

in the rural districts. The cities want to take part of the money which should be used for construction and maintaining rural roads for roads in the cities. To begin with, we say that any raid on this fund will be to the detriment of the rural districts, and yet I submit it was the rural people to whom it was intended this proposal should apply. But this is the point: if you take an amount such as £150,000 from the Main Highways Fund it must have the effect of retarding the carrying-out of a programme of main-highway construction and improved paving throughout the whole of the country. This programme has been set out by the Board, and the counties are working to it. The various counties are, as it were, getting their machinery together in contemplation of bearing their portion of the cost of carrying that programme into effect, and if you take one-fifth of the revenue from the petrol-tax out of the fund, then you must seriously retard the carrying-out of that scheme. As I have already said, the money is only to be used for the maintenance of these particular roads. First of all, an investigation would have to be made to see if a road was entitled to a grant, and then to see if the money had been spent on it; consequently the administrative costs would be very high. It would be departing, as I say, from the fundamental principle of main highways, and the amount to be given would be just the reverse of what is being given in other parts of the country. Under this proposal the amount is to be £1 for £3. To-day the general contribution of the Main Highways Board towards county roads is £2 for £1; so that it will be seen that there will immediately be a clamour for this particular contribution to be increased to something like what the counties are getting for the other roads. All this increases the administrative work very considerably. A much greater amount of checking would be necessary to ascertain whether, say, 1,000 yards of metal went on to a road for which the county gets £2 for £1, or on to a road for which it is to get £1 for £3.

*Mr. Sullivan.*] We would have to get a Highways Board that could do the job entrusted to it.

*Witness:* I have no doubt that you could but I am simply stating, from the counties' point of view, that this is not desirable, and that it should not be made a function of the Highways Board. And another reason for that is that the Public Works Department in respect to all roads that are not main highways are making grants from time to time for construction work, and so on, and you would have the Public Works Department and the Main Highways Board operating on the same roads, which is a position that does not obtain to-day.

*Hon. Mr. Veitch.*] The Counties Association opposes the clause?—It feels that it is not right to take that money out of the Main Highways Board's funds. There is just one other point. I would like to refer to clause 58 (5), which reads as follows: "From the total amount of the heavy-traffic license fees received in any year there shall be deducted such amount as may be prescribed in respect of administrative expenses, and the residue shall be paid to the local authorities entitled thereto in accordance with regulations to be made in that behalf under section 166 of the Public Works Act, 1928." The Counties Association had communication from several Councils in this matter, and they felt that the system of distribution at present in force was working fairly well, but I know there are inequalities. For instance, in the district where Mr. Healy comes from there is a desire that some alteration should be made, because one area which may be in one group for the purpose of distributing heavy-traffic fees is being disregarded.

*Mr. Healy.*] The Awatere County?—Yes. The Minister might be able to indicate what is suggested there. Personally, I have stated to the Counties Association that the distribution is not sound—there is too big a proportion of the fees going to the cities and boroughs in comparison with what goes to the counties—so I am hoping that in the framing of the regulations regard will be had to a proper distribution. It is possible that the Minister may be able to devise a scheme which may materially improve the present scheme.

*Hon. Mr. Veitch:* This would be a distribution based on actual traffic.

*Witness:* I think distinct improvements could be made.

*The Chairman.*] You consider that this clause is necessary in some form?—I gave two contrary opinions—one from those counties which felt that the present system was working all right, and another from the rural parts. In the rural parts of the country where the towns do not occupy such an important part the distribution is reasonable good, but in other places it is distinctly unfair. Subclause (6) of clause 58 is a proposal to repeal sections 164 and 165 of the Public Works Act. Briefly, those sections are a prohibition on the use of lorries or vehicles over a certain weight.

*Hon. Mr. Veitch:* It is intended to administer this for the purpose of keeping axle-loads down. The present method of doing so is so inequitable and rough-and-ready that it does not give the country people the traffic or service they are entitled to under more scientific conditions. The axle-loads will not be increased.

*Witness:* The counties think that that could be done by your regulations under section 166 rather than by repealing the two sections, which are the only statutory bar to the bringing on to the roads of vehicles over a certain weight; and the counties feel that they have been engaged with the Main Highways Board for a period of years in the construction of a type of road calculated to carry a certain weight, and if by any regulation the weights that are to be put on the roads are going to be in excess of the maximum loads for which the roads have been constructed the counties will be seriously embarrassed and the Highways Board would be faced with extra expense. If you build a bridge or road to a standard which statutorily says it is limited to 10 tons for a four-wheeled vehicle and 15 tons for a six-wheeled vehicle, then you know where you are. The standard is fixed, and we hope that these sections will not be repealed; but if the Minister can see his way to make regulations in a more scientific way it would be better to do so by regulation, still retaining those sections in the Act.

*Hon. Mr. Veitch:* Subclause (3) of clause 58 reads: "The power to issue heavy-traffic licenses conferred by any regulations for the time being in force under the last-mentioned section shall include the power to refuse to issue a license with respect to any motor-vehicle that does not conform to the requirements of such regulations." Suppose you get a design of motor-vehicle which will carry more