

any Government which is in power will have carried out and given effect to. If that principle is carried out we ought to be able to sweep away the whole of these extra roads-and-bridges grants, excepting so far as it may be necessary to carry out the unfulfilled obligations of the Government in not making the main arterial roads up to the lands they had sold and received the money for. I think the obligations on the part of the State should be absolutely carried out, and I trust that that will be, under the authority of the Public Works Department, one of the first works undertaken—namely, that every man who has bought land and paid for it shall have the guarantee of the State carried out that there shall be access given to him for his products to be exported and the necessaries for his family brought in. I think we may say, as far as the ridings are concerned, it is your clear opinion that ridings shall continue, and that the right of the electors or the Councils to say whether there should be riding accounts whilst there are ridings shall be a matter left to the Councils themselves, and shall not be interfered with by legislation. I should be sorry if the story our friend from Taranaki told us about toll-gates were to become general throughout the Dominion. I was surprised a little while ago when visiting that beautiful province to find toll-gates at successive stages placed across the main road, because I remember hearing a number of years ago how some young bloods, who must have been meant for Territorials, knocked down the toll-gates. The mere fact that there were toll-gates in this age of the world's history in order to stop passage from one district to another was absolute proof and demonstration that the reform of local government was absolutely necessary. May I say, with reference to the question of cities and towns, that I think one of the most important functions that this Conference can have will be in suggesting, if necessary, means by which the greater cities may group to themselves the suburban population. Christchurch had already done this. It has not only added the surrounding boroughs, but these also have drawn to themselves a large portion of the surrounding counties, and Christchurch is now a very large city. I understand Wellington has done the same in several directions, and Auckland, I believe, hopes and proposes to do the same. If any direction or suggestion from this Conference will show the way of making it easier for the big cities to group within themselves the surrounding areas, I, as Minister of Internal Affairs, will facilitate that work. Not only so, but I sincerely hope that the same process will be applied to some of the second-class towns. The other day, in going through the Victorian statutes on local government—because I might say, in passing, that in order to understand this question I have studied not only the local-government laws of New Zealand, but of the neighbouring States also—I noticed that over there they lay down that when a town acquired a population of 20,000 it is entitled to be called a city. I do not know that we have that in our law; but I would like to see a race starting from to-day as to which is to be the next city in New Zealand—whether it should be Nelson, Palmerston North, Invercargill, Timaru, or Wanganui. At any rate, I think we want to facilitate and assist the grouping of our younger towns in order to raise them to the rank of cities. I would like to say that the franchise is a difficult problem. You have already in the cities the recognition of the residential vote, and when once any franchise has been given to any section of the body politic it is never possible to take it away. There are some things that you can do, but when once men and women have got the franchise it is unheard of in political history that that franchise is taken from them. So far as county franchise is concerned, I am not going to express an opinion. That is a matter that I think, whatever this Conference does, will be fought out very vigorously on the floor of the House of Representatives, and, as the fight will really take place there, I do not think it would be wise on my part at this stage to express any opinion. I do not know that there is any further subject for me to speak on. I have taken full notes of the discussion that has taken place. I most sincerely thank the Conference for the fine spirit shown during the discussion, and say that I think the effect will be educative not only so far as the country but also as far as the Government is concerned, and, I hope, as far as Parliament is concerned. I hope also that after our labours are finished I shall be able, with the assistance of my staff, to formulate a measure which will have a chance of going through Parliament, and which, though it will not accomplish such a large measure of local-government reform as was proposed in the Local Government Bill, will be the means of improving in many ways local government throughout this country. (Applause.)

Mr. E. ALLEN (Auckland) said he had no intention of introducing party politics into the Conference. He had no idea who the interjector was, and he would be the last person to introduce party politics.

Mr. LIFFITON (Wanganui) said, in view of the fact that the Minister had thanked the Conference for the fine spirit in which the Conference had met him, he would move, "That this Conference record its hearty thanks to the Hon. Mr. Russell, Minister of Internal Affairs, for the fine spirit and friendly and straightforward manner in which he had controlled the Conference."

The motion was carried unanimously, by acclamation.

Motion, "That the Local Government Bill be now considered," agreed to.

#### COMMITTEES.

to consider and report on the various subjects contained in the Bill, the President being *ex officio* a member of each Committee:—

#### (No. 1.)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD (Provincial Councils and Subsidies, Grants, and Finance).—Messrs. John Fisher, Waikato; E. Maxwell, Taranaki; E. N. Liffiton, Wanganui; F. Cowper, Waipawa; J. Corkill, Wairoa; Dr. J. C. Collins, Cook; J. T. Quin, Hawera; J. G. Armstrong, Wairau; H. Everett, Nelson; T. Kennedy, Westland; J. Studholme, Ashburton; R. Milligan, Waitaki; H. M. Driver, Otago; William Macalister, Southland; H. J. Middleton, Southland; R. Moore, North Canterbury.