

pretty widely open. By petition, small boroughs contiguous to cities could come into the cities very often without the terms of amalgamation being properly arranged. That was a situation they had to face in Wellington. Some wanted the small boroughs to come in at once, but he thought it would be very grievous and very burdensome to the finances of the large municipalities if the pace of amalgamation was forced any more. He would point out the position with regard to the finances of Wellington. The capital value upon which the rating would operate under the Bill for Wellington was £7,000,000, and for the whole of the counties within the Wellington Province the value was £17,600,000. The capital value for the Counties of Makara, Hutt, Horowhenua, Manawatu, and Oroua was £10,600,000, so that clearly they would have to consider seriously the position if all the liability was to be placed on the city. In saying this he did not want to be taken as simply putting forward destructive criticism. He believed that a certain amount of good work could be done in the matter of amalgamating some of the minor local bodies with other bodies, and also by strengthening the County Councils; but in his judgment the wisest course with regard to the cities was to leave them out, because he believed the whole trend of local-government law elsewhere as well as in New Zealand was in the direction of insisting that the cities get special legislative powers of their own in order to carry on their numerous functions. The President had rightly said that one of the essentials of local government was simplicity of form and method, but so far as the large boroughs were concerned their inclusion within the province would not mean simplification in any respect, but would add to the complexity of the functions they already had to exercise. Further, he would like to say, with regard to the financial effects of the Bill, that he believed they would be so serious that if the Bill was to go through the House in its present form the financial aspect of it should be gone into by a Commission, so that the bodies affected could clearly understand what the financial results would be before they indorsed the measure. He was glad to find that the Cities of Auckland and Wellington took the same view of this matter, which was not one of antagonism to the country districts, but was simply a recognition of the fact that their own financial liabilities were so great that they were compelled to safeguard the interests of the people to whom they were responsible.

Mr. F. W. VENN (Chairman of the Horowhenua County Council) would like to say a few words as to the opinion of the county he represented. All were aware that for many years there had been a great cry for some reform of local government, but all thinkers, at all events, were agreed that there had been a need of pointers to the Government as to how to bring about that reform. The Government of the day had now practically placed the matter in the hands of the local authorities, and if during the week they could only show the Government how to bring about a better state of affairs in connection with local government they would get what was desired. Here, then, was their chance. If they wanted reform, let them tell the Government what was desired, and how to get it. So far as his county was concerned, they did not believe in a Local Government Board. They believed that meant further expenditure, probably the appointment of another Minister or somebody else, and some one would have to pay for that, and that some one was the man on the land. The Minister had told them they proposed to set up a Board on the principle of the British Local Government Board, but he was afraid if they proceeded on those lines they would imitate the frog in the fable that tried to be as big as a bull. As they knew, the result was that the frog ultimately burst, and he feared they would burst if they tried to swell themselves into imitation of the British Government. He thought the Bill was a mistake. They all wanted less interference from Parliament. As the thing stood at present they could not move outside the four walls Parliament set up without what was called an Order in Council, and the worst of Orders in Council and Acts of Parliament was that they were generally passed by people who knew very little about local government. Personally, he thought that one of the finest things that could happen would be for the House to pass an Act prohibiting any person from sitting in the House until he had served at least four years upon a City, Borough, or County Council. If an Act of that sort was passed they would get men in whom they would have confidence, and men who knew what they were doing when they passed Acts for the control of local bodies. One thing the counties would like the Government to give more attention to, and which they ought themselves to be very careful over, were the remits brought up from time to time before the Municipal Conferences and the County Conferences, and more particularly to some of the rejects of the County Conferences. He noticed in this Bill a number of the rejects of the County Conferences, and he hoped they would be able to save several of these rejects. The trouble with County Conferences, and he took it it was the same with Municipal Conferences, was that they had always tried to pass as few remits as possible, on the supposition that the fewer they passed the more likely those passed would be to receive attention, and because of this many remits had been shut out. He did not think, so far as hospitals were concerned, that they would in any way better the position by abolishing the Hospital Boards. But what he did think was that they should bring pressure to bear upon some of them, at all events, regarding the awful charges they levied on the local bodies in the country. The Wellington Board had started last year with a credit balance of £18,000. Now, that money was actually drawn from the local bodies, who were paying interest on an overdraft at the bank for it. The Board had wound up the year with a credit balance of £10,100, and because they only had that credit balance they added 15 per cent. on to the levies. He thought this wanted seeing into.

The PRESIDENT.—Who should see into it? Would you refer that matter to the Local Government Board?

Mr. VENN said matters were bad now, but he believed the Local Government Board would make them infinitely worse. So far as the subsidies were concerned, his opinion was that they should be abolished altogether, and that the Government should take over the support of the Hospital and Charitable Aid Boards, and administer them in the same way that they did the mental hospitals and gaols. Wellington to-day wanted something like £57,000 for charity, and