

Mr. ALLEN said Massey, and he was not ashamed of him either. If it was only to get subsidies that they put members into Parliament for, then the sooner they ceased having parliamentary representation the better. In his district they put a member in for Parliament because he was a man, and not for the reason that he could get them grants. He thought that some scheme should be devised whereby local bodies should not be tempted to ask for grants, and in the long run, after they had their estimates decided upon, to get nothing. He admitted that some small local bodies did get considerable grants for roads that led to nowhere, whilst other local bodies who had asked for grants for years could not get a penny for their roads. He could not understand it. It seemed to him that until this matter was put on a proper footing they would always have trouble in regard to it. As regards hospital matters, he did not see why hospital affairs should not come under the review of the Provincial Councils. It appeared to him that our institutions at the present time were, on the whole, fairly well managed. They might be better managed.

A delegate: They might be worse.

Mr. ALLEN said that was perfectly correct. This Bill, at any rate, was an attempt on the part of the Government to do something towards making administration better. If the Government failed in the matter, as the remarks made seemed to indicate would be the case, they could console themselves with the fact that "it was better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

Mr. J. BRUCE (Chairman of the Akaroa County Council) joined with others in thanking the Minister for calling the Conference together. He appreciated the courage of the Government in facing this particular subject. The Minister, in his speech, covered the ground very well, and had given them a lot of useful information. It seemed to him that they had gone in for a process of elimination. Judging from what had been said, one might assume that education and charitable aid would be left as at present. Provincial Councils would be practically wiped out, and if that was so their city friends were not concerned at all. They had their Municipal Corporations Act, which dealt with everything which affected them, and consequently the discussion would not interest the city delegates much more. There were one or two subjects mentioned by Mr. Studholme in his very able speech that he would like to refer to. Mr. Studholme aimed at what, he thought, every one present aimed at—that was, to do away with the scramble for public funds that took place every session. Mr. Studholme advocated as a remedy for that a graduated subsidy, and, if he caught his points correctly, believed that the graduated subsidy proposed in the Bill would meet the position. He thought, however, that the Minister's own admissions rather contradicted that; in fact, the Minister said it was unworkable. When they took into consideration such matters as mining lands, Maori lands, and others they would see that it was almost impossible to fix a graduated subsidy which would meet all the requirements. He did not agree with Mr. Studholme that the control of education should be handed over to the Provincial Councils. He did not think it would make for economy. Touching briefly on the effect the Bill would have on the counties, he would just mention that the Bill altered the methods of paying subsidies, did away with ridings—which in some cases were unworkable—abolished Road Boards, and would throw the onus of collecting rates imposed by the Provincial Councils on to the counties. He thought the consensus of opinion was against the establishment of the Provincial Councils. He agreed with Mr. Wilson, that, after all, our system of local government was not so very bad. He thought there was room for improvement, of course; but a great deal could be done if the smaller counties were enlarged, and increased powers given to the Councils. A good deal of organization would be required; but in the present counties they had the groundwork, and it would be much better to work on the basis of the counties rather than to set up big bodies like Provincial Councils. The matter had been so well debated that it was only threshing straw to go over it again. He was thoroughly in accord with what had been said on the matter of education. The Dominion had in recent years evolved a system of education which was really working very well indeed, and he thought it would be a retrograde step to place the control of education in the hands of men not elected because of any qualification for controlling education. These Councils could not control education so successfully as the present Boards did. The same applied with regard to charitable aid. The average man elected to these Councils would not have the experience and skill which a man elected for the specific purpose was calculated to have—he might have, but the chances were that he would not. He admitted that there had been reasons for remodelling our local authorities. If the County Councils had increased powers and responsibilities they could take over a deal of the work of the smaller local bodies within their boundaries. They could do the work with the aid perhaps of outside Committees, although he did not altogether approve of that principle.

Mr. JOHN FISHER (Southland Education Board) said that after so many opinions had been given it was almost impossible to find anything new to say. A great deal of the discussion had been from a more than usual parochial point of view. It did not matter to the Conference whether it was a Liberal, Conservative, or Labour Government which brought down a Bill to give local-government reform. They should look at the matter from a wide point of view. When the Bill was first introduced it was looked on with disfavour by most people. He felt that himself. He thought the setting-up of the Local Government Board was a very good thing. The Governor in Council was an unknown quantity. By the Local Government Board they would have substituted for that person a concrete body to which they could apply, and by which they could expect to have their applications treated in a business-like manner. He did not like the composition of the Local Government Board, but he presumed that that was not a hard-and-fast constitution, and that representations for a more democratic Local Government Board would be acceptable to Parliament. The discussion showed that they all recognized that reform was necessary, and in order to bring about that reform there must be elimination of a number of small bodies, and, in some cases, of large bodies. But the whole of the discussion had taken this form: they were all prepared to sacrifice the other fellow, but they were not prepared to go down themselves. Unless there