

40. Do you object to the proviso in clause 19, which says that "It shall not be necessary to take a poll of the ratepayers in respect of any such loan"?—It has advantages and disadvantages. It is better in the case of small loans not to have to go to the ratepayers.

41. *Mr. E. G. Allen.*] I understand that the Wellington assets in connection with the fire-brigade are very large?—Yes.

42. And it would be difficult for the Board to borrow money to liquidate that debt?—Yes.

43. Would you be satisfied with the interest on the value of your fire-prevention assets being paid by the Board, and the property being held by the Board in trust?—We should, if we got the amount to repay the loans. Assuming that you could provide for the repayment of the loans the matter might be arranged. I think the loans are for ten years, and we are creating a sinking fund, so that they will be exhausted in ten years.

44. Have you any idea of the value of the Government property in Wellington?—No.

45. You do not know what amount of revenue would be realised to the Board at $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the pound on the rateable value?—Leaving out Government property, we know that there is eight millions' worth of capital value.

46. Do you think the Government should not be represented on the Board?—I do not see any purpose that is really served by it. If they contributed one-third, then they would be entitled to representation. In some places where there is little Government property private ratepayers would pay considerably more and would stand out.

47. *Hon. Mr. Carroll.*] That would not be the case in Wellington?—No.

48. You think the Government should contribute sufficient towards the Boards to justify them in getting representation—either one-third of the contribution or a lesser amount?—Yes.

49. *The Chairman.*] What arrangement do you think would be fair in reference to your water-supply in connection with this Bill? That is a question that has not been broached in the Bill. It seems to me to be a very important question, and none of the witnesses have touched upon it?—That is a very large question. I am glad you mentioned it, because in Wellington we have raised tremendous loans for our water-supply. The Board under this Bill would get the benefit of that. That is the reason I emphasize the contribution of one-third to cover that matter.

Mr. Parr (Auckland). : So long as the Council has a fire brigade in its district I see no objection to the Board using the water; but if you are going to bring in a larger area, then the question arises, why should the Board have the benefit of the water?

Mr. Robbins (Hawera). : I represent not only the Borough of Hawera, but also the United Fire Brigades Association. The objections raised to the Bill are in regard to certain matters as to the constitution of the Board or as to the Board itself. As far as the contributing bodies are concerned, I may say that the Fire Brigades Association agree with the principle that the Municipal Conference has agreed to—that is, that the three parties should contribute equally. However, they have gone into the matter more minutely and under different circumstances, and consider that the Government Insurance Department will be coming in under "insurance companies," and will have to contribute. Then, again, we shall have the right to levy a rate upon Government property in all these boroughs and cities, which will put a different complexion upon the scheme altogether. As to the constitution of the Board, the Fire Brigades Association passed a resolution recommending extended Boards instead of small boroughs, and the extension of the Board over areas coterminous with the old provinces. My opinion is that the Victorian Act would come in here, and we should have metropolitan and country Fire Brigade Boards; that is to say, the metropolitan Boards would answer for such places as the four large centres, and then you would get over a great many difficulties which have been raised by previous speakers. The country Board would operate over small and large boroughs in the country district, and these would be coterminous with the district I have mentioned, but excluding the four centres. I think something on those lines would be found to be practicable, and would be better than cutting them up amongst themselves. As far as the members of the Board are concerned, I emphatically say that those bodies which contribute should have direct representation. It would be almost impossible to work it on the lines suggested, by the local body calling in outsiders. The point was raised as to whether the Borough Council would be absolute. There is no doubt about that. A committee might consider that certain plant was necessary, and the Borough Council might be absolutely unanimous, and yet when the proposal came up for confirmation the whole thing might be vetoed, and there would be friction between the two bodies. If you are going to have a scheme for placing fire brigades in an efficient state, you must have a special body set up to control the fire brigades and the equipment of them. With regard to the matter of plant in hand, I see no difficulty. On the bare face of it it seems like confiscation for the Board to take it over without compensation; but supposing there was a clause in the Bill stating that this particular plant was vested in the town or city, and that the only charge was for interest and sinking fund, which they would have to provide—or depreciation you might call it—I see no objection to it. The plant is secured to the city or town, the interest will be provided for, the insurance companies will be paying, and the Government will be contributing as well as the local body. I would be very sorry to see the Bill crippled or thrown out through anything of that description. There are other matters that the United Fire Brigades Association would like to see given attention to. It has been suggested that the cost would all come back through the action of the insurance companies on to the people, but I do not think that would be the case. Take the fire brigades in the large centres at the present time, and you will find that there are four of them with an upkeep costing about £8,000 per annum. Then there are ten first-class country brigades, with an annual upkeep costing £500—that is £5,000. Then there are seventy brigades of what you might call the second-class, and their annual upkeep costs about £100: the whole amounting to about £20,000. When you consider the large figures representing the premiums raised in this colony, the sum referred to is a very small amount indeed to put on the premiums to recoup the companies for their expenditure in