

- (8) That, in order to limit the liability of the contributing local authority, a maximum be prescribed for the annual expenditure which could be enforced in each fire district, such maximum to be fixed by reference to the population on the lines suggested in the last report, on an empirical basis by Schedule to the Act, or other suitable means; and that provision be made that this limit of expenditure shall not be exceeded except with the consent of the municipality, the Central Council, and the Minister.
- (9) That in the event of a difference of opinion arising between the Central Council and the Fire Brigade Committee of the municipality, the Council would have a right to have an investigation made by a member, and, if necessary, a technical representative also, whose expenses would be paid on the same basis as those of insurance members of Fire Boards under existing legislation. In the event of failure to agree after this investigation and discussion with the Fire Brigade Committee the question at issue to be decided by arbitration.
- (10) That with respect to the raising of loan-moneys provision be made that, except in the case of united fire districts, loans for fire-protection purposes will be raised by the municipality. This will enable them to be treated as trustee securities, which is not possible under the existing legislation.
- (11) That the estimates of expenditure of the independent controlling-authorities existing under the amended legislation be forwarded to the Central Council for review. In the event of it being determined to maintain the existing system of Ministerial approval of all fire-district estimates, such estimates to be forwarded through the Central Council, which shall have the right of comment and recommendation to the Minister.

CAUSES OF FIRE.

The causes of fire in fire districts are set out in Table I attached. An examination of the table discloses no reasons for modification of the inferences drawn in the last annual report. As is but natural, the year's returns show considerable fluctuations in some cases both from the previous year and from the average, but a comparison of the long-term tables for the cities brings out clearly the major causes of fire loss. The losses shown as "cause unknown" bear, as usual, a high ratio to the total loss, but this is not indicative of the existence of causes of high fire losses other than those enumerated. The fact is that in a number of fires shown as "cause unknown" total destruction of the building occurred, thus removing any evidence of the cause.

INSPECTIONS.

The inspection work carried out was less than in previous years owing to my absence from duty for two months due to ill-health. About half of the brigades were inspected during the year. Close touch was kept with the activities of all districts by means of newspaper-cuttings, and, where necessary, several visits were made. The conditions found were generally satisfactory, and it is pleasing to report that most of the brigades are maintaining a high standard of training. Tests on the water-supply were made in a considerable number of towns, and recommendations made to the Boards concerned as to the development of the brigade organization and the purchase of new plant and equipment.

A number of reports were also made with regard to the fire-protection of Government buildings and to the local Government Loans Board on loan proposals for fire-protection, water-supply, and water-reticulation services.

Attached are statistical tables covering both the year under review and also averages taken over a period of years.

I have, &c.,

R. GIRLING-BUTCHER,

Inspector of Fire Brigades.