

TOWN'S RATE PROTEST MEETING BEING ARRANGED
Ought There To Be a Referendum on Christchurch Joining Bournemouth?
Striking Comparisons In Rates Payable In The Two Towns.

C.T. March 8th, 1930.

A Town's Protest Meeting is being organised in Christchurch by the Christchurch Chamber of Trade, against the new rate of 9s. 5d. imposed by the Hants County Council.

We understand that the date was to be fixed at a meeting of the Chamber's Committee, yesterday (Friday) evening, and it will be announced in our next issue. It will probably take place on Monday, March 17.

We suggest that at this meeting a resolution could be moved to test the feelings of the ratepayers, calling on the Town Council to hold a referendum on the plain question: Are you in favour of Christchurch joining Bournemouth?"

If, by a substantial majority, the ratepayers give their assent to such a question, then the Town Council could approach the Bournemouth Corporation and obtain their views. If Bournemouth agrees to the request, the Town Council could then apply to the County Council to make an order for Christchurch to be included in Bournemouth in the same way that they made an order for Highcliffe to be incorporated in Christchurch. Should the County Council refuse to make such an order under the Local Government Act of 1929, then the Town Council could apply for a Ministry of Health inquiry and the decision would rest with the Ministry. If Bournemouth and Christchurch desired to join forces, would the Ministry flout the ratepayers of both towns?

WHAT NOBODY YET KNOWS.

Meanwhile the total rate for Christchurch in the coming year is still unknown. With the County rate at 9s. 5d. and the Borough rate of 5s. 6d. in the year now ending, the prospect is a rate for the year commencing April 1 next of 14s. 11d. However, we learn that the town is entitled to a grant, to be worked on "weighted" or "unweighted" population—which excludes children under five. The County Council has been written to as to how much this grant will amount to, but they do not know. The Ministry of Health has been written to—and they don't know yet. Nobody knows.

At any rate, if the combined rates in this town are not nearly 14s. or 15s. this year, it will not be long before they reach that figure under the County Council administration.

Members of the Town Council and ratepayers generally are alarmed at the prospect of a rate of 14s. 6d. or 15s. in the £ in Christchurch. This disclosure, which was made in our Editorial Notes of last week, caused something like consternation in the town, especially when it comes on top of a 30 per cent. increase in rateable value last year.

With the County Council rate doubled in the first year that they take over the Guardians' duties and the unclassified roads in the rural districts, it is likely to continue to increase. We have never known a County Council to reduce its rates; they failed to do so even with a 30 per cent. increase in rateable value last year before they took over their new duties.

This will effectively bar the Town Council from even any essential schemes of development. They will never be able to afford to put their roads in decent order; they will never be able to afford a modern refuse destructor or an up-to-date fire engine; they will never build a Public Library; never be able to provide a Recreation Ground for the Jumpers area; they will never be able to stand the cost of a Harbour Board—to say nothing of a costly main drainage scheme for Highcliffe and engineering feats to save the cliffs at Highcliffe.

A SCHOOLBOY'S CHOICE.

A nine-years-old schoolboy was discussing the question with his father, who was hard pressed to explain it; it is "all so complicated" as somebody else put it. Father summed it up in the

form of a question : "Now, my son," he asked, "if you are going into business would you choose as partners a lot of people who had very little money like yourself, or would you choose to go into business with one very rich partner?" That nine-years-old boy, with a happy laugh, quickly replied: "Why, the rich one, of course!"

We have been met with the retort that the "rich one" —Bournemouth — does not want Christchurch and would not take the old Priory Town in as a partner. One man gave as his reason that Bournemouth had not included Christchurch in its Parliamentary Bill. What a ridiculous argument! Christchurch possesses justly a great civic pride; it existed centuries before Bournemouth was thought of; it is the mother of Bournemouth; it gave Bournemouth a big dowry in the form of Southbourne. Like many proud old ladies, Christchurch would have resented her daughter's taking legal means to dispossess her of home, so to speak.

Let us look at the other side of this human comparison. The old lady of Christchurch is facing ruination, her home is beginning to totter about her. Would a daughter in an affluent position turn a deaf ear to a request from a mother who is starving herself in an endeavour to make ends meet?

Where it is a case of life and death—and that is what the County demands now and in the future mean to Christchurch—one has to put pride in one's pocket—and to live.

As for Bournemouth not wanting Christchurch, wasn't there a time when the County Borough made approaches—on the occasion when it wanted a little more population to have its own Member in Parliament—and isn't it a fact that the proposal to join Bournemouth was defeated by three votes by Christchurch Town Council?

BOURNEMOUTH TO REMAIN AT 7s.?

How can Christchurch continue to live alongside Bournemouth, with the rates in the one place double those in the other? We remarked last week that Bournemouth's rate in the coming year would not exceed 8s. in the £. We learn that two weeks ago, the Mayor of Bournemouth stated publicly that the rates in the County Borough would remain at 7s.— the same figure as in the present year. The reason for this is that Bournemouth is a County unto itself, and is not called upon to pay for the relief of the poor all over Hampshire and the making of roads in agricultural districts where no rates are paid—and Christchurch is; and there is the ever-growing rateable value.

It would not matter so much if Christchurch were 20 or 30 miles away from Bournemouth, but where two towns are separated only by a river and the rates in one are double those of the other, is it possible for the double-rated town to exist? Can you blame people for leaving the one for the other?

RATES COMPARISONS IN THE TWO TOWNS

We have taken some trouble this week to find out some comparisons between Bournemouth assessments and those of Christchurch, because of the popular belief that the County Borough was

A FAIRY TALE.

Once upon a time a typist typed a rate of 5/9 instead of 9/5, but as it didn't happen at Winchester Castle Hampshire has to pay 9/5.

only enabled to enjoy a low rate owing to having a higher assessment on its property. Our investigation exploded this theory, as you will see.

One of the most interesting comparisons that we came across was that of a firm with a house and shop in Bargates and similar premises in Christchurch Road, Boscombe. In Bargates, the premises are assessed at £40, which on a rate of 10s 6d. means £21 in rates for the year. If our rates go up to 15s. the Bargates premises will pay £30 a year. The house and shop on the main road in Pokesdown was doubled in rateable value a year ago on the general re-assessment of Bournemouth

and is now rated at at £56. Bournemouth's rate is 7s. in the £, and the rates on these premises therefore amount to £19 12s. A house and shop (seven rooms) next door to these Bournemouth premises are rated at £52, and at 7s. the owner pays £18 4s. in rates. And everybody will agree that Christchurch Road, Pokesdown, is a far better shopping centre than Bargates; and they will appreciate, too, that it is not the difference in rateable value, but in the amount of the rates that accounts for the huge difference between £30 in Bargates and £18 4s. and £19 12s. in Bournemouth.

MORE BUSINESS COMPARISONS.

A lock-up shop off the the main road in Winton, is rated at £21 and pays £7 in rates. A lock-up shop in Castle Street, Christchurch, with a rateable value of £24 pays £12 10s. now in rates, but when our rates reach 15s. in the £ it will pay £18.

Shops with houses attached in Tuckton Road, Bournemouth, rated at £40 pay £14 a year; in Moordown houses with shops are rated at pounds £56 and pay £19 12s.; shops with house in the excellent business centre on the main road in Winton are rated at nearly £100, but call it a level £100 and at 7s. in the £ the rates amount to £35 a year; on the Holdenhurst Road (above the Central Station), business premises with good living accommodation are rated at round about £66 and pay £23 2s. in rates

What do we find in Christchurch? A garage and house in High Street are rated at £60, the present rates being 30 guineas, and a 50 per cent. increase would bring it to 45 guineas; at Bournemouth's rate of 7s. these premises would pay £22, or less than half. A house and shop in Bargates assessed at £33 now pays £17 6s. 6d. and a 50 per cent. increase means over £25; in Bournemouth it would be £11 11s.; a shop with house in High Street rated at £56 now pays £29 8s. but at 15s. in the £ it would pay £42; in Bournemouth the rates would be £19 12s.; another shop with house in High Street, with a rateable value of £119, now pays £62 10s. in rates, and a rate of 15s. would increase the sum to about £90; in Bournemouth it would be £41 13s.; Church Street, house and shop, rateable value of £60, now pays 30 guineas and a rate of 15s. means £45; in Bournemouth it would be £21; and we can go on "piling on the agony" as far as business premises are concerned.

AND SOME RESIDENTIAL ONES.

A few examples in private houses. Bournemouth does not possess "A Pit" or a "Pound Lane," but it has got a mud-wall, thatched cottage at Redhill, Moordown, assessed at £7, the rates on which are £2 9s. a year; bungalows in Tuckton Road are rated at £26 and pay £9 2s.; Old Priory Road houses, Tuckton, are rated at £14 up to £24 and pay £4 18s. up to £8 8s. in rates; in Belle Vue Road, Tuckton, houses are rated at £52, and pay £18 4s., £48 and pay £16 16s., £42 and pay £14 14s. and at £38 and pay £13 6s.; and nearer Christchurch end of Tuckton Bridge there are six-roomed houses rated at £28 and paying £9 16s. and £32, paying £11 4s.; six-roomed subsidy houses are rated at £19 and pay £6 13s. Subsidy houses in Christchurch are rated at £18 and now pay £9 9s., which with the rate at 15s. would be increased to £13 10s.

Take our Vicarage. Its rateable value is about £67; at any rate the Vicar pays £35 14s. a year in rates. Southbourne Vicarage is assessed at £105, and at 7s. in the £ the Vicar there pays £36 15s. Add 50 per cent. to the Christchurch rates and the Vicarage here will pay £53 11s. as against £36 15s. at Southbourne.

Our readers will be able to work out their own comparisons when the new rate is actually struck.

The above affords some striking comparisons, but our readers will bear in mind that they are based on a rate of 7s. in Bournemouth and of 15s. in Christchurch. Our rates may be "down" somewhat and Bournemouth's up, but it is none the less interesting.

It is of interest to add that Bournemouth's rateable value increased by the amounts stated in the following years: 1922-3, £22,000; 1923-4, £34,000; 1924-5, £48,000; 1925-6,

£44,000; 1926-7, £84,000. On April 1, 1928, the rateable value was £1,081,783, and on April 1, 1929, it had risen to £1,411,219, while a penny rate produced £5,500. The County Council penny rate produces £11,000.