

the Municipal Act has taken away the authority from local bodies to establish salvage or fire-police corps, therefore it is necessary that power should be given to the proposed Boards to establish salvage and fire-police corps. I would also suggest that power be given to the Boards to cause to be held inquiries into the origin of suspicious fires, and also that they should be represented at inquests on fires. At present there are no professional firemen represented at these inquiries, and very valuable information which might be elicited is thus lost. A further power which the Board should have is that of erecting fire-alarm circuits for public use. In subsection (3) of clause 22, the Superintendent has power to inspect theatres and other public buildings within his district, and report to the Board whether proper precautions for the prevention of or escape from fire are being observed; but there is no power given to the Boards to control those buildings. Therefore, I would propose that such power be given to them. The present Municipal Corporations Act gives the officers of the brigade power to use water from the water-mains, but there is no power given either to the Board or its officers to use water that may be required from wells or tanks, and, in my opinion, such power should be given. There is no power at present which will admit of any brigade recovering their expenses or receiving remuneration should they be called upon to extinguish a fire on board any ship in harbour, and such an omission, in my opinion, should be provided for. I would suggest a new clause to follow clause 21 of the Bill, to provide that "An officer shall be appointed and paid by the Government, who shall be an experienced fireman, and he shall act as advisory officer to the various Boards in the matter of establishing brigades, providing plant and appliances. He shall inspect all brigades annually and report to their Boards, and with such assistance as he requires shall act as valuator for all buildings, plant, and appliances taken over, be empowered to adduce evidence, examine witnesses, and address the Court at inquests on fires. His authority shall be recognised by all officers and constables of the Police Department, and they shall render him any assistance he may require. If found necessary, a deputy or deputies may be appointed to assist the principal officer." I can see a most urgent necessity for the appointment of this officer. It really means that the whole fire service throughout New Zealand would be put on an efficient footing. Were there no such general control as this every brigade would be an authority unto itself, the Boards would have to be guided by such authority, each brigade would follow its own fads, and there could be no possible uniformity. Further, the officer suggested should be appointed by the Government, so that he might be a man entirely free from any local prejudices and independent of any one Board. This is all the more necessary, because it is proposed—and it is essential—that he should act as a valuator for the purpose of taking over plants and appliances on behalf of various Boards. I would propose that under clause 22—"Powers and duties of the Superintendent"—the following subsection be added: "Any turncock shall, upon any fire occurring in his district, proceed with all possible speed to the fire and, when directed so to do by the Superintendent, shall assist by all means in his power the insuring of a plentiful supply of water." This is necessary, as the turncock, being the servant of the local authority, might object to the authority of the Superintendent of the Board. Moreover, it is the ordinary clause used in every Fire Brigade Act. I would also propose the following additions under this clause (a): "Every local authority, company, or person supplying artificial light to any premises on fire shall forthwith send some competent person to shut off or disconnect the supply of artificial light to such premises, or to any building, land, or street adjoining such premises or adjacent thereto, as and if directed so to do by the Superintendent." "Any local authority, company, or person owning any electric tramway shall, if required so to do by the Superintendent, forthwith send some competent person to cut off the supply of electricity from any section required." In connection with these proposed amendments, it must be apparent that electricity is coming into very common use, and at certain times, such as at fires, a considerable amount of danger may be present. Therefore it is necessary to give the Superintendent power to cut the light off if necessary. I would propose that the following clause be substituted in lieu of clause 28: "Upon the coming into force of this Act every brigade existing in any fire district shall be subject to the control of the Board, and all land and buildings occupied by any brigade shall be vested in the Board, in trust, provided that the Board shall pay to any local body, company, or person, owners of such land or building, a rental of 4 per cent. on the capital value; provided further that should there be any loan outstanding on any such land or building, the amount of the loan shall be deducted when computing the capital value and the interest at the rate of percentage at which the money was borrowed added to the annual rental. The Board shall take over all plant and appliances in possession of any brigade at a valuation. The payment for such plant and appliances to be extended over a term of ten years or determined earlier should any Board decide so to do." Another new clause I would propose is the following: "Any person who tampers with any fire alarm or fire-signalling apparatus, or gives a false alarm of fire, shall be liable for the first offence to a penalty not exceeding £10 or one month's imprisonment, and for any subsequent offence shall be liable to imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour, and without the option of a fine." This offence is much more serious than appears on the face of it. It is not the mere inconvenience caused by the brigade turning out, and in some cases the expense that is attached to it, but every time a modern brigade turns out in answer to a call of fire there is always an element of danger either to themselves or to the people in the street. So far as danger to themselves is concerned, firemen are only too ready to risk that when there is a fire at the place to which they are called, but it is not right that they should be asked to incur such danger for the mischievous pleasure of evil-disposed people. This offence is looked upon as a very serious one in many parts of the world. In New York, anybody giving a false alarm is liable for the first offence to a fine of £100 or six months' imprisonment, and even in conservative London fines of £25 have been inflicted for a first offence. The suggestions I make are embodied in a list which I now put in.