

ment had grown up, and, although the counties had not got all that they had asked for, they were always sure of getting something. There were just one or two other matters he would like to mention. In the district to which he belonged the present system with regard to hospitals worked admirably. There had been no friction, and the work had been done in a splendid manner. He opposed absolutely the proposal that there should only be five members of the local bodies, for in his district that would not work at all.

The PRESIDENT.—When I mentioned “five” I only meant five to be elected by the people direct. I did not mean that the Committee should consist of five, because the county might elect seven, and the Committee would comprise twelve.

Mr. SMART said that that would do, but to have a Committee of five would not suit at all. The representatives of these counties had a full sense of their responsibilities, and did their work well, and in such a manner as had received approval in the past. Then there was the question of the franchise. That was most important, and it was a subject on which the Conference should speak with no uncertain sound. He strongly objected to the franchise as proposed in the Bill. Local bodies were to all intents and purposes administrative bodies, and there should be some voting qualification which would insure that a man had a sense of his responsibility. As proposed in the Bill, it might happen that a man occupied the chair of a County Council who had no interest in the county at all. He thought there should be some qualification, and was in favour of the continuance of the present system. In his district it was possible for a man to take up a residence area, for which he paid 5s. a year, and under the proposal in the Bill that man would have as much power as a man holding property worth £1,000.

The PRESIDENT.—You are evidently not in favour of manhood suffrage.

Mr. SMART said he was, but a distinct line had to be drawn between Parliament and a local body. Parliament dealt with the liberties of the people as well as other matters, and it was advisable that every one over the age of twenty-one years should have a voice in those matters. With regard to the matter of the overdraft, he would like to say that it was stated in the Bill that under no circumstances could the overdraft exceed the balance of the estimated revenue for the current year. It was quite easy to imagine a case in which that provision would be exceedingly oppressive. For instance, at Christmas twelve months ago damage to the extent of £1,000 was done within an hour in his riding of the Vincent County. That damage had to be remedied at once, and if they had previously been expending up to their limit they would have been in a nice fix. The men who were in charge of county affairs were not children, and should have some liberty, so that they could carry on the duties properly. There were a good many other matters to which he would like to refer, but he would leave them over until the opportunity came for dealing with the subjects in detail. At the same time, he thought it was right that the Conference should know what the general effect of the Bill would be on each place. If that was done they would be able to arrive at some general conclusion, and evolve something which would be a permanent benefit to the whole Dominion.

Mr. H. J. MIDDLETON (Southland, Wallace, and Fiord) said it appeared to him that they were gradually but surely evolving something out of the discussion that was going on. A process of selection was being made, and he thought they were drawing a line round the only part of local-government reform that was necessary or would be acceptable to the people. It had been made manifest that no reform was needed in regard to the big cities, and also that the present system of Hospital and Charitable Aid Boards could not be improved upon. What, then, had they left? Very little was left that required reform with the exception of the counties, and the solution of that difficulty, he believed, would be found in an enlargement of the counties and the giving of somewhat extended powers to the counties. He came to the Conference to especially oppose the formation of the Local Government Board as proposed in the Bill; but he must admit that the remarks they had had from the President had to a great extent disarmed criticism in regard to that Board. It was not the revolutionary thing they had been led to believe it. It was merely a system to take over the duties and responsibilities and privileges at present vested in the Governor in Council. He understood that that was largely what it meant.

The PRESIDENT.—That is so.

Mr. MIDDLETON said he did not believe in centralizing, but they must admit that it was necessary to have some responsible body between the local bodies and the General Government. He was at a loss to see that the setting-up of the Provincial Councils would make for economy in administration. Given a reasonably large County Council, he thought they would get the most economical administration possible. He happened to represent a very large county. They had a capital value of eleven millions, and the total cost of administration, covering everything that could reasonably be called administration, was 7 per cent. of the annual revenue, which from rates alone amounted to almost £40,000. If Provincial Councils were set up to have jurisdiction over main roads and bridges, it would be necessary for those Councils to at once set up a staff for the maintenance of those roads and bridges, and the counties would still have to continue their present staffs and working gangs. The counties had built up a system under existing conditions, and it was working satisfactorily. His county had an organized bridge gang, and that gang could not be dispensed with by the county if the Provincial Council was set up; but that Provincial Council would also require to have a bridge gang. It appeared to him that the rating-powers which it was proposed to give the Provincial Councils would simply double the liability of ratepayers without their getting any return for it. He had not been able to see anything in the proposal to establish Provincial Councils except an increased cost of roads and bridges. He agreed with Mr. Studholme in his condemnation of the system of grants and subsidies; and if anything further was needed to satisfy the Conference, and the country, and the Government of the viciousness of the system, he thought he could supply it. The matter to which he referred was a somewhat notable one. The grant was made for a thoroughly private