

Now as to Road Boards. I think, if we allow 200 Road Boards to the colony for the present, that would give an area of 380,000 acres to each Board and a population of 3,000 people as a minimum. Hereafter (say in 1920) I would rather see only 100 Road Boards, with an area of 760,000 acres and a population of 6,000 people. The medium number would be 150 Road Boards with an area of 500,000 acres and 4,000 of a population. We need not be so strict as to the population being in exact proportion to the area in the Road Board form of local government as we should be in the amalgamated counties, but it must fairly approach the principle. Thirty miles by thirty miles would in my opinion be as much roadwork as one road engineer could look after, and there should always be one duly-qualified road engineer (a licensed surveyor) to each of our Road Boards; for I have seen the greatest waste of money in many Highway Boards in the colony owing to there not being a properly-qualified officer to fill this post. I believe that almost every single district road around Mount Egmont has its own Road Board, their revenue varying from £40 to £100 a year. Most of this money goes in paying for advertisements, postage, and clerical work. Some of the warden work of construction, too, is simply lamentable, as many as three different grades being observed—two, of course, being abandoned—in one piece of road round a hill. In Appendix F I attach an extract from the *Taranaki Herald*, of November, 1883, showing the terrible folly of the eight Chairmen of Road Boards in the Taranaki District at that time.

In the Forty-mile Bush, in the Wellington Province, and near Auckland as well, the Road Districts are altogether too small in area. In Appendix G I attach a letter written in June, 1883, warning the Masterton Road Board, which then embraced the Forty-mile Bush, not to allow itself to be cut up into too many Boards. The warning was unattended to, and now there are eight or nine Road Boards where there should be but one. The waste of money in clerical work, advertising, furnishing returns to the Government, stamps, &c., is simply enormous. But the chief waste, as I have said, is the overseership in construction by the wardens themselves—good enough country settlers, well-intentioned men, but nine-tenths of them unacquainted with the proper way of making roads and bridges.

These two examples will prove the error of Sir F. Whitaker's and Sir Harry Atkinson's idea of throwing a Constitution to the people and telling them to adopt it or not as they liked; also that a Constitution grows and is not made. These good people who set up so many Road Boards in Taranaki and the Forty-mile Bush had no idea whatever of the harm they were doing. And the eight Taranaki Road Board Chairmen, who thought that a committee of themselves could look after the bridges, and so abolished their county—their names should be engraven on brass, and handed down to posterity as a dreadful example of early colonists who understood so little the principles of true local self-government.

On the other hand, I have witnessed small County Councils in the South Island abolishing all the Road Boards within their area. This I thought a proper step, as the special County Council then fitted itself by area and population to the proper form of Road Board government—it became a mere Road Board. I think the Pahiataua County Council should follow suit in this, and, when done, change its name into the Pahiataua or Forty-mile Bush Road Board, merging all its county functions into a new amalgamated Wairarapa County extending from the Manawatu River to Palliser Bay. There is power, of course, to merge, and it is this power I propose to take advantage of in reducing the number of local bodies.

I think the idea of throwing a Constitution to half a million people, as was done in 1875, and telling them to rend and tear it as they pleased, deserves the utmost condemnation at our hands. The result proves the mistake. We are all at sixes and sevens with each other, and the central Legislature is free to run riot with our resources, as it has done for twenty years past.

I attach in Appendix H a letter written by me, 26th February, 1884, explaining how our Constitution Act was originally drafted, and telling the names of the gentlemen who did it. I say also that the Constitution of the United States was not thrown to the American people to rend and tear and patch as they pleased, but drafted by a few eminently educated men—chiefly by one Algernon Sidney, in a coffee-house in the Strand about 1681–82; the great English Republican aristocrat amending the draft afterwards at his charming home at Penshurst, in Kent. It was Mr. Penn, after whom Pennsylvania was named,—then emigrating to America,—who met Algernon Sidney, in the Strand, in London, and asked him under what form of government should the colonies live. Sidney thereupon roughly drafted the present celebrated American Constitution. Therefore I now say that it is always a terrible blunder to throw any form of Constitution to a people and tell them to rend and tear it as they please.

With respect to rating. Dual rating for road-construction should of course be abolished. The counties should not interfere with the Road Boards in this respect at all. All that the counties should do would be to look after the bridges and certain roads of colonial importance.

As to the wards in the Road Board and ridings in the counties, I should increase their area, but otherwise leave their constitution much as it is now—five to nine wards in each Road Board, and a similar number of ridings in each county, but each county riding to return two members to the Councils.* The boundaries of wards, Road Boards, and ridings to be coterminous. The ward unit of local government comes down to us through the long vista of fifteen hundred years of time. I have for it the highest respect. Base it only rightly, fit it only fairly to the area of population of any Anglo-Saxon country, and I warrant you, sir, that any superstructure you build upon it will come out free and independent. At present there can be nine wardens to a couple of miles of road in Taranaki. Is it any wonder that these petty wards struggle with each other most bitterly, and in the end lose their independence, the central Legislature mopping it up? For where there is so much division there cannot possibly be any true ruling. The ward unit must be rightly fitted.

* I understand since from the Premier that he prefers the name of "District Councils" for any such reduced number of counties. I hope Mr. Seddon will retain the good old-fashioned name of "County," but I will not insist upon the point, so long as the principle of reduction is conceded by Parliament.