

But the operation of "The Municipal Corporations Act, 1886," is a different matter. It has proved most disastrous to county government in some places, and a real danger ahead. I will take the Hutt County as an example. A few years ago this county was compact, homogeneous, and in all respects workable. An epidemic of borough-making set in, which has to a very large extent emasculated it. Five boroughs have been cut out of it—namely, Petone, with a population of 2,175; Melrose, with a population of 1,275; Onslow, with a population of 2,000; Lower Hutt, with a population of 1,550; Karori, with a population of 966: total, 7,966; leaving the county with a population of 6,114. These figures are as at the date (1891) of last census. They would be today somewhat larger, and the ratio would be more in favour of the boroughs.

This remnant of a county is, however, still responsible for some 75 miles of main arterial roads—the eastern, to the top of the Rimutaka Hill, and the western, to the Waikanae River—roads which are practically as much colonial works as any railway in the country, but to whose maintenance neither the City of Wellington with its 35,000 of population or any of these boroughs contribute anything, except some half-dozen miles in Lower Hutt, Petone, and Onslow.

Looking at the area and rateable values we get some interesting figures:—

—	Area in Acres.	Rateable Property.			Total Income.		
		£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Petone	952	...	...	...	1,333	5	4
• Melrose	3,962	201,746	0	0	1,147	14	4
Onslow	2,870	118,507	0	0	422	5	4
Lower Hutt	3,255	226,736	0	0	1,261	9	0
Karori	5,312	...	...	...	459	9	2
	16,351	546,986	0	0*	4,624	3	2
Hutt County (851 ratepayers)	362,000	875,460	0	0†	4,254	13	7

* Three only.

† Including £36,000, unoccupied Crown and Native lands.

It is thus apparent that the cream of the rateable property has been taken from the county, and no extra provision made for the maintenance of those roads, which surely are of vital importance to the boroughs they feed. The complete *reductio ad absurdum* would be achieved by the establishment of two or three more boroughs, say, at Johnsonville, Pahautanui, and Upper Hutt, when the whole maintenance of the main arterial colonial roads would fall entirely on settlers of the more remote, and therefore less valuable, country.

This is only one instance. There are other counties in a similar, possibly worse, plight—*e.g.*, Eden, Selwyn, and Peninsula. I would suggest (1) in the first place, an amendment of "The Municipal Corporations Act, 1886," whereby proposed boroughs should have a minimum of three thousand inhabitants, and a rateable value of not less than £250,000 (there is no limit as to population or value now), boroughs to contribute to main roads leading to their boundaries; or (2) in the second place, the taking-over of main arterial—*i.e.*, county—roads by the colony, working through the local bodies by grant from the Consolidated or Land Fund, as is done in some parts of the United States of America. By some such scheme the incidence of taxation would fall more evenly and fairly on the whole population, and the local bodies insure a more satisfactory finance.

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6th August, 1894.

UPON THE PRESENT CONDITION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN NEW ZEALAND.

[Read before the County Conference at Wellington, August, 1894.]

I THINK it must have been in July, 1885, that I had the honour of attending a County Conference, sitting in Wellington. It was either that conference or a slightly earlier one. But in order to bring the results of conference work up to date I attach in Appendix A the resolutions then arrived at. Since 1885 I do not think there has been any great conference of County Councils—a matter to be deplored, as our Parliaments avoid grappling with the question. I extract from a late paper a discussion that took place in the House of Representatives about a fortnight ago upon the Pohangina County Bill. Similar discussions have taken place since 1885, but no useful result has followed. Different individual members admit the glaring evils resulting from the hurried abolition of the provinces in 1875 in order to carry out a mistaken policy of public works (which, in my opinion, has done vast harm to the colony, both in regard to wrecking its local-government system, and also in making it a Protective in place of a Free-trade colony), but no Government since 1875 appears to have sufficiently understood the principles upon which our Constitution Act was based to be able to introduce order into the chaos. I may explain that the proposed Pohangina County would contain an area of perhaps _____ acres. Delegates can now fully realise the absolute prostitution of the name of "local government" in the colony at the present time:—

"TOO MUCH GOVERNMENT.

"'Too much government' was the burden of the debate on the Pohangina County Bill yesterday.* The Bill proposed to convert a road district into a county, and was promoted by Mr. Pirani. It was opposed by Sir Robert Stout, who said that the effect of turning these road

* Parliamentary session of July, 1894.