

I think it would be as well, also, for Chairmen of Road Boards to be *ex officio* members of the County Council—my aim being to obtain a Council composed of eighteen to twenty-two members, bound together in unity as to their local requirements; the executive of the Council being the chairman, treasurer, clerk, commissioner of settled lands, bridge engineer, police, sheep and rabbit inspectors, and other such officers.

I think the experiment should be tried of the county maintaining its own police, the great object being to decentralise from Wellington. There are grave dangers now from the central authority having charge of the local police.

The present area of the municipalities is altogether too large for the population qualification within the counties, and it should be reduced. On the other hand, the population qualification for town districts is too large for any given area, and it requires lowering about 33 per cent. The manner in which these things have been ignored by the framers of our late Acts appears to me to be inexplicable. Many growing villages require to be town districts, but have not the necessary hundred houses.

With regard to charitable aid and lunatic asylums, I think the counties will look after these two things better than the irresponsible Boards which now have the looking after them. In making the chief towns of the colony counties in themselves, I leave the great lunatic asylums to them. Otherwise—that is, in charitable-aid matters—I think the twenty-nine counties I sketch out—twenty-five country and four town—might arrange this more amicably than at present.

With regard to lands, I would advise the separation of the settled lands of the Crown from the waste lands; the County Councils to administer the settled lands, and to have all dealings with settled lands in any shape or form.

With regard to finance in road-construction, I think the Road Boards should only be able to rate and to borrow up to a certain limit. But I have never been a great admirer of the Roads and Bridges Construction Acts, although I have been compelled to make use of them. I do not like throwing the cost of new work upon the localities, leaving the central Legislature free to squander millions of money as it pleases. What we should aim at is the absolute cessation of this wasteful expenditure, and the reduction of taxation upon the part of the central Legislature. This is what Canada is doing—reducing taxation by the Dominion Parliament—which will allow the localities then a greater spending-power.

The making of new roads and bridges is one of the *trinoda necessitas*, the second duty of the State after the defence of life and property. When there has been no necessity to defend, as in this colony, then the making of new roads and bridges became the first duty of the State, and it was a complete blunder to throw the whole cost of the work upon the localities. This blunder alone assisted chiefly to wreck our county and Road Board system. The argument that the State had all its work to do to maintain the railways does not apply. These costly iron roads have proved of little more advantage to the individual settler than our old metalled roads, New Zealand being a long narrow strip of land with a double seaboard. But thirty millions of money have been spent in running railroads alongside our old metalled roads, leaving settlers ten miles away from the railway as badly off as if there were no railways at all—more, indeed, because they cannot now expect any assistance from the extravagant central finance in constructing their new roads in the great work of settling the country.

There are a few arguments I have noted amongst others *re* the amalgamation of the counties which I wish now to record. In 1886 the Commissioner of Crown Lands in Wellington wished *himself* to inspect the Kaiwata Bridle-track, and declined to allow the County Council I sat in to do so. If a County Council is unfit to construct a bridle-track properly within its area, I cannot see the use of local government at all. The same remark applies to a properly-formed Road Board. I hope delegates will clearly understand what I say. If they are incompetent to be intrusted with the making of a bridle-track, then it is perfectly useless their meeting in conference at all.

In 1887 I saw a Minister of the Cabinet, an Under-Secretary, and a Rabbit Inspector going to inspect a run upon which it was difficult to get the rabbits down. Could anything be more absurd than that? So far I think I am justified in saying that the one central rabbit Act has done little good in suppressing the rabbit nuisance in this colony.

In 1887 I remember another Minister of the Crown telling the Woodville people that the Government had had such a bad experience of county work that he did not like to hand over such an important and costly work as the Manawatu Bridge to the local bodies. I think that Minister was quite justified in his remarks. The manner in which the bridges of the colony are being neglected by the counties and Road Boards deserves the severest condemnation. I hope a reduced number of counties will appoint good bridge engineers amongst them, and strike a small rate for the proper maintenance of the bridges. But all small bridges within the Road Board areas should be left to the Road Boards, the counties to take charge of all road bridges separating Road Board districts or counties.

There is no difficulty whatever for the counties to engage amongst themselves any of the engineers who constructed the great railway bridges, so that, personally, I advise no dependence upon the central Legislature for anything.

These three examples are sufficient illustration of what I mean.

A constitutional blunder has also been made, I think, in separating the population of the small municipalities and town districts within the counties from the local rating-areas.\* I can quite understand a town and county of itself being so separated, but not any smaller population. Tolls are now very properly abolished where possible, and the dwellers in any of the small townships use the roads of a Road Board fully as much as any of the landowners, and they are quite as much entitled to subscribe to their support. Roads are for the use of a people first, then for a people's goods and chattels; so it is the people generally who must first subscribe to their support. Of late

\* The United States town district embraces a much larger area than our town districts. The reader must not confuse the two.