

HARRIS BLAZE BRINGS ACTION

Mayor Orders Probe Into Employment of Alien Enemies

COL. GRASSETT'S WARNING

Local Firms More Watchful of Origin of Their Employees.

Did the Huns do it? This question was repeated in the city yesterday, sometimes in jest and sometimes seriously. Monday night's blaze, which did at least a million dollars' damage to the Harris Abattoir in West Toronto, which is engaged in the filling of important war orders, succeeding as it did fires in four or five city munitions plants during the past few months, has set the citizens to thinking and the city officials to acting.

Mayor Asks for Reports.

Employments of enemy aliens in munitions plants was the subject of conferences at the City Hall yesterday between the Mayor and the police and fire departments. Col. H. J. Grasett, Chief of Police, in commenting on Monday night's disaster, warned local war industries against the presence on their premises of men not avowedly pro-ally. Mayor Church asked for full reports on the conflagration from the heads of the fire and police departments, which documents he will submit to the Board of Control, where the question of the advisability of a thorough inquiry into the cause of the recent big fires whose origin has been more or less suspicious will be discussed. The Mayor declared yesterday that if it were necessary to obtain all the facts he would order an inquest into the Harris Abattoir fire.

From statements made to The Globe last night by the heads of local war industries, it would appear that very few, if any, enemy aliens are at present employed, and that in these cases rigid supervision is exercised. It would appear also that the fire in West Toronto and its results have had the effect of tightening the cordon of scrutiny and thereby reducing the possibility of another blow at local war production.

Firemen Busy Last Night.

Three companies of firemen were pouring water all last (Tuesday) night on the smouldering ruins of the fire at the Harris Abattoir, which began Monday night at 9.30 o'clock. Deputy Chief Russell was quite confident that there would be no serious outbreak, but the men were placed there on instructions of Chief Smith.

The police investigation into the cause of the fire is being conducted by Detectives Taylor and Levitt. Up to the present there have been no developments that would tend to show the fire to have been of incendiary cause.

Mr. Harris' Estimate.

Mr. William Harris, President of the company, stated yesterday afternoon that the damage to the buildings would be \$500,000. He was unable to place any estimate on the loss to the contents. Thousands of tons of meats and other produce that were stored in buildings not burned would be from one-half to one-third total loss. This damage would result from the smoke. Mr. Harris is quite sure that the blaze started in the packing sheds, and was not the work of plotters.

Resume Killing To-day.

It is the intention of the firm to resume killing to-day. With the exception of 225 employees in the office, all help was idle yesterday.

The following is a list of the buildings damaged given out by Mr. Harris:

Totally destroyed—Train shed, icing plant, lard refinery, provision room, sausage room, box factory and laundry. In the icing plant the apparatus used for crushing ice for the refrigerator cars was rendered useless by the fire.

Damaged — Cooler building and abattoir.

Saved—Office building, oleomargarine plant, garage and stables.

Fires in Toronto have surpassed the \$3,000,000 mark within eleven months, and in the large fires all of the companies suffering have been engaged on the output of war essentials.

Fires Thoroughly Probed.

Chief Grasett stated in an interview yesterday afternoon that all fires were thoroughly investigated, and nothing had been found to indicate that the fires had been started by aliens. There were, he continued, materials that were very inflammable in the vicinity of where the fire broke out. The Inspector of the Keele Street Station had informed him that there were six watchmen on duty at the plant, and any doubtful characters would have in his opinion, been seen by them.

Harbor Board Acts.

At a meeting of the Harbor Board yesterday it was decided that no aliens of enemy countries should be employed by the Commission in future. Two applications have been received for sites, one from the National Yacht Club, which desires a site at the foot of Bathurst street and the other from Rev. J. Russell Maclean, on behalf of the Boys Naval Brigade.

None at Russell Works Now.

In the early years of the war, said Mr. T. A. Russell of the Russell Motor Works, he had a number of enemy aliens employed, who had been employed for years, and who appeared to be trustworthy men. Considering the times it was felt to be good policy to dispose of their services, though in individual cases injustice might have been done. Mr. Russell stated that there were no enemy aliens employed in their munitions plant, and he did not think that any were working in any of their factories.

Lieut.-Col. J. B. Miller of the Polson's Iron Works told The Globe that his firm had no enemy aliens employed. "The Government is very particular in not employing them in shipbuilding works," he said. They had a good many Italians and Russians employed, but no Austrians or Germans that they knew of. Sometimes it was difficult to tell, but they were constantly on the watch to see that none got in.

Will be More Careful.

"Henceforth we are going to be more particular than ever to watch those in our employ," said a member of another large firm engaged in the filling of war orders. "It per-

tainly is lamentable that there should be so many calamities of this kind. It looks very suspicious." He stated that between 200 and 300 men have enlisted from their plant and the difficulty of securing laborers is very real. No enemy aliens were in their employ now.

From time to time certain suspects have been shadowed and later discharged if circumstances warranted it. Some of those who appeared to be aliens claim to have been born in Canada, and the situation is consequently made very difficult.