

LOCAL NOTES.
THE RATES RAMP:
15s, IN THE £: ALTERNATIVES FOR CHRISTCHURCH.

C.T. March 1, 1930

The rates in the Borough of Christchurch will be about 15s. in the £ for the financial year commencing April 1 next. We say "about," because in these days, a penny does not seem to matter "tuppence!"

Joking aside, this is the most serious thing that has happened in the town's history.

It is so serious that not only protests, but action is needed to fight it.

It is nothing short of a scandal, this rate ramp, and a scandal that must be fought tooth and nail. What we want is business men in the administration of our country's and our county's affairs.

If the business men among us do not act then we must take the consequences and "turn the other cheek." In the end we will be so black and blue, and in fact so completely knocked out, that we will think a Phil Scott or Canera has hit us.

We again warn the ratepayers of Christchurch that their rates this year will be 15s. in the £. Let us be fair and see where the blame belongs.

The total rates in Christchurch for the year ending with the present month were 10s. 6d. in the £—on an increased assessment. This 10s. 6d. was made up as follows: Hants County Council 4s. 2½d., Bournemouth Christchurch Board of Guardians 10½d., Christchurch Borough Council 5s. 6d. (including 2s. 6d. on sewerage and other loans).

In our opinion the last Conservative Government brought about a number of unwise changes which the ratepayers, whether Conservative, Liberal or Labour, will have to pay for. Boards of Guardians were abolished, the whole face of our counties is being changed as far as urban and rural parishes are concerned, and the control of unclassified roads is placed in the hands of the County Councils.

The County Council rates for the coming year have now reached Christchurch. The County Council declare that the additional work which the Government has forced upon them means additional money to carry out these schemes.

The net result is that the County Council rate has gone up from 4s. 2½d. to 9s. 5d. in the £ on the increased assessment. It means that if our Borough Council keep their rates to about the same as the year now ending—say 5s. 7d. (a paltry penny doesn't matter)—the rates for the coming year in this town will be 15s. In the £.

We invite local members of the County Council, the Chairman (the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Malmesbury), the Mayor (Mr. F. E. Abbott), Sir Stuart Fraser and Mr. John King to satisfy the local ratepayers of this extortionate demand.

We realise that pounds to the average member of the County Councils represents pence to the average ratepayer. As far as we know, most of them are pretty well-to-do financially, and they can probably stand Poplar's poundage rate without a flicker of an eyelid. But they won't be popular.

Can we offer a remedy? We will put forward two alternatives. The first is that Christchurch should join up with Bournemouth—and a thundering good case could be made out for such an application.

Bournemouth's "all-in" rate for the year now ending is 7s. in the £ (including education, roads, police and poor law) and is not likely to be more than 8s. in the coming year—or about half of the County plus Christchurch Borough rate. Put it to the vote and see what the ratepayers would say—the "eyes" have it. And what a majority!

The second alternative which we would advocate in any case is that Hampshire should be split up into two County Councils. The present area and body are undoubtedly altogether too unwieldy. Do you know that the Hants County Council consists of 20 aldermen and 61 councillors—a total of 81. Does that promote for proper control and efficiency? Do the representatives from one end of the County know the needs of the other or even one another? Doesn't it mean that those

centrally situated get "all the plums" while those in the "outer circle" are like lost sheep?

And do you know that the Castle at Winchester controls the destinies—and the pockets—of 410,000 people? Do you know that Lincolnshire with a population of 455,000 has three County Councils? There is Kesteven, with 108,000 people, Holland 87,000 and Lindsay with 260,000. Cambridge County Council has 129,000, Bedfordshire 206,000, the Isle of Wight 94,000 and Wiltshire 292,000. There are three County Councils in the County of Yorkshire, one with a population of 173,000, while Oxford has 132,000. On point of population, therefore, to say nothing of acreage, Hampshire should be split into two County Councils. The north could continue to be governed from the Castle at Winchester, and the south should have its headquarters at Christchurch—unless this Borough goes in with Bournemouth.

In 1928-29, Hants County Council took £9,101 2s. 3d. out of Christchurch: this year it is estimated that the town will pay to the County £10,301—or £1,200 more. it doesn't matter about the odd pennies—but in the coming year with a rate of 9s. 5d. in the £ this town is called upon to pay £24,860 to the County. What are the Town Council and the Chamber of Trade going to do about it?

CRIPPLING CHRISTCHURCH.

It comes to this—that the extortionate demands of the County Council will cripple Christchurch financially and effectively block all schemes of local development. If our Town Council had come out with a scheme doubling their rates, the members would have a most uncomfortable time in being "button-holed" by the electors, but all Christchurch can shout from the top of the Town Hall and Winchester would not hear or heed them.

Size it up this way. What chance of progress is there for Christchurch with a rate of 15s. in the £—and likely to advance to 20s. in a few years—alongside of Bournemouth with a rate of 8s.? Won't the effect be to empty Christchurch of residents as soon as the latter can find suitable homes across the river in Bournemouth?

The Town Council is in no way to be blamed. Their hands are tied behind their back. They have done their best and succeeded in running the town's affairs economically, and have put their house in order. The whole of their efforts are nullified by the rapacity of the County.

Without any disrespect to the Town Council—who, in fact, should lend their support to it—we suggest that a Town's Protest Meeting should be convened by the Jumpers Ratepayers' Association, the new Townswomen's Guilds, or the Chamber of Trade, at which this serious matter can be threshed out.

Further, if after full and free discussion, Christchurch ratepayers come to the opinion that it would be better for this Borough to throw in its lot with Bournemouth, a resolution to that effect should be passed on to the Town Council to take the necessary steps. The resolution could call for a referendum of the town on the question in the same way that Highcliffe electors were given the opportunity to vote to come in with Christchurch.

Bournemouth's Parliamentary Bill for the enlargement of the County Borough is now in the House of Commons. Is it too late to put through an amendment to include Christchurch in Bournemouth? The Town Council has already appointed Parliamentary agents who could give or procure an opinion immediately on such a question. It is a matter of life and death to the future existence of the Priory Town.

In the meantime, an official notice in our issue warns ratepayers that proceedings will be taken against those who have not paid their rates for this half year.