

county, with the residential franchise which was in force to-day there, could dominate the election of a member of a Harbour Board or Hospital Board. The Bill provided that in the counties they should have a residential franchise and a property franchise. Well, unless the cities and boroughs were brought under the same franchise, it was not fair to apply it to counties. The franchise should be uniform. He hoped that some of the representatives of cities or boroughs would voice their opinion as to whether it was not desirable to—if he might use the word—improve the excellent Municipal Corporations Act by altering the franchise so as to give the owners of property a voice in addition to their residential vote. If they would agree to this the country representatives might go some part of the way to meet them on the franchise question. As to the abolition of Town Boards and Road Boards, the Counties Conference had recommended that the Road Boards should be abolished, and a suggestion had been made by the Counties Conference some four years ago as to how that should be brought about. To-day they could not abolish a Road Board without a petition, and it was a very difficult and cumbersome thing. It seemed to him it might be done by means of a poll. He was radical enough in this regard to desire the abolition of the Road Boards by a clause in the Act.

Mr. JOHN BAILEY (Chairman of the Waikato County Council) said that in the county he had the honour to belong to, and in the county which Mr. Fisher represented, they had Road Boards and the counties doing their work harmoniously and well. When these Road Boards were formed it was by petition, and the ratepayers in the districts concerned signed the petitions to a man. The Counties Conference had no right to seek to disfranchise these people. If the Government of New Zealand set out to abolish these small local bodies the small local bodies would abolish the Government. Some of the Road Boards that were too small might be grouped, but the Town Boards Act should be kept in force. This, he considered, was one of the finest Acts passed. Where the population grew in a small district it enabled the people to govern themselves; and this was what they all desired. He did not think the Provincial Councils would ever do. For example, they had had Mr. Garland get up to speak. That gentleman, no doubt, was sound on education; but when he turned to county matters he had not gone far before he tripped. The hospital and charitable aid districts, he (Mr. Bailey) thought, worked very well as at present. They were certainly big enough. When the Government decided to give the Waikato Hospital and Charitable Aid Board more territory they saddled them with Rotorua. Dr. Valentine came and told them what a splendid thing it would be if they had Rotorua, and got on the weak side of the Board, and they agreed. As soon as he had got them to agree to take Rotorua, he said the Government were going to build two hospitals there—one was to be an infectious-diseases hospital and the other a general one—and the Board would have to keep them up. That was not fair, because Rotorua was practically a Government town, and the rates that went to the Board from it were very small. He thought the Government should take back Rotorua, and try the Provincial Council there for five or six years.

Mr. E. N. LIFFITON (Wanganui) said he had been asked by the Rangitikei County Council to put their views before the Conference. The following was the communication they had sent him:—

“The following are the principal objections of this Council to the Bill: (1.) Centralization of control by Local Government Board under charge of a Minister of the Crown. (2.) Reversion to provincialism most objectionable, being both costly and cumbersome, and tending towards centralization. (3.) Dual control by Provincial and County Councils quite unnecessary, especially in respect of roads and bridges. (4.) While approving of merger of all road districts, strong objection is taken to the abolition of ridings and town districts, as the former give greater satisfaction to the ratepayers, while the latter have proved to be in the best interests of the people living in small towns, giving them control of their own affairs, and the power to undertake works outside the general functions of a County Council. (5.) The proposed franchise under the Bill is most objectionable, especially if ridings and town districts are abolished, as it would place the control of county affairs largely in the hands of those who contributed little or nothing towards the local rates. (6.) The proposed abolition of many of the local bodies and the placing of their various functions (education and river-protection, for example) under one body is inimical to good government; the present Boards, whose members give their services free, are better able to deal with these matters. (7.) The financial proposals under the Bill are most unsatisfactory, as it is sought to place greater burdens upon the local rates for general services which would be a charge upon the general revenue of the country. (8.) The delegation of power to Committees is not satisfactory. (9.) The proposed division of the Dominion into provinces is unsatisfactory; in some cases there is no community of interest whatever. (10.) The Bill, in the opinion of the Council, is altogether too revolutionary.”

He did not in every instance go so far as the Rangitikei County Council; nevertheless, they were an important county, and had a right to have their views put before the Conference. He desired to mention one point that occurred to him while the Hon. Mr. Russell was speaking. The Minister told them that the average cost of administration of the various local bodies was 9·70 per cent. Well, in the first place, these people were spending their own money, and had some right to say how much they should spend. But was it excessive when other bodies were considered? What was the cost of administration of the Government Life Insurance Department, for instance? More than 9·70 per cent.; it was 12·15 per cent. or 15·12 per cent., if his memory served him aright. Why, the cost of management of the Government itself, he would undertake to say, was more than 9·70 per cent.

Mr. R. MOORE said it was impossible adequately to discuss the principles of the Bill in five minutes. Those gentlemen who had spoken practically condemned the Bill. He was not going to do so right up to the hilt, but he had great difficulty in finding many good points in it. The principles which the Minister said underlay the Bill were admirable, if the Bill did give effect to them, namely: a reduction of the local bodies, the simplification of their work and economy in