

I am supporting the claims of local government. In a few words, the position is this: that men are appointed to the City Council because the people in that locality think they have the business acumen and local knowledge to do the best for the people in the district. No matter how good a centralized State Department may be, and how well organized it may be, it is obvious that men in Wellington, say, cannot have the same knowledge of local conditions in Dunedin, and therefore cannot do as well for that district as capable business men on the spot, having a full knowledge of local requirements. Neither can such a State Department do the work as economically. If you want an example of what happens, take the case of a man in business who turns his business into a company and hands it over to directors. No matter how good the directors may be, they will never watch that business as the owner himself would have watched it. The position is the same with regard to local bodies: the State cannot run things as economically as a local body. And local bodies have their rights, and they should be jealously guarded. We have the right to control our own affairs, and this Bill is a process of attrition taking away those rights. So far as I can gather from the Bill, it is believed that certain money is being lost through not licensing certain vehicles. Well, we certainly want to help the Government and the Railways—we want to see the railways getting all the traffic possible. The question of the composition of the Board has been discussed, and as to the representation on it of the North Island and the South Island. The one blot on New Zealand is that it is not a country—it is a place of provinces. I think we should all get together. This Bill is a phase illustrating the provincialism I have referred to, and we would like to see it amended. In our opinion, the transport business of New Zealand can best be carried on by the various Borough Councils. Too much government is not good for any country. With regard to the tax on locally-produced motor-spirit, that is the biggest shock in the Bill, because New Zealand has long been trying to get free of the necessity of going to America for its motor-spirit.

*Mr. Murdoch.*] You say it is common knowledge that there is a proposal on foot to take the heavy-traffic fees away. What evidence have you of that?—If you want concrete evidence we will send it to you: it is the common talk of the place, and there is never smoke unless there is fire.

But you have made the statement, and you have no evidence to support it?—Well, you will have it very soon, because the master carriers are coming here. They have stated that it was iniquitous, the amount of money so many vehicles were paying in tax. As a matter of fact, they do not pay enough to reimburse the damage they do the roads.

*The Chairman.*] Do you not think speed has something to do with the matter?—Yes, it is quite probable.

*Mr. Murdoch.*] You suggest the fees should be increased?—Yes, if anything.

*The Chairman.*] Undoubtedly the object of this Bill is to bring about a unification between different localities. It would appear that, at any rate, you are in favour of that as between the two Islands, but against it as applying to more or less contiguous localities. At the present time there is a certain amount of conflict and variation between the regulations made by different localities. This Bill is an attempt to bring about a uniform law. Are you in favour of that or otherwise?—I am in favour of a common law being applied to all the various boroughs and localities.

That the same principle should apply all through?—Yes.

*Hon. Mr. Veitch.*] Are you aware that under existing conditions there are thirteen local authorities which have power to grant licenses, and that under this proposed measure it creates eighteen local authorities so authorized, in substitution of the thirteen which exist to-day?—No, I did not know that.

You say that the Bill has a tendency to centralize, but there will be eighteen licensing authorities instead of thirteen, and each of the eighteen will have power within their own districts only, and not have power to control their neighbours, as some existing licensing authorities have now. That does not look like centralization, does it?—It might be better if they had more power to control their neighbours.

*Mr. Sullivan.*] You know, of course, that when a local body sits as a licensing authority and any other local body is involved they have power to send a representative to state their opinion?—Yes.

How many endorsed licenses have you in Dunedin?—Very few.

I mean licenses which have been issued by other local bodies and which have been endorsed—drivers' licenses?—We are very strict there. Any man who comes from another district is tested by us. Can you do that under the law?—Yes.

Then you have not had much difficulty in respect of endorsed licenses?—No. We test the man, and if he does not pass we will not endorse his license.

*Hon. Mr. Veitch.*] In my statement I was referring to licenses for motor services, not licenses for drivers.

*Witness.* Yes, I understand.

*Mr. Sullivan.*] Do you want the Bill?—I certainly do not want it. I think it is a step in the wrong direction—a retrograde step.

*Mr. Williams.*] Do you seriously suggest that this proposed imposition of 4d. a gallon on locally-produced motor-spirit will stop anybody producing it, if they can obtain it?—Yes, I certainly do. It will prevent people prospecting for it.

You think it will have that effect?—I am sure it would.

If no revenue is to be obtained from oil produced in New Zealand, assuming it is got from either underground or from coal, where do you suggest the Highways Board would derive its revenue?—I should say the motorists would pay the equivalent of the money which we now send to America for petrol.

*Mr. Williams.*] How would you arrange to get that tax?—I am not a man in Parliament, or I would soon evolve a way, because the motor people are the easiest in the world to tax. They suggested this tax, and they would suggest another.

I agree that it would be a good thing if we could produce the motor-spirit in this country?—I think the whole thing is a little premature at present: we have not found the oil yet.