

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM.

Mr. A. E. JULL (Chairman of the Hawke's Bay County Council) thought the thanks of the Conference was due to the Hon. Mr. Russell for the vast amount of interesting matter he had placed before them. When they had practically the whole Cabinet at their Conference, it was, in his opinion, a clear indication of the serious intention of the Government to take up the question of local government in a practical way. In the past, Local Government Bills had been placed before conferences, and had been torn to pieces, and suggestions made to the Government, and, as a rule, nothing further had been done. In this case, however, the fact that the Minister in charge of the Department concerned was in the chair at the Conference was a clear indication that there was a serious intention to proceed with some measure of local-government reform. He (Mr. Jull) proposed to ask the meeting to pass a resolution of a general character indicating that in the opinion of the Conference some measure of local-government reform was desirable. If the Conference affirmed this, there was some justification for their proceeding further; if they, on the other hand, declared that no reform was necessary, there would, apparently, be no need for further deliberation. He felt sure there would be fairly uniform agreement on this matter. The very large attendance at the Conference and the extreme interest that had been taken throughout the Dominion in connection with the selection of delegates were indications that the people were alive to the necessity for some alteration in the present local-government law. He moved, That in the opinion of the Conference some measure of local-government reform is desirable.

Mr. W. MACALISTER (Southland Education Board) had pleasure in seconding the motion. Most of the delegates had come to Wellington convinced that some measure of local-government reform was necessary, and after hearing the interesting address of the Minister he felt sure they were more convinced than ever that something ought to be done.

Mr. G. J. GARLAND (Auckland) asked what the proceedings would be if the motion were carried. If one were going to have no chance of saying anything afterwards, he had better say it now.

The PRESIDENT: You need not fear that. I have been too long connected with public life to expect seventy gentlemen to come here and not have a chance to talk.

Motion agreed to.

THANKS TO PRESIDENT FOR ADDRESS.

Mr. C. J. PARR (Mayor of Auckland) thought the Conference should place on their minutes an expression of thanks to the Minister for his address, which had opened up a number of important matters. They might agree or disagree with him in the conclusions he had arrived at, but no one could deny the care and thought he had given to the question. As a mere act of courtesy the Conference should accord the Hon. Mr. Russell their hearty thanks. He moved, That the Conference thank the Hon. Mr. Russell for his address.

Motion agreed to.

The PRESIDENT desired most sincerely to thank the Conference for their recognition of the small part he had taken. He had tackled some fairly large jobs in his time, but he thought this was the toughest he had ever had to deal with. When he read the proceedings at the different local conferences that had been held—and he had read every one, and kept himself in touch with everything that had been said about the Bill—he concluded that he was in for a very hot time, and he was not sure yet that he was not. But there was an old saying that Providence tempered the wind to the shorn lamb, and they would, he was sure, work together and do their best to improve the proposals of the Bill, or at any rate, give the Government a clear indication of what experienced men engaged in the work of local government thought the best course to be taken. That was the desire of the Government. They wished the representatives of local bodies to help them. The Government realized the difficulty of the problem. It was a problem which even an able man like Mr. Seddon started to deal with and had to lay down. The Bill before the Conference was Sir Joseph Ward's, and, coming after these distinguished and able men, he (Hon. Mr. Russell) felt some trepidation in undertaking the task of trying to pilot a scheme of local-government reform through a body of that kind, which probably possessed more brains and experience in connection with local government than any Conference that had assembled before. He was proud to have the honour of presiding over the Conference, and it was his desire that their proceedings should lead to definite results and definite good. He thought they ought to have that day, on a motion that the Bill be considered or some general proposal of that kind, an all-round discussion with regard to local government. A question that should be put before the Conference in the first place was this: there were nearly seventy delegates, all of whom would have an equal right to discuss every question that might be raised; was it desirable that there should be a time-limit placed on speeches, and, if so, to what extent? If each delegate spoke on a question for only five minutes, there would be 350 minutes' discussion, without counting anything he (Hon. Mr. Russell) might want to say. He would suggest a time-limit of five minutes.