

*Mr. Gray* : As I said before, I am dealing more particularly with a district like Christchurch. It would make people who escape at present—including the Government—pay towards the upkeep of the brigade, because the tax would be general throughout the colony. There are a lot of people who do not pay anything, and there is a lot of Government property in these places that we think ought to pay something towards the upkeep of the fire brigade. They escape the rates, and are not taxed in any way.

*Mr. Hanan* : Is not the risk by the Government out of proportion to the amount contributed by the Government ?

*Mr. Gray* : Yes, I think so.

*Mr. Parr (City Councillor, Auckland)* : It seems peculiar, Mr. Chairman, that I should be called upon to explain to you, who are the father of the brigade in Auckland, matters in connection with the fire brigade ; but the trouble seems to us to be that the Bill is evidently framed to meet the case of young towns that really have no fire brigades. The cardinal section of the Bill is section 17, which states that it is the duty of the Board to establish and maintain an efficient fire brigade for the suppression and extinction of fires, &c. From the point of view of a small country borough, I do not know that there could be much objection made to the Bill ; but from the point of view of the large cities, the very gravest objection can be taken to it. It seems to me that at the last moment this was recognised by the draftsman, because in the last section (28) he seems to meet the case : "Every brigade existing in any fire district on the commencement of this Act shall be subject to the control of the Board, and the equipment provided for or belonging to the brigade (except in the case of a volunteer brigade) shall be deemed to be the property of and vest in the Board." That is rather a wholesale method of dealing with our property. In Auckland, I think we have spent about £15,000 in equipping thoroughly an up-to-date fire brigade during the last few years, and that does not include the cost of the land. I think the total cost is about £17,000. Naturally, the cities will kick against a Bill which proposes to take away £17,000 without compensation. The problem is, what is the best thing to do?—and we recognise that you have a very difficult problem to solve. It seems to me that keeping the plant vested in the present local body is hardly workable. I think you will have to set up a Board, and I do not see any objection to that Board so long as you compensate the present local bodies for their expenditure. The question was raised by one member of the Committee as to where the compensation was to come from. That, no doubt, is another difficult matter. It is true that you give the Boards power to borrow, but to borrow on what ? What security have they on which to borrow ? At present in the cities you have the city revenues, but what will the bondholders say when you propose to give them another security, and what security will that be ? It seems to me that that will be the crux of the whole question. So long as you give us compensation there seems to me to be no objection to taking over the fire-brigade plants. The question of finding that compensation may be one that may be wrestled with successfully. That is the position. We have no objection to the Board, provided compensation is made by the Board. With regard to the constitution of the Board, we object to section 3, which proposes to set up a Board consisting of seven members, one member to be appointed by the Government, three to be elected by the insurance companies, and three to be elected by the local authority. That practically gives the Government control of the Board, because I can quite conceive that the interests of the citizens and insurance companies might on many occasions conflict, in which case the Government representative would have the balance of power, and the Government now being in the insurance business, the representative's vote would be given in favour of the insurance companies to the detriment of the citizens. It seems to me that the Government, having entered into the insurance business, should not have such representation on the Board, especially if they are not going to pay practically anything towards the upkeep of the brigade. We think the citizens should be represented by a majority of members on the Board. There are other matters of detail which I have no doubt others will go into, and I have just stated briefly the main principles we object to.

1. *The Chairman.*] The money raised in connection with fire-brigade plants has been referred to?—Yes.

2. The debenture-holder will still have the city revenue as security?—Yes.

3. You object to the representation on the Board as proposed?—Yes; it seems to me that you ought to give the citizens predominant power in the partnership.

4. There is no other clause in the Bill that meets your objection?—No; the machinery seems all right.

5. No doubt in all Bills of this sort the objections will have to be found out by the working of the measure?—Yes. The main thing we want is to get contributions, and as soon as possible. In Auckland we are spending £2,500 a year, and the citizens have to find every penny of that, and we think the insurance companies should pay their share of it. We want a Bill of some kind, even if it has some unsatisfactory features, to assist us in meeting the expenses.

6. *Mr. Sidey.*] With regard to clause 3, do I understand you to mean that there should be only the insurance companies and the Council represented on the Board, and that there should be a majority of members of the Council on the Board?—Yes. Under this Bill the Government pay practically nothing.

7. A Board with three representatives of insurance companies and four representatives of the Council would meet your view?—Yes; I think that would be a fair thing.

8. *The Chairman.*] If each had to pay half, you think the Board should be equally divided, and that that would be better than at present?—Yes.

9. *Mr. Sidey.*] Do you know anything about the Victorian Act?—No; I only know the contributions, not the machinery.

10. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] In answer to a question by the Chairman I understood you to say that with equal contributions of the insurance companies and local body they should have equal