

Industrial Aspect of Conscription

Conscription is coming soon, and this will bring a fresh crop of problems to the men who have to keep business going during the crisis. The general public, which has been so insistent upon equality of sacrifice, and so satisfied that conscription is the only way to ensure it, hardly realises the extent of the administrative machinery required to carry out such a measure. Conscription must not be allowed to operate blind-fold. Men who are more valuable in their jobs must be kept there, if it is to the nation's interest. Tribunals will no doubt be set up to deal with the exemption claims. In England, the exempted classes were at first very numerous, owing to the importance of many trades in supplying the Army and Navy with fighting material. Here the industrial position is more simple, but as we have fewer men, care will have to be taken that industries are not drained dry of experts. The coal mining industry is so important from a Government standpoint that there is every probability of coal-miners as a class being exempted from military service. In other industries the Government is sure to take the line of dealing with each individual case upon its merits. We mention this subject early, as a warning to our readers who conduct businesses, to carefully go into the staffing question, with a view to action if it is necessary to save their undertakings from risk of absolute stoppage. The Dominion's system of monthly reinforcement drafts enables us to avoid calling up very large bodies of men simultaneously, and it may be some satisfaction to many to know that in the opinion of authorities well able to judge, the voluntary method is not by any means worked out, and that it may be possible to run for several months without the compulsion measure.

A Bad Example

Every year the State official who inspects New Zealand Fire Brigade equipment presents to Parliament a report upon the Dominion's fire losses. The figures are large enough to make a stirringly interesting item in the newspapers, but there is little in the way of systematic effort to keep down this enormous fire wastage, in connection with which New Zealand holds a somewhat unenviable record. In the large cities, by-laws are framed with the good object of ensuring that in the congested business areas, at any rate, buildings must be reasonably fireproof, and not constitute a menace to surrounding property. But until all our old wooden buildings are replaced, we will continue to have in the heart of our cities, these dangerous centres of possible trouble. In Canada, where national attention is being paid to the matter, the Dominion Conservation Commission Ottawa, in an effort to reduce the great annual fire loss, are taking up the idea of establishing a general building by-law to cover all the provinces and secure some uniformity of construction. The Commission have asked a number of city architects of the chief cities of Canada to give their opinions as to what such a national building by-law should contain.

New Zealand, apart from the annual official outcry about fire wastage, enjoys no national lead in this

important respect. On the contrary, if one looks for bad examples, it is to the Government Building in the capital city we must turn. At the rear of this huge wooden pile the authorities are hiding another structure, ugly and inflammable. It is a two-storied office for the Base Records section of the Defence Department. The frame and interior are of wood, but as a shame-faced kind of concession to the ideal of making things fire-proof, galvanised iron is used for the outer walls. If this undignified headquarters of an important department ever catches fire, how much protection will be afforded the neighbouring Government Building by the thin sheets of iron? We wonder what the Inspector of Fire Brigades privately thinks of his masters!

An Annual Promise

About a year ago, a representative deputation of town planning advocates interviewed the Hon. G. W. Russell, Minister of Internal Affairs, to urge the need of a Town Planning Act. The Minister was not asked to bring in a Bill straight away, but he was reminded of the excellent opportunity which presented itself for passing through Parliament a measure avoiding party lines of difference. Useful suggestions were made by the deputation, duly noted and forgotten by the Minister, and the draft of a suggested Bill was left with him to be placed in the waste paper basket. Mr. Russell affected to be keen on the subject, and promised with the heartiness of an experienced politician that the matter would receive attention in the recess. He doubted whether a Local Government Bill could be got ready for the 1916 session, but he assured the hopeful and satisfied town planners that the delay in dealing with the whole question of local government would not prevent the introduction of a Town Planning section as a separate Bill. "Next session" has arrived, with the Hon. G. W. Russell inviting town planning enthusiasts to await the advent of still another "next session." In a letter to the Greater Wellington Town Planning and Municipal Electors' Association, which had reminded him of his firm promise, the Minister states:—"As the coming session will be practically confined to legislation arising out of the war, it is regretted that no opportunity is likely to arise for the introduction of a Town Planning Bill. I hope, however, during the coming recess to call a conference dealing with the question, with a view to enabling legislation to be proceeded with for the improvement of local government." This makes the position even worse than it appeared to be a year ago. Precious time has been lost, and the subject is now destined to be a kind of side-line in a conference of local government delegates, who as a body will have no special liking for town planning. The subject is one for those who have made a special study of it, apart from the administrative problems of local bodies. The Minister of Internal Affairs should not be allowed to push off so important a reform because he does not personally understand its vital value to the community. Unless he is stirred up again, Town Planning legislation is as remote as a complete Local Government Bill, which has been annually promised for 12 years and is still being promised.