

Dealing now with what I have defined as the essentials of a sound form of local government, let us examine how far our present system meets those essentials.

(1.) *Simplicity of Form and Method.*—Can it be said that there is simplicity in a form of local government which provides for Road Board and Town Board operating within the same sphere as a County Council—levying rates and having separate staffs, and possessing to some extent the same functions? Some of the existing counties have a population of less than 1,000 persons; many others have less than 2,000 persons; only twenty-five have a population of over 5,000. A system of local government which allows three different forms of governmental administration to exist within such sparsely populated areas is surely not only fantastic, but utterly ridiculous. In addition, however, to the three classes of authorities named, there are others in the same district—such as the Education Board, the School Committees, the Hospital and Charitable Aid Board, the Harbour Board, and several others, all of which necessitate certain expenses for election, and, in most cases, for management. I think that the mere statement of the case which I have presented shows that the system at present in operation is wanting so far as simplicity of form and method is concerned.

Here it may not be inappropriate if I place before you a list of the public bodies engaged in carrying on the local government of the million or so of people who constitute the population of New Zealand, as follows:—

Borough Councils .. .. .	113
County Councils (Act not in operation in 9)	115
Road Boards .. .. .	149
Town Boards .. .. .	56
River Boards .. .. .	38
Land Drainage Boards .. .. .	41
Water-supply Boards .. .. .	2
City and Suburban Drainage Boards .. .. .	3
Harbour Boards .. .. .	32
Tramway Boards .. .. .	2
Hospital and Charitable Aid Boards .. .. .	37
Fire Boards .. .. .	20
Rabbit Boards .. .. .	3
Rabbit-proof Fencing Board .. .. .	1
	612
Domain Boards (Lands Commissioner), (approximate)	525
Cemetery Boards (Crown lands), (approximate) ..	600
	1,125
Education Boards .. .. .	13
School Committees (approximate) .. .. .	2,100
College and High School Boards .. .. .	23
University College Councils .. .. .	4
	2,140
Total .. .. .	3,877

Assuming that the above bodies have an average membership of six, we have 23,262 persons engaged in some form or other of local government in the Dominion, or one out of every forty-three persons of the entire population, or probably, if we take the adult male population, one in about every fifteen.

(2.) *Efficiency as regards Local and District Needs.*—No doubt the evolution of time and the practical experience of those engaged in the work of local government have, upon the whole, secured a certain amount of efficiency as regards what I may call the “bread-and-butter” duties and responsibilities of the local-government bodies—such as attending to roads, bridges, streets, &c. But there are many higher purposes that come under the heading of local government—such as libraries; the preparation of suitable by-laws, varying according to the district in which those by-laws are intended to operate; and many such matters—which cannot be upon a sound footing while the bodies that deal with them are weak so far as both population and finance are concerned.

One of the questions that I think this Conference should consider is how far it is possible to increase the functions of those local bodies that are to con-