

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Assembly

WEDNESDAY, 4 NOVEMBER 1964

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CLOSURE OF POLICE STATIONS IN BURKE ELECTORATE.—Mr. Inch, pursuant to notice, asked The Minister for Labour and Industry,—

Is it the intention of the Police Department to close the Gregory Downs, Malbon, Duchess and Urandangie police stations?

Answer:—

“As was the case when the Honourable Member for Rockhampton North asked a similar Question on October 15 last, the Honourable Member is referred to the reply given by me to a Question asked by the Honourable Member for Cook on October 7, 1964.”

PAPERS

The following papers were laid on the table:—

Orders in Council under—

The Abattoirs Acts, 1930 to 1958.

The Fauna Conservation Act of 1952.

The Primary Producers' Organisation and Marketing Acts, 1926 to 1962.

Regulations under The Fruit and Vegetables Acts, 1947 to 1959.

FIRE BRIGADES BILL

INITIATION IN COMMITTEE—RESUMPTION OF DEBATE

(The Chairman of Committees, Mr. Hooper, Greenslopes, in the chair)

Debate resumed from 30th October (see p. 1175) on Mr. Dewar's motion—

“That a Bill be introduced to consolidate and amend the law relating to fire brigades.”

WEDNESDAY, 4 NOVEMBER, 1964

Mr. SPEAKER (Hon. D. E. Nicholson, Murumba) read prayers and took the chair at 11 a.m.

QUESTIONS

ADDITIONAL HOUSING COMMISSION HOUSES AT AYR.—Mr. Coburn, pursuant to notice, asked The Minister for Works,—

In view of the acute housing shortage in Ayr due in large measure to the substantial expansion in the sugar industry, will he approve of the provision of at least an additional ten Housing Commission dwellings at Ayr as soon as is practicable?

Answer:—

“The Housing Commission has arrangements in hand, at various stages, for nine dwellings at Ayr—seven to be erected on Commission land selected by purchase applicants, including one for which a tender has already been accepted, and two to be erected on the applicants' land. Additional Commission sites are available for selection for the erection of houses.”

Mr. DUGGAN (Toowoomba West—Leader of the Opposition) (11.7 a.m.): I am certain that the Minister in charge of the Bill does not expect to be, nor will he be, immune from criticism from time to time while he is exercising his Ministerial responsibilities; but I pay him a very sincere tribute this morning for the policy he has adopted of furnishing explanatory notes with Bills that he introduces. It is something about which I have spoken for a long time in this Chamber. Although Ministers in previous Governments may have been remiss in this respect, I have noticed that explanatory notes have been provided on two occasions on which the Minister for Labour and Industry has introduced Bills. They are very helpful to hon. members, and if the Minister is responsible for the introduction of this practice I give him my warmest congratulations. The notes do not cost very much; although the information contained in them does not reveal very much that could not be ascertained by inquiries, it is in a convenient form, it is helpful to hon. members, and I thank the Minister for doing it.

Mr. Dewar: Other Ministers have done it.

Mr. DUGGAN: Very rarely. Offhand, the only instance I can recall is when Mr. Munro, who was then Minister for Justice, introduced the Companies Bill. I do not know whether or not it is coincidental that the Minister for Labour and Industry has done it on two occasions, but I thought it was to be part of a deliberate policy that he was following. I commend the practice to other Ministers. It does not give any premature indication of the intentions of the Government or violate Government policy, and I think it is a very sensible arrangement. Hon. members find it very convenient to know which sections are being amended and the extent of the proposed amendment, and their inquiries and research are facilitated. As I said, I hope the practice will be followed more extensively by Ministers.

Unfortunately, the Minister beat me to the gun to some extent on Friday and I did not hear a great deal of what he had to say in his introductory speech. However, I have had an opportunity of reading a report of his submissions and, on a superficial examination, it appears that the proposed Bill contains many desirable features.

The consolidation of the Fire Brigades Act is very important. I do not think many people realise the service that fire brigades provide for the community. Certainly a great deal of money is being expended—one-seventh by the Government, one-seventh by local authorities, and the remainder by the Fire Underwriters' Association—and the aggregate cost of maintaining fire brigades over the length and breadth of the State is very high.

The Minister indicated in his survey that in most of the States there have been consolidating measures and that control is vested very largely in one central authority, except that in some States there are separate bodies, with a rural authority controlling the work of country fire brigades.

There is apprehension in some quarters in Queensland that perhaps control may be too rigid as a result of the acceptance of this Bill; in other words, that there will be increased governmental control of this very important instrumentality and that the rights and wishes of local fire brigade boards will be very largely ignored.

The Minister has indicated that it is not his desire to interfere with the autonomy of the local boards, and it remains to be seen whether that will be the fact. I should hate to think that there was undue interference with the operation of local fire brigade boards. After all, they are generally composed of people who have served with a local authority or fire brigade association, in the case of Government appointments, and who take a very keen interest in this activity. It will be agreed that fire prevention problems differ from locality to locality and I think that local people are perhaps more aware of some of the particular problems that are likely to arise. I should be very loath to

see them lose whatever autonomy they might reasonably require to operate their fire brigades efficiently.

I think there is much to be said for the standardisation of equipment. That applies very largely now but there is still room for considerable further effort in this regard. I was informed—I think last year, from memory—by some people from country fire brigades who were down here for a conference that, as I recall the interview, there were nine different types of companies involved. That being so, it seems foolish that there should be any lack of proper standardisation. I think efforts have been made to achieve standardisation. Obviously, from the points of view of convenience, operating efficiency and economy there is nothing worse than to find that the equipment provided by one company does not fit that provided by another or that certain equipment leads to a different sort of practice or custom in one area from that operating in another.

Mr. Tucker: That was one of the main drawbacks at the bulk-sugar installation fire in Townsville.

Mr. DUGGAN: I am glad to hear that interjection, because that disastrous fire had great economic consequences which might perhaps have been mitigated considerably if action had been taken to standardise the equipment.

Whilst on this question of standardisation, I do not know whether it is because the Minister happens to be a Liberal Minister that he seems to be keen on changing the colour of fire-brigade engines from red to white.

Mr. Ramsden interjected.

Mr. DUGGAN: I read somewhere that he thought such a change was desirable. I do not think there is anything repugnant in the colour red. In any case, it has been accepted for years that one can see a red fire-brigade vehicle a long way off without its having to resort to the clanging of bells, and can immediately give it the right of way as one is obliged to do. I hope this is not a political type of decision based on the Minister's abhorrence of the colour red. If the Minister feels that it will be more pleasing to have a white vehicle than a red one it may be all right except that it has been traditional, as far as I can remember, for fire engines to be red. I hope there is no provision in the Bill to take from fire brigade boards this right of choice.

Mr. Ramsden: I do not think so. The longer you like red the longer we will remain in office.

Mr. DUGGAN: That type of interjection is the very reason I made the point. Some members opposite become so obsessed with their complex about this sort of thing that they get to the point of being silly. The colour red for fire engines was accepted long before we came to office. The colour has been standardised in every State of the

Commonwealth with Liberal Governments and Labour Governments over the years, yet the hon. member makes such an interjection. If the hon. member's only claim to remaining in office is the continual use of the red smear to prevent the Labour Party from assuming office, he is doing a disservice to democracy.

Apparently provision is being made for a common superannuation fund for fire brigade employees. I am not quite clear from the Minister's observations whether that is so. I understand that provision is being made for a compulsory superannuation scheme and presumably it is something along the lines of the local government superannuation scheme in that if an officer is transferred from one area to another his rights are protected. I think that is desirable. Fire brigade work is more specialist in character than most other types of work. A person who is efficient in fire fighting probably would be less fitted to enter other callings than most people in industry. It takes a long time to learn all aspects of fire fighting. There are several developments, particularly in the bigger cities, where instruction tends to go further because of the various problems associated with protecting property. High-density building, water pressures and all sorts of problems have to be considered in the larger cities. Indeed it has become quite a science for fire brigade officers to understand everything associated with providing an efficient and effective service in the community. So I hope nothing will be done to bring to an end the free interchange of officers between one area and another.

I note from the Minister's observations that there is provision in the setting up of the council for it to recommend the dissolution of fire brigade boards, I do not know what circumstances are envisaged that would justify such a power being exercised by this body. It could become very much a dictatorial power. If it is intended to staff this body with a very small group of men with sweeping inspectorial powers and certain executive powers to make recommendations to the Minister—it will have the ear of the Minister, and because it is a creation of the Minister obviously its recommendations will find a sympathetic ear—it could become an autocratic body. It should concern itself primarily with the task of co-ordinating and standardising, and generally providing facilities for the training of firemen and fire officers.

I do not know whether any provision is made in the Bill for a central training school to enable some standardisation of instruction. That is something that could well be given attention. I am sure it will because it is important to have a very high standard of efficiency in fire brigade officers. I do not know what the position is in other parts of the State, but I presume it has followed very much along the lines of what has been the practice for a number of years in Toowoomba

where there are a certain number of permanent men and a certain number of volunteers who are trained. They come out on call and attend any major fires. That has been superseded to some extent in the larger centres but in the smaller centres a similar practice still prevails. It is desirable that there should be some standard practice. No doubt that is happening. As I say, I do not speak with any authority on that matter.

Qualification for promotion is another factor that should be well considered in a Bill of this kind. At times some difficulty is experienced by people who apply for jobs in establishing that they have the required qualifications. It may be that the members of a board who have particular ideas may feel that persons who have trained in a certain centre are unsuited for another centre. Consequently a very promising officer may have difficulty in establishing his claim for promotion to some other centre of the State. I hope the Minister can give us some advice on that point.

The Minister also mentioned in the introductory stage that attempts are being made to co-operate with the New South Wales authorities in getting co-ordinated action in the case of fires in the border area. I think there is some need for co-ordination on fires in Queensland between the various fire brigade areas. Recently there was a major blaze in Sydney, when the Mobil Oil installations caught fire. Brigades went from all over Sydney to fight the fire and were very successful in minimising the damage. I understand that there have been problems in the past because fire brigade boards in certain areas have been unwilling to go over the border. I presume that some action will be taken to iron out a uniform policy on this matter.

Mr. Dewar: That will be a job for the State Fire Services Council.

Mr. DUGGAN: Recently there has been a great deal of unfortunate criticism and wrangling between the fire brigade authorities and the city council about the site for a new fire brigade station somewhere in the Roma Street area. The chairman of the board has made some very caustic comments about an alleged lack of co-operation on the part of the city council in making a site available. I think most people will view with very serious disquiet the fact that apparently there is a gap in fire protection defences in Brisbane because of the brigade's inability to get a site in that section of the city. I am not criticising or belittling anyone in particular at the moment because I do not know enough about the facts, and I do not want it to become the plaything of politics merely because the brigade has expressed some concern about the council's lack of co-operation, a statement which I will not accept until it is proved. In any case, I hope political pressure is not exercised so that when areas are resumed the council is not prepared to authorise their use for fire

brigade purposes. I am referring now specifically to Hardgrave Park. I do not think there should be any surrendering of parklands in the city for this purpose. Instrumentalities should be given every encouragement to create parklands. Even in our own time as the Government we resumed parklands occasionally. During the time that I was Minister for Transport, whenever there was an occasion—and there were some occasions, such as at the Normanby—when it became necessary to take over some portion of a park for railway duplication purposes, I was always very reluctant to do so. Before I went to Cabinet I said that it would be done only if Cabinet agreed to the proposal. Happily, Cabinet did not agree. Obviously, with railway extensions the land must be adjacent to the existing track, unlike when land is resumed for road purposes. I was prepared to purchase a greater area of land than the area to be resumed, and to give it to the council in exchange.

I believe that at any time when land is to be excised from parklands the proposal should be given the gravest consideration even though Brisbane has very good parkland areas, more than most other cities.

Mr. Hughes: Without going for parklands, the brigade has power of resumption.

Mr. DUGGAN: There must be land available. If the fire brigade is lacking statutory power to acquire land on fair terms the Government should provide the power on a proper basis. The fire brigade wants 40,000 square feet for its second fire brigade building in the city area. Surely there is property available. It is entitled to a site with easy access to the William Jolly Bridge and other places. It is desirable for the brigade to be strategically situated in order to have quick movement to the maximum area of the city.

If there are difficulties in this matter I hope the Government will not exercise its authority to take parkland from the council and give it to the fire brigade board but that it will clothe the board—if it has not already the power—with power to acquire lands on exactly the same basis as is provided for in the Public Works Land Resumption Act in the case of land for public usage.

I hope this matter can be brought to finality. If it has been going on for 11 years, that is too long, whoever is responsible. At the moment I repeat that I am not blaming any particular person. Whoever is responsible, the delay has been too prolonged. It is not right that a city the size of Brisbane should be denied full and effective fire protection because of inability on the part of those responsible to agree on a proposed site.

A quick examination of the Minister's introductory speech seems to indicate that there is justification for many of the proposals, although I think it will be conceded

that some matters will need to be watched carefully. It will be interesting to ascertain the reaction of the country fire brigade boards to the proposal. I think that there will be strong resistance to any undue interference by the central body. It is essential to have co-ordination and standardisation in every practice, and it should be disseminated throughout the State. Nobody could argue or cavil at the taking of some steps in that direction. We should minimise interference with those boards unless it can be shown that some are inefficient or inadequate. If that is the case, it is up to the Minister to inform hon. members of the Committee what those deficiencies are. If they are as great and as grave as he thinks they are we will be prepared to listen to his submissions on the taking of action to remove from certain people the authority they now exercise or to curtail it. The power to recommend the dissolution of boards, and similar powers which apparently are contained in the Bill, are rather drastic.

I should like some indication from the Minister as to the provisions, if any, for an appeal against dismissal or disciplinary action resulting, for instance, in down-grading. Quite often when a person has these powers and has his own ideas, as the appointee to this job will have, other persons can become victims of his attitude. Mr. Healy was mentioned at one time as a possible appointee. The job might not be sufficiently important for a man with his qualifications. He is recognised as an outstanding fire brigade officer.

Mr. Dewar: The job will be classified higher than any at present. No consideration has been given to personnel. The job will be advertised throughout Australia.

Mr. DUGGAN: If the appointment calls for qualifications higher than those already held, there could be an up-grading. If the present qualifications entitle Mr. Healy to a certain salary, and a higher qualification is sought—and it is obvious that the Minister will want the best man—a higher salary will have to be offered to attract an application from a man of his calibre. He might not necessarily be the appointee, but it might attract an application from him.

It has been said that Mr. Healy has definite and forthright views on certain matters, and he may be correct in holding those views. I am not criticising him at all; I merely point out that it has been suggested to me on previous occasions that if a person, whether Mr. Healy or somebody else, has definite ideas about things, and the opinions of another person run quite contrary to his point of view, the second person could be prejudiced in some way because of the power that this Bill will give. I think in justice to everybody concerned, it would be desirable to have some explanation as to how extensive those powers are and of the provisions covering appeals against dismissal or down-grading.

One of the great problems confronting fire brigades everywhere is lack of water pressure. At most fires where the brigade is unsuccessful, it is because of inadequate pressure. Water supply is primarily the responsibility of the local authority. It costs a tremendous amount to reticulate water, and usually the further it is spread out the greater the effect on the water pressure. That is one of the great problems confronting fire brigades when fighting fires. Under this proposal the State Fire Services Council will have an opportunity of conferring with local authorities to see whether some effective steps can be taken in this regard.

The skyline of Brisbane is changing considerably as new buildings are constructed. The one to be erected in Eagle Street might reach 40 or even 50 storeys if sufficient funds are available. These new buildings pose fire-protection problems. Fire brigades often attempt to influence authorities who grant approval for the construction of multiple-storey buildings on the ground that facilities for fighting fires in them are not available. This type of building can very easily make fire-fighting equipment obsolete. I think that in Sydney there has been an insistence upon the inclusion of fire-protection measures in the designs of buildings in excess of a certain height. It has been suggested that if there were a fire on the 25th floor of a building recently completed in Sydney, people on the 27th and 23rd floors would be quite unaffected by it.

Mr. Hughes: There was a fire in Gipps Street some time ago in which the flames went down the lift well. What would be the value of such protection in that case?

Mr. DUGGAN: I am not speaking as an expert in these matters. Equipment does become obsolete if local authorities grant approval for the construction of buildings parts of which are beyond the reach of the equipment available to the fire brigade. I suppose that in many instances there is a reluctance to discard and replace equipment for this reason. There will be some problems in the transition period.

(Time expired.)

Mr. AIKENS (Townsville South) (11.32 a.m.): I am going to make a serious suggestion to the Minister who introduced this Bill. It is that the second reading be delayed till the Bill has been sent to every fire brigade in the State and all members of fire brigade boards and those employed by them have had an opportunity to consider it. I know that in Townsville and other places in North Queensland this measure is viewed with considerable apprehension. The fear is that this will be another instance in which the powers of local boards and the rights and privileges of people employed by them will be whittled away, just as the powers, rights and privileges of other instrumentalities and their employees have been taken away by regulations issued under other Acts.

If I may digress a little, we have seen what has happened to electric authorities throughout Queensland. At one time they were completely autonomous. They received their powers, authority and revenue from those whom they served. The people controlled them, and they functioned in the interests of the people. Today every electric authority in the State is controlled by a bunch of puppets who dance at the end of strings pulled by the Commissioner for Electricity Supply. So it is with every public instrumentality that has been brought under the so-called benevolent protection of laws passed by this Parliament.

The main reason for the apprehension felt by firemen in country areas is the fear that by the passage of this Bill the so-called advisory and co-ordinating capacity of the State Fire Services Council will be either enlarged by regulations issued under the Act, or will later be enlarged by amendments to the Act to give to this benevolent and paternal council that the Act proposes to set up tyrannical and dictatorial power over every fire brigade board in the State. I am being brutally frank in my remarks on this measure. That is what firemen in the country areas of Queensland fear, and it is what I, too, fear. They fear, above all things, that the right to promote and appoint firemen to positions anywhere in the State, which is at present held by local boards, will be removed. At present a man is either promoted in his own particular board area or transferred to another board area on promotion.

Mr. Dewar: There is no such thing as a transfer from one board area to another.

Mr. AIKENS: What I mean by "transfer" is that they can apply for a position in another board area, and whether or not they get that position—

Mr. Ramsden interjected.

Mr. AIKENS: For goodness sake be quiet and concentrate your energies, if any, on a tunnel under the river.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. AIKENS: This is a problem that seriously affects firemen in all country areas of Queensland.

Mr. Ramsden: Why don't you get your facts straight?

Mr. Dewar: You have my assurance that that is not affected in any way.

Mr. AIKENS: That is an assurance that I have been given over the years by many Ministers who have introduced legislation in this Chamber. They have said, "It is not the purpose of this particular piece of legislation to take complete control of country instrumentalities." But we have seen, and learnt from bitter experience, that sooner or later either the Act is amended or regulations are issued after the amending Bill goes

through Parliament to give a central authority the right to exercise such administrative powers.

I was speaking of transfers when the hon. member for Merthyr made his uncouth and uncultivated interjection. A fireman employed by one fire brigade board has a right to apply for a vacant position in an area controlled by another fire brigade board, and if he has the qualifications and capabilities required, it is quite likely that he will be appointed to the particular position, whether as a first-class fireman, deputy superintendent, or superintendent. The firemen fear—and I fear with them—that the Act will be enlarged, either by amendment or by regulation, to give a central authority in Brisbane the right to determine not only who shall be promoted in a particular board area but also who shall be appointed to a vacancy in any board area. They fear—I am speaking bluntly, frankly, and brutally, on this matter—that the power of selection for promotion and appointment will be vested in the hands of Mr. Healy, who, of course, is the superintendent of the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board.

Mr. Hughes: He is very efficient.

Mr. AIKENS: He may be a very efficient officer and a very efficient fireman—I have nothing derogatory to say about him in that respect—but it is apparent to anyone who knows Mr. Healy or has read reports of his remarks and what he has done that he regards every fireman who did not train under him in Brisbane, and who is not persona grata with him, as a country bumpkin or an oaf. The only people who will be promoted and appointed to positions of authority in country areas are those who trained under him and are persona grata with him. If the Minister does not know, I am telling him that that is the fear of every country fireman in Queensland. I believe that the Leader of the Opposition touched on this matter, but I am putting the position much more bluntly than he did. We—when I say “we”, I mean all the people in Queensland outside Brisbane—fear the centralised and tyrannical control of the fire brigade boards outside Brisbane by Mr. Healy.

It is all very well for the Minister to say that such a move is not envisaged in the Bill. I repeat: I have heard such statements from Ministers over the years, but sooner or later the power and authority of people in country areas have been whittled away and, finally, control has been centralised in Brisbane. That is why I ask the Minister to delay the second reading of the Bill so that copies of the Bill may be sent to country areas. I hope that every member of Parliament, irrespective of his political complexion, who represents a country area will send a copy of the Bill not to the members of the fire brigade board in the area that he represents but to a representative of the firemen in that area and ask the firemen to let him have their conclusions so that he

can air them at the second-reading stage. Then we will get some idea of what the firemen of Queensland, outside of Brisbane, think of this measure.

Mr. Thackeray: If firemen gave their views and it was stated here that they came from Rockhampton, the firemen would be sacked.

Mr. AIKENS: Does the hon. member mean that all the firemen in Rockhampton would be sacked?

Mr. Thackeray: Yes.

Mr. AIKENS: I doubt that. I am going to send a copy of this Bill to the firemen who are employed by the Townsville Fire Brigade Board and I am confident that they will either write to me or see me when I go home for the week-end and tell me what they think of the provisions in the Bill. Then, at the second-reading stage, if they are not satisfied with any particular provision I shall tell the House what they say. There will be no need to mention their names.

Mr. Thackeray: I know of a case in Rockhampton where they wanted to sack a fireman because he wore a white shirt to work.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member for Rockhampton North will have an opportunity later to speak.

Mr. Ramsden interjected.

Mr. AIKENS: The hon. member for Rockhampton North, in one of his lucid moments, is trying to be helpful, unlike the hon. member for Merthyr, who is a destructive critic and, what is more, a vicious political bigot. Objection to fire engines being painted red is certainly puerile—in fact, it is fantastically juvenile—and is just the sort of interjection we would expect from the hon. member for Merthyr. It does not matter to me whether they are painted red, white, blue, or yellow, but the fact is that they have been painted red for donkey's years and everyone recognises them when they are painted red. I suppose he would suggest that because London's double-decker buses are painted red the authority controlling them is a socialist authority, or something like that.

Mr. Ramsden interjected.

Mr. AIKENS: That is an amazing interjection from the hon. member for Merthyr. I do not want to introduce this particular subject again but I can remember him, with his spindly shanks, getting off the boat at Picnic Bay in his pink shorts.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! I ask the hon. member to confine his remarks to the Bill.

Mr. AIKENS: Thank you, Mr. Hooper. I accept your ruling but I could not resist saying that. That is as close to red as he was prepared to go—they were a hideous pink, too.

I want to pay a tribute to the members of the fire brigade board in Townsville. Down through the years we have had a particularly good fire brigade institution in that town. For many years it was controlled by the late George Garven, and the present superintendent has followed what is known as the Garven tradition. The people of Townsville are very proud of their fire brigade board and their firemen and I should not like to see, as a result of this measure—or any other—the firemen of Townsville or any other area in Queensland persecuted and victimised simply because they are employed in the country areas of this State.

I have very sentimental memories of the fire brigade board because when I came from Cloncurry in 1930—transferred to Townsville by the Moore Government as punishment for my activities on behalf of the Australian Labour Party—I joined the famous Townsville Apollo Choir and the Townsville Fire Brigade Board of that day allowed us to practice in a room at the fire brigade station. It was hot, but it was the only room we could get and we appreciated their gesture in that regard.

We all know, of course, that many foolish motorists will not pull out of the way or pull off the road when they hear the siren of an ambulance car or a fire brigade vehicle. If their own houses were on fire, or even if the grass in their yards was on fire, they would want the engine to get there as quickly as possible; but one can see traffic on the roads in Townsville—and I know people act similarly in other cities—with the fire engine siren screaming behind cars but they just will not pull out of the way to let the engine get past.

Mr. Windsor: Sometimes it is a bit difficult to hear.

Mr. AIKENS: It is a bit difficult to hear for anyone who does not keep his ears clean. I live at Hermit Park and I can hear the fire engine at North Ward, 3½ miles away. I suppose even if a man drove a noisy car—and very few members other than the hon. member for Ithaca can afford to buy anything else—he would have no trouble in hearing a fire brigade engine. I understand that in those circumstances there is a provision in the traffic laws allowing a fire brigade engine to travel on the right-hand side of the road. A fire brigade engine is not strictly confined to the traffic laws when it is going to a fire.

I really think that that is a very sound provision as long as it is not abused by the man driving the fire engine. This happens only on very rare occasions. I have never known it to occur in Townsville but some

time ago in Brisbane a man who was driving a fire engine—not to a fire—so far transgressed the traffic laws that he knocked down and killed an unfortunate person. No action was taken against him. I raised the matter in the Chamber and asked why the drivers of fire brigade engines should be exempt from the provisions of the Criminal Code. It created quite a sensation at the time. I was attacked by members of the fire brigade in Brisbane. I stand on what I said then. While the man driving a fire engine is at liberty to take risks in order to get to a fire as quickly as possible, he is not at liberty to endanger the lives of innocent people to get to a fire, any more than was a doctor we had in Townsville some years ago. He thought he had the right to drive at any speed and in any manner he liked in order to get to a patient. I soon let him know that he had no right to endanger the life of one person on the off-chance that he might save the life of another.

Mr. Smith: There is a big difference between fire engines going to fires and doctors and ambulances. Fire engines are going to deal with what threatens the lives of a number of people; ambulances and doctors, on the other hand, are going to attend to one or, at the most, a few people.

Mr. AIKENS: The hon. member for Windsor puts up a typical legal quibble. As a matter of fact I answered that point just before he made his interjection, but he was not listening. No-one has the right to endanger the life of one person on the off-chance that he might save the life of another. To me the life of everybody is sacrosanct, even if it is not to the hon. member for Windsor. While I say that the driver of a fire engine has the right to take reasonable risks—even to drive on the right hand side of the road—to get to a fire as quickly as possible, he has no right to take risks to such an extent that he may endanger the life of an innocent person. It was done here in Brisbane. I attacked it then and I attack it now. I was abused then, and I suppose I will be abused now. But that is the way I stand, and that is what I think about the matter.

Mr. Smith: You take a lone stand.

Mr. AIKENS: I have been standing alone for years. As a matter of fact, it is my proudest boast that in my early years I was taught to stand on my own feet. Unlike the hon. member for Windsor, I do not need somebody else to lean upon. I form my own opinions and express them. I do not accept them ready-made from some dill, as does the hon. member for Windsor.

The CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr. AIKENS: I did not refer to him as a dill. I merely said he accepted opinions from dills. I am proud of the fact that my stand is a lone stand. If I express an opinion and the whole world expresses a

contrary opinion, there is no reason to say that the whole world is right and I am wrong. The opposite might well be the case. Let me say to the hon. member for Windsor that any man who has an opinion and does not express it, like the hon. member for Windsor is using his skull only as a coffin for his dead brain.

I will conclude my speech with another appeal to the Minister. I ask him to delay the second reading of this Bill, not until members of the fire brigade boards have had an opportunity to examine it in detail, but until every fireman in the country areas of this State has had an opportunity to examine it in detail. If there is anything in the Bill that gives firemen in country areas cause for alarm, apprehension, or fear, I am confident that at the Committee stage the Minister will do all he possibly can to remove the cause of that alarm, apprehension, or fear.

Mr. HUGHES (Kurilpa) (11.50 a.m.): This Bill seeks to repeal the "Fire Brigades Acts, 1920 to 1962," and to establish a co-ordinating and supervising authority. It is not before time that such a Bill was introduced to meet the general needs of the community. I served as a member of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Board for a number of years, and I often felt that there were times when the board could not give the required assistance and service to outside boards because each authority seemed to be a law unto itself. They were autonomous boards; each had a certain form and standard of training and carried out its allotted task in the way it saw fit. There were even deficiencies in couplings for hoses, apart from differences in the standard drill and gear for fire-fighting. When other boards were called upon to assist, the most efficient service could not be provided. Apart from that, there are the larger questions relating to overall difficulties, particularly civil defence.

I repeat that the Bill is certainly not before time, but at times it is wise to hasten a little slowly in order to get the best possible measure to meet all needs. No doubt the State Fire Services Council will come into being, and by establishing it we will get tremendous benefits.

The hon. member for Townsville South made a somewhat blistering attack on Mr. George Healy, the Chief Officer of the fire services in Brisbane, and on the hon. member for Merthy, who is most assiduous in his duties as a member of the board. That is the personal view of the hon. member for Townsville South about another person's opinion. He comes into this Chamber as a crystal-gazer, a mind-reader, a fore-seer of future events, but to my knowledge he has never yet been correct. In my estimation, Mr. Healy is a most efficient officer; in fact they had to get him up to Townsville to put out a fire. It was "going well", as they say in the fire brigade. I can understand the need for the proposed council

when such an event as that took place. I ask the hon. member whether it is a fact that, when the Townsville bulk-sugar terminal was afire, the chief officer at Townsville was holidaying at Magnetic Island. Did he come over to the mainland, see the fire "going well", and, because he had paid a return fare on the ferry, hot-foot it down to the ferry and go back to the island at a time when the fire was "going well"?

Mr. Aikens: Let me answer that statement. There were firemen from everywhere. There were firemen from a United States destroyer. Everyone was there. I do not know of the incident to which the hon. member has referred, but Healy came up and said, "You seem to be doing all right; keep on going."

Mr. HUGHES: He went up, all right. A man with his experience was the very man who could get such a fire under control. It was a holocaust. It was an example of what could happen here, in outside areas, and demonstrated the urgency of drafting a Bill to meet community needs. We have problems in the metropolis, particularly because of the higher industry density.

Mr. Aikens: You agree, with Healy, that all firemen are oafs and clots?

Mr. HUGHES: I say that is a figment of the hon. member's imagination.

The CHAIRMAN: Order! The hon. member for Townsville South had an opportunity to make his contribution to the debate. I ask him to let other hon. members make theirs without any further interjection.

Mr. Aikens: I am only trying to help him.

Mr. HUGHES: Mr. Healy can stand up for himself. The fire-brigade service in Brisbane is second to none. If it is run by an oaf, then let us have many more oafs of the same type.

Mr. Davies: It is not better than Maryborough's service.

Mr. HUGHES: The hon. member's pride in Maryborough's service is appreciated. However, we need such a council as is proposed to make a study of existing problems and to undertake the tremendous research needed to standardise methods, training and efficiency in firefighting. Brisbane is faced with many problems, because in this metropolis and port we have a large concentration of industries and problems associated with wharves and oil refinery establishments and storage. We also have many old homes which are tinder dry and fire hazards. The State Fire Services Council will provide what is necessary to cope with these problems now and in the future.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to protective measures in tall buildings. The promoters of Torbreck were held up for some time because of the fire hazard. I mentioned by way of interjection the holocaust in the building of S. A. Best Pty. Ltd. in Gipps

Street, Fortitude Valley. It was supposed to be a safe building of concrete and steel, but the fire spread to all floors through the lift well. In this modern era, with its taller buildings, it is time that a council such as this was formed, with power to insist on certain safety standards. It is beyond the research and the capabilities of general boards, which administer their own areas. Because of a lack of technical knowledge those boards need guidance from a council such as this.

I hate to think what would happen if there was a fire in Queen Street. It would probably be one of the greatest tragedies of our time.

Mr. Aikens: What would wizard Healy do about it?

Mr. HUGHES: I do not know that Mr. Healy could do much, not because of a lack of technical ability or fire-fighting equipment, but because of a lack of water. The local authority—the Brisbane City Council in this case—for many years has been free-wheeling in the spending of money not only in regard to water pressure, but also the size of water mains. I was on the works committee of the Brisbane City Council and know that the water mains in Queen Street would not provide sufficient water to put out a fire in the little house behind the big house in a suburban allotment.

Mr. Bennett: And the C.M.O. would do nothing about it.

Mr. HUGHES: The C.M.O. and Labour councils are both to blame. I am not being political in this matter; I am being factual. Every member of the Chamber should hope and pray that there will not be a fire in Queen Street because the brigade would not have sufficient water pressure to fight it. It is good that such a council will be set up—it is not before time—because many local authorities have been free-wheeling on the provision of water pressure. They spend money on bitumen roads and kerbing and channelling because those things are vote-catchers and are matters of political expediency, but the City Council feels that no-one appreciates that it would be necessary to spend thousands of pounds to provide the required mains pressure to fight fires. This is work that is not seen by the ordinary citizen. Because of this type of thinking, the city could be in danger from an outbreak of fire.

A council such as this—I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that it should not be autocratic; nothing would be more loathsome or odious—should be cloaked with sufficient power not only to test the efficiency of the various boards, but also to recommend to the Minister that local authorities be forced, where necessary, to provide a sufficient head of water to successfully handle any fire.

I now deal with the siting of buildings. There is wrangling with the Brisbane City Council at the moment. That causes frustration. Men who are charged with the responsibility of public office should face facts logically. What counts is not who is right but what is right. If that is to be the guiding principle, responsible men in the local authority and on the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Board should quickly get together and reach agreement. If, through lack of a proper understanding of the problem by the city council or whoever else may be at fault, hold-ups and frustration are being forced on the board, it is about time the board proceeded on its own and used the powers that it already possesses to carry out resumptions necessary to obtain suitable sites.

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that there should be no alienation of park land. There are within the inner-city area, where fire stations are needed to cope with industrial development, old homes that could well be resumed and demolished. Their owners would be compensated to an extent quite beyond their imagination in earlier times. Property valuations have increased with the passage of time, and those whose properties were resumed would be fairly well looked after. Let the fire brigade board, on a basis of fair resumption, obtain sites that are, although perhaps not ideal, at least the most suitable.

The planning of buildings has then to be considered. As I mentioned, I served as a member of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Board for quite some time. I resigned on a matter of principle. To design a station the board re-engaged architects whose services had previously been dispensed with. I felt that if it had been previously considered that they could not do the job satisfactorily, they should not have been engaged later to carry out a larger job.

I felt that here was an opportunity for fire brigade boards and other semi-public bodies to submit their requirements to open competition. I believe that in this work young architects in the community should be given an opportunity to display their skills, instead of restricting it to a little coterie of architects who were given all the large jobs. So far as I am concerned, this principle could well be applied by the State Government. Let the young fellow be given an opportunity to show his talents.

The Bill provides that tenders have to be called for work and goods exceeding a value of £250. In my opinion, that would include architect's fees involved in the designing of a building and the supervision of its construction. I hope the proposed council sees fit, in its wisdom, to give an opportunity to young architects to show what they can do. The board may also reap the benefit of a more economic type of construction. After all, the architect employed must of necessity meet the requirements of the board and the chief officer, because they know what they want.

It is on such suggestions and advice that the architect must design the building. I hope that in future tenders will be called for this work. This will result in competition for the job.

The proposed council should not interfere in the administration of the board any more than is absolutely necessary. Those serving on boards are dedicated people performing a public service. They receive no payment for their services. I think that they are entitled to it because many of them, particularly in country areas, serve at some expense to themselves. They are men of high standing in their communities and are prepared to devote much of their time to carrying out a public service. For this, I believe that they deserve considerable gratitude. Boards carry out their administrative duties in a very sincere manner, and I do not believe that they should be interfered with unnecessarily by any council set up under the Bill. There may be at times some necessity for the Minister, on the advice of the Council, to intercede when a board may be deadlocked on a matter of principle. In fact, when the question of the Kemp Place fire station, to which I referred earlier, was under discussion, both the Minister and I were members of the board, and I think it is fair to say that there was a division of opinion as to how the fire station should be built. Some members wanted it built by competitive tender; other members wanted to employ the firm of architects that had already been sacked by the board. When a division of opinion occurs on such a vital question as that, which involves the outlay of large sums of money and co-operation with neighbouring boards, I believe that the proposed council should, by giving advice to the Minister, have over-riding power to break a deadlock.

A piece of paper has been handed to me, on which this verse appears—

“Old Clive Hughes is a fireman bold,
because he puts out fires.

He went to a fire the other night,
because he puts out fires.

The flames, they caught some dynamite,
And where Clive went, we don't know quite;

But wherever he is, he'll be all right,
because he puts out fires.”

It appears that an hon. member in our midst has a sense of humour and can turn a good phrase. No doubt, I could expect to have his company. I should say that the board discharges very efficiently its responsibility for putting out fires.

In his introductory speech, the Minister mentioned the superannuation scheme and said that it is obligatory on the men to join. I think that is a very good idea. I know how much work the Minister did personally to give firemen an opportunity of participating in a superannuation scheme. Such schemes are no longer a privilege, and I think they should be available wherever

people sell their labour so that they can provide for their own future and for the future of their wives and families. The Minister is to be commended for his work in this connection.

I think it is desirable that joining should be obligatory, but I wonder to what extent a member will lose financially if he goes from Brisbane to another board area. I do not believe there will be an obligation on all boards to have a superannuation scheme.

Mr. Dewar: Yes. They have a right to come in as at 1 April or 1 October. Every board employing firemen has now joined, and 97 per cent. of their employees have joined the scheme.

Mr. HUGHES: I am very glad to hear it. Is the Minister saying that if a fire brigade employee goes to another board area on promotion or appointment, his rights are preserved and continued?

Mr. Dewar: Yes.

Mr. HUGHES: That gives wonderful protection. I only wish similar protection was available to employees of the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade. Perhaps the Minister for Health might consider providing it in the near future.

Mr. Davies: What colour should the fire engines be painted?

Mr. HUGHES: It does not matter what colour they are, as long as they get to the fire and do their job. They can be red, white, black, blue, or brindle, as far as I am concerned; it is their efficiency that counts.

Fires on uninsured property have been a vexed question for years, and many people have suffered at the hands of fire brigades. As a matter of fact, I myself have suffered; I have had to pay a bill in this connection. A fire might commence on someone's property and spread to vacant land owned by an absentee owner. If the fire brigade is called and reaches the fire when it is on the property owned by the absentee owner, that person receives a bill from the fire brigade. Property of that type cannot be insured, and many people have received bills in circumstances similar to those that I have outlined. At last we see evidence of wisdom in this attempt to solve the problem, because the Bill provides that where a fire results from an act of vandalism or an act of God, the innocent absentee landholder, who does not even know that a fire has occurred, will not be saddled with the bill. Why should he be? He is unable to insure his property, and the Government and the local authority each contribute one-seventh of the cost of maintaining the fire brigade. Surely he should receive protection in return for the taxes and rates that he pays.

Mr. Bennett: Why shouldn't the insurance companies cover the loss?

Mr. HUGHES: That is another argument. The hon. member has the right to speak if he wishes to, but I felt that in the case I mentioned the fire brigade board acted out of step with propriety in charging for its services in regard to some of these lands. As the matter stands now, where an owner might be liable the board may, at its discretion, charge the owner but if it does charge an absent owner of vacant land for fighting a fire on that land it has to prove that the owner is liable. That is fair and British justice.

I have spoken at some length on the matter of water pressure, and I do not know that I need say any more.

To bring to a conclusion some of the aspects of the matter I have outlined, the fire inspector will report to the Minister on efficiency and, I presume, on training and equipment and all other matters affecting the working of the brigade. However, will the Minister be able to enforce an order on these boards and will there be some way of obtaining standardisation in the training methods and views of various boards? A member of the civil defence organisations will be represented on the proposed council, so I presume there will be some uniformity, through which will come efficiency. I hope the Minister will recommend in the not far distant future some means of standardising equipment and methods, and form of training.

I served for many years, and still serve, on the ambulance committee, as do several of my colleagues on this side of the Chamber. We have at all times stressed to drivers that they must obey the rules of the road and drive with efficiency, safety and courtesy. I could not always say the same thing about the drivers of fire engines. I have seen these engines charging along like express trains and I am sure if the drivers could get any more speed out of them, they would. I do not know whether they become red devils when they get behind the wheel of a fire engine, but I have seen them blatantly breaking the traffic laws. I sometimes wonder whether it is necessary. When a fire engine goes from an outside station to a fire another engine from the city replaces it and I do not think there is any necessity for them to travel hell for leather regardless of the safety of human beings on the roads. I have seen these bell-ringing red devils breaking the traffic laws and I think they should be made to observe them.

Mr. Bennett: Why are you attacking the firemen?

Mr. HUGHES: I am attacking the system, not the individual. I am attacking the system that presently prevails in this State.

Mr. Bennett: You are accusing them of being reckless drivers.

Mr. HUGHES: What are they? You cannot replace a life or mend broken bones easily. I can recall instances in this city

of people being killed as a result of the reckless driving of fire engines. Surely when a fire engine is going from the central station to relieve in an outside area there is no necessity for this wanton disregard of safety.

Mr. Davies interjected.

Mr. HUGHES: On many occasions. As a member of the ambulance committee I cannot acknowledge that I am over-generous to them. One cannot bring back a life and I cannot see that a fire will get so much out of hand in a couple of seconds or minutes that it would warrant the possibility of killing innocent citizens.

Mr. Smith: I say to you what I said to the hon. member for Townsville South: a fire brigade is in a different position from an ambulance car or a doctor.

Mr. HUGHES: It may be in a different position. It depends on their own assessment of the position, but a fire engine can still be a lethal weapon in the hands of a reckless driver.

(Time expired.)

Mr. LLOYD (Kedron) (12.15 p.m.): For the guidance of the hon. member for Kurilpa I will point out why fire engines are red. Fire engines are always "rushin'" and Russians are "red". That is why fire engines are red. Speaking seriously, I think it is a very distinctive colour and no doubt it has been adopted as the standard throughout Australia because people can readily see and recognise it.

The creation of the State Fire Services Council is a matter that I think should be treated on its merits as non-political. In 1962 I referred to the inadequate fire protection in a great number of institutional buildings, such as schools, aged people's homes, and hospitals. I said then, and repeat now, that in most of those institutions fire precautions and protective measures are inadequate, and they face a very grave danger. This has been going on for many years. A private fire engineer, qualified in England and Melbourne, made an investigation and gave a full report on the matter. I warned the Government at the time that if it allowed this inadequate fire protection to continue in so many old homes which had been converted for profit to house old people in Brisbane, there would be a very serious fire before very long. At that time the Minister in charge, the late Dr. Noble, virtually ignored my statement, saying that he had no control over the matter, that it was one for the Brisbane City Council. Within a short space of time there was a tragic fire in a home for the aged at New Farm, and several people were burnt to death. Immediately following that, but a little late, the Brisbane City Council decided to license all these homes, despite the fact that they were operated mainly on Commonwealth Government finance and licensed by the Commonwealth Government health authorities.

What was done does not go far enough. These old homes are still continuing with inadequate fire protection. Many old homes in Brisbane are being converted for the housing of aged people because of the Commonwealth subsidy that is granted for that purpose. They are housing sick and aged people who are unable to help themselves. There is still a very grave danger of fire tragedy in these homes. In 1962 I asked that a fire engineer be appointed.

If the proposed council is to have co-ordinating and supervisory authority over the whole of Queensland I am in favour of it as long as it does not endanger the autonomy of local fire brigade boards. The Leader of the Opposition asked the Minister questions about a number of matters concerning the organisation of this proposed council, which will have to be examined very closely. Every local authority in Queensland has a different set of regulations covering fire precautions. Brisbane has a certain set of fire-protection measures, another local authority has a different set, and so on throughout every local authority area in the State. It is absolutely impossible to give adequate protection to all without a standardised set of fire-protection measures by which all local authorities must abide and with which all building authorities must comply.

Only recently there was a very serious oil installation fire in Sydney, but at the present time at the oil terminal at Pinkenba not one permanent night-watchman is employed. The Metropolitan Security Service, which patrols Brisbane, is the only body that does any fire-watching in that area. Each of the oil terminals should have a night-watchman permanently employed to safeguard not only the interests of those owning the oil but the interests of all people living in that area. A very serious conflagration could occur there at any time. In schools, aged people's homes, and often in hospitals, fire precautions are inadequate. Mr. Healy had quite an argument recently with the Government about the lack of fire precautions in the new building being constructed for the Department of Health in George Street. He is a qualified man but he has a large number of administrative duties to perform. He has an extremely arduous job.

If the proposed council can insist upon standardisation of fire regulations throughout Queensland and if the people appointed to it are fully-qualified fire engineers, we may get some results in protection for the public.

In this nuclear age, with its inherent dangers, all buildings must have definite protection against fire. It is rather strange that we do not get more assistance from the insurance companies than the precepts they pay. It is even stranger that, very often, the dangers that exist are ignored by the Press. The installation of normal fire-protective measures is insisted upon in many parts of the world, but not here. The Press may choose to ignore the danger because

of the fear of the losing of subscribers and, for that reason, give too little publicity to this matter.

This very serious problem cannot be adequately examined by me or any other person who is not a qualified fire engineer. However, when we are approached by qualified people and informed on substantial grounds that the dangers exist, we must pay heed to their advice. We must remember that special dangers apply to buildings constructed of concrete; they present a very serious fire risk. Again I do not know a great deal about the subject, but I understand that in the case of a very high building a fire can cause intense heat in certain parts of it and can cause death by suffocation in other parts of it. With the changes in architecture and the development of nuclear weapons throughout the world, these matters should be very carefully examined.

If it is the duty of the proposed council to consider all these matters, and if it is its responsibility to supervise the construction of buildings and see that precautions are taken to minimise fire hazards, it will be doing good work. However, if its sole responsibility is to interfere with the administration of the local fire brigade boards it can only do harm.

These matters could have been considered by the Government several years ago. It may be that it is only in the last few years that they have been brought to the Government's notice, but up to the present the Government has ignored them. I hope that on this occasion there will not be the same lack of consideration given to them.

In the city area of Brisbane, all new large buildings must be built of fire-resistant material. However, that protection is not compulsory in other local authority areas. There is therefore a definite need for a co-ordinating body throughout the State to insist upon basic regulations, which may be altered to meet requirements in various parts of Queensland. Basically, there must be standardised regulations covering all fire brigades.

I repeat that this matter has been before the Government for a number of years, but up to the present it has been ignored. I should like a full explanation from the Minister as to the powers that will vest in the proposed council. If qualified State fire engineers are to be appointed in various parts of Queensland, they will do a good job. However, in the past there has been little concentration on training fire engineers. There is some provision for it in Victoria, and in some overseas countries there is a university course for fire engineers. It has been realised in countries closer to the probable areas of conflict that this should happen. It is about time that we in Queensland came to the same realisation and gave aged as well as young people in the community adequate protection from fire. We have been fortunate in the past. I do not think we can rely on being so fortunate

in the future. It was most unfortunate that it took the tragedy at New Farm in 1962 to bring this need to the attention of the Government. I regret that the Minister did not take notice of the statements that were made prior to that time. When houses are converted into homes for the aged, schools for young children, and hospitals, we must ensure that adequate protection is given against all eventualities. If we do not, the people to blame will be those responsible for failing to insist on having adequate fire precautions installed throughout the State.

Mr. RAMSDEN (Merthyr) (12.26 p.m.): I enter the debate because of an interjection from the hon. member for Maryborough about the colour of fire engines. I have no recollection, during the Minister's introductory remarks, or in my own knowledge of what is intended, of the colour of fire engines being mentioned, except in the vivid imagination of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Bennett: What colour do you think they should be?

Mr. RAMSDEN: I think they should stay as they are, if you want my personal opinion; but I am sure that the Committee is not interested in my personal opinion. The only reason I made that apparently silly interjection was that I knew the Leader of the Opposition would bite, and that is what he did.

He expressed the hope that no undue influence would be exerted on the autonomy of local boards by the institution of this new set-up. As a member of the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board, I place on record that I am not the slightest bit concerned that the passing of this legislation will interfere in any way with the autonomy of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Board, or with my right, as a board member, to exercise my own free vote. The assumption that this will set up some dictatorial board does not merit serious consideration.

The Leader of the Opposition raised the question of the dissolution of fire brigade board areas, and wondered under what circumstances that might take place. This probably will come about—the Minister can correct me if I am wrong—only because of the need for some practical or more economic approach. It may not happen, except following the growth of new areas or added development in new industrial areas, which may make a particular board area too big to handle, when one lot of industries would be transferred to another area. That may alter the constituency of a particular board area. I feel that this will come about because of what we in the political world would call a need for redistribution. I cannot imagine any other way in which it would happen.

Mr. Dewar: The same as when a board fails to carry out its duties under the Local Government Act.

Mr. RAMSDEN: The failure of a board to carry out its duty calls for reconstitution of a new board, rather than the disappearance of a board area. I can see no danger or damage in that.

I should like to comment on the statement of the Leader of the Opposition about the caustic remarks of the chairman of the Brisbane board on the Brisbane City Council's failure to grant site approval for what is known, in board circles, as the Roma Street fire station. The Leader of the Opposition spoke of the failure of the board to acquire a site in the Roma Street area. I should like again to place on record, as I did only recently in my speech during the Budget debate, that it is under no circumstances the fault of the board that there is not a fire station at Roma Street. It is completely and utterly the result of the local authority's failure to accede to the board's reasonable requests.

I should like to say at the outset that it is purely fortuitous that there happens to be an Australian Labour Party Council in power, because I can say without any fear of contradiction that, irrespective of the political colour of the local authority, there has never been an attempt to provide any more co-operation than is now being received from the present party in office at the City Hall. This is not a political matter. It seems to me to be a lack of understanding by the local authority of the need to provide protection against fire in the city of Brisbane.

The question of whether the board has power to resume was raised. In fact, the board has power to resume at a fair price.

Mr. Dewar: The Government resumes on its behalf.

Mr. RAMSDEN: That is fair enough. I do not want to split hairs on the matter. If the brigade wants a block of land badly enough, the brigade asks the Government to resume it, and in most cases gets it.

The Leader of the Opposition said there is plenty of land available in this area. If he is so omniscient as to know where all this land is, I am quite sure that every member of the board would deeply appreciate receiving the benefit of his advice. We have looked long and large at this question, and we know that, with the exception of the sites for which we have asked, there is no land available.

For the benefit of hon. members and the Brisbane City Council, land for fire brigade purposes must meet certain requirements. After all, it is not a private home, a boarding house, or a shop that is to be built. What is to be built is a centre from which an efficient fire-fighting unit can operate. For that reason, there are four requirements that must be taken into consideration by the

board in its search for suitable land for the erection of the Roma Street station, or, indeed, any station.

The first consideration is the location of the land. When we ask for land in the general area of Roma Street, we want it in the Roma Street area and not at Milton or somewhere else. We want it in that area so that if a fire breaks out in the city of Brisbane the stations at Kemp Place and Roma Street will be no farther than 2½ minutes' drive away.

Secondly, not only must a site be located where we want it; it must also be suitably located traffic-wise. It is no use buying land or having it given to us if it is on a street or road carrying one-way traffic that will not permit of vehicles turning out to a fire in the opposite direction. Because of the growth of one-way streets in Brisbane caused by an additional 10,000 vehicles using the roads each year, this angle of traffic flow must exercise the minds of board members. This consideration alone was sufficient to prompt the move from Ann Street.

The third point to be considered in the selection of land is that it must be of sufficient area. It is no use offering 32 perches upon which to erect a fire station at Roma Street. In addition to the space required to assemble the number of vehicles that the chief officer and the board decide are necessary, a drill yard is needed, because physical fitness is part and parcel of the training of firemen and exercising takes place every day in the drill yard.

Mr. Bennett: Do you think the station at Kemp Place has been a success?

Mr. RAMSDEN: It will be a success when it can be worked in conjunction with a station at Roma Street. Without the Roma Street station, it will not be a success. The board knew that in the first place. The whole plan was conceived and approved by the Government many years ago on the basis that there would be two city fire stations. The chief officer has estimated that with the operation of Kemp place on the one hand, and Roma Street on the other, no fire in the city of Brisbane would be more than 2½ minutes away from a fire station.

Mr. Bromley: I will correct you—3½ minutes.

Mr. RAMSDEN: The hon. member can correct me if he wants to. This is a point to be considered.

The third point is this: not only do we want space for a fire station but we are hopeful also that we will have enough land to set up the proto centre on the same site. Again, this will enable the best and most economical use to be made of the land, both administratively and financially.

Finally, the fourth concept that we have in mind relates to the economics of the plan. The Leader of the Opposition said that the

chairman of the board spoke caustically of the Brisbane City Council. In my opinion, he was a bit too gentlemanly and did not speak caustically enough. I assure the Leader of the Opposition that if I had been chairman of the board, I should have been far more caustic much earlier in the piece.

The choice that we made originally is still our choice—that is, the corner of the Roma Street market site from which the weigh-bridge is to be removed—and when the board saw the Lord Mayor and the Town Planning Committee in deputation and asked for that site, the Lord Mayor was quite blunt and said, "No, I will not give you site approval there." When we said "Why?" the only reason he could conjure up was, "Because it will interfere with and spoil my city beautification plan." He said, "If you like to go down the road a couple of blocks on the opposite side of Roma Street there is a block of land that I know is for sale. Have a look at it. If it suits your purpose, I will give you site approval for it." As I said during the Budget debate, why a fire station on the north side of the road would spoil his beautification plans and one on the south side of the road would not, I do not know. Nobody has explained why.

The board looked at the site for which the Lord Mayor was prepared to give site approval, but two blocks were necessary for its purpose. The board's agents asked the price, which was £300,000, and an architect estimated that it would cost another £10,000 to raze to the ground the multi-storey buildings on it. In all, it would have cost £310,000 to put up a building that the board estimates will cost no more than £100,000. I ask you, Mr. Hooper: would the people of Brisbane be happy with the mentality of a board that allowed such a situation to exist? I think the chairman of the board was justified in making caustic remarks. I do not care whether a Labour alderman or a C.M.O. alderman—Lord Mayor Jones, Lord Mayor Groom, or anybody else—is in office. This fight has gone on for years and it is time it stopped. It is a matter of plain common sense, and the board is empowered by the Fire Brigades Act to act for the protection of the city of Brisbane from fires.

I hope the State Fire Services Council that the Government proposes to set up under the Bill will be a body to which fire brigade boards can appeal, if necessary, for added strength in dealing with recalcitrant city councils or other local authorities. I say quite unashamedly that the Government ought to give serious consideration to the interests of the people of Brisbane and, having in mind the fire-fighting services of the city, tell the Lord Mayor that unless he takes a responsible view and agrees to help the board to find a site that will enable it to carry out its obligations under the Act, the Government will have no alternative but to give some consideration to passing an enabling Bill to allow the board to build without city council site approval.

Mr. Hughes: He is holding the city to ransom.

Mr. RAMSDEN: Of course he is. I say again today, as I said in the Budget debate, that I am amazed that the Government of Queensland, the Government of a sovereign State, can set aside by Order in Council a block of land for fire-brigade purposes and then be told a deliberate lie by the local authority. I say that because, when I asked the Minister a question as to when site approval would be given, he gave an assurance from the City Hall that approval would be given the next day. We hear talk about Profumo! This is exactly the same thing; the Minister told this House a lie. He himself was not telling a lie, but the advice he was given was a lie.

Mr. Davies: Shocking!

Mr. RAMSDEN: It is shocking. The Government was prepared to accept that and to let the Lord Mayor say, "You can give the board whatever land you like—I could not care less—but I am damned if I will let them use it." I wonder just how much pride the Government has, particularly when it allows a situation as ludicrous as that to exist.

Mr. Campbell: It shows how much power the Lord Mayor has.

Mr. RAMSDEN: As the hon. member for Aspley says, it shows how much power the Lord Mayor has.

Having said that and cleared the air about these caustic remarks on the treatment of the board, I place on record that the sentiments I expressed in this Chamber during the Budget debate have been read by members of the board and have been accepted as their general views. They are not merely my personal views.

Mr. Davies: I should like to have it in writing.

Mr. RAMSDEN: I put it in writing; it is in "Hansard".

Mr. Davies: I mean in writing by the board.

Mr. RAMSDEN: The hon. member for Townsville South, who is not here, vented his usual political and unbalanced spleen, entirely divorced from any sense of responsibility, in a vicious and entirely unwarranted attack on George Healy. He spoke about the fears of the Townsville Fire Brigade lest it should come under the control of this alleged monster, this dictator—I do not know what the other words were that the hon. member used in referring to George Healy.

That, of course, is typical of the hon. member for Townsville South. We all know he comes into this Chamber time and time again and makes the most outrageous charges, which I am quite certain he knows are not true. If he does not, he should give some

consideration to the effect his words might have upon unthinking people who do not know him as well as we in this Chamber do. Nowhere at all, either in the Bill or in the Minister's speech, was it ever implied that the chief officer, be he George Healy or anyone else, is to act in any but an advisory capacity to the relevant board in regard to the employment of officers and men. Is that so, Mr. Minister?

Mr. Dewar: Yes, and more so to the council itself.

Mr. RAMSDEN: Quite right. Whatever the Townsville Fire Brigade thinks of George Healy and whatever the hon. member for Townsville South says they think of George Healy, the truth is that the Townsville board and the Townsville brigade were very pleased to ask for George Healy's assistance and that of his senior officers at the time of the recent Townsville sugar terminal fire. And let there be no mistake about the fact that the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Board was asked for him. We did not send him; we had no power to send him. We were asked for him. When the hon. member for Townsville South ventures an opinion as to what the Townsville firemen think of George Healy, it shows that somebody is off the beam. I suppose, as usual, it is the hon. member for Townsville South.

Having dealt with those matters, let me make one or two other comments which I think are pertinent. Instruction in fire control has been mentioned in this debate as one of the reasons for the proposed council. It will co-ordinate the training of firemen throughout the State. I draw attention to the fact that a few weeks ago H. C. Sleigh Pty. Ltd. screened for the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board a film on fire fighting that was produced by the Standard Oil Company. I sat in and saw the film when it was shown to the firemen. I think the board subsequently saw it. It was such an impressive film that I drew it to the notice of the Minister for Industrial Development and the Minister for Mines and Main Roads. I arranged for H. C. Sleigh Pty. Ltd. to give a private showing to various engineers in those departments to show them ideal fire control in an oil terminal.

We have been told in the past that, in the construction of the oil refineries at the mouth of the river, precautions which are normally expected in the United States of America are being followed. Most of us are quite prepared to accept that as true. Of course, we have been disturbed in recent weeks by two very serious oil fires in other States. The one in Sydney a few days ago quite obviously could have wiped out half of Sydney had it not been brought under control. Therefore the subject of oil fires in refineries becomes a vital one to us at this time. I suggest to the Minister in charge of fire brigades, as I have suggested by letter to the Minister for Mines and Main Roads

and the Minister for Industrial Development, that he take a very close look at the agreements covering the setting up of the two refineries to see what can be done to bring their fire prevention and fire-fighting facilities into line with those overseas. The Standard Oil Company's film shows that what is being done in America is vastly different from what is intended in Brisbane. That film was described by Mr. Healy as the best training film of its kind he has ever seen, so much so we have arranged with H. C. Sleigh Pty. Ltd. that after the film has done the Australian circuit in the oil industry it will come back to us for use as a training film in the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board. I say this because I want it brought to the notice of those in authority that we do not want any refinery installations at the mouth of the river telling us that they are giving us complete fire protection when in fact they are giving us less protection than is demanded of them in their home country. I say that advisedly. I ask that that matter be looked at before we, too, at a later date, have a holocaust at the mouth of the river.

Mr. Davies: Do you also state that the drivers are reckless drivers?

Mr. RAMSDEN: Not at all. That is a typically silly question from the hon. member for Maryborough. He does not worry me in the least because with my vast experience of life I have learned to suffer fools gladly.

Mr. Davies: The hon. member for Kurilpa said so.

Mr. RAMSDEN: I am quite sure that the hon. member for Kurilpa was mistakenly interpreted by the hon. member for Maryborough. It is an amazing fact that when insurance premiums were adjusted recently, the premiums on ambulances went up 27 or 28 per cent. and the one class of vehicle in respect of which premiums came down was the fire engine. Do not let me misinterpret what the hon. member for Kurilpa said or even what the hon. member for Maryborough implies he said, but the truth is that in the view of the insurance companies who cover these people for compensation the drivers of fire engines are such a safe risk that they have reduced the premiums on fire engines.

Mr. Campbell: It was based on their experience.

Mr. RAMSDEN: Of course it was.

The hon. member for Kurilpa is entitled to say what he likes but I wish the hon. member for Maryborough would make his speech in his own time, and in his own inimitable style.

My last remarks concern tall buildings. This matter, too, was raised by either the Leader of the Opposition or the Deputy

Leader. As a board, we came to the conclusion, when we recently considered the purchase of another ladder, that it was absolutely stupid to buy the maximum length ladder, which is 144 feet. We did that on the advice of the chief officer and other technical men in the brigade.

(Time expired.)

Mr. DEAN (Sandgate) (12.51 p.m.): I wish to make certain observations on this Bill, which amends the law relating to fire brigades. I have some knowledge of the work and responsibilities of fire brigade boards because I have served as a member of the metropolitan board. From that close association I have a working knowledge of the subject.

I hope the Bill meets with the approval of Fire Brigade members. At this stage it is very difficult to make detailed reference to the provisions in the Bill because it is not before us, and unfortunately I was not in the Chamber when the Minister introduced it as I was attending an official function. Nevertheless, I hope the measure will contain provisions that will mean an improvement in the working of fire brigade boards. I have always admired the men of the brigade for their high standard of efficiency and quality in the performance of their work. The majority of them are dedicated to the job. I hope the legislation provides an extension of the board's activities in the outside suburbs.

I suppose that in the last few months every hon. member has heard—although the subject is now more in the background—that there has been considerable discontent with, and criticism of, the palatial building at Kemp Place. It is a beautiful, extremely modern building, and I have no quarrel with it.

It has been said—although I do not entirely agree—that it has been built at the expense of some of the outside areas. People who have a knowledge of fire brigade work have stated emphatically that, for the cost of that station, we could have built two good-sized suburban stations and also a headquarters at Kemp Place, but I do not fully subscribe to those statements.

In my own area of Sandgate, the facilities, the fire-fighting equipment, and the men, are equal to any in Brisbane, but our headquarters are far behind the requirements of the area, which has grown considerably. We now control a much larger area than when the brigade was established. I sincerely hope that, by this measure, Sandgate and the other suburbs will get more modern and up-to-date headquarters.

Some years ago, I spoke in the Brisbane City Council on the Estimates covering fire brigades. My statement at that time was misconstrued and misunderstood. I make a similar statement today. During the summer

months, householders and property owners should be compelled to keep spare allotments clear of weeds and undergrowth. When I previously made that statement this situation was developing, and it is still with us today. Many firemen who may be required in another area to fight a more serious fire are being turned into grass-fire fighters. At the risk of being misunderstood again, I repeat that the householder should be compelled by the council, at the end of the winter period, to clean up any block of vacant land so that the fire brigade will not be called out to fight grass fires when there is a possibility that they will be needed at more urgent fires. Recently in my electorate I saw the brigade fight a grass fire for two to three hours. They would not have been fighting that fire if the owner of the property had cleaned up the grass. The criticism of the Brisbane City Council by the chairman of the board was not warranted. When he made that statement he did not realise the misunderstanding that exists at the present time between the council and the fire brigade board.

Mr. Davies: Fired by hysterical outbursts from the hon. member for Merthyr.

Mr. DEAN: No doubt. The chairman did not take into consideration the fact that the fire brigade headquarters were located in Ann Street, and therefore the City Hall was fully protected by the brigade's equipment. Since the brigade has moved to Kemp Place the risk has become greater. I feel that he was very unfair in attacking the council as he did.

I hope that under the new measure something can be done to bring about more co-operation on the part of local authorities in building up water pressure. During my time on the board I took a close interest in the water pressure in my area. A close survey has been conducted in many districts in the Sandgate electorate to discover where the old mains are. It has been found that they are corroded to such an extent that there is a poor supply of water available. In comparison, in new areas a larger pipe is being installed in an effort to cope with the requirements of the fire brigade.

I hope that under the proposal certain inner areas of the city will be fully protected. I refer to the fire hazards which exist in the city proper. There are many fire hazards in the city close to the old fire brigade headquarters in particular, and from what I have seen very little improvement has been effected either by the owners of the buildings or by the firms occupying them. I hope that the measure will do something to establish good water supplies in the city area.

Progress reported.

The House adjourned at 1 p.m.