

Mr. BROWN (Masterton) said that if they went on multiplying elections it would lead to great confusion.

Mr. BAGNALL (Auckland) said this was an important matter, and ought not to be disposed of in too much of a hurry. It was one of the most important questions that the Conference had to decide. In Auckland there was a feeling that there ought to be an extension of the franchise; but it was a difficult question to decide what was the best way to do it. What appealed to him most was the question of cost. There would have to be a separate returning officer for these elections, and there would have to be separate deputy returning officers at each polling-booth. That would mean a greatly increased cost. He would like to see the franchise extended.

Mr. DAVIS (Ashburton) said he was opposed to having the Hospital Board elections on the same day as the parliamentary elections. The multiplying of elections would result in confusion, and there would be many informal votes. He would rather support the retention of the present system of election for Hospital and Charitable Aid Boards.

Mr. SCANTLEBURY (Reefton) said it was his intention to vote for the amendment, although he sympathized to a great extent with the resolution. If the change provided for in the motion were carried, he was afraid that in some districts it would result in the election of most undesirable men, and the charitable-aid expenditure would go up by leaps and bounds.

Mr. R. C. KIRK (Wellington) said, having had experience of the three Boards in Wellington for many years past, he failed to see anything wrong with the present system, other than in some details. The proposed change in the method of election would mean a great deal more expenditure, and he failed to see any advantage it would have over the present system. Some of the objections that were urged against the present system were, he thought, owing to mistakes that had been made and that had been perpetuated under the present Act—particularly in regard to separate institutions. If some of the little anomalies under the present system were abolished, he thought they could get along very well.

Mr. O'BRIEN (Mercury Bay) said he would support the motion. The present system stood condemned. He thought they could get real good men under the proposed system of election.

Mr. McGRATH thought the people generally should have a voice in the election of these Boards. He would oppose the amendment.

Mr. CARSON (Wanganui) said he did not think they had heard one suggestion that would, if carried out, mean an improvement on the present position. His sympathies "went out" to the system of popular election. Still, he did not think an election under the parliamentary franchise would be an improvement. First of all, he did not think the people themselves would take sufficient interest in the matter. There was not quite sufficient at stake, and people would not take the trouble to vote. Candidates for certain local bodies—those who were not interested in public works—were not necessarily the men who were most interested in the question of charitable aid and hospitals. He could not support the motion; and as to the amendment he was prepared to vote against it if another amendment that had been suggested were brought forward.

Mr. CRANBY (Napier) said he was not at all in sympathy with the proposed parliamentary system of election for Hospital Boards.

Mr. HOGG, M.P. (Masterton), said, looking at the provisions of the Bill with regard to the mode of election of Committees and members of Boards, he was at a loss to see that they were any improvement whatever on the conditions that now existed. He could understand a radical reform or improvement, but this seemed to him to be a case in which they ought to judiciously "leave well alone" until they could think of something better. The Bill, instead of being democratic, was bureaucratic from beginning to end. What powers were the committees going to have? It seemed to him that it would be immaterial who the members of the committees were. He was of opinion that the principle of the Bill was bad from beginning to end.

The CHAIRMAN said they would deal with the question of committees later on. He believed that was a weak point in the Bill.

Mr. HOGG said the Boards would have all the powers, and the committees would have none. His sympathies were entirely with the amendment. If they could not discover something to improve the present system, then they should allow the present system to remain.

Mr. BAIN (Southland) said his sympathies were more in favour of the amendment than of the resolution. He would suggest that, instead of each local body sending a delegate, nominations should be received, and the names should be sent to the various local bodies, and every Councillor should vote for a particular candidate. He thought that would be more satisfactory and would be extending the franchise in a proper way. It would also avoid any chance of "points" being worked in connection with elections. As far as Southland was concerned, the representation there had worked very well indeed, with one slight exception. The whole district was fairly well represented in accordance with the amount contributed, and he thought that was the basis they ought to work on.

Mr. BURKE (Westland) said that as far as Westland was concerned the present charitable-aid arrangements had been quite satisfactory, and he had no fault to find with them. He might point out that the county and the borough elections took place at different times and in different years. If a change in the constitution of the Board was considered necessary, it might go in the direction of the Government nominating two members on the Board.

Mr. TALBOT (South Canterbury) said he also intended to support the amendment. He did not think any objection that had been raised to the present system could not be similarly raised against any of the other systems that had been mentioned; and a great many more objections could be raised against them. It had been stated that it was necessary to become a member of another local body in order to be elected to a Hospital and Charitable Aid Board. He might point out that the local body could appoint whom they liked: it was not necessary for the person appointed to be a member of the local body itself. He sincerely hoped the Government would let well alone: that until they saw an absolute necessity for altering the present system they would let it remain.