

Mr. FISHER (Southland) would like to take members' attention from the far North to the far South. They heard a great deal about the difficulties of the far North, and the roading problem that existed there; but three or four counties in the south were the largest counties in New Zealand. The County of Southland contained something like 3,700 square miles; the County of Westland 3,400 square miles; and the Lakes County something just under 3,000 square miles; while the undeveloped county in which all the scenery was—the Fiord County—comprised about another 3,000 square miles. The Southland and Wallace Counties were, he believed, at one time riddled with Road Boards, but these had been abolished, and the counties were administering the work of these numerous bodies; and they had it on the authority of the Minister and of Mr. Jull that the Southland County was one of the best managed in the Dominion. Then, they had 100,000 acres in the County of Wallace, in its natural state, wanting roads, bridges, and railways for its development quite as urgently as any part of the North Island. Yet this county did not require a single Road Board. The County Council was quite capable of undertaking the work and carrying it out successfully without having half a dozen Road Boards under it. It should also be remembered that they had climatic conditions to contend with that did not exist in the far North. It was just as difficult for the people to get about in the counties mentioned as in any district in the far North, and yet they had only County Councils for that vast amount of territory, which was kept in order; and they had three engineers attending to the outlying parts. If these conditions were right in the south, he did not see why there should be any insuperable difficulty in applying the same system in the north. It should be remembered that they had met for the purpose of making some reasonable recommendation that would be applicable to the Dominion as a whole. It was all very well saying the Road Boards were doing their own work and spending their own money, but there was the cost of administration to be considered, and the figures showed that the cost of administration was so large a sum of money that something very considerable ought to be saved upon it. The amount that could be so saved would surely go a long way towards roading some of the road-lines, so that he thought the recommendation of the Committee was in the right direction. If they were not to abolish Domain Boards and Road Boards, there would be nothing done in this direction for the next twenty-five years. They had now assembled gentlemen from every part of the Dominion who had worked in connection with local bodies. He believed there was a full representation of those bodies; but whether there was full representation of counties, Road, River, and Drainage Boards or not, those who possessed the best knowledge of the interests affected were the men who had recommended the absorption of the small bodies; and if they were going to do anything practical they should adopt the recommendation Mr. Jull had read out. He claimed that they were in as good a position to act as experts upon this subject as any Commission that could be set up, and the action would not be so arbitrary as if the power were put into the hands of one or two men who might be travelling round the country for the next five years. He thought the motion was in the right direction, and hoped that it would be carried.

Mr. GARLAND (Auckland) said he wanted to add, if possible, an addendum to the motion.

The PRESIDENT said there was already one amendment before the Conference.

A delegate wished to know if it was the ruling of the Chair that certain members could stand up and air their views five or six times on one subject, giving no one else a show.

The PRESIDENT remarked that he had not endeavoured to enforce the usual rule of one speech on one item, but he thought it should be a matter of good taste on the part of those who had already spoken on a question not to speak again upon it, and to relieve him of the responsibility of telling them they had already spoken. It seemed to him the matter had been fully discussed, and, with their permission, he would put the question to the vote. He had a motion and an amendment, and as the amendment traversed the motion, he would put the amendment first. Before doing so, however, he would like to say one or two words. The position was this: the country had been crying out for years past for reform in connection with local government, and one of the reforms undoubtedly asked for was that the number of local bodies now existing should be reduced, in order that they might have a simpler and better system. Throughout the whole country, he believed, there was a desire to see strong counties formed, and Mr. Horrell had given an excellent illustration of how this could be done in the district he came from, where the Counties Act had not been in force, and where the county had now been brought into operation, and the work of two Road Boards was being done by one county, to the advantage of the people. Mr. Fisher had also given examples from the south, and he was himself able to speak from personal knowledge of Hawke's Bay, where the county, which was excellently managed, had no interior Road Boards at all. If that system was good for one part of the country it ought to be good for other parts of it. He quite admitted there was a sentimental attachment to existing bodies which had to be considered, and it might be somewhat harsh if there were brought into force an Act that would have the effect of compulsorily submerging the small bodies. It had been stated that there were fourteen Road Boards existing in one county of 43 square miles.

A delegate: Twelve.

The PRESIDENT replied that even that meant that there should be twelve offices, twelve secretaries, and twelve different bodies of men doing what in other districts was done in one office by nine men.

A delegate: What about the population?

The PRESIDENT said, so far as that was concerned, if the districts carried a large population they ought to consider whether they would not form themselves into boroughs, and take upon themselves the higher form of municipal government. He would now put the amendment which had been moved by Mr. Venn and seconded by Mr. Everett, namely: "That the question of merging the Road Boards be left to a Commission of inquiry."