

trative costs, the arranging of finance, the standardization, cost, and interchange of plant and equipment, and the training, particularly of officers, but also of the personnel generally. In view of the long-continued operation of the existing system, however, it is unlikely that such a radical change would be acceptable to the interests concerned.

It will be noted from Table II attached that of the fifty-five Fire Boards, thirty-five have an annual expenditure of less than £1,000. It is very open to question whether the maintenance of an independent local authority is justified for the administration of an expenditure of this order if some satisfactory alternative system of control can be devised. It is, of course, essential that this alternative system should firstly be such as to ensure that the efficiency of the existing fire-brigade organization would not be prejudiced, and, secondly, should give to the insurance interests the voice in the control of the fire service which is justified by their contribution to its upkeep.

In addition to the fire-district brigades normally covered in these reports, fire brigades maintained or subsidized by the local authority exist in seventy-five towns. The Fire Brigades Act, 1926, provides that on application by the local authority, and subject to the taking of a poll of ratepayers, any local-authority district having a population exceeding 1,000 may be declared a fire district. It will be seen from the list below that of the seventy-five towns referred to forty are qualified on a population basis to become fire districts, and may at any time elect to do so. This point is emphasized by the fact that the local authorities for two of these towns—Upper Hutt and Patea—have already made the necessary application in accordance with the Act, but declaration of these districts as fire districts has been deferred pending further consideration of the local-body amalgamation proposals as they affect the fire service.

It will be apparent, however, that the problem cannot be confined to the elimination or amalgamation of the existing Fire Boards, but consideration must also be given to that section of the fire service at present controlled by the local authorities. In order that the importance of this section may be realized the following summary shows the populations served by the Fire Board and municipal brigades respectively.

Population.				Fire Districts.	Municipal Control.
0-1,000	..	..	..	1	35
1,000-3,000	..	..	..	27	27
3,000-6,000	..	..	..	7	9
Over 6,000	..	..	..	20	4
				55	75

It has been the experience of the Department, particularly in recent years, that in most cases the fire-protection organization taken over from the municipality by the Fire Board on formation of the latter is noticeably below the usual Fire Board standard of efficiency. It has usually been found necessary to replace or augment considerably the plant and equipment, and even the alarm system and the accommodation provided for the brigade. The reason for this is probably that the fire-protection service is ordinarily the least vocal of the municipal departments and its requirements are not fully recognized until either a serious fire, or agitation by brigade members, brings it more prominently under the notice of the public and the municipal authorities. On the other hand the Fire Boards have the sole duty of maintaining an efficient organization, and it may be taken for granted that, with some notable exceptions, the municipal brigades are less satisfactorily equipped for their work and to that extent are less efficient than those controlled by Fire Boards.

It must be made clear that the remarks with respect to the lower efficiency of the municipal brigades in no way apply to the personnel—on the contrary it is practically on the personnel alone that the existing standard of efficiency depends. Most of the municipal fire-brigadesmen receive no payment whatever, and where payment is received it is only a small allowance to cover damaged clothing, or in a few instances loss of wages whilst attending fires. Not only do they receive no payment, but in many cases the brigades have, by means of entertainments and public subscriptions, raised money to supplement the plant and equipment supplied by the local authority. A case recently came under notice where one small-town brigade has during the past four years purchased a fire-engine and later fitted it with a fire-pump almost entirely out of brigade funds. The Fire Board and municipal brigades are part of the one service and are all members of the United Fire Brigades Association. The two sections compete in both national and district competitions, and the results show that the municipal brigadesmen in no way suffer by comparison as regards personnel efficiency.

The interests of the volunteer fireman in brigade work is partly sporting—a keen interest usually being taken in brigade competitions, partly social—as the fire-station is the centre of many social activities, particularly in the smaller towns, and partly with the idea of service to his community. Both the Fire Board and municipal brigades are on the same volunteer footing, the only difference being that any allowance made to the former is usually on a more liberal basis. It is essential that any reorganization of the control of the fire service should maintain this volunteer spirit, since it would be beyond the financial resources of even the major cities to establish adequate brigades manned entirely on a professional basis.

The fact that such a large number of local authorities are prepared to shoulder the full cost of the fire-protection organization and have not taken advantage of the existing legislation to form a Fire Board, and thereby obtain the advantage of insurance contributions, indicates that there must be some serious objections to the existing legislation. So far as the local authorities are concerned, these objections appear to be, firstly, a disinclination to hand over the control of the fire brigade to another