

232. We have dealt with preventive measures at some length. In New Zealand there seems to be a fatal acquiescence in the present neglect of fire-prevention measures. The greatest possible emphasis must be placed on the fact that the best way of fighting fire is to prevent it, and that prevention can be ensured by regulations making measures approved in those countries that have given careful consideration to the loss of life and property caused by preventable fire, imperative.

233. Our inquiry into the cause of the fire was hampered by the confusion and difficulty arising out of the removal from Congreve's basement of the electrical cable before it had been thoroughly examined by the supply authority. We think that it would be in the public interest, where major electrical installations are concerned, if it were made compulsory for any person intending to dismantle, remove, or interfere with it to obtain the prior consent of the electricity supply authority for the district.

234. We think a recommendation upon the conditions of service and the organization of the fire brigades is forced upon us. The question of the organization of the fire brigades we consider a major matter demanding instant attention. We have had to criticize the lack of organization that characterized the efforts of the brigade in the case of Ballantyne's fire, and in the course of doing so criticize the lack of leadership and command exhibited by the officer in charge at the time.

235. The officer in charge was neither a Superintendent nor a Deputy Superintendent ; He was the Third Officer. He had no distinguishing uniform known by the public to show his rank. Our criticism of the officer in charge is not intended to question in any way his quality as a fireman, so far as he had been instructed.

It is really the lack of system and teaching that is at fault. There is no school ; there are no necessary examinations in New Zealand ; and the method of promotion has depended almost entirely on length of service in the brigade. The officer in charge had never previously been in charge of a major fire. He had not been attached to a Superintendent as officer linking the Superintendent in charge with the whole body of firemen.

No officer in the Armed Forces can take command of any considerable body of men without intense training in the duties of command, and without understanding of the necessity of a discipline that demands almost automatic and prompt response to orders. Without some college, school, and refresher courses the qualities necessary to command in the fire brigade cannot be tested and weighed.

236. We had the evidence of the Chairman of the Christchurch Fire Board as to the procedure adopted by his Board in dealing with the appointment of officers. The recommendation of the Superintendent and length of service seem to have been the deciding factors. The Chairman referred to examinations, both written and oral, as having assumedly taken place. He was unaware of the fact that examinations were not held or considered necessary. His recollection of the matters contained in the files of the Board and the Superintendent's reports was vague. We were left with the impression that no sufficient consideration was given to the vital question of the real qualifications of executive appointees.

The selection of officers is in the hands of the Board. It must accept full responsibility if it appears men not fully qualified have been appointed to senior positions in the brigade.

237. Mr. Glover, who appeared for the Superintendents' and Deputy Superintendents' Union, forcibly advocated a brigade 100 per cent. efficient, and to attain that efficiency stressed the necessity of some school for training. He also stressed the necessity of a disciplined force if the brigade is to be efficient. He submitted that the Superintendent should have power to hire and fire.

In support of his claims for efficiency, he put in for our consideration pamphlets and reports that are of great use when considering the efficiency of the brigade and the conditions of service in the brigade.