

Clause as proposed — “That the present system of triennial elections be retained in the counties, and be made to apply to all local bodies, the elections to be held on the same day” — agreed to.

Mr. F. HORRELL (North Canterbury) said, before they finished with No. 3 Committee's report, he would like to point out that one matter had been omitted, and that was with regard to the election of Hospital Boards and Harbour Boards. In an election of that kind it often happened that there was a combined district, including one or more boroughs in counties. Under the present franchise the boroughs had a preponderance of votes, because a man and his wife could vote, while in the county only a ratepayer could vote. In his own county there were two boroughs — Rangiora and Kaiapoi — and these two boroughs, if they combined, could put in whom they chose.

The PRESIDENT. — Have you ever known them to combine?

Mr. HORRELL said, No, but they might. He thought there should be one uniform system.

The PRESIDENT asked if Mr. Horrell had any motion to propose

Mr. HORRELL said, No; he was only making a suggestion.

The PRESIDENT said the matter would be borne in mind.

Mr. A. E. JULL (Hawke's Bay) desired to bring up a matter which the Committee had discussed at its meeting when the franchise in the counties was dealt with. He wished to move the following resolution, and it had a bearing in the direction Mr. Horrell had mentioned: “That the municipal franchise be amended so as to provide for a vote for ratepaying qualification in addition to the residential qualification.” They had had the assistance of the municipalities in discussing some of the county affairs, and he thought it would be just as well if they assisted the municipalities to put their house in order in respect to franchise. The municipalities had assisted to retain the present county franchise, which the County Councils felt was a desirable thing to do; and it seemed to him desirable that the municipal franchise should be amended, because one of the difficulties they were labouring under at present was that the qualification in the boroughs was different from what it was in the counties. They might be able to reduce the anomaly that existed. He wished to point out an additional anomaly: a residential ratepayer in a municipality had one vote; but if he were a non-resident ratepayer he had a vote in his municipality, and he would vote also if he lived in an adjoining borough or county. So they did provide a ratepaying qualification; yet the residential ratepayer was penalized to the extent of one vote. He (Mr. Jull) trusted the matter would receive the consideration of the Conference. If it was proper — and it was, in his opinion, proper — under the present circumstances for the counties to retain their existing franchise, then it was their duty to assist to give the ratepayers in the boroughs some measure of justice which at present was denied them.

Mr. F. HORRELL (North Canterbury) did not think the motion met the difficulty. His difficulty was that if a man lived in a borough he and his wife were entitled to a vote, but if he lived outside the borough in a county, only the man could vote; the wife was disfranchised.

The PRESIDENT said the real position was this: what the county wanted and might get some day was a uniform franchise for local government. The trouble was, Who was going to get hold of the proper thing and carry it through? He could not see the way. It gave him the impression of trying to catch hold of a porcupine.

Mr. D. McLAREN (Wellington) said he would like to meet Mr. Jull in regard to this matter, but would suggest to him that the proper line of reform was to make the county franchise the same as the municipal one. Mr. Jull said that it was undesirable some people should have two votes whilst others had only one, and he proposed to remedy this by giving all ratepayers two votes. He (Mr. McLaren) thought the proper basis for reform was to establish the principle of “one citizen one vote” in respect to local government right throughout. The proposal seemed to him like the counties legislating for the municipalities. He was inclined to think that the electors of the municipalities would have a good deal to say on this question for themselves. There were, to his knowledge, people earning their living in Wellington who, as the law stood at present, had actually no municipal vote at all, yet they had been resident in the city for a long time. He referred to men working out in the harbour on the coal-hulks. Owing to the position of the boundaries these men had no municipal vote. He was desirous of getting a slight amendment of the Act to give these people a vote. The danger in regard to the municipalities, if he did not mistake, was not so much in bringing in the democracy to take part in returning representatives, as in the direction of leaving them out, so that they would have so little concern in the place in which they resided that they would be entirely indifferent to its interests. It would be a very unwise thing for the Conference to carry the motion, because it would be taken as an indication of an attempt on the part of the counties to interfere unduly with municipal rights.

Mr. H. R. FRENCH (Auckland) said, so far as the Committee was concerned, it had not carried any such resolution as that proposed. Certainly one member had expressed himself in that way, but as one who wanted to see the present county franchise retained. They did not wish the municipal ratepayers in any way to interfere with that franchise; consequently the country residents did not wish to interfere with the municipal one.

Mr. F. W. VENN (Horowhenua County Council) said that when a borough and a county were bracketed together for the purpose of returning one or more members to a Harbour Board or Hospital Board, the borough employed the same franchise as when they elected their Council. Why was this privilege denied the county ratepayers? Why should not a county ratepayer have the same voting-power for a Harbour Board as he had for the election of his Council?

Mr. J. FISHER (Southland) entirely disagreed with Mr. Jull in this matter. As one in a very small minority on the Committee, he (Mr. Fisher) approved of the principle laid down in the Bill, and agreed with Mr. McLaren that it would be an absolutely retrograde step if the Conference passed such a resolution as that proposed by Mr. Jull. It would lay them open to