

# ROUND THE BOROUGH

Christchurch times May 20, 1944

TO suggest there is any link whatever between the report of Mr. Rowland Burrows, K.C., on the Fire, Police and Civil Defence Services of Newcastle and the experiences and history of Civil Defence in the Borough of Christchurch does not mean that anyone has the slightest grounds for casting aspersions at the integrity of the Civil Defence personnel, or of those in control of the Civil Defence personnel of the Emergency Committee of the Borough of Christchurch.

There are, however, most important matters of principle which apply here, as at Newcastle, and as in every other part of the country.

I trust, therefore, that any who may consider themselves to be concerned with what I write this week will be good enough to understand:—

**1. When I mention individuals I do so only by way of illustration of the principles involved.**

**2. As an individual myself I am completely and utterly disinterested in the constitution and duties of the various committees and organisations I may find it necessary to mention.**

**3. I consider it my duty to write what I am going to write because I believe it concerns the Borough and because, conducting a free newspaper open to publish the frank opinions of everyone, I can see no just reason why I should refrain from publishing the frank and outspoken views of its Editor.**

For the purposes of this article, I am glad to say that there is little of the Newcastle affair that need be repeated to the public. As I have said, we fortunately have been served by men who have taken a proper view of the responsibilities, laid upon them by the appointments they have held. It may be helpful, however, to remind you of the following points that arose out of the Newcastle enquiry.

1. As far back as March, 1942, the Home Secretary suggested to a deputation from Newcastle that it was anomalous for anyone (he happened to be referring particularly to Councillor Embleton) to be both Chairman of the Emergency Committee AND Deputy A.R.P. Controller.

2. In Parliament last week, Mr. Morrison said that a member of a Council should not be a member of the Emergency Committee AND Deputy A.R.P. Controller.

3. Mr. Morrison also stated that a member of the Emergency Committee should NOT accept a responsible position in Civil Defence. The position in Christchurch is contrary to each one of these three principles. Before continuing, may I mention that this is being written before the meeting of the Christchurch Council on Thursday, when especially if the promised circular conveying Mr. Morrison's views is received in time to be referred to the Council meeting—certain decisions may be taken. But whether such decisions are taken on Thursday or not, my premise remains that the Emergency Committee, the Controller and the Deputy Controller for Christchurch ought to be changed. And I will state what, in my opinion, the changes ought to be.

First, the Emergency Committee, A lot of people, I think, may have wondered why I have, so they consider, "had my knife into "the poor old Emergency Committee. I have said before now in these columns, and in these actual words that the Emergency Committee should be changed. And if I have not previously published my reasons for that opinion, I will do so now. For the work it has to do, for the responsibility it shoulders, for the power it can exert, and for the amount of money it has to spend the Christchurch Emergency Committee, instead of being the strongest Committee on the Council, is one of the weakest.

Two of its members, as I published last week, are Alderman J.W. Tucker, Chairman, who is also Deputy Controller, Councillor T. Markham, who is also Controller. These two gentlemen combine duties and responsibilities which, as Mr. Morrison has at long last said, should not be combined, for the very simple and sound reason that one man cannot at the same time be superior to and subordinate to another.

And the Home Secretary has said that a member of the Emergency Committee should not be the Controller. I cannot, of course, say what reason Mr. Morrison had in the back of his mind for this decision, but I can repeat something which actually appeared in a local newspaper on the 23rd October, 1943: "The time has come to call a halt to this reckless extravagance. Time after time I have urged this view upon our Emergency Committee; **but it has always been defeated by the Controller asking what would happen if we didn't spend the money and we were blitzed.**" That, if it is true (and it was not denied) provides one reason why a member of the Emergency Committee should not be Controller.

How about the remaining members of the Christchurch Committee?

On principle I think Councillor Stevens' position is anomalous.

Councillor Stevens is an employee of the same company as the Controller and, indeed, works for the particular branch of which the Controller is manager. Let me hasten to say that Christchurch has never suffered from this position; neither the Controller nor Councillor Stevens have ever abused their peculiar coincidence of business relationship; but nevertheless it is, to my mind, entirely wrong in principle. The two remaining members of the Christchurch Emergency Committee are his Worship the Mayor and Councillor Northover.

The Emergency Committee which, besides having considerable powers, handles nearly one-third of our total expenditure in the Borough ought, I say, to be the strongest Committee on the Council. I would like to see it a fairly large Committee; but unfortunately there are not a large number of members of the local Council I would like to see on it.

If I were asked who I would suggest for service on this Committee I would be prepared to say; but for the time being I will only mention that in my idea of a strong Emergency Committee, only one, or possibly two of the existing members would be serving. The one would there on his merits: the possible second would be there to give the committee the benefit of continuity and past experience. The remainder would be newcomers. Newcomers to the committee, and relatively new to the Council; though by no means all the newcomers to the Council would find their way into my ideal committee.

And now for the Controller and Deputy Controller. I repeat that what I write carries no insinuation against the two gentlemen who hold these offices in Christchurch. I discuss the position they hold only: and I am firmly of the opinion that both of these positions should be held by persons:

1. Who are not members of the Emergency Committee.
2. Who have had the time to undertake the fullest degree of training in all departments of Civil Defence work.
2. Who have the ability to assimilate that training.
4. Who have the mental qualities and composure necessary to make wise and quick decisions in an emergency.

5. Who have the personality (as I believe a Ministry of Home Security circular lays down) to create confidence in a period of strain and to promote the harmonious working of all branches of the personnel.

It is without question my opinion that the man in Christchurch who best satisfies what I have listed as my idea of the necessary qualifications of a Controller, is Mr. F. A. Griffiths, the A.R.P. Officer.

Bear in mind that the Controller is ultimately and finally responsible in the time of supreme emergency. It is, to my mind, unfair to expect any man to take on these duties and responsibilities as a part-time occupation.

Of course, it is not necessary to have a full time separate paid Controller; but it does seem to me to be so perfectly natural for the man who is responsible for producing an organisation to be the one responsible for controlling it when it is put to use.

I can see no reason why the person who is A.R.P. Officer should not also be Controller of Civil Defence. I can see many reasons why the A.R.P. Officer of Christchurch should be the Controller,

And now, I realise, I haven't said anything about the Deputy Controller.

The Borough of Christchurch, I feel, is well enough served by expert and capable full time Civil Defence workers (and also part time workers) to be able to produce at least a small selection of men from whom a Deputy Controller could be chosen without his having to be the Chairman of the Emergency Committee. I think the Deputy Controller ought to be chosen by the Controller, approved by a really strong Emergency Committee—and, I suppose, approved by Region as well; and it should be remembered that inasmuch as the Deputy Controller is a man who must be able to stand and act in the place of the Controller, the five qualifications outlined above should he possessed by the Deputy as well.

These are hard words that I am writing; but I believe them. And I believe it to be necessary to give them an airing.

And now one final remark.

Throughout the war, I have shown through the columns of this paper that I have taken an interest in the Borough's Civil Defence affairs I have dared to speak frankly. I have criticised and I have made suggestions. For my pains I have received no benefit but sometimes criticism in return, which any man will reasonably expect and welcome. On one occasion I was treated to a "considered statement, largely invective, which the Chairman of the Emergency Committee read to the Council, and which accused me of causing unrest among all the Civil Defence personnel.

I hope that it will not be said of what I have written this week, that it has caused unrest among all the Civil Defence personnel. What I have written has been written, not to cause unrest, but to promote the strength of

this important service and to remove from it those breaches of principle which, though they have not led to abuse in Christchurch, have been singled out by high officials of the land as being generally undesirable and anomalous.

#### DUMPED BOXES.

Arising out of the question asked by Councillor McArdle at last month's Council meeting, the Council has decided that in future, the Sanitary Inspector be instructed to arrange for any wooden boxes deposited at the Refuse Dump to be stored in the salvage shed and to be disposed of to the Borough Surveyor or sold. That's one bit of bad odour gone. Pity something can't be done about the other.

#### PROGRESS.

About 14 years ago. Councillor Vaughan reminded the Christchurch and District Chamber of Trade meeting this week, a report appeared in the Christchurch Times that the Chamber of Trade, then in the first year of its existence, expressed an urgent desire for the Goods Department of the Southern Railway, Christchurch Station, to have its own telephone line installed.

The present Stationmaster, Mr. Dray, who was at this week's meeting, was able to assure members of the Chamber of Trade that there was every hope that such a telephone would be installed, before they met again.

#### DESTINATION CHRISTCHURCH.

Mr. Dray told the Chamber of Trade that only last week another parcel arrived here instead of Christchurch, New Zealand.

There must be something peculiar about arriving at Christchurch by rail. Mr. Dray said there were any amount of people over-carried from destinations up the line because they were asleep or for some such reason but, he added, "they all get out at Christchurch."

#### BLAST.

In the main street of a South Coast town, near which bombs recently fell, a tailor's large plate glass window was blown out. It was the only shop window in the street to go: and it was the only shop in the street that had been using a wire strainer "anti-shatter" device.

Commenting on this coincidence to the Vicar, who happened to be passing, the tailor remarked through his windowless window; "Perhaps, after all it would have been better if I'd trusted in the Lord."

#### YEARS TO COME.

"What were these motor car things that people used to use, Daddy?"

"Oh. I dunno son, they were something like the Jeeps we use today, son....except they were a bit different.