

If it be conceded that the colony is not unduly peopled, or, in other words, that there is room in it for a much larger population than at present, we may eliminate from our consideration the expediency of promoting the survival of the fittest. In densely-populated countries, concealed though it may be, the consideration that the survival of the fittest will in the end be the best lies at the root of the indifference with which the interests of the separate classes forming the community are regarded. Here we cannot, in common prudence, tolerate such indifference. It is essentially of the utmost importance to each class that the other classes should prosper. This seems so simple a truism that you may consider I am trespassing on your patience in leading up to and uttering it. Yet it appears to me of such immeasurable moment to our whole moral, social, commercial, and corporate system, that I cannot proclaim it too loudly. In the absence of a disposition to give and take, the welfare of the country cannot be properly consulted. Those interested in any of the classes of occupation must recollect that the progress of the other classes is the surest road to their own. The towns must not ask an advantage from the country districts if they are not prepared to give one in return. The colony cannot become wealthy without manufactures on a large scale. The multiform conditions of town life give a market to country producers, but the denizens of the towns cannot prosper unless they afford to country producers facilities for reaching markets and opening up lands. What I wish to establish is that it is our duty to consider how all the classes of occupation can best aid each other, so that they may all equally progress, and knit together a self-reliant, self-supporting community.

The most important point which arises from this contention is that, if there are to be Customs duties which will affect the cost of production by country producers, these must have assistance to open up their lands. The means the provinces afforded for opening-up the lands by roads and bridges was the foundation of the colony's progress. We have since gone in for more ambitious arterial systems. But the time has come round when we must consider, as a complement of those systems, the general opening-up of the country, and especially those parts in which the present means are small. To base the aid we render on the present means of the recipients would be to give to those who have, rather than to those who want. Hence I am free to confess that I recall a great deal I said last session about each district depending upon its own taxation. Of course this should be so in a measure: we cannot refuse to enable the districts which have prospered to prosper still further. But we must go beyond this, and remember, in the spirit of the old provincial aid rendered to young districts, that the feeble require special sustenance. The assistance cannot be based on the means of each—larger aid must be given in proportion to the poorer districts.

Our proposal, then, is settled subsidies extending over many years, but divided after a plan which will give greater consideration to the poorer districts. The scale will adjust itself, that is, as a district becomes richer its receipts, though perhaps larger, will be based on a lesser scale. This is not the place to fully discuss the proposition. I must refer to it to an extent little more than to elucidate our financial proposals. It is, however, necessary to explain that the long term of years to which we propose the colony should bind itself has for its object to settle the finance of the local bodies and enable them to borrow on the security of the subsidies. We are, moreover, distinctly of opinion that the local bodies should be released from tutelage. The conditions under which the subsidies should be expended should be prescribed, and the Boards be held responsible for the proper expenditure of the money; but we do not approve making the expenditure subject to the supervision of the Government. The experience of the Roads and Bridges Construction Act, and the enormous labour it has devolved on the Public Works Department, show the fallacy of a system in which the responsibility is divided. We can never have a satisfactory system of local government unless the ratepayers are made to feel that they have no one but themselves on whom to depend for a wise expenditure of the corporate funds. Let the most interested absent themselves from the district or be indifferent to the proceedings of the local bodies, but let them understand that they do this at