

It has also indicated that it has no desire to exclude from the benefits of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act any non-permanent firemen who desire to take advantage of its provisions and obtain full value for their services. The request has therefore been made to Government that the new legislation should contain appropriate definitions of "volunteer" and "part-time" firemen and that specific provision should be made that volunteer brigade members shall have no obligation to join the union.

22. This question has been given some ventilation in this report because it has an important bearing on the efficiency of the Fire Service. The "volunteer" firemen, honorary and remunerated, form more than 80 per cent. of the Fire Service, which could not function without them. Most of the larger secondary towns with population exceeding five thousand have one or more permanent men attached to the volunteer brigade for maintenance work and to ensure rapid turnout to fires, but a major share of the responsibility is still on the volunteer brigadesmen. Even in the metropolitan areas the volunteer brigades are still required for protection of suburban areas and to form a reserve of men for operation at large fires (see paragraph 6). The viewpoint of the men themselves must also be given due consideration if a contented Service is desired. The United Fire Brigades' Association recently requested all brigades which retain the volunteer organization to take a secret ballot under official control to obtain a free expression of opinion. Most of the brigades complied, and the aggregate of the votes cast was 57 for affiliation with the union and 2,281 against.

23. The volunteer and permanent firemen have worked together efficiently ever since the permanent men were first employed. Careful inquiries do not disclose a single instance of friction because one was in the union and the other not. The only reasonable ground which could be put forward by the permanent men for inclusion of the volunteers would be that the controlling authorities were in some way utilizing the services of the volunteer brigades to prejudice either the Service conditions or the number of the permanent staff. The information given above (paragraphs 9-16) as to the improved conditions recently granted to the permanent staff (which compare favourably with those of any Fire Service in the world) and as to the increases in establishment since 1936, negate any such suggestion.

INSPECTION

24. It has not been possible during the year, owing to the pressure of other work, to do any routine inspection of brigades. Inspection visits have therefore been restricted to towns where it was necessary to discuss with the brigade-controlling authorities the provision of new equipment, changes in brigade organization, or the development of the emergency organization and the accommodation of emergency appliances. A number of reports were made on fire protection of Government property and to the Local Government Loans Board on loan proposals for fire protection, water-supply, and water-reticulation services.

25. Attached (Table 3) are statistical returns covering the year under review.

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