

If it were done out of Consolidated Revenue, every worker would contribute and then it would be a tax. But under this system the people who pay in my view are the ratepayers in the community through their local government contribution. They are the people who will be paying and it is my view that they should have an equitable say. If they are called upon to provide 75 per cent of the revenue, they should have somewhere near 75 per cent of the say. I would settle for 50 per cent, but I believe that the present proposal is not an acceptable financial proposition. I would feel just as strongly about local government's trying to get a say in how fire brigades are run. That should be left to the professionals. I get back to what I said before. I wonder why the need is there for the Director of Urban Fire Brigades and the Director of Country Fire Brigades to have any say at all in the operations of the commission when they have complete autonomy under later provisions in the Bill.

Mr HOPE (Tamar) - Mr Chairman, my first speech will be very short in this Chamber. In fact, it will be perhaps only a comment. Mr Chairman, I feel very much involved in local government and this Bill certainly concerns local government. I was interested in the comment by the honourable member for Mersey that perhaps we ought to be looking at the financial structure before we consider the point in question. Mr Chairman, I am strongly opposed to some unwieldy council and I think that the amendment proposed this morning by the honourable Leader is something fairly close to what is needed, but not quite sufficient to satisfy the need as I see it. I have sat on the North-West Regional Water Authority for some considerable time with three government nominees - one, of course, is the Under Treasurer, and three representatives of local government. Although the Under Treasurer is a very capable man a number of times he had to be reminded that we were representatives of the ratepayers, the people who pay.

This is just the point that concerns me. It concerns me because we have three government nominees, one of whom is the Under Treasurer or his agent. I support his being there, or a nomination from the Treasury, but I am still concerned about local government representation. As the honourable member pointed out just a moment ago, when local government levies this tax, it will be thrown back in its face. When I entered Devonport Council eight years ago - and I have been interested in councils all my life - I received quite a surprise to find there were levies for ambulance, for fire and even street lighting. The average ratepayer in the municipality thinks about water, sewerage, streets and even perhaps garbage, but this is where his thinking stops. When we impose a tax of something like \$30 or \$40, Mr Chairman, some councillors are going to be in a difficult situation because we are going to have inflation and other things that matter to every council.

I know what the council that I am Warden of will be faced with, and I believe that the councils will be looked upon as the body which will be imposing the tax. How this tax is imposed perhaps is something that is still in question. I agree with the suggestion of the honourable member for Mersey that perhaps we ought to be thinking about how the financial structure is going to operate before we even consider this particular point. This is the point that concerns me as a new member.

I am not in favour of some large council. As has been pointed out, fire fighting is something that needs the skills of specialist people who are involved in it. They are the people who ought to know. I believe that, if local government is going to be responsible for the imposition of the tax, local government ought to have a slightly greater say in it.

Mr MILLER - Mr Chairman, it is in the nature of a side trail, but, as I would see it, the points made by the honourable member for Gordon bear heavily on this clause. He stressed - and there was some support from honourable members - that local government is making a 75 per cent contribution. That is not the view at all of the Government. The situation, of course, is that the Government would have a certain amount of money to raise. It would take 25 per cent from general revenues. The rest will be raised by way of a property tax. This is a government tax - there is no argument. There is argument, but, as I see it, it is crystal clear that the Government has a certain amount of money to raise. It elects to take 25 per cent from the general revenue and invoke a property tax for the remainder. The role of local government is that of an agent undertaking the work on behalf of the Government, for a fee. This is the true situation. If the Government had tried to choose some other tax, - and I earnestly suggest that we have looked at this very carefully - it would be very hard to find another area in which to impose taxation to raise over \$8 million.

A property tax seems to be the best solution because fire services exist almost completely, judging by the records of fire of this State, to protect property. So property owners should be taxed by the Government. When the accounts are shown at the end of the year, it will be quickly seen as a return to the Government of a government tax. Sir, I understand the honourable members for Tamar's and Gordon's feelings that there may be some people who will say that the councils will have the responsibility. But the difference between the other levies adverted to by the honourable member for Tamar for libraries, ambulance and these sorts of things, is that within the terms of the legislation the fire levy will be shown as a distinct government imposition. The Government's job, as the honourable member for Queenborough rightly said yesterday - it was so true that I wrote his words down - 'The responsibility for imposing a tax falls fairly and squarely on the Government'. This will be a government tax and the opprobrium which may arise from a tax - and any tax is unpopular - will be on the Government.

Fire services exist to protect property at least to the extent of 75 per cent. I know they protect life too, but the amount of life lost over the last year was negligible in a monetary sense. There may have been a death or two and that is tragic, but honourable members will understand what I am driving at. The vast majority of fires in this State concern property and the Government rightly imposes a tax on property. Why should a person who cannot afford to own a house have to make a contribution to protect another person's property, a person who can own a house? In the books of account, if this State is forced back into the Grants Commission, as well it may be, this tax will be a calculation on the effort the Government is making. It is a government tax in every sense of the word. How would you arrive at an equitable situation? It would be very difficult for me to gauge. But there is obviously a basic difference in thinking, so far as the taxing responsibility is concerned, between the honourable member for Gordon and myself. He rightly points out that the ratepayers are involved. The ratepayers in this sense are the property owners and it is the property owners whose properties are being protected by the Fire Service. The Government is levying a tax on those properties to provide 75 per cent of the service. I cannot accept the argument that, because the local government is being asked to act as an agent for a fee, it ought to have representation equivalent to the amount which comes from that particular fee.

Mr LE FEVRE (Cornwall) - Mr Chairman, on the matter of 75 per cent I am inclined to agree. In fact I do agree with the point made by the honourable Leader. It is a government tax, not a contribution from local government at all. It will be raised by local government. It has been argued, by some honourable members, with some justification I do not doubt, that the odium of that will fall upon local government.

Mr Broadby - This is paid by ratepayers, not local government.

Mr LE FEVRE - That is right. I believe that, if the accounts are separated, as suggested, it is more likely that it will be seen by the community as a government impost for the purpose of fire services on a State basis. That remains to be seen, of course, and I admit immediately that there is some ground for the counter argument that has been made. Perhaps it will go the other way, but I do not think so. The thing that strikes me about all this is that we are now looking at fire services as a State issue, and we must be pursuing this one goal only. That is to get the best possible solution to the problems that arise from fire.

Does this mean that we are going to have a better solution if we add a representative of the Municipal Association, a representative or a nominee of the Under Treasurer, and all the other suggested nominations? In the proposal by the honourable member for Macquarie and in the proposal that we received from the Municipal Association itself, I think 13 persons were suggested. So we could go on ad infinitum. We could go to the whole population of Tasmania, I suppose, and say that every opinion would be valuable. I suppose without any question it would.