

Question 16—*continued.*

place of meeting of the County Council; the expenses of his attending the several meetings costs the county more money than the district he represents pays rates, and another member within a few shillings of the rates collected within his riding. In fact, the rates collected in Hobson County just about pays the expenses to spend the Government grant-in-aid. If we are to have County Councils, I would suggest that five or seven Road Board districts form or make a Council, and the Chairmen of Road Boards be the Councillors. It is the general opinion here that County Councils and Road Boards cannot work together, and that in districts like ours County Councils cannot do the work as well or as cheap as Road Boards. That where Chairmen of Road Boards act as secretary, inspector of works, &c., the ratepayers should be allowed to remunerate him out of the rates.

Paparoa—One form of local government would be preferred, say a county with a minimum acreage of 100,000, or Road Board, with power to amalgamate, with county powers. Under the present county system outlying districts pay one rate, whereas the highway districts must either pay two rates or have nothing for expenditure on the district roads. Approve of proposed triennial valuation.

Wairau—No.

Wairau (by ex-Chairman)—When the measures referred to in the circular were before the House last session I took the liberty of addressing the sitting member for Marsden, Captain Colbeck, and through him the Hon. the Premier, upon the absolute necessity which it is manifest exists when legislating upon these subjects, to give the fullest consideration to the extreme difference subsisting between the mature and wealthy local bodies of the South and those of the struggling, sparsely-settled districts of Auckland North. Thus in preparing a Consolidated Road Board Act, which is a most desirable measure, it will require the most careful consideration of the several Provincial Acts which may have been found suitable for these parts as well as those of the Assembly, and great care not to import into the Act provisions which, though suitable for other localities, may not be adapted to these. Above all things it should not be brought forward until draft copies have been forwarded to and well considered by the major part of the local bodies. The hasty legislation upon these and kindred subjects, such as fencing, impounding, &c., has been productive of incalculable mischief. So far as can be done, the introduction of optional clauses will often be found very desirable. This important provision is I see intimated in the 9th clause of the circular, as offering to the districts the option of choosing whether the Council or Road Board shall be the local governing body. This will, I feel sure, be regarded as a great boon by the ratepayers of these districts, whose predilections have always been strongly in favour of Road Boards, which have been found amply sufficient for all requirements, and for many years previously to the

Counties Act have been doing good and efficient work. One great impediment which exists here to the working of the Counties Act is the extended area which the counties are made to embrace, compelling the members to take long and toilsome journeys to the place of meeting and to long absences from their homes; thus entailing also heavy charges on the funds to meet their expenses. Especially is this the case with Hobson, the boundaries of which were laid out by Sir R. Douglas without knowing at all what he was doing, and without consultation with any of the local bodies, who would willingly have assisted him; the result being that the timber-producing district of the Wairoa, without either roads or Road Boards, and which until the county rate was levied had never been taxed for public works, has been annexed to the four Highway Districts of Matakoho, Paparoa, Wairau, and Pukekaroro (or Kaiwaka), which have been settled for nearly twenty years, and during that period have regularly been rated; consequently in the Wairoa everything has to be done, entailing heavy contracts and large outlay, necessitating also the employment of a resident Engineer at a salary of £250 per annum, whose services in these districts are never required. It is moreover insisted upon that the Council meetings shall always be held at Tokatoka, in the Wairoa District, from hence forty miles, and from Kaiwaka fifty, so that it is with much difficulty any resident can be obtained to accept the office of Councillor, and their expenses amount to £5 each time. At the very first meeting, when I represented this district, and two other Chairmen of Boards also, it was at once evident that such an incongruous arrangement never could work satisfactorily, and efforts were forthwith made to effect a separation, the necessary documents being prepared as well as they could be, and committed to the charge of the then sitting member for Rodney, Mr. John Sheehan; but, as nothing was ever heard of the matter afterwards, I presume they were committed to that honorable gentleman's capacious receptacle for good intentions. Since then the requirements of the Counties Act to obtain this object are such as to have deterred any further action being taken in this direction. In framing the Counties Act, I apprehend that one principal object in view was to relieve the Government as far as possible from the necessity of having to deal directly with such a very large number of local bodies as the Road Boards now constitute, and there can be no doubt that this is a most cogent reason for some sort of amalgamation or union of them to be effected. The Counties Act, however, seems in many instances to have gone too far beyond what the state of the country and population justify. It would appear that if facilities had been provided for the union of contiguous highway districts (somewhat similar to unions of parishes under the New Poor Law Act of England), with power to embrace outlying districts, and the ready formation of highway districts where non-

existent, it would have been amply sufficient for all present needs, and have largely relieved the Government in the direction above alluded to. It might further also have been provided that the Chairmen of these Boards should constitute the Council, which would thus have been composed of individuals best qualified to understand the requirements of the locality and the means of supplying them. If, in the preparation of the measures about to be introduced by the Government, somewhat similar provisions to those indicated can be brought in, I think they will be found to prove very acceptable to the settlers north of Auckland, even though some of the honorable members of the House may not appreciate them.

Whakahara School Committee—There are in the opinion of the writer many defects in the working of County Councils and Road Boards side by side, and it is seen in this county, and in others of which we may read, the same difficulties seem to occur. Each system has its good points, which are worth preserving. The writer thinks that a system combining the two, and making one system out of them, would be preferable to either by itself, or to the two on the same ground. Sometimes in opposition, or it may be perhaps sometimes in harmony, this might be accomplished in this way—(1.) Every county to be divided into ridings containing as nearly as could be an equal population; every riding to be a road district, and where no Road Board exists, or inhabitants neglect or refuse a Commission to be appointed, elections to take place as now, or like Councillors are elected. (2.) Every district Road Board to elect every year, as soon as they themselves are elected, a County Councillor. (3.) The Council to elect a Chairman as at present, or as Mayors are elected. (4.) The County Council to be empowered to collect a rate of 2s. in the pound, to be collected in one sum; 1s. of this to be voted by Council for county purposes, 1s. to be at the disposal of Road Board. (5.) The Council to arrange what county works should be done, and as far as can be these works to be under the superintendence of the Road Boards of the district in which the work is done. This system would save travelling—one or two meetings a year would be sufficient, inspection, two collectors of rates, quarrelling between Road Boards and Councils, and would give local inspection of work, and would be more popular, as the Council would be a large Road Board.

Rodney—If the whole colony is placed on the same footing in applying for grants for construction of main roads the wealthier counties will at first have a great and unfair advantage over the poorer counties. To remedy this the colony might be divided into a number of large districts, and a fair proportion of the whole sum voted by Parliament placed to the credit of each such division. We do not profess to speak for other portions of the colony, but suggest that the district north of Auckland should form one such division. The counties in this division would compete fairly with each other in their rating powers, and their ability to obtain the benefit