

hold a Commission of inquiry, probably one of the members of the Local Government Board would be one of the members appointed to the Commission.

Dr. COLLINS said he had been one of the Committee that had passed this resolution, and he thought it would be remembered that during the course of its deliberations the President and he had had some little interchange of opinions on the subject. He held firmly to the opinion, and he asked consideration for it, that in the composition of a Board of this description continuity of legislation should be insured, otherwise the Board, whatever its composition, would be futile. He would invite them to consider the composition of the Board as set down in the resolution. In the first place, there was proposed a resolution which would allow of there being three members on the Board plus the Minister, and there they would remain for a stated time—namely, five years. Now, what class of individuals did they propose to place upon that Board? They could not place parliamentarians, for the simple reason that they were excluded, and if they were not, the exigencies of the times and the disruptions of Parliament would probably very soon put these members out of court. They would require the appointment of independent members; and what did that mean? Would the independent members be appointed by the Government or would they be appointed by the Minister? They might be excellent appointees, but it should be remembered they would be absolutely independent, and there they would be for five years. Then, immediately they got a change of Government what would they find? The Minister of the opposing party in politics would come in, and take his seat on the Board with three independent members elected by the last Minister, and the new Minister would probably have opposite legislative ideas. Was that a wise proceeding?

The PRESIDENT.—It is what goes on every day in the Civil Service. The Civil servants are appointed, and virtually appointed for life. All the heads of departments are in that position.

Dr. COLLINS said he was sorry if their opinions did not agree, but he could only state his own opinion. He thought Civil servants were the only persons who could be wisely appointed to a Board of this sort. The heads of departments, to his mind, would be the best members of the Board. They were all gentlemen who had risen from the ranks, and who had been more or less under parliamentary control until they had reached the higher rank. Now, it was claimed for these gentlemen that they were independent. That might be a truthful assertion; but he had been under the impression that the Civil servants had not the independence that was claimed for them by the Ministers or high authorities, who gave votes; and under these conditions there would be the danger of pliancy to deal with. It might be urged that this was a minor objection, but it still remained good. Now, he held, and the district he represented held, that if it were necessary to form an intermediate Board between the local bodies and the Government—a Local Government Board—the people should have representation upon it, and he failed to see how they would get continuity of representation, and gain satisfaction for those whom they represented at the Conference, if they were blindly going to vote for a Local Government Board under the proposals they had before them. He, for one, certainly could not do so.

Mr. STODOLME said, as a personal explanation, and in reply to statements that had been made, that clause 111, which had been referred to, entirely related to provinces.

Mr. FRENCH (Auckland) would only take up a minute. He was opposed to the setting-up of the Local Government Board, because of the history of the English Local Government Board. That Board had been set up as a measure of decentralization in 1858, when Parliament desired to pass on certain functions to the local bodies; but almost invariably they had not passed them on. It was because no one would know where the responsibility was if the Board were set up that he could not help thinking the best thing to do was to leave the power in the hands of the Minister.

Mr. E. MAXWELL (Taranaki) was distinctly against the establishment of a Local Government Board in any form, but thought that if it was to be established at all it should be an independent Board. It would be an absolute farce to set up a Board consisting of the Minister and certain heads of departments, for the work was really now done by the Minister and the heads of departments, and the only result would be that the Minister would be relieved from responsibility. He could not follow the line of argument in favour of a Local Government Board, for the reason that if the Provincial Councils were struck out—and there was no doubt they would be struck out—the duties left to the Local Government Board were so small that it was not worth while appointing a Board, for the Minister could not possibly be troubled with any great excess of work. The subject had been discussed at the meeting of the Committee on the previous evening, and he did not hesitate to say that the majority of the Committee had been against the appointment of the Board until assured by the Minister that he did not wish to gain any powers additional to those now held by himself and the Governor in Council. Upon receiving that assurance, members had not seen any particular objection to having these gentlemen called a Local Government Board, instead of their being called the Minister and the heads of departments. But almost immediately after they had passed the clause they had discovered there was an increase of power suggested, and that the danger some had foreseen would exist if the Board was established, as it would be appointed with the object of relegating to it certain powers not now recognized as among the duties of the Governor in Council and the Minister. In any case, as they would doubtless do away with the Provincial Councils, there would be no warrant for establishing the Board; but if it were established it should certainly be an independent Board. The majority of the Conference he believed to be with him in the opinion that it would be much better for them to be able to look to the Minister, and to hold him responsible, than to give the Minister of the day, whoever he might be, the opportunity of sheltering himself behind the Board. Speaking generally, he was confident that was the position taken up. The Minister was now responsible, and they knew it; but in the other case he might carry out a particular work, and, if objection were taken to it, reply that it had been done in accordance with the finding of the Board. Anyway, he did not see any possible gain from the creation of such a Board, or any warrant for taking up the time of