

because the Road Boards were doing the work of the by-roads; but the work of the by-roads was being done in 100 out of 124 counties in New Zealand by the counties, and it was being done well. He would point out that the bulk of the expenditure now was not upon what people called main roads—that was, arterial roads—but it was upon district roads, and it seemed to him quite proper that these should be brought under county administration. It was surely evident that if they were to do anything in the shape of reducing the number of local bodies they should begin by passing a resolution affirming the decision and recommendation of this Committee.

Mr. PARR (Auckland) was inclined to think the recommendation of the Committee a little too drastic. He thought there were a great many unnecessary Road Boards, but was not inclined to agree that all Road Boards were unnecessary. In their district—in the far North—there were between fifty and sixty of these Road Boards, and some of them, to his certain knowledge, were doing excellent work, and work which he did not think the County Councils would be able to do anything like as well. For these Road Boards they got hold of men familiar with local requirements, men who were living on the spot, and were able to do the pioneer work of roading these districts in a thoroughly efficient and, he thought, in many cases, in the most economical manner. He would suggest that the same line should be taken with the Road Boards as they had suggested with regard to local bodies contiguous to cities—that each case should be investigated on its merits, and that wherever the Commission, after making inquiries, was satisfied that a Road Board was unnecessary it should go into the county. He was sure there were cases in the north, which was an entirely different country from that in which Mr. Jull's instances were to be found, where great hardship would be done if these local bodies were wiped out at one fell swoop. They ought to apply the pruning-knife vigorously; but before they recommended the Government to abolish absolutely the Road Board system there should be inquiry. The circumstances of the districts varied extremely, and they must not forget that though possibly in such a district as Mr. Jull had mentioned it was absolutely necessary the Road Boards should go, that did not apply to other districts. Special circumstances existed in certain areas, and those circumstances should be the subject of inquiry by a Commission. The County of Eden had been mentioned by Mr. Jull, and there were in that county of 43 square miles fourteen Road Boards but there was no County Council in that district. The county really comprised the City of Auckland and some suburban boroughs, and the Road Boards were contiguous to the boroughs. There was no question, in his mind, that they should rather ask the Commission to say which should go out. The Committee had suggested the propriety of Commissioners investigating on the spot, and deciding which should be merged in the city; and he suggested that they should take the same step, and act in a judicial manner, in connection with the country Road Boards.

Mr. F. HORRELL (North Canterbury) thought the main object of the clause was to have one system of control. Where there were Road Boards in a county there were two systems, and the proposal was to do away with one of them. So far as Road Boards were concerned, these bodies had no doubt done excellent work. A year or two ago he remembered a resolution had been carried at the Conference in favour of abolishing Road Boards, and he had strongly opposed it, for the reason that in the county he came from the Counties Act was suspended and the Road Boards were doing the work, so that there was not two systems of rating. As soon, however, as the Act was altered they had decided to adopt the county system by amalgamating two or more road districts. They were now, therefore, working under the county system, having abolished the Road Boards and merged the two districts into a county. If the matter were taken into consideration, he thought it would be admitted to be far better, instead of having two local bodies striking rates, to have but one. So far as Road Board districts were concerned, it was easy enough to have that district converted into a riding of the county, and so to have representation for it. If the gentlemen representing Road Boards took this into consideration, he believed they would see that the proposed system would work perfectly well.

Mr. H. R. FRENCH (Auckland) remarked that he had been a member of the opposition on the Committee in connection with the recommendation made. It seemed to him that in the Auckland district there would be a lot of resistance to this proposal. So far as Road Boards were concerned, their own county had last year lost subsidy because another Road Board was in existence—they had lost a matter of £85. In the evidence before the Committee it had been stated that the tendency was to merge local bodies, and it seemed to him that the County Councils were able to deal with that in the right way should the tendency continue. In one riding in their county they had three different centres, and each little centre appointed its members, because the setting-up of three Boards protected their own interests, and they got their own rates spent in their own localities. If the road districts had not the inducement which existed in the way of subsidies to remain as separate bodies, they would merge into the counties, and in that manner the way would be cleared without any compulsory abolition.

Mr. E. N. LIFFITON (Wanganni) indorsed all Mr. Parr had said with reference to the Road Boards in the far North. In some instances the members would not be able to attend to their duties in a county once in three months. This was the portion of the country that was known as "the roadless North," and in bad weather a man would not be able to get about to attend to business. All the objections the various members of the Conference had raised might be met by Mr. Parr's suggestion—that a Commissioner should be authorized to report on the subject; and the Minister would then be able to carry out all that was wanted, because an independent Commissioner would tell whether a road district ought to be absorbed into a county or whether it should be allowed to work out its own destiny. As it was, every Road Board had power to merge into the county, and so, especially with regard to the far North, if they had what Mr. Parr had asked for, they would have all that was necessary. To force the Road Boards into the counties would be unwise, because it would be impossible for members to attend county meetings. There should be a Commission set up to inquire what Road Boards should be merged and what should be allowed to work out their own destiny.