

Mr. C. W. COMER. (No. 12.)

Mr. C. W. COMER, clerk to the Halswell Road Board, and also a member of the Spreydon Road Board said they were altogether against the abolition of Road Boards, but he believed that the Road Boards should in certain cases be amalgamated with the adjoining Road Boards. He said his Board's rates alone amounted to £1,000 a year, and the total expenditure for management is £150.

Mr. WILLIAM McMILLAN examined. (No. 13.)

Witness: I represent the Ellesmere District. We want to retain the Road Boards, and if the Road Boards are abolished we wish to form a county ourselves. Ours is a large district and well bounded. The nearest point in my district is twenty miles, and the farthest away over forty miles, and our valuation is a million and a third. The $\frac{1}{2}$ d. rate brings £2,700, and the expenses for management amount to about £280.

146. *Mr. G. W. Russell.*] What is the feeling in regard to the alteration in the franchise?—Leave it as it is.

147. Would you like extended powers, as far as the franchise is concerned, if the Road Boards are retained?—This Counties Act would give us what we want, I think.

148. But you also have a proposal, as far as amalgamation is concerned?—That would not affect us at all. I think the amalgamation would be of advantage.

Mr. F. BENHAM. (No. 14.)

Mr. F. BENHAM, Malvern Road Board said: The feeling of our district is strongly in favour of retaining the Road Boards. They are not altogether against amalgamation. Our rateable property is £1,394. We strike a $\frac{1}{2}$ d. rate, which brings £352, and the cost of administration of that is £153 0s. 11d.

149. *Mr. Stevens* (to Mr. Morgan).] I understood you to say that the subsidies were divided between the Road Board and the County Council?—We get some back in the shape of subsidies to mend roads, and some to mend bridges.

150. In what direction do they spend their £500?—It goes to the general maintenance of the county.

151. Is not the whole of the money spent for the same purpose as that for which the Road Board expends its subsidies?—No; a large amount goes towards the office expenses.

152. This subsidy of £1,000—is it all expended in the best interests of the general public?—I expect we get a fair proportion of it.

153. It seems very strange to me that it requires two local bodies to administer the interests of one area?—It is not a small area. The county is over one hundred miles from one end to the other.

154. I wish to get some salient points why it requires two local bodies?—They could not do it very well with one centre. They would have to maintain the present Road Office to work the county. As we argue, it is absolutely impossible for the County Council to take the place of the Road Board.

155. *Mr. Hall* (to Mr. Sharp).] You have roadmen in your district. Do the men bring in reports to you?—Yes.

156. I would like to ask you this: During the whole of the evidence we have had the contention that they would be administered at a very much less cost than if they were merged into one body, as the members had a special knowledge of the requirements of the district. Would it not be sufficient to have these reports from the roadmen?—My contention is this; that the way the Ashley County is worked is the best system of local government.

157. *Mr. Meredith* (to Mr. Boag).] You are in favour of retaining the present local franchise on a property qualification with a plurality of votes; and you believe in Road Boards and road districts as the most efficient and economical form of government?—I think so, and I do not think it can be bettered. Take, for example, our district. There are five men selected—all practical men. They meet there once a month, and lately once a fortnight, and these men know thoroughly the requirements of the district. We have a thoroughly practical man as clerk and surveyor, who is not overpaid by any means. The conclusion I have come to is this; that I do not think it can be managed otherwise with any better success.

158. You are not in favour of the parliamentary franchise becoming the local franchise?—No.

159. *Mr. Hardy* (to Mr. McMillan).] You speak of the Road Board management being very popular?—Yes, it is.

160. And what about the County Council?—It is a disgrace to any county. Every one concurs in that opinion.

161. You sometimes have considerable trouble in your district in connection with bridges; have you been able to get those bridges erected or not?—No; in consequence of the position taken up by the County Council we were unable to avail ourselves of the grant which was made by Parliament for this purpose.

162. *Mr. Hornsby* (to Chairman): I want to know if these gentlemen recognise that they are all in favour of amalgamation of Road Boards, but not in favour of the Counties Bill. As a matter of fact, it appears to me that they want extended powers. Will you ask them how they reconcile that?

Mr. Morgan: We do not object to the counties. We want them in a workable size. We want direct representation on this Commission.