

Question 16—continued.

up for traffic and facilitating agriculture, &c.

Tuhikarama—The Road Boards can discharge all the duties of County Councils at much less expense, provided full power be given them, and means provided for enforcing the payment of rates at a less cost and more quickly than under present Act.

Raglan—None; except that I am of opinion that, if the powers of the Road Boards were increased, and an allowance was to be made to the Chairman and also to the members for each meeting they attend—the amounts to be fixed by law—they would be quite able to perform all the work which is now divided between them and the County Councils. The Karioi Road Board have adopted the views in this paper *in toto*.

Pirongia—Would necessitate the provision of funds other than ordinary rates from adjacent lands for the maintenance of arterial roads, especially in districts where the Counties Act is not in force. What this provision should be we are not prepared to suggest, but we are of opinion nothing adequate is shadowed forth in the circular. As to the construction of the Board of Public Works, it seems the powers would be practically in the Minister for Public Works, while the responsibility would be divided. This does not seem expedient. In the matter of elections it seems desirable to reduce the clerical and advertising charges for management of local elections as far as possible, and at the same time secure unanimity of action between two bodies where there are such.

Raglan Town—No answer.

Whakatane—No.

Cook—The basis of the valuation as proposed is the new Rating Bill. Meets with the approval of this Council, as also the proposal to vest power in the Public Trustee of selling or letting land for non-payment of rates.

Ormond—None.

Patutahi—No answer.

Te Arai—No answer.

Poverty Bay—That the accumulated rates on Native properties would eventually lead to difficulties.

Tauranga—No answer.

Katikati—We entirely approve of the property-tax rating, and that there should be a simplified method of collecting the rates of absentees. We also think that the licenses in districts in which there are Road Boards should be granted to the Road Board, not to the County Council, and we are totally opposed to a dual rating. We wish to spend our own rates and whatever grants the Government may kindly give us on our own roads, and not be subject to the jobbery and maladministration of our rates by the County Council. For instance, the County Council, after the Government granted £2,500, and latterly £2,000 for the Thames-Tauranga Road, immediately increased their Clerk's salary from £70 to £150, and allowed their Engineer an increase from £250 a year and travelling allowances to somewhere over £1,000 a year, that is, 5 per cent. on every shilling granted by the Government on the Thames-Tauranga Road, Te Aroha Road, Hauriri Bridge, &c.

Te Puna—It may not be inadvisable here to submit the following remarks upon the working of Road

Boards, derived from lengthened practical experience of them, and suggest the following alterations as likely to prevent the evils they expose: In considering the many measures with which you have had to deal, the difficulty that must have met you at every point must have been to protect the powers to be conferred from abuse. It appears impossible to entirely do so; and, through the opening that must be left to cupidity and self-interest, no small proportion of the resources of the whole colony is prevented of the effect it should have in the general development and prosperity. In this way a very large proportion of the rates of Road Boards is expended on works that are not immediately, and in many cases not at all, necessary, but are undertaken solely to serve the private ends, and confer value on the properties, of the faction having for the time the upper hand in the Board. In nearly every road district these factions exist, and they are divided and engaged in a struggle to get a majority in the Board for this purpose. Once in power, the object is to get as much money as possible—in many cases the Boards are run hopelessly into debt—and lavishly expend it in employing their friends and dependants in or about their own properties. In this way the general needs of the district get entirely uncared for. In some cases the object is to rapidly increase the value of the property, and sell out at the increased value, when the district, saddled with a debt incurred for the purpose, is left. It will immediately appear to you how this must interfere with the due development and sound progress of the colony, and also how distressing and annoying it must be to those who wish to have things conducted honestly and to best advantage. The root of the evil lays in the morals of the sort of people into whose hands the power unavoidably falls, and is beyond the present scope of legislation. The remedy would be to place the power in better hands, and so that there would be more checks. This can be done by transferring to the County Councils all power of rating or raising money; and by making, subject to their consideration and discretion, all grants or payments to Road Boards. County Councils have a larger number of members, and proportionately would be the difficulty of unfairly using their powers. It is obvious from this that it would be unwise to subdivide them, or reduce the number of members. In proportion as the powers, members, and importance of Councils are increased, the higher would be the class of men that would seek to enter them. These would in themselves be a guarantee of a higher integrity; they would have the public eye more on all their official doings; and there would be the practical, official, and interested vigilance of the Road Boards keenly watching them. Road Boards should continue, and be elected as at present, but have power to subdivide into and appoint officers for subdistricts. Their functions would be: every year to ascertain and furnish to the Council a list of their requirements for ensuing year, with estimate of their cost, and to ap-

point officers to ascertain these, and see them carried out. For this purpose, in every district and subdistrict there would be appointed two ratepayers who, without pay, would undertake the supervision of all roads and matters in their district, and would direct and control all labour and works not under professional supervision. These would report at regular intervals to their Boards, and the Boards annually would have to produce to their Councils a report and balance-sheet. Such an arrangement as the above, while it would reduce the possibility of abuse to a minimum, would save a considerable sum of money now lost in expenses. Every Road Board has to pay Valuer, Collector, Clerk or Secretary, and Engineer. These would all be done away with. One staff would do the work for all; and, the number and extent of the Council's operations being thus greatly increased, they would have permanent employment and be able to maintain a more competent and efficient staff. I have an idea that a system somewhat similar to the above is in use in Scotland, and is found to work exceedingly well.

Wairoa—If the valuations under the Counties and Rating Acts are kept in force, provisions should be made for appointing Boards of Reviewers, instead of making Resident Magistrates Judges of Assessment Courts, without any appeal from their decisions. Respecting the scheme for constructing roads through Crown lands out of the purchase-moneys, the Council trust the Government will act up to their proposals.

Hawke's Bay—(1.) If Government valuers be not appointed, the right of appointment should rest with the counties and not with Road Boards, for the following reasons. Firstly, Road Board valuations are very uneven; secondly, it appears by the present Rating Act that the County Council has no power to object to Road Board valuations. (2.) It is a question whether the powers vested in Judges of Assessment Courts are not altogether too large to be used by the class of Judges appointed, unless some power of appeal be given.

Heretaunga—No.

Kereru and Aorangi—No answer.

Marakakaho—County Councils and Road Boards to have power to make roads through Native lands not through the Court.

Okawa—Road Boards to have the power to value the rateable property in their districts.

Papakura—No answer.

Petane—Road Boards should have the power to appoint their own valuator, providing the Property-Tax Commissioner's valuation is not made universal.

Te Mata—The valuations would be more easily and justly made if valuers were appointed by each Council for each county.

Waipawa—Respecting the scheme of constructing roads through Crown lands out of the purchase-money, the Council trust the Government will act up to their proposals.

Norsewood—Respecting the scheme of constructing roads through Crown lands out of the purchase-money, the Road Board trust the Government will act up to their proposals.

Oero—No answer.

Ormondville—Respecting the scheme of constructing roads through Crown lands out of the purchase-