

*Mr. Harris.*] Do all your cars come under the definition of "omnibus"?—They do not; none of them come under the Motor-omnibus Traffic Act at the present time. Our cars are termed service cars, but under this Bill they will be classified as motor-omnibuses. But motor-omnibuses are a distinct vehicle: their description is "a vehicle carrying more than seven passengers and plying for hire at a fare not exceeding 2s. for a single journey." The bulk of those whom we represent run service cars, and at the present time they are not controlled by legislation, but we are asking that they shall be controlled according to the provisions of this Bill.

I think you said that there were many people in New Zealand evading the payment of heavy-traffic license fees. What authority have you for saying that?—I know of one or two cases myself. The heavy-traffic fees are payable to local bodies—that is, they collect them themselves—but there is no compulsion to collect them and in some cases they are lax, and I know of cases where the fees are not being collected at the present time.

You are not referring to the local bodies' own vehicles?—In some cases, yes; but I know of private cases also where they do not pay their heavy-traffic license fees.

*The Chairman.*] You approve of the principle that the heavy-traffic licence fee should be paid at the same time as the vehicle is registered, but you do not contend that the full twelve months' fee should be paid then?—No; but, as I said before, we contend that the heavy-traffic license fee is an unfair tax. It is only charged on cars over 2 tons in weight used in public transport, and we claim that that is an unfair class tax, and we are hoping to have that tax removed at as early a date as possible, because the petrol-tax is the only equitable system of collecting taxes. A man buys his petrol and is taxed according to the use he makes of the highway, but so far as the heavy-traffic fees are concerned he does not pay, for a number of reasons, in proportion to the use he makes of the roads. In the event of that tax having to be paid we want to see some uniformity in its collection.

You are not personally affected by the payment of fees: you pay only to a limited extent?—Practically every vehicle we have in use pays, according to the size of the car. We pay on practically every car in our fleets, because 2 tons is the limit, and very few even seven-seater cars, with their load, would be less than 2 tons.

With reference to the licensing of vehicles, do you think, if the present principle of licensing by local bodies is maintained, that a local body could possibly maintain control and inspection over cars that would be travelling long distances?—They would have no chance, in my opinion. I cannot see that it would be possible for Wellington City to grant licenses and impose conditions covering a service, say, between Wellington and Napier or Wellington and New Plymouth. Even a combination of licensing authorities on either of those routes would have great difficulty in carrying it out. They would all want to impose their different restrictions or regulations.

*Mr. Williams.*] Do you think a 6-ton vehicle does more harm to the road than a 30 cwt. vehicle?—It does.

From what you say, I gather that the extra petrol a heavy vehicle would use on a journey, compared with a lighter one, should compensate for the extra use of the road?—To a large extent it would, because the heavier vehicle would be using much more benzine.

At the same time, whoever constructs the road has to construct it according to the heaviest vehicle that goes over it?—Yes; but the type of highway would enter into the question, of course. For instance, a 6-ton vehicle running on the Hutt road, in my opinion, would not do much more damage than a private car; but it depends on whether the road is built for it. If the two vehicles, however, were run on the old macadam road the heavier vehicle would, of course, do a great deal more damage. Our main objection to the heavy-traffic tax is this: that we start on a car of 2 tons, and hundreds of privately-owned cars in the country are as heavy and travel just as fast, and they get away with it, and why should a man who gets his living by the use of a heavy vehicle be penalized? That is why we say it is a class tax.

Apparently your main trouble is that the commercial vehicle pays a heavy-traffic fee, and the private owner does not, for the same weight?—Yes. When the petrol-tax was imposed we agreed to it as a fair tax for the use of the highway. The petrol-tax is a fair indication of the use you get from the highway, and is reasonable, but the heavy-traffic tax is not a fair tax, and at that time we understood it would be wiped out. Unfortunately, it was not, and we are still paying the two. I think we can prove that we are paying a much greater rate than any other branch of the industry. There is a man here to-day who, I find, is paying over £200 a year for each one of his vehicles before it turns a wheel.

The heavy-traffic fees have always been a local-body tax, and not a Government tax?—That may be; but it does not trouble us much who gets it when we are paying it.

The heavy-traffic fees are more a construction tax than a running-tax?—We realize that, and that the local bodies collect it; but the fact remains that we are paying twice—we pay the petrol-tax along with the private owners, and all other taxes, and that money finds its way into the Highways Fund.

You cannot run on the roads until you have the right to run on them, and the local bodies have to subscribe towards the cost of building those roads?—Yes.

And that, I take it, is their idea for imposing the heavy-traffic fees?—We do not object to the payment of taxes, and recognize the necessity for good roads—we have to have them—but we do object to be the only people paying the heavy-traffic tax.

*Hon. Mr. Veitch.*] The point is that you pay these heavy-traffic fees for the use of the main highways, and yet the money does not necessarily go there?—That is so. The fees collected, I understand, may be used for anything in the way of street improvements, repairs, alterations, or, I take it, it may be used as in Wellington for the purchase of half a block of property for street-widening. It is the possession of the local body, and they are entitled to use it for that purpose.

*Mr. Williams.*] As against that, the owner of the commercial vehicle is not confined to the main highways?—That is so.