

strength on the Board?—Yes; I put it in this way: that if I could not get anything better I would be satisfied with that. I think the citizens should have the control by having an additional vote in case of conflict between the parties.

11. In case of conflict between the insurance companies and the local body, you think the representative of the Government would become an ally of the insurance companies?—I think it would probably be so, now that the Government are an insurance company.

12. It is a question of proportion with you, and you think the balance of power should rest with the local body?—Yes.

13. *Mr. E. G. Allen.*] Seeing that the insurance companies would naturally increase the premium rates to make up their contributions to the Board, would not the municipalities have to pay the whole cost of the Board's fire brigade? If the insurance companies were to contribute even one-third of the cost, would they not increase the premiums to make up that loss?—No; I do not think so. I think the Government would take steps to stop that. The companies have a formidable competitor in the State now.

14. *Mr. Herries.*] Are you satisfied with the definition of "fire brigade"?—Yes; as far as Auckland is concerned. We are a very large borough, and prefer to have our own brigade.

15. What about the contiguous boroughs?—Why should they have the benefit of our brigades? At present they have no brigades, but if they have to pay compensation I see no objection to their being included in the area. They should pay a rateable part of the compensation. The City of Auckland has two contiguous boroughs—Parnell and Grey Lynn—and neither has any fire brigade worth mentioning. I have no objection to these boroughs being included, provided they pay a certain portion of the compensation.

16. And you do not see that provided for in the Bill?—No.

*Mr. J. J. Devine (City Councillor, Wellington).* Our objections to the Bill are similar to those raised by Auckland and Christchurch—certainly Christchurch—because the circumstances are almost identical in these two cities. The position in Wellington is that we have an actual loan for which debentures have been issued for £9,000. That is not the cost of buildings. We have supplemented those from other sources. The land is a very considerable asset, of which I could not give you a detailed estimate; but I am assured by the Mayor that the total value of the equipment, land, buildings, and plant is not less than £45,000. That, of course, is an enormous sum to have confiscated as this Bill proposes. It is absolutely clear, from section 26 of the Bill of last session and section 28 of the Bill of this session, that actual confiscation to the Board of all our plant and property is proposed. What do we get for that? We get a contribution from the insurance companies. In common with the gentlemen who have previously objected, I think the contribution of the Government is practically nothing. They get representation as ratepayers. Wellington is in an extraordinarily singular position, because the largest amount of Government property is in Wellington, and is protected at the cost of the ratepayers. If they paid rates they would probably be the largest ratepayers in Wellington. What Wellington has always sought for is that there should be an equal contribution, as in the Australian Colonies, from the Government, the underwriters, and the citizens. At one time in Wellington the Underwriters' Association did contribute, but it is a strange thing that when we went to great expense in getting an efficient water-supply they immediately dropped their contribution, and for many years the citizens have had to pay for the establishment and equipment of the fire brigade, and also the extension of the water-supply: and they have now the question of still further extending the water-supply, which leaves the insurance companies sitting on velvet so far as Wellington is concerned. The objections of Wellington to the Bill are similar to those raised by Mr. Parr and Mr. Gray. The impression we gather from the Bill is that it is a Bill which largely helps the small boroughs to equip and maintain fire brigades; but we consider that in cities like Auckland, Christchurch, and Wellington we should be left alone if we get contributions. It is of special significance where we protect such a large amount of Government property. The property is the property of the people of New Zealand, and we are protecting it for the people of New Zealand. If the Government Buildings were burnt down the loss would fall on the whole of the colony, and when we protect it we are benefiting the whole of the colony. The insurance companies are benefiting for the same reason. We have to find everything, and the insurance companies contribute nothing. Wellington objects to the constitution of the Board, and agrees with Mr. Gray and Mr. Parr that the local body should have a preponderance of voting-power on the Board. As the election of members of the Council takes place every second year in April, I think the month of April proposed for the meeting of the Board should be extended to May, but that is a matter of detail. The Minister and the Government have a very strong pull on the Board. Under section 10 the annual estimates of expenditure have to be submitted to the Minister, and I think that is too much interference. Section 11 provides that the amount of the annual expenditure so estimated shall be contributed and paid to the Board. The annual contribution to the brigade in Wellington, I think, is about £2,000 a year. We have this year ordered a chemical engine, and secured sites in the suburbs for the placing of this engine, and for the equipment of the brigade. There has been a large expenditure in the way of capital, and also a large annual expenditure. There is a Superintendent at present and about thirty-seven men, and I say that that number will have to be increased. I do not think the Boroughs of Onslow and Karori are able to maintain brigades, but probably arrangements might be made by which, if Wellington continued to provide a fire service, these districts could be brought in. If the policy of the Bill is to come into effect this year, then it seems to me that the districts will have to be made very much larger.

17. *Mr. Hanan.*] Has any loan been raised upon fire-brigade land and plant in Wellington?—No; the loans have been saddled on the city generally. They are special loans, and the city is liable for them.