decided on its policy in connection with this important matter. The chief feature of the policy is that the right of withdrawal will not be permitted to School Boards, so that once they agree to a consolidated school in the district, they will have to continue to support it.

The problem of entering upon a consolidated school system for the rural districts is a many-sided one, and many difficulties have had to be overcome by the Minister of Education, Hon. Dr. Cody, in framing the policy. Many of the country schools to-day are in a good state of repair, and local boards will be averse to entering upon any heavy expenditures which would necessitate discontinuing the use of the present buildings. To overcome this difficulty the Government will give financial assistance to pay a portion of the cost of the construction of central buildings. Grants will be made, probably based upon the assessed values of a section, which would be regarded as the equivalent for the abandoned buildings. Local School Boards, however, would be expected to meet the remainder of the cost of the new building not covered by the Government grants.

While many of the buildings are now in good shape, there are also a large number of schools which will have to be substituted by new ones. In some instances the present buildings are not large enough to meet the needs of the districts in which they are situated. The entering upon a consolidated school policy

would not be the same hardship to such districts.

Under the proposed legislation from three to five schools will be consolidated. It is estimated that such a school will have about 75 or more pupils in attendance. To endeavor to cover a larger area by one school, it is felt it would be impossible, as the children would have to come from too great a distance. It is the hope of the Department that these schools will ultimately develop into continuation schools.

By providing that once having agreed to support a consolidated school a local board cannot withdraw, the Department hopes to overcome a difficulty which has handicapped the system elsewhere in the Dominion. The act will either provide that it will not be permissible to withdraw, or else the withdrawal will be surrounded with safeguards to protect the system, which is now to be introduced. Local Inspectors and boards will be allowed a free hand in organizing the various sections. If the school sections agree among themselves to have a consolidated school, the Inspector will investigate and submit a plan to the Department of Education. It is not the intention of the Government to force consolidated schools upon local sections, but those that come in will be assisted in every possible way.

The amalgamating of the schools is not expected by the department to cause any surplus of teachers. The development of many of the schools into continuation schools will take up some of the teachers who will be thrown out of work. Then, too, there are a number of schools in outlying parts not supplied with well-qualified teachers.