

3. Government directed that every possible effort was to be made to obtain some acceptable compromise between the conflicting viewpoints expressed to the parliamentary Committee on local government and the recommendations of that committee. A series of conferences was therefore held with representatives of the national organizations concerned with the Fire Service. On the administrative side these consist of the Fire Boards', Municipal, and Underwriters' Associations, while the United Fire Brigades' Association and the Federation of Fire Brigades' Unions represent the brigadesmen. Similar discussions were also held with officers of the Departments concerned, including Treasury, Public Works, State Forest, and the Armed Services. In addition, a personal visit was paid to 134 of the 159 towns in which fire brigades operate. Conferences were in each case held on the spot with representatives of the local authority and the fire brigade. The proposals were explained in detail and also the organization and equipment necessary in the town to enable the brigade to take its part in the emergency organization.

4. These discussions were most valuable and many of the suggestions made were adopted in the draft legislation. A memorandum was first prepared setting out the compromise proposals. This was discussed with the executives of the national organizations, which subsequently made joint representations to the Minister. A draft Bill was then prepared to give effect to the modified proposals recommended. This was circulated both to the national organizations and to all Fire Boards. As was to be expected, the local authorities in the smaller towns were unanimous in approving the principle of contributions to brigade costs by Government and underwriters. The draft Bill was approved by the Union Federation and the Municipal Association, subject to certain amendments which would probably have been agreed to. On the other hand, definite opposition was expressed by both the Underwriters' and the Fire Boards' Associations. It was finally decided to drop the proposals for the 1946-47 session so as to allow time for further consideration in the recess.

5. It would appear that the opposition from the underwriters centred in the proposed basis of contribution. That from the Fire Boards' Association seems to have arisen partly from a misunderstanding of the intentions of the draft Bill and partly from a fear that the transfer from Ministerial control to that of a central authority would involve some loss of status to the existing Fire Boards. A further complication arose from the circulation by one of the Fire Boards of alternative proposals for control of the Service on a provincial basis. Under the circumstances it is desirable that the proposals of the draft Bill should be reviewed in this report.

#### EMERGENCY ORGANIZATION

6. The two principal types of Civil fire emergency against which provision must be made are forest fires and the block fires likely to arise, as at Hawke's Bay in 1931, from severe earthquake. The essential requirements are a sufficient force of firemen, trained and equipped for overland operation from static water-supplies, and organized on a national rather than a purely local basis so that any units required can be mobilized without notice at any time. These are also the requirements of a wartime fire service. The organization, developed on the lines proposed, will therefore constitute the fire section of our peacetime defence system. Minor emergencies for which fire service pumps and equipment have been used in recent years, but which do not require the same standard of preparedness for immediate use, are the reinforcement of water-supplies in drought periods, the removal of flood-waters, and replacement of drainage pumps temporarily out of commission.

7. Major civil emergencies occur very infrequently and the type of operation necessary is seldom used in fire-fighting in urban areas. It would be unreasonable to expect the Fire Service to remain keyed up for emergency operation as it was during the war, unless the brigades are given some immediate objective and an incentive to maintain the specialized training required. The proposed rural fire-protection service provides this objective. A small annual retainer will be payable in respect of industrial