

ELECTRIC POWER BOARD.

IN SPEAKING BY THE TOWN COUNCIL.

FURTHER AMENDMENTS TO THE BILL.

LOCAL BODIES NOT CONSULTED.

Here is the Power Behind the Throne?

At the last meeting of the Invercargill Council, Cr. Lillicrap drew the attention of the Council to the provisions of an amending Bill to the Electric Power Board's Act.

Lillicrap said that he had perused the Bill, and found much in it for the Bill to disapprove of. When the Council was asked to join in the scheme supplying electricity for Southland, understanding was that the position would be the same as that which the Invercargill Aid Board occupied so far as revenue by the Board was concerned. The C.A. Board prepared its rates and found what each local body had to pay, and sent in a statement accordingly when the local authority agreed to raise the money. That was a satisfactory way of doing the business, since the Corporation's decision to join the scheme an alteration had been made in the Act of 1919, that was so satisfactory as the system that had been found favour with the Council. This had not been so bad, but the latest Bill had a clause empowering electric supply to levy a rate on constituent districts to allow the controlling authority in the various areas to do it, paying two and a-half per cent. for the service. It was only reasonable to expect that before such an alteration was proposed the bodies interested should be consulted, but no such course had been taken in this instance. Then there was provision in the Act for the payment of members of power boards for their attendance at meetings. When a body came into existence with such a flourish of trumpets and with, as it was said, the object of promoting the interests of the district, they should have been the to bring forward such a proposal. Members of other local bodies could have every reason also ask for payment for their services. One of the grand features of the administration of the affairs of counties and other areas was that those who attended to such matters gave services free to their country, but members of this Board, which they were going to confer so much benefit on Southland were to be paid besides receiving out-of-pocket expenses. However, as now law, but he thought the Power Board, the only local body in existence for their services. Then again the chairman's salary was to be £200 per annum, but according to the Bill the rate may fix it from time to time. It never intended that the chairman should be a permanent official of the Board. He moved that the copy of the Bill be referred to the committee with power to act.

Seconded by Cr. Martin.

Mr. Blake: It is very gratifying to hear Lillicrap's analysis of the provisions of the Bill and the candour of his remarks is worthy of appreciation. The members of the Board are giving the ratepayers a considerable amount of money and it would be interesting to know many of the provisions of the Amendment Bill originated in the local office. The thing that has been done is tantamount to a betrayal of the ratepayers. This is the second time the Act has been amended, and it seems easier to amend it than for a debating society to alter its constitution. As an example—it was recently said that the chairman go abroad to

purchase machinery. The Auditor-General stated that if the chairman went Home, then he and the members would be held responsible. In other words, Section 34 of the Act was not capable of such a wide interpretation. The chairman's visit was put off until an amending bill was through which gave a wider interpretation to Section 34. This extension is provided for in the new bill and it is scandalous that the act should be so easily amended. As far as expenses are concerned, the members receive a guinea a day and expenses. The ratepayers had understood that the scheme would cost about a million and a half, but it would seem that it was going to cost a great deal more. The engineers have stated that turbines which were estimated at £300,000 are now going to cost between £600,000 and £700,000. The confidence of the ratepayers has been completely shaken by the Board's methods of administration. There was too much secrecy about the conducting of the Board's affairs. As soon as anything of importance came up the Board went into committee. There was the censorship of the Press. I could talk to the Council, sir, for half an hour about the methods of the Power Board which it is impossible to approve of.

Cr. Carswell said that possibly if the Bill had come before them in its present form the Council would not have given their approval to the scheme. Such rating powers given to the Board must cause the ratepayers some alarm, while there was the other point referred to before—the payment of members. A highly praised feature of the administration of local affairs had always been the readiness with which public-spirited men offered their services and there was no reason why members of the Power Board should not also give gratuitous service. If it was right they should be paid so should others receive similar consideration, but he was sure members of other local bodies were quite satisfied with things as they were.

Cr. Mackrell: I have thought a great deal about this matter, and I considered giving notice of motion with a view to getting more information. It seems as if the Power Board had gone to the ratepayers with certain proposals and had afterwards approached Parliament to have the Act amended over the heads of the ratepayers. There is reason for grave apprehension at the present time. Finance did not seem right. It was first considered that £800,000 would meet the requirements, then the amount was raised to £1,000,000 and now it was getting to £2,000,000. The committee should give it every consideration and I will support its being referred to the committee with power to act.

The motion was carried unanimously.

THE AMENDMENT BILL.

PROVISION FOR RATING.

The Electric Power Boards Amendment Bill introduced yesterday consists very largely of machinery amendments to the Act of 1918. Such points as the definition of the term ratepayer for the purposes of the measures and the formal description of a hydro-electric power board as a local authority within the meaning of other Acts are covered.

The powers of levying rates invested in

power boards are dealt with to a certain degree. The procedure is set down as being by resolution. When such a rate has been levied it is for the board to determine whether it shall itself collect the money (for which purpose it may pay away not more than 2½ per cent. of the proceeds to cover expenses) or whether the local authorities of the districts comprised within the board's territory shall collect it. In the latter case, if the local authority fails to take the necessary steps to collect the money the amount shall constitute a debt payable to the board, which may take action to recover the money.

By the principal act, when the board decided to construct or purchase works for the generation of power it was necessary to supply to the Public Works Department full details of the scheme it was intended to launch before the empowering Order-in-Council was issued. These provisions are preserved, and it is stated that no such work shall be commenced "except with the authority of the Governor-General in Council and pursuant to such condition as may be prescribed in that behalf by the Governor-General in Council."

An Order-in-Council may also authorise the purchase by a power board of any electric works within its district owned by a local authority. Power to make by-laws in the same way as any other local authorities for the use and management of its works, for the protection of people from injury, and for the protection of its property is to be given to the boards. The maximum penalty for breaches is made a fine of £50 with a further £5 per day for continuing the breaches.

Finally, the cost of the installation of electric equipment in public or private buildings or the rent payable for the use of it is made a charge upon the land for rating purposes.

MATAURA ISLAND NOTES.

(Own Correspondent).

Rain and sunshine have alternated during the past week. On Sunday and Monday nights very hard frosts were experienced, which caused most of the early potatoes that are through the ground to be blackened.

This district is still affected with colds and other sicknesses, in the form of mumps, influenza, and spinal meningitis have been noted in the district.

At a meeting of the Island Cricket Club held last Monday night, it was decided to lay down a new pitch. The ground where this new pitch is to be held has yet to be considered.

A largely attended meeting of returned soldiers was held on Tuesday night. Representatives of the Invercargill executive were present and outlined the views and objects of the R.S.A. Before this most successful meeting closed a sub-committee was formed which no doubt will be a great success in this district.

Mr L. Howden has made arrangements with the local carpenter for an addition to be built to his house. A large portion of the timber required is already on the ground.

INVERCARGILL PROGRESS.

During the past nine months dating from the 1st January 142 plans for new buildings have been inspected and permits issued representing a total value of £101,177, made up as follows:—Fifty-nine dwellings, value £62,169; 46 garages, £2,920; 3 warehouses, £27,500; alterations and additions, £8,588; total, £101,177. This shows a large increase both in number and value compared with the same period last year, when 33 dwellings and other small buildings, having a total value of £36,400, were erected.

Winton residents have taken up the question of establishing a woollen industry in the town. Already two meetings have been held, and the project is now under way. Information gathered shows that capital to the extent of between £50,000 and £60,000 would be sufficient to start with.

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DISTRICT ELECTORS' ROLL.

PURSUANT to "The Municipal Corporations Act, 1908" (Regulations No. 6, 15th February, 1911), NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the District Electors' Roll (Residential) is being purged by omitting the name of every person whose name appears on the District Electors' Roll for the last General Election of Mayor and Councillors who did not vote at that Election.

All Persons who may be entitled to have their names inserted in the said Roll, which is now in course of preparation, are invited to ascertain by enquiry at the Town Hall whether their name appears on the list, and if not, to make a claim on the prescribed form.

F. BURWELL,
Town Clerk.

Town Hall,
October 6, 1920.

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Memorial Notices—For notice only, 3/6; notice with verse, 3/6, plus 6d per line for each verse.

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