

4. There appears to have been an entire misconception of the principles that underlie questions of local government by our politicians. Proper consideration does not appear to have been given to the suiting or the fitting of the population to the area. This appears to me to have been the fundamental mistake. The words "money" and "rating" have been bandied about, and these appear to have formed the bases of the questions at issue, whereas they have little to do with the question of efficient local government. The English statesman who drafted and advised upon our original Constitution Act treated these two questions as side-issues, but paid particular attention to the question of area and growing population. It is to be regretted that, whilst in the United States the people cherish and preserve their original Constitution, and amend it with the greatest reluctance, we in New Zealand alter with the utmost readiness one of the wisest forms of constitutional government ever granted to a country or to a community. I take it that our Constitution Act was a purely impartial Act, based upon the experience of ages.

5. I should suppose that the framers of that Constitution had a fairly simple task before them. Given an insular country within the temperate zone, possessing a certain geographical configuration, lying at stated distances from the continents, occupied by a small tribe of savages whom a century of time would cause to disappear, what form of government was most suitable to the area and growing population, that population belonging to the Anglo-Saxon race?

6. The question was admirably answered in our Constitution Act, whose wreck may still be seen in the efficiency of our Waste Lands Boards. The mistakes we have made appear to be two: (1) in violently abolishing, in place of gradually and cautiously amending; (2) in setting up too many forms of local government.

7. There was ample provision made in the Act (our Constitution Act) for dividing the provinces into counties, as witness the erection of the County of Westland. All that the colony required was the erection of a few more such counties. But the Act was sacrificed to a question of money (public works), and those who did so quite overlooked the fact that questions of area and population and local government stand upon immutable principles, whose roots run deep into the centuries, and that it is as impossible to prune these roots from a money point of view as it would be to evolve a perfectly new form of Constitution suitable to money. Those who abolished the provinces appear to have been clumsy workmen, unacquainted with their work. I would suggest no more violent changes, but a gradual rectification into the proper path. Violence of any kind is certain to recoil upon itself.

8. In a colony like this; undergoing the heated process of development, it is impossible to centralise government completely. One portion of the colony will not have that which is suitable to another portion because it is unsuitable for itself. The people of Auckland may be olive-growers and eaters of the lotus, when the people of Otago will be energetic shipbuilders and the navigators of the seas; although the people of Auckland, like the people of Greece, must become a maritime people, fond of adventure and prizing local independence. Herein the question arises of running a mountainous country, with a vast seaboard, some £20,000,000 into debt for the purpose of building railways. A maritime people will always find out their own markets. Might it not have been better and far more economical to have encouraged the maritime spirit and saved the debt? Our ports then would have been free to trade anywhere. They are not so now. The railways would have been built as they were wanted. Any Government therefore desirous of carrying out a policy of centralisation will build its house upon sand, for nothing but local independence will ever control a maritime people. There is as much difference between the two ends of this colony as between northern Scotland and southern England.

9. I should therefore wish to see a wise form of local government provided, acting hand-in-hand with the central authority. At present there is nothing but confusion. Our Acts should be general, but our administration local—that is to say, the executive officers should report to and work with efficient administrative local bodies. These bodies must exactly suit the area and population, changing only as the latter preponderates, and changing slowly. There must not be one county all population and another county all area. There should not be so many licensing bodies that their cost of administration is absurd. One Fence-viewer (or Act) cannot supervise all the fences in the colony and settle the disputes constantly arising between settlers, leading often-times to heartburnings, jealousy, and crime. Nor can one Rabbit Act perform the work expected from it. How greatly would the settlers of the colony from north to south thank the Legislature for devising some means of settling the constant disputes arising over the one question of draining!

10. Our politicians must recognise one thing—namely, that the laws of constitutional and local government do not depend on questions of railroad-making. Far better had we doubled the number of our provinces and taken away their money functions than abolished them and set up sixty-six counties in order to carry out a railway policy. We must go back now and correct the false steps we have taken.

11. The question of money must be separated from that of local government. It is sufficient if the General Government and the Road Boards tax us for the *trinoda necessitas*: (1) Keeping the fortresses in repair; (2) maintaining the naval and military forces; (3) keeping the roads and bridges in repair. Other principal dues of the Crown have long since been converted into Custom duties. We pay for justice, postal and railroad service, and the like. It is not generally considered a statesmanlike act to impose too much taxation in too many ways upon a people. Our Constitution Act has been broken in upon in order to carry out a particular money policy. Those who committed this error did not perhaps think that the colony might rock to and fro, the impetus having once been given, between provinces and counties, between unity and separation, until the North Island stood arrayed against the South Island upon this very question of local government. But these dangers are yet to come: hitherto they have only been hinted at. Those who abolished, in place of gradually and cautiously amending, have stirred up monsters concerning whose existence they perhaps did not even dream. They never considered that the area of this colony is divided into two parts by a narrow strip of sea, which is of more importance to the