

districts into counties would be that counties would eventually be abolished; by Mr. Bell, who spoke in a similar strain; by Captain Russell, who declared that the measure would result in doubling the borrowing-powers of the district; by Mr. Mitchelson, who advocated increase instead of decrease of county areas; and by Mr. Tanner, who kept the debate going till the 5.30 adjournment, and shelved the Bill. In answer to inquiries the Premier said there was 'too much local government,' a statement which was received with a chorus of approval. He considered there should be a large reduction in the number of local bodies, which would mean a reduction of administrative expenses."

Notwithstanding these remarks, delegates will find that the Pohangina County Bill will become law.\*

I am hoping that a more frequent sitting of county conferences will bring forward delegates who understand the true principles of local government—country settlers who have studied and read the historical bearings and precedents of the important question at issue. For upon ourselves, dwellers in the country, rests the particular form of local government under which we choose to live. There is no necessity for us whatever to rest content with the mistaken legislation of 1875. Few town representatives will care one jot about the question unless we stir ourselves in the matter, make ourselves acquainted with what is required, and ask for what we want.

At the former conference I attended I saw very clearly that the delegates had not then grasped the position at all. I hope better things of this conference. For the consideration of delegates I attach in Appendix B a copy of a memorandum I had the honour of forwarding in June, 1883, to the Hon. Walter Johnston, then one of the Ministers of the Cabinet, at his own request. There is nothing in it I wish to retract now, or particularly amend. My repeated references to the money question in the memorandum were made for the purpose of emphasizing the vast difference that exists between local government based upon a "money" point of view (rates and taxes) and local government based upon area and population, the only true principle.

From a mere money point of view there can be no good form of local government at all. The question of rating should, of course, be considered in sketching the form of any local government, but it is really more a matter connected with revenue purposes. If the Crown or the central authority draws all the revenue and consolidates it, then, of course, there will be little local revenue. *Au contraire*, if the central authority reduces its expenditure, and throws the responsibility of taxing upon the local authorities, there will be plenty of local funds. At present our central authority in this colony draws four and a half millions of revenue out of a nine millions surplus of produce, so that it is almost impossible for the local authorities to spare much more for the great work of opening up the country.

In the memorandum I refer perhaps a little too strongly to the fact that I did not wish to see the provinces restored. I must have taken that view then because, having wrecked our Constitution by abolishing the provinces too quickly, it would be better to amend the Counties Act by reducing the number of counties than to repeal it and go back to the provinces. Personally, I think the provincial form of local government an excellent one. We still retain it in our Waste Land, Education, Charitable Aid, Cattle, and Harbour Boards, &c. It is, with the Municipalities, the only true form of local government we at present possess, the Road Boards being so much interfered with by the excessive number of counties, and made too much to depend upon the central Legislature for everything.

In Appendix D I attach a copy of resolutions arrived at by a joint committee of the Rangitikei County Council and the Rangitikei Highway Board about July, 1881. Resolution No. 2 points out the necessity of the central authority lessening its expenditure in place of increasing it.

About February or March, 1881, the following notice of motion was sent by me to the Wairarapa West County Council (now Wairarapa South). It was duly discussed, and, I think, referred to a conference of County Councils sitting in Wellington about 1882. It may have been that earlier conference I attended, and not the one in 1885:—

"That a respectful address be presented by the Council to Parliament, praying that Parliament in its wisdom will, for the efficient working of the county system, see fit to reduce the number of counties in the colony by about two-thirds of those at present in existence. That some portion of the legislative and administrative powers possessed and exercised by the late Provincial Councils be handed over to such a reduced number of counties. That a subsidy of £1 for £1 be contributed from the consolidated revenue upon all county rates levied for the purpose of maintaining and erecting important bridges and opening up main roads in districts not served by railways. That Road Boards alone see to and provide for the permanent roadways in districts served by railways. That special votes be made by Parliament for any works of colonial importance. That a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the different County Councils in the colony, calling attention to the advisability of holding a general conference during the approaching session of Parliament, touching the matters herein contained."

I also find amongst my papers the following resolution, which may or may not have been passed by that conference: "That this conference, having considered the position of local government in the colony, is of opinion that various amendments in the law are urgently required. That in the opinion of the conference the present defects in the system, the wants of various local bodies, and the direction in which amendments of the law should be made and assistance given, would be best ascertained by an inquiry under the authority of Parliament. This conference therefore respectfully urges upon the Government the necessity of immediately appointing a Committee of

\* It has since become law, but the Act does not give the acreage of the new county, neither do the statistics of the colony, Part VI., Miscellaneous (being the portion relating to local governing bodies), give the areas of counties or road districts. I would ask our Registrar-General to amend this omission as quickly as possible. Let us see the areas and population of all our local governing bodies. I have great suspicion, too, regarding "The Levels County Act, 1894," creating that district a new county. Pohangina and Levels appear to me to stand much in a similar position.—C.P., 1894.