

The PRESIDENT said that he would like to say, in the event of the scheme coming into operation, that a district such as was referred to would no doubt come under a high scale of subsidy, which would have the effect of providing the money required. The position was an important one, because of the mining districts which, as stated by Mr. Williams, had little or no rateable value in property, and would therefore be bound to receive special consideration from the Government.

Mr. FISHER thought it was a very important principle which was involved from the point raised by Mr. Jull. He understood that Mr. Jull complained that Parliament had to decide what sum was available for subsidies to local bodies. That might be a varying one per annum, or would the subsidies be fixed by schedule and rigidly adhered to?

The PRESIDENT explained that the law in New Zealand had always been that subsidies were fixed at a special rate by Act, and therefore they remained. It was a question under the sliding scale of the six classes that a district might be shifted from one class to another—a district would not always remain in the same class—but, nevertheless, the subsidies themselves would be settled on a fixed basis, and therefore the local bodies concerned would be perfectly sure of their finance when once the scheme became established.

Clause 7 of No. 1 Committee's report as amended agreed to.

The Conference decided not to proceed with the subsidies paragraph of clause 6 of No. 3 Committee's report, as follows: "The Committee recommends that a change in the basis of subsidies for counties is desirable, that the necessities of all districts should be fully considered, and is disposed to favourably consider the general lines of the scheme in force in New South Wales as referred to by the Minister in his speech."

Reports of Committees Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4, as amended, adopted as reports of the Conference.

VALEDICTORY.

The PRESIDENT said they had, to all intents and purposes, completed the business of the Conference, and he congratulated the delegates upon the close attention they had given to their work and having completed it in such a satisfactory manner.

The PRIME MINISTER (Hon. T. Mackenzie).—Mr. President and Gentlemen,—At this late hour of the night I am quite sure that I would be consulting your wishes were I not to occupy your time at any length. I know the good work you have been engaged in, and my colleague, your President, has told me how thoroughly you have devoted yourselves to it. I have had an opportunity of perusing some of the representations that have been submitted, and there is distinct evidence that you have devoted yourselves earnestly and assiduously to the task of assisting in the formation constructively of this important Bill dealing with local government. I thank you very much for what you have done in that respect. I also think that the President deserves great credit for the manner in which he has gone about his very arduous task.—(Applause.)—From the inception of the work to its conclusion he has shown marked capacity and control, indicating that he is well qualified for work of this description, and perhaps of a wider description. I simply conclude by congratulating you again on the splendid work you have done.

Mr. JULL (Hawke's Bay).—I think we could not as a Conference dissolve without expressing our views in respect to the very able manner in which the Hon. Mr. Russell, as Minister for Internal Affairs, has conducted this Conference.—(Applause.)—We who have sat under him for the last two or three days are aware of the great amount of patience and tact that has been necessary to be exercised in the conduct of this Conference, and I am sure that he has fulfilled—aye, more than fulfilled—our highest expectations. And I should like to say that nothing further is required to indicate to the people of this country that it is the earnest desire of the Minister to achieve something of an important character in the local government of the Dominion. I repeat that the attitude he has taken up at this Conference is sufficient evidence of that. I can only say that I am going to ask this Conference to place on record its deep sense of gratitude for the able manner in which Mr. Russell has conducted the business, and I desire to express the hope that the result, although it may not come up to the expectations of the promoters, will in the near future be a measure acceptable to the country as a whole.

Mr. PARR (Auckland).—Sir, may I, as a city representative, second the motion of thanks to you. I entirely agree with Mr. Jull that one of the outstanding features of our Conference has been the ability—the conspicuous ability—with which the proceedings have been directed by the President. You, sir, had a difficult and thorny task. You had to take charge of a Bill and meet a Conference of some sixty gentlemen representing every phase of local government throughout the Dominion. The Conference was mainly hostile to the Bill, and I want to congratulate you upon the fact that through your tact and able management of the Conference, while the Bill has gone almost wholly and entirely, you succeeded in getting a series of resolutions passed which, I beg leave to say, express the real minds of the people of New Zealand. These resolutions, when put into legislative shape, will, we believe, give satisfaction to the people we came here to represent. I want to say again, as I said before, it has been most pleasing to me to realize that the Government of the day has met us not in any patronizing spirit, but in the true spirit of partnership, in the big work of administering the affairs of the Dominion. That has not been lost upon us, and we shall not forget. I express the satisfaction we all feel in the fact that a number of outstanding matters have been settled, and, I think, settled properly. It is a matter for congratulation, I am sure, to us all that the system of parliamentary grants or subsidies is at last to be put upon a more equitable and decent basis than we have hitherto had. I express my personal indebtedness to you for your invaluable tact and courtesy, and I feel that the Conference could not have been better handled by any chairman than you during the last few days.—(Loud applause.)