

purpose, and of no public utility whatever, and it was given without the knowledge of the County Council, which was forced into the position of spending the money, although it was only a small sum. Their specifications for the work were approved by the Government Engineer; the work was carried out, and again approved by that Engineer. Then they applied for payment of the grant, but their application was hung up, and they got no reply. They renewed the application for the grant, and within the last six weeks word was received from the Public Works Department that the authority for that grant was withdrawn. Now, that was a nice position to place a local body in. If they were to be faced with that sort of thing, what guarantee had they in the future in spending any grants given in that manner? There was only one word which appeared to him to properly describe such an action, but it was a word which thoroughly met the case, and that word was "repudiation." If one Government could repudiate the obligations of a former one, where would they be landed? He, for one, would decline to spend any grants that were offered to them.

The PRESIDENT.—I desire to say that what you have referred to was not done by the present Government.

Mr. MIDDLETON said he was very glad to hear that. They had been informed within the last six weeks by the Public Works Department that the authority for that vote and a similar one had been cancelled. The contract for the latter vote had been let, but fortunately, owing to the bad season, the contractor was unable to begin the work, and therefore the Council did not incur any liability. But in the case to which he had previously referred the Council had incurred the liability, and was out of pocket. Surely it was possible to devise some better method than that. Indeed, it would be a good thing if the politicians could get rid of the system. In regard to the franchise, he was opposed to give representation without taxation. One delegate had advocated that the resident non-ratepayers should be given a vote, but later on he called them "irresponsibles," and said they should not be allowed to take any part in discussions on loan proposals. If they are irresponsibles—and I agree with him—why should they get the vote? They were administering purely local affairs, and chiefly with locally raised money. The amount they received from the Government was so small, and the amount that those resident non-ratepayers contributed through the consolidated revenue was so small, that it was not worth taking into consideration as an argument in favour of the franchise. In the country almost all those who were not householders had their food provided for them, and they only paid duty on their clothes and luxuries. He had briefly touched on what he thought were the most vicious proposals in the Bill. He thought they might evolve something out of the Bill by suggesting to the Government the wisdom of increasing the size of the counties. Let the Road Boards merge, except in very new districts, where they were doing good work; and some system should be devised to take over the little River Boards. The present County Councils could strike the rates, and proclaim separate rating areas for them, and set up Committees to administer those affairs.

Mr. H. LOWE (Mayor of Thames) said the President deserved the thanks and appreciation of the delegates for bringing them together. There was no doubt but that it gave representatives from all parts of New Zealand an opportunity of expressing their views upon the Bill, as well as upon local government generally. There was real need for reform. Personally, he favoured enlarging the powers of the County Councils. He differed very much from the remarks of his friend from Ashburton, and also with the last speaker, who seemed to be inclined to make it criminal for the Minister to give grants. Those gentlemen seemed to expect that districts should live upon their own taxation. If Ashburton had a rateable area that contained within it something like a million acres of mining lands that was not bringing in one single farthing in the way of rates, then the delegate from Ashburton would not have spoken as he had done. The positions were altogether different. In Hauraki Peninsula there were a million acres locked up right in the centre of the district, and a fringe of the district only was being cultivated. Outside of that they had no rates whatever coming in, with the exception of a few mines that were working on the fringe. A good deal had been said about education, but, personally, he was not in favour of handing education over to the Provincial Councils, or any other body of men. The Education Boards had done excellent work, and the progress made educationally since the inception of the Act proved that. Something like 80 to 90 per cent. of the people of New Zealand were able to read and write. New Zealand had one of the largest percentages of educated people in the world, with the exception of Scotland. It would be a great mistake to make sweeping changes, and do away with Boards that had done excellent work. Education Boards were composed of men who had given a life study to education. He did not mean to say that the system was without flaws, because in some cases it was possible to have better administration. It would be impossible for the proposed Provincial Councils to take the same interest and do the same work as the Boards. In his district they had four School Committees, with something like thirty-four men, doing work that could easily be done by nine; but that was only one point. Generally speaking, he considered they could not do better than stick to their Education Boards. Referring to Hospital Boards, he was of opinion that hospitals would be far better administered by the local districts themselves, because there there would be found local sympathy. He would appeal to Dr. Valentine if they had not one of the most economically administered hospitals in New Zealand.

Dr. VALENTINE.—That is so, sir.

Mr. LOWE went on to say that some time ago the central body administered the Coromandel Hospital, which was unsatisfactory to all parties. The moneys were foolishly expended, and in the matter of charitable aid people took advantage of the remissness. Coromandel petitioned to be made a separate body, and they indorsed that petition, because the central body was glad to get rid of it. Since the transfer both charitable-aid and hospital work was better administered at Coromandel. They had made a saving this year of £60 by their economy. Thus, he believed