

taking a man out to test him for his license, will have to send that man on to the Government authority to get his license, with a covering memo. of some sort letting them know that he has satisfactorily passed the test. It would be just as easy for the local body to write out the license—more easy, in fact—and complete the whole transaction, and it would certainly save the individual who was applying for the license a lot of time.

In practice, the examiner never does that?—The Inspector took me out, for instance, and when we had completed the test he took me into the office and got them to write out the license straight away.

But you had to go to the office for it?—Yes; but the office was where we completed the test. I drove to the office, we went in, and in five minutes I had the license, whereas I presume that under the Bill a man applying for a license would have to get a letter or form to take to the post-office, and there he would have to go and wait his turn, and in due time a license would be issued, so that there would be no saving in time, but really a waste of time so far as the applicant was concerned, and no saving of labour in any way on the part of the local body.

*Hon. Mr. Veitch.*] You pay for your own driver's license when licensing a car?—Yes; but what I am referring to is when a man is tested in the first instance. The 5s. which we now get is to be divided between the local body and the Government authority.

That is quite wrong. I think you will find it is not. Taking the cost of administration from the fee of 5s. is not dividing the revenue?—No; but the cost of administration will go to the Government and not to the local body, and there will be no reduced labour so far as the local body is concerned. The point has been raised by the Minister as to local bodies having all the heavy-traffic fees returned to them. Let me point this out to the Committee: that, while our heavy vehicles practically operate within the confines of the City of Wellington, our share of the heavy-traffic fees is only 47 per cent. of what is collected.

*The Chairman.*] Then, you get a percentage of what is collected outside?—We have practically over 90 per cent. of the heavy vehicles in Wellington, so that we would not have returned to us one-half of the heavy-traffic fees which we will have to pay on vehicles not only such as buses and trackless cars, but also on heavy lorries which we use in constructing our own roads. More than half of those fees will go to the other local bodies.

How is the division of heavy-traffic fees arrived at in your case?—In Wellington we have arrived at it by mutual agreement. The various local bodies interested met, and we came to an amicable agreement. In addition to that, we have taken from us the 5 per cent. which we now get for collection of these fees. That will be taken and used by the Government. I may say that we agreed in Wellington to this percentage of 47 in view of the fact that we had this additional 5 per cent. for the collection. When that is taken away the whole position will be altered, and we certainly would never have agreed to such a small proportion as 47 per cent. had it not been for the fact that we were getting the 5 per cent. for collection. Altogether we shall lose, if this Bill passes, the following sums: In petrol-tax, now remitted to us on our own road-lorries, £1,250 per annum; in heavy-traffic fees, if all these vehicles are now to pay heavy-traffic fees, we shall have to pay additional next year £3,567; and we shall also lose in the collection of heavy-traffic fees the sum of £1,500; making a total reduced revenue to the Wellington City Council next year, if the Bill is passed this year, of £6,317. There is another point in regard to the Bill, and that is that we hold that it centralizes in Wellington the control of the whole of the motor transport trade of New Zealand. The municipalities hold—and we discussed this matter at great length—that what is required is less centralization, instead of more as provided in this Bill. The local bodies desire more control of their own affairs, and less control by the Government. Instead of centralization, they consider decentralization will give more effective and efficient control; and we fail to see why the Bill cannot be drafted unifying and codifying their powers, but leaving the whole administration to the local bodies, instead of attempting to exercise control and administration from one centre as proposed in the Bill. I may say in regard to this that, speaking as an old railway officer, the centralization of that Department was carried to a very great extent; but five years ago it had to be discontinued, and decentralization established, and since decentralization came about the needs of the people have been met in a much better way and better service has been given. The people are more satisfied, and certainly do not complain now as they once did in regard to the railways. If we take the Education Department, centralization there has been carried to a greater extent, I think, than in any other Department of the Government service, with the result that dissatisfaction is rife throughout New Zealand. There is more controversy, I dare say, in regard to education than over any other public subject or question in New Zealand. The powers of Education Boards have been taken away to such an extent that the prestige of the Boards has been lowered, and in the same way the standing and importance and powers of local bodies will be infringed upon. We have at the present time Health Boards, Loan Boards, Transport Boards, and other Boards, and the rights and privileges of the people are being taken away when you impair or reduce the rights and powers of the local bodies which they control. Democracy is being superseded by a bureaucracy which will never give satisfaction, nor prove economical or efficient. I want now to give some idea of the costs of construction so that the Committee will see, apart from petrol-tax and heavy-traffic fees, the municipalities are called upon to make a very heavy expenditure.

Has that a direct bearing on the Bill?—Very direct, for this reason: that local bodies are put to very great expense in constructing, in the first place, and then improving and maintaining, roads towards which motorists, either through heavy-traffic fees, the petrol-tax, or any other tax, contribute little or nothing, and I just want to give some indication of what the cost is of a few operations in the City of Wellington. Our expenditure in this direction is very great indeed, but I will ask you to consider only two of the many works that are now being carried out. One is the widening of the road