

*Mr. Gray* : In Victoria the Board has power to borrow money, and I have no doubt the contributions would enable interest on the money raised to be paid, and they would share and share alike.

*Mr. Hanan* : Seeing that your city has gone in for what may be termed Greater Christchurch, and that other places may follow suit shortly, do you not think that some departure is necessary in the way of establishing Boards which shall give representation to a wider body than sary your Council?

*Mr. Gray* : We find that we are quite competent to undertake the fire service for fifty thousand living within the city boundaries and within a mile of the city boundaries. We have a system by which we attend fires within a radius of a mile, if people will give us a guarantee beforehand that they will pay the expense for going out that distance, so that we are able to attend all fires within that radius, and the system works very satisfactorily.

*Mr. Sidey* : I understood you to say that the amount you are called upon to pay now for the fire service is £2,000 a year. I want to know what rate that would represent?

*Mr. Gray* : We have not worked it out on the unimproved value yet, but it would be a very big figure now representing the unimproved value.

*Mr. Sidey* : Would £3 in the thousand be sufficient to meet your case on the capital value?

*Mr. Gray* : Speaking offhand, I should say that would be more than ample.

*Mr. Sidey* : On the annual value it would give you far too much? You cannot say whether the amount required here would be ample to meet your case?

*Mr. Gray* : I think it would be ample.

*Mr. Sidey* : You are in favour of the principle that the insurance companies should contribute?

*Mr. Gray* : Yes.

*Mr. Sidey* : I was not quite clear as to what you said as to representation of the insurance companies on the Council.

*Mr. Gray* : You are acquainted with the provision giving power for the Council to allow any citizen to sit who has a special knowledge of any particular subject. We have set up a Waimakariri Water-supply Committee, and have included several citizens who know more about this question than members of the Council; and the same principle might be extended to the Fire Brigade Committee, with satisfactory results.

*Mr. Sidey* : You think that with such representation the insurance companies ought to be satisfied?

*Mr. Gray* : I think so.

*Mr. Sidey* : This Bill provides for a Board, and I understand that you think the boundaries of the districts might be extended under the jurisdiction of the Boards?

*Mr. Gray* : I did not say that. I think if provision were made for districts like Christchurch, which is self-contained, leaving out the country districts, it would be better. You might find districts in New Zealand where you could group a number of small districts under one Board, but I should be strongly against bringing in any country districts so far as Christchurch is concerned.

*Mr. Sidey* : Have you anything to say with regard to the selection or choice of the men who should form the brigade?

*Mr. Gray* : That has always been left to the Superintendent. The Council appoints the permanent men. We appoint the Superintendent and Engineer, and the selection of the rank and file we leave to the Captain or Superintendent, who has power to engage or dismiss. We never interfere.

*Hon. Mr. Carroll* : I think the Fire Brigades' Association in their proposed Bill recommend that the districts should be parcelled into Fire Board districts, with the terminus of the old provincial boundaries?

*Mr. Gray* : I am not sure about that.

*Hon. Mr. Carroll* : Would you be inclined to favour such a scheme, provided the four large centres were excluded as self-contained bodies?

*Mr. Gray* : I do not know how that would work. It is problematical. I am inclined to think it would not work well. These things work better under local management. If you notice the rise of the small towns: they start a fire brigade by getting a hook-and-ladder brigade, and afterwards get a little steamer, and gradually grow in that way. But I have not had any experience in small districts, and am speaking more particularly as to small centres.

*Hon. Mr. Carroll* : Taking Christchurch as an instance, you prefer that things should remain as they are instead of having a Fire Board appointed in place of the present local body?

*Mr. Gray* : I would not object to a Board if it were more on the lines adopted in Victoria as regards representation, if the expense were divided up between the Government, the insurance companies, and the municipality, with equal representation, provision being made as to the manner in which they should be selected or elected.

*Hon. Mr. Carroll* : You would not have very much objection to the Fire Board, then?

*Mr. Gray* : No.

*Hon. Mr. Carroll* : With regard to the point you mentioned as to the value of the plant owned by the local bodies, supposing the local body were compensated for that, would it, to your mind, remove a material objection?

*Mr. Gray* : Yes.

*Mr. E. G. Allen* : Do you think, Mr. Gray, that it would be right for the Government to contribute one-third, seeing that the majority of the people of the colony would have to contribute to this fund indirectly, and could not possibly be benefited by the action of the fire brigade at all? Those who live outside the radius to which the fire brigade could possibly travel—country people, for instance—would, under your proposal, have to contribute to the cost of the fire brigade, while at the same time they would get no benefit from it?