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Palmerston North, 1893-1902.

A study of his political career.

A thesis presented in fulfilment
of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in
History at Massey University.

B. Symondson

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I remain entirely responsible for any error or omissions that remain.

B. Symondson
Wellington 1977

ABBREVIATIONS

AJHR	-	Addendices and Journals of the House of Representatives.
BPIC	-	Ballance Papers Inward Correspondence.
BPOC	-	Ballance Papers Outward Correspondence.
EP	-	Evening Post.
FS	-	Feilding Star.
MES	-	Manawatu Evening Standard.
NZPD	-	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates.
WLBM	-	Wellington Land Board Minutes.

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Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the political career of F. Pirani, who represented the Palmerston North electorate from 1894 to 1902. Pirani entered the House a liberal, but within a few years was in strong disagreement with the Liberal government on several issues, so in 1896 he stood as an independent liberal. From 1898 Pirani believed a change of government would be to New Zealand's advantage, and in 1902 he was an opposition candidate. Despite this transformation in political colours only on the land question was there a major change in Pirani's views in the years he was in the House. This at first sight is contradictory, and this thesis, by a detailed study of Pirani's political career and beliefs, is intended to clarify this situation. It is also hoped that the thesis would be a first step in the analysis of local Manawatu politics in the latter part of the nineteenth-century. Other regions, for example Canterbury, Taranaki and the Waikato, have been studied in depth, but the Manawatu's timing and pattern of development was, it is suggested, unique, and this alone suggests that a study of its local politics would prove fruitful to those considering the wider picture.

The value, and the limitation, of a thesis are considerably determined by the methodology and the sources used. Sources are to an extent independent of methodology, but methodology frequently determines both the way and the extent to which different sources are used. The politics of the Canterbury region for the period 1870-1890 has been studied in detail in a number of

theses. In all cases the theses were concerned with local politics usually with only a single election and hence a heavy reliance was placed upon local newspapers, and a booth-by-booth analysis of election results. This led Bohan,¹ in particular, to the conclusion that party played no role in the politics of the period. Millar² believed that the polling-booth method did not allow issues their due, and Evans pointed out that "there is no getting away from the fact that on some issues a two-party division existed, and in parliament with much more certainty than in the electorates."³ I believe the comments of Millar and Evans to be very important, and I have therefore attempted to explain in detail Pirani's career at both the national and local level, and also the influence that each had on the other.⁴ Because of this I believe the result is a better building block towards a more complete understanding of the politics of the period than would otherwise be the case.

It need hardly be said that previous research has analysed both the politicians and issues of the 1890's in considerable detail. However, I believe that the very existence of this thesis, as well as its conclusions, point to a complete gap in previous research, the detailed study of the secondary figures. Of the major figures Seddon, McKenzie and Reeves have been studied both well and in detail, Ballance and Ward have received quite inadequate treatment. Of the issues land has received detailed and capable treatment, the liquor question is in a much less satisfactory situation. At least, however, in all these cases

attempts have been made, and the gaps are obvious. The findings and conclusions of this thesis suggest that, as with many other topics, one cannot assume the local details are insignificant, simply because the broad, national sweep of events has already been considered. Rather this thesis has, I believe, shown the need for similar studies of other secondary political figures. A detailed study of A. W. Hogg, for example, would be not only useful in itself, but would almost certainly allow fruitful contrasts and similarities with F. Pirani.

Modesty was not part of Pirani's character, nor was conciseness part of his style. As a result Pirani's nine years in the House provide a body of speeches which provide indispensable core material on Pirani's political career and beliefs. The speeches have been supplemented by the private papers of Seddon and Ballance, and newspapers. The voluminous newspaper clippings which form part of the Seddon papers were particularly useful in discussion of the elections as regrettably there is not extant a continuous series of either the Manawatu Evening Standard or the Manawatu Times, a gap in the sources only partly filled by the continuous run of the Feilding Star.

I have frequently quoted the Manawatu Evening Standard as if it was Pirani speaking. The newspaper was owned from 1892 by the Pirani family, and only on the issue of federation with Australia did I ever find a disagreement between the paper and Pirani. Theses and secondary sources have been widely used for particular topics but only Clarke has even a paragraph concerned solely with Pirani.⁵

Any consideration of Liberal party politics in the 1890's must give some consideration to the differing attitudes of Ballance and Seddon. The contrast between the two is particularly important in this thesis because Pirani entered the House principally due to Ballance, and he soon believed that Seddon was betraying the ideals of Ballance. Pirani's subsequent years of conflict with Seddon were in part a clash of personalities, but it is also suggested that between Pirani and Seddon there were fundamental differences as to the means and ends of liberalism.

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- 1 Bohan E. "The General Election of 1879 in Canterbury". (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Canterbury), 1958.
 - 2 Millar D. P. "The General Election of 1884 in Canterbury. Being a Study of Politics Within the Province of Canterbury, New Zealand". (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Canterbury), 1960. pp. iii, iv.
 - 3 Evans A.M. "A Study of Canterbury Politics in the Early 1880's With Special Reference to the General Election of 1881". (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Canterbury), 1959. p.34.
 - 4 A University of Otago Ph.D. by John H. Angus, covering the period 1873-1893 confirms the value of looking at politics at both the local and the national level. Unfortunately this thesis was not available for study, as it had not been presented at the time research on the present thesis was finished.
 - 5 Clarke J. C. "The New Zealand Liberal Party and Government 1895-1906". (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Auckland), 1962.

Chapter One

The Manawatu

As with most, if not all, politicians, Pirani's views were the result of several influences. The lack of private papers has meant that we shall probably never be aware of some influences, at the level of family and friends, that were critical. In the early 1890's Pirani himself said that one individual, John Ballance, had had a strong impact upon him.¹ In 1905 Pirani recalled that he had entered the House a Ballance man, not a Seddon man; but in the same breath he called Massey "one of the straightest liberals in the House."² Ballance influenced Pirani's political ideals, and especially his concept of political leadership, rather than gave him detailed ideas. On the issues of land and education, where Pirani had detailed, specific proposals, they emerged from personal experience and the actual needs of his constituents.

We do not know for certain why Pirani settled in Palmerston North, and it may not have had anything to do with the opportunities a frontier settlement offered the young and energetic individual, but the latter seems unlikely. Whatever the reason Pirani believed the people of Palmerston North and the surrounding district worth representing, to the point where his health was nearly broken. While his constituency alone is not a complete explanation of Pirani's politics, it is a sufficient part that without an understanding of the Manawatu of Pirani's time one cannot hope to understand Pirani.

The key to an understanding of the Manawatu of the 1890's is the recognition that the region was emerging from its frontier period. Conditions in many respects

remained very primitive, particularly in the smaller settlements inland from Palmerston North, settlements which were the actual frontier. Palmerston North itself believed the worst was over, but remembered how bad the worst had been.

Inland Manawatu on the whole benefited from European settlement being relatively late by New Zealand standards. By the time settlement was serious the Maori Wars were over and the provinces were shortly to be abolished, which meant Government help was usually better planned. The region was able to respond to the rise of dairying without loss of previous investment. Breaking in of the bush, however, was not made any easier.

In the early 1840's the New Zealand Company had shown considerable interest in the area but little came of its extensive plans. Foxton was settled in the 1840's but even by the 1860's settlers remained few, despite the favourable comments of travellers. The Maoris were peaceful, though this might be explained in part by the lack of settlers.³ Closer settlement had two prerequisites - initial surveys and land purchase from the Maoris.

The Rangitikei Block was purchased in 1849, the Awahou and Ahuaturanga Blocks in 1858, the Manawatu - Awahou Block in 1865 and the Manawatu - Rangitikei Block in 1866.⁴ Most of the purchases were effected with little difficulty but the Manawatu - Rangitikei caused bitter dissension, both between the Ngatiraukawa and Ngatiapa tribes, and within them.

Dr Featherstone, the Superintendent for Wellington Province, purchased the land for £25,000, although he knew ownership was in dispute. Every historian consulted concluded that Maori custom was largely, if not completely, on the side of the Ngatiraukawa and, with varying degrees of certainty, that Dr Featherstone agreed on a price with the Ngatiapa to

speed the sale, while the Ngatiapa agreed to sell, before any decision could be made as to how the purchase price should be divided, just because their title was weak.⁵

The Native Land Court hearing at Otaki, 1868, satisfied no-one, so the case was heard in Wellington in 1869. The Ngatiraukawa lost more completely this time, but obstruction and litigation continued until 1870 when the Minister of Native Affairs reached a final settlement.

This cleared the air virtually completely, though minor incidents in the 1870's suggest that some Maoris were not entirely happy. At one stage, tribal warfare had seemed possible, which would hardly have encouraged European settlement. The general absence of friction has led to statements that it was non-existent.⁶ This was not quite true despite the comment of a settler that there was "not the slightest fear on account of the native of those days",⁷ and the readiness with which Maoris provided guides for surveyors and labour on Public Works schemes. The Palmerston North - Foxton tramway was blocked by Maoris on a number of occasions. A minor inconvenience to settlers it appears to have been an effective method of local Maoris for airing a particular grievance.

The survey work was carried out under conditions of considerable difficulty in country which was swampy or covered in dense bush and often both. In 1858 a survey of the Upper Manawatu was abandoned temporarily, due to mosquitos.

The first sale of Manawatu sections was in 1866, and of Palmerston North sections in 1867, but little enthusiasm was shown. In the early 1870's a reporter believed Palmerston North should be renamed Scriptown and that legislation should make the spotting of town sections illegal.⁸ Even in its very earliest days Palmerston North had a 'land' problem. In the late 1860's settlers were so few that the Wellington Almanack listed residents

for the entire Manawatu for the years 1865-1869; not until 1870 was Palmerston North separately entered. It was Vogel's schemes which transformed the picture. They provided people willing to take the hardship of breaking in the bush and the necessary back-up of public works schemes. By 1872, there were twenty-three dwellings in the township, but being typically frontier, the population included only three women.⁹

Palmerston North was to become the pre-eminent settlement of the Manawatu, but this was not inevitable. The 1870's saw settlement at many sites in the Manawatu - Sanson (1870), Palmerston North (1870), Feilding (1874), Halcombe (1876), Rongotea (1878) and Ashhurst (1879).¹⁰ Just as Palmerston North was to outstrip Foxton, so one of these settlements might have out-stripped Palmerston North. The latter's initial advantage was its communication link with Foxton. If Palmerston North was difficult to reach, any other place was even worse. In the early 1870's neither Foxton nor Palmerston North was geared for an inflow of hundreds of people. A track provided the only access from Palmerston North to Feilding. Between 1871 and 1873 sections in and around Sanson were balloted and occupied but it was not until 1873 that the settlers were able to get any of their produce out. Before then, their existence was entirely subsistence.

Transport was critical to the early settlements and was the key to Palmerston North's growth, transport within settlements, between settlements, and transport links with the outside world. Inadequate communications acted as a restraint which meant the land could be developed only by the application of sheer hard work and lots of it.

Contemporary newspapers continually refer to the swamps and the need for drainage, and apparently deservedly; one spot was actually termed "Muddy Bush". The river served as the earliest highway between Foxton and Palmerston North.

Until 1875, when a bridge was built, people crossed the river at the Woodville end of the Manawatu Gorge by iron cage.

In 1870 it cost £1 per ton to freight goods by sea from Wellington to Foxton, but from Foxton to Palmerston North it cost £20 per ton. The earliest roads were Maori tracks, never satisfactory, and made frequently impassable by winter mud. Flooded rivers could mean a wait of days before a crossing was possible and even then only if one had a bullock team. It was not easy to forget such problems, and the need for ever better communications remained for the Manawatu a vital issue in the 1890's, for the growth of the region meant that supply tended always to lag behind demand.

From necessity, a network of links emerged and Palmerston North, even by the mid-seventies, had become a communications centre.

<u>Palmerston North linked with</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Method</u>
Foxton	1871	rough road
Wanganui	1871	road
Manawatu Gorge	1872	road
Foxton	1873	tramway
Hawkes Bay	1875	road
Feilding	1876	rail
Foxton	1873	tramway
Hawkes Bay	1875	road
Feilding	1876	rail
Foxton	1876	rail
Wanganui	1878	rail

As this network developed, the tendency was for other settlements to link with it so that as they grew, Palmerston North benefited from the through traffic and emerged as a wholesaling and marketing centre.

Pressure for the link with Foxton began almost as soon as Palmerston North was settled. The tramway proved difficult to construct and was far from luxury travel. Despite this, 300 return journeys a month were made between Foxton and Palmerston North, when the communities' combined population was only 500 people. In addition, the tramway made possible exploitation of the district's timber.

The obvious rival of Palmerston North was not a settlement further inland, but Foxton, the entry-port on the coast. Foxton's major commercial interest was the flax industry, hence its early start became a liability. A boom attracted mushroom operators and sharp practices that ruined the product's reputation. This difficulty was not overcome until 1901 when the Government imposed compulsory grading. Foxton's function as the economic outlet of the region was lost in 1886 when the Wellington - Manawatu railway, terminating at Palmerston North, was opened. Yet again we see the significance of communications, particularly railways, for Palmerston North.

Inevitably the conditions for early settlers were primitive in the extreme.

"There were two seasons in the year - the mud season and the mosquito season, the latter the pioneering colonist declaring much the worst".¹¹ The mosquitoes ferocity was legendary; it was claimed they could eat entire animals to the bone. Business premises habitually placed smoking cans at the front door overnight and more than one church service had to be abandoned. In the 1880's, workers on a road project for the Manawatu Railway Company, had to be paid 10s. a day against a norm of 7s. and even then all the work was done under nets.

That the Manawatu was pioneer country even by New Zealand standards, is shown by the sex ratios. The national average of women to men in 1874 was 75.17 per 100 men but in the Manawatu-Kaironga Country 66.16 per 100 men,¹²

although the high proportion of immigrants would have meant more equalised figures for the under-21 age group.

The decades 1870-1890 saw a dramatic change in the Manawatu and especially in Palmerston North. By 1890 much of the bush had been cleared and Palmerston North was the chief town of the region with a prosperous future based on the town's communications function¹³ and the region's agriculture. The Manawatu became dominated by the small farmer for whom a compact network of communications was crucial to a viable cost structure.¹⁴ In contrast, the 1890's was more a decade of consolidation, lacking in any dramatic new structural innovations. In the Manawatu, the small farmers' victory was not achieved by the bursting up of large estates; there were not, relatively speaking, any large estates to bust up. Instead, settlement was achieved by the cumulative work of many settlers, cutting down and clearing the bush, then slowly creating high-production units. This partly explains why Pirani concerned himself very little with large estates, and what should be done with them, but concerned himself in great detail with the difficulties of the bush settler.

Early farming in the Manawatu was of necessity subsistent. It was so expensive to move goods in or out, that wheat was locally grown.¹⁵ Even when improved communications mitigated this problem, the difficulties of clearing the land, of fencing, of moving stock over log-littered ground, and the danger of tutu poisoning, meant that settlers were initially concerned with survival, and even then needed assistance:¹⁶ Help came principally from two sources - public works and timber. For the settler, both were transitory - public works filled in gaps and provided ready cash, while sawmills moved with the retreating bush,¹⁷ but they did provide a necessary backstop during the first stage of development, and a necessary base for the still-future security of refrigeration.

Palmerston North and the Manawatu were naturally affected by the Depression of the 1880's; cash was short and bankruptcies frequent, but the district, being new, had less to lose. Flax, timber and public works remained the chief sources of income and though growth was slowed, there were mitigating circumstances. The bush clearing carried on and the construction of the Wellington-Manawatu railway meant jobs.

The decade 1886-1896, when most of New Zealand was in the depths of a depression, was one of expanded economic activity in the Manawatu, from which Palmerston North in particular was a beneficiary. The role of new railway lines was absolutely critical.

Private interest in Wellington formed the Wellington-Manawatu Company in 1880, at the time the largest private company in New Zealand. For a number of reasons, the Company chose to alter the terminal from Foxton to Longburn. Though a longer route, it avoided the coastal swamps, gave a quicker link with Palmerston North, Wanganui and potentially the East Coast, it therefore could expect a greater volume of through traffic. The new route also followed the Company's land grants.¹⁸

The railway opened up the Southern Manawatu and linked it with Palmerston North. The years 1886-1900 saw the timber trade reach new production levels. Palmerston North's population rose 140 percent in the years 1887-1896,¹⁹ while Foxton's rose only 40 percent. In 1885, Palmerston North was not the dominant settlement of the Manawatu, though its importance was recognised.²⁰ Palmerston North, Feilding, Halcombe and Marton, were all important rail centres on the Wanganui - Palmerston North - Foxton railway, which linked bush areas. Palmerston North gained a tramway link with Sanson in 1884 and a rail link in 1886. The Wellington line was completed in 1886 and the Hawkes Bay line through the Manawatu Gorge in 1891. The Gorge link between East and West Coasts was of national importance, a special train with

1,000 passengers from Wellington joined the celebrations. It was originally intended to terminate at Bunnythorpe but the Manawatu Railway Company altered this to Longburn, again playing a crucial role in Palmerston North's growth. In the short space of ten years, Palmerston North had grown to a regional dominance and national importance summed up by the statement, "it is a junction of three main lines of railway - the Wanganui - New Plymouth, Wellington - Manawatu and Napier - Woodville".²¹ If Pirani was in the House an often self-confident individual, he fully represented the prevailing mood of his electorate.

Farming, mainly dairying, catered at first for the uncertain local market. On one occasion when Wellington had a surplus of butter, the majority of local cows were shot. Dairying involved very hard work, in the most primitive of conditions.²² All milking was by hand, as was the churning for butter. Butter production in the Manawatu County expanded 61.7 percent in the years 1886-1891, while cheese production declined 8.3 percent. Co-operative dairy factories were established at Chilternham (1893), Sanson, Tokomaru and Te Horo (1894), Rongotea and Apiti (1895), Awahiri (1897) and Levin (1899).²³ In 1893 the New Zealand Farmers Dairy Union Ltd, opened a large factory in Palmerston North, which by 1896 was supported by eight skimming stations.²⁴ The largest meeting in Palmerston North to that date was held in 1886 to organise the first A.&P. show, and the show rapidly became the social event of the year. In 1886 there were 290 entries, by 1902 this had risen to 6,297. Longburn was typical of the inland freezing works which opened to take advantage of the frozen meat export trade, and relied on rapid transport to the coast.

The period 1880-1900 saw dramatic changes in farming methods. "The advent of the self-binding reaper in 1883 marked a second phase of agricultural expansion in the Manawatu".²⁵ By the 1890's the pattern of fattening

hill-stock sheep on lowland pastures had emerged and as dairying and sheep became established, export industries improved, crop rotation provided better fodder and the use of superphosphates and other manures spread. The factories took most of the toil out of butter production, while in the late 1890's, the first mechanical milkers appeared. The Babcock test set a standard which gave advantage to the progressive farmer. Taken together, these changes can be said to have revolutionised farming practice.²⁶

As with any frontier town urban services and social graces were slow in coming. The first transport service was a private cab from the Square to Terrace End in 1878, and it was considered progress when it acquired a cover. In 1884, a nightwatchman was appointed because the police force was inadequate for the growing population. The hearing of cases was equally unsatisfactory. A Courthouse was erected in 1874 and District Court Sessions held, but it was not until 1903 that a sitting of the Supreme Court was held. A post office was opened in 1873 and in 1875 the town was linked by telegraph to Wellington, via Foxton. In 1880, Palmerston North was joined by a line through the Manawatu Gorge with the National network which stretched from Russell to Bluff. The telephone arrived in the late 1870's with 74 subscribers, rising to 161 by 1901.

Fires were a particularly dangerous hazard to early Palmerston North because buildings were wooden and fire-fighting services were inadequate. A volunteer fire brigade was formed in 1877 but disbanded because of lack of equipment. The Borough granted £30 for equipment in 1883 and the Palmerston North Volunteer Fire Brigade was officially formed in 1887. F. Pirani was an early secretary and in one major blaze, almost lost his life. He

situated himself at a point of vantage in the centre of Fitzherbert Street from which he played a hose on the flames. The heat, however, became so intense that the only way in which he could maintain his stand, was by enveloping himself in soaked blankets and have another brigadesman play a hose on him. ²⁷

Education was notable for the rapid expansion rather than the quality of facilities. Central School opened in 1873; in 1875 the roll was 52, in 1881 124, in 1883 370 and by 1892 over 600. The building was enlarged or replaced in 1876, 1879 and 1882 and a new site used in 1890. Other schools were opened in 1884 and 1893.

Palmerston North functioned in the 1890's not only as the market centre for the Manawatu but also as the supply centre for a frontier that had moved on. Settlement of the Upper Oroua and Pohangina valleys only began in the late 1880's and in the 1890's followed the pattern of Palmerston North of the 1870's. Roads were of dubious value, where they existed at all; timber was ruthlessly cut down or burnt off, only as communications eased did a largely subsistence economy give way to a cash one, but as it did so, Palmerston North benefited from the through traffic. ²⁸ Other centres nearer might benefit more in the short term, as some certainly did from the work on the Main Trunk north of Marton in the 1880's and 1890's, but as the frontier disappeared or the Main Trunk moved on, such places suffered whereas Palmerston North, being more broadly based, continued to grow.

It behoved anyone who was to look after the interests of Palmerston North to look after the interests of the Manawatu as a whole. This was certainly one

reason for Pirani's success, he concerned himself with issues that were vital to the region as a whole, hence he was seen as representing something more than just Palmerston North.

Palmerston North badly wanted numerous services which could not be obtained without government help. In most cases the borough could put forward on merit a very good case for getting those services; so could many other settlements. It was the latter point which Palmerston North, naturally enough, was none too keen to concede. As a town with little history but a considerable future Palmerston North was in the 1890's quite prepared to elect an individual who worked hard for, was part of, and therefore presumably understood, the requirements of a settlement which saw itself as uniquely placed to take advantage of the opportunities for continued growth which were an article of faith in the community.

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- 1 See below pp. 29 and 30.
 - 2 MES, 25 Oct. 1905, p.5
 - 3 Page A.J." 'Manawatu' : from the earliest times to 1900". (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Canterbury), 1928. See chapters three and four, pp. 35-91, for this period.
 - 4 See Appendix 1, diagram 1, for the location of the Maori blocks.
 - 5 Baldwin B. E. "Early Native Records of the Manawatu Block."
Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute 1905 p.8.
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Page, pp. 61-68, 86.
 - 6 Page, pp. 96-97

- 7 Quoted Bradfield A.G.S. Forgotten Days, Palmerston North 1956 p.24.
- 8 Wellington Independent 7 March 1872. In Manawatu and Palmerston North in the 1870's (a bound volume of newspaper clippings held by the Alexander Turnbull Library).
- 9 Petersen G. C. The Pioneering Days of Palmerston North, Palmerston North 1952 p.39.
- 10 See Appendix 1 figure 2 for a map of the Manawatu region.
- 11 Bradfield, Forgotten Days, p.22. Quoted from an early settler.
- 12 Tester K. G. "Railways and Settlement - A Study of the Nature of the Relationship between Railways and Settlement in the Manawatu and District between 1871 and 1971". (unpublished M. A. thesis, Massey University) 1972. p.105.
- 13 Appendix 1 Figure 3 for successive maps showing the growth of railways in the Manawatu.
- 14 Saunders B.G.R. and Anderson A.G. Introducing Manawatu, Palmerston North 1964. pp.156-159.
- 15 Oliver R. G. "The Impact of Communications in Manawatu-Kairanga, 1874-1916" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Massey University) 1973. p.92.
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- 17 Tester, p.18.
- 18 Tester p.39.
- 19 Appendix 1 Figure 4 for Palmerston North's early population figures.
- 20 W. Park's Manawatu and Wellington Almanack, Directory. Calendar Diary and Nautical Almanack for the year 1887, p.176.
- 21 Cyclopaedia of New Zealand Vol. 1, Wellington 1897. p.1139.

- 22 Weightman J. G. Newspaper articles, mainly from the MES, (a bound volume held by the Alexander Turnbull Library) p.4.
- 23 Matheson I. R. The Birth of Palmerston North, Palmerston North 1971. p.65.
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- 24 Matheson, p.66.
- 25 Croucher W. G. "Rural Manawatu, farming through the years".
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- 26 *ibid*, p.32.
- 27 Petersen G. C. Palmerston North A Centennial History, Wellington 1973, p.132.
- 28 Mainwaring R. G. "The Vital Years. The Small Farm Settlements of the Upper Oroua and Upper Pohangina Valleys 1885-1900." (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Wellington), 1965 pp. 7,21,38.
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Chapter Two

Pirani's Political Career 1890-1893

The 1890 and 1893 Elections

Pirani was the representative for the Palmerston North seat for the years 1893-1902. He had unsuccessfully stood as a labour candidate in 1890 but he won the seat in 1893 as the official Liberal candidate. Pirani soon found himself in sharp disagreement with Seddon, and in 1896 was an independent. By 1899 Seddon regarded him as one of the Opposition, and Pirani, though he called himself a 'true liberal', believed a change of government was needed. Pirani was not the only liberal who rebelled against Seddon's running of the party; indeed, from the mid-1890's it was commonly observed that the Left-Wing, as the discontented liberals were called, were a more effective opposition than the Opposition. In the many volumes written on the politics of the 1890's little attention has been paid to the Left-Wing, either as a group or as individuals, with the exceptions of Clarke,¹ who has a long and excellent section restricted mainly to the parliamentary level, and Whitcher,² whose short but quite detailed studies of the New Liberals of 1905, included some overlap of personnel - T. E. Taylor, W. W. Tanner, and A. W. Hogg.

The questions, I believe, that need to be answered about Pirani are why he found it necessary to break with Seddon and the Liberal Party, and how was he able to survive the attempt by Seddon to defeat him. Answering these questions will involve consideration of Pirani's personality, his political beliefs, attitudes and opinions, and the relationship between these factors and his constituency.

Though Pirani was born in Australia in 1859 the family moved to New Zealand in 1864; he was in no way influenced by an external up-bringing or education and regarded himself as a New Zealander. The Pirani family was Italian by extraction and Roman Catholic by religion. Goldman³ asserted that the family was Jewish, and that F. Pirani's father, H. C. Pirani,⁴ had been a prominent member of the Melbourne community of Sephardi Jews,⁵ but this appears to be incorrect. Apart from Goldman only two pieces of historical research have been written on the Jewish community in New Zealand,⁶ and neither mention the Pirani's. F. Pirani's grandson advised that

neither Henry Charles Pirani NOR any member of his family were at any stage of their lives practising Hebrews ... at some period after arriving in Australia H.C.P., ceased to be a Roman Catholic and became a member of the Church of England.⁷

He also states that H. C. Pirani's correct middle name was Charles, not Cohen, "his baptism ... is a matter of record in the Roman Catholic Basilica in that district of Florence"⁸ which was the family home.

F. Pirani's father spent his life in journalism, and at first Frederick and his brother David seemed likely to follow him. Frederick served his apprenticeship on the Wanganui Herald under Ballance in the late 1870's, while David worked in the journalistic trade in Hawke's Bay, Poverty Bay and Palmerston North, after which he returned temporarily to Victoria.⁹ F. Pirani soon found public life too attractive,¹⁰ though his involvement in journalism, fire services and particularly education went beyond their value to his political career.¹¹ In 1912 Pirani was to serve on a Royal Commission on education.¹² After 1902 Pirani spent most of his life in Feilding, except for his final years, when he moved to Wellington.

To understand why Pirani moved away from the Liberal Party one must consider the political environment of the 1890's, and Pirani's beliefs and expectations. The early 1890's was in several senses a period of political change. The Liberal/Conservative division became much clearer, and a primitive liberal national structure emerged. The government was a single group, whose members had an agreed common policy; there emerged a new degree of Cabinet and Caucus cohesion. In 1888 a Caucus meeting elected Ballance; and in 1893 confirmed the leadership of Seddon. By the late 1890's Caucus meetings were held regularly. The liberal parliamentary party was not a collection of personal and/or provincial groups, of the type which had previously formed governments. The Liberals were not like a modern political party, but they exhibited, to varying degrees, many of its features. The period was transitional so features of the pre-party mode of government remained, for example Stout led a group of independent Liberals who had in common a belief in radicalism and prohibition. Parochial and individualistic attitudes remained of primary importance to many members. The parochial member put local interests above loyalty to any wider group, and projected local interests on to the national scene, with only secondary consideration for the national or parliamentary implications of doing so. The individualistic member put loyalty to his beliefs before loyalty to wider parliamentary groups. The Liberal Party had not submerged parochialism and individualism, but caused many members to believe they could best be served by the alliance of interests the Liberal Party represented. It will be argued that Pirani, a parochial and individualistic member par-excellence, was unwilling to accept the limitation of individual freedom this entailed.

Parochialism and individualism dominated New Zealand politics before the 1890's; 1876 made no difference to this. What Bohan found for Canterbury was almost

certainly true elsewhere. "The main feature of the elections in North Canterbury was the pattern of local man versus non-resident and well-known politician ... the Canterbury Liberal Association's support was conspicuous by its absence."¹³ In all three electorates - Ashley, Kaiapoi and Coleridge, despite diversity of type, personalities and local issues were far more important than platforms. Small farmers and small town businessmen were the dominant interests.¹⁴

"The people of Coleridge were concerned to get a member who would look after them; the member they elected was an independent who set out to fulfill their wishes. Higher aspects of policy or principle were alien to both electors and elected."¹⁵ In Canterbury Grey and his followers were as provincial as anyone, indeed the clearest division was between Greyite provincialists and centralists, not liberals and conservatives.

The 1890 election was preceded in the Manawatu by a flurry of activity by the Knights of Labour, in which Pirani was closely involved. At the first Feilding meeting Pirani was the main speaker, and emphasised the need for social unity, "the greatest thing needed was legislation for the greatest good for the greatest number ... the main object of the Knights was to unite all labour, irrespective of trade, creed, color or sex,"¹⁶ adding that the Knights did not approve of boycotts or strikes. The Knights had started two months before in Palmerston North, and now had a membership of 250; an assembly only one week old in Ashhurst was 51 strong; and branches were being formed in Woodville, Pahiatua and Eketahuna.¹⁷ Following the meeting a branch with 22 members was formed in Feilding.¹⁸ One John Saxon attacked the meeting as having been purely political, and believed that the 'communist' views put forward would not appeal to the average settler.¹⁹

Julian West and Pirani replied that Saxon misrepresented the Knights, who were far more moderate than he had pictured. For a brief period the Knights, in Feilding at least, were a major news item, and received considerable coverage. The Maritime Strike caused an essentially moderate group some problems. The Union Steamship Company was censured for joining the Shipowners Association, while men who had not obeyed the call out of their union executive were precluded from the Knights;²⁰ but shortly after the Feilding Assembly made it clear it was not affiliated to the Maritime Council, and urged arbitration on both sides.²¹

At first it was denied that Pirani was an election candidate, but the Feilding Star reported that many farmers were joining the Knights, especially in Palmerston North. Pirani went to Foxton to open a Knights of Labour Assembly, and made an openly political speech.

He opposed the present Ministry; supported one percent tax on unimproved value of land; income tax; abolition of customs duties on necessities of life to extent of £250,000; abolition of Property Tax, reform of the Upper House, and repeal of the Bankruptcy Laws"²²

On the same day Pirani was chosen unanimously as candidate at a Knights of Labour meeting in Palmerston North, and two days later received 500 votes at a public meeting, to 5 for J. G. Wilson and 5 for James Linton (the latter said he would withdraw).²³ A few days later Pirani moved the vote of thanks at a public meeting of Sir George Grey's which 600 attended.²⁴ Grey may have long ago exasperated parliamentary liberals, but his platform appeal had not waned, and Pirani needed all the exposure he could get. To avoid vote-splitting Ballance and other leaders gave endorsement to particular candidates where

more than one stood under the Liberal banner, but they were not always successful. In the 1890 election Ballance gave formal support to Pirani. One of Pirani's opponents, Stevens, was to receive it for the 1893 election for another seat. This is but one example of how fluid the party structure of the early 1890's was, and the extent to which leaders had to acknowledge local feeling.

The seat was a mixed one, in the south it included Palmerston North and a number of smaller settlements, such as Tokomaru, Bunnythorpe and Ashhurst. Northwards it stretched well into the Ruahines, to include the headwaters of the Oroua and Pohangina rivers. North of Feilding, which was outside the electorate, the Oroua River formed the western boundary.²⁵ The northern part, very recently settled and still thinly populated, formed a contrast to the southern portion.

The main issues of the election were land settlement, labour legislation and electoral and constitutional reform.²⁶ The contest was three cornered, between J. G. Wilson, who had represented Foxton for the previous eight years, Pirani, and John Stevens. Wilson had no deep interest in politics, but fear of Pirani kept him in the contest. "I should have given politics up but friends urged me on. Pirani, they said, would win the seat if I didn't stand and he was of socialistic tendency."²⁷ Ballance spoke in Pirani's support, calling Wilson 'the Dummy of the House,' a comment on his almost complete absence from the debates, while Pirani noted that in 1890 Wilson had been present at only eight out of seventy-two divisions.²⁸ The latter was due to illness, which probably added to Wilson's dislike of Pirani's style of campaigning, "we were quite friendly, but Pirani who was then on Smith's paper in Palmerston spat and bit and spoke of lying but he wasn't worth powder and shot."²⁹

Despite Wilson's illness and reluctance he was a well-established local figure, and Pirani could not hope to defeat him without considerable settler support. The growth of the Knights may well have convinced him that he had it.

Brand notes that "few candidates escaped heckling or the ribald interjection, but disorder was rare."³⁰

Election meetings were generally regarded as social gatherings. Whether it was due more to the Palmerston North district or to Pirani, his meetings seem to have been disproportionately disorderly.

Croucher records an election meeting of a Mr Brown, almost certainly Pirani, held at Sanson.³¹ The chairman elected was an ardent conservative, and by no means sober. He started talking about his own politics, which threw the meeting into uproar. While the audience thoroughly enjoyed the fun Pirani was ignored by most present. Flour and eggs flew in all directions, which Pirani seemed to enjoy rather than be disturbed by, and squeezed his points in at any available opportunity. When the chairman adjourned to the Junction Hotel Pirani helped restore order by personally ejecting a leading source of the trouble, which "won him the admiration and sporting instinct of the meeting."³² Such meetings gave Pirani little chance to explain his principles, but at least he became known. There can be no doubting Pirani's immediate impact. Wilson had denied a rumour that he would retire from the contest, and J. Stevens supporters were working hard, but the Feilding Star believed Pirani would win; he "has been doing his case an immense amount of good by his frankness and perfect straightforwardness."³³ Wilson was seen by his own admission as played out, and advised to retire for a younger and more vigorous man.

Wilson's was a balanced position, he favoured free-trade, including minimum taxation on necessities, but preferred the property tax to the Land and Income

Tax Act, and later favoured freehold over the 999-year lease. He opposed dummyism, favoured borrowing to build roads to open land up, and later supported women's franchise.³⁴ Though the Feilding Star noted him as being in favour of denominational subsidies³⁵ this does not appear to have been an issue in the campaign. Despite having voted against Atkinson's tariffs in 1888 Wilson regarded himself as an Atkinson man. Pirani threw an equally wide net, though a labour candidate, he also opposed increasing the burden on farmers. While stating that he contested the seat at Ballance's request, he also said he would not pledge himself to anyone.³⁶

The campaign became rougher, however, "the Manawatu Herald reports that Mr Pirani's supporters have circulated an improper 'skit' on Mr Wilson which has had the effect of turning the more respectable of Mr Pirani's friends from him."³⁷ The Feilding Star, apparently alluding to this, believed Pirani's chances had been badly damaged.

At one time we thought Mr Pirani had a good chance of heading the poll, but recent events, to which we need not further allude, have gone heavily against him. Of course, he may slip in between the two other candidates if his first supporters are loyal to him and active in polling every one of their men.³⁸

The result was Wilson 1055, Pirani 994, Stevens 396. "Pirani polled the highest in Palmerston, Stevens in Awahuri, elsewhere Wilson had a majority."³⁹ Pirani's Palmerston base had almost given him victory, but Wilson's knowledge of the electorate, and the electorate's knowledge of him, just won the day. This was to give him a further term, 1893-1896, as the representative of Otaki. As late as 1902 Wilson was asked to stand, but declined on grounds of health and his presidency of the Farmers Union.⁴⁰

In the early 1890's Pirani's links with both the Liberal Party and the Knights of Labour tightened.⁴¹ Knights of Labour special settlements close to or actually in Pirani's constituency partly explain why special settlements were for him a topic of particular attention. The Confidence Assembly of the Knights of Labour in Palmerston North was founded on 5 July 1890, with Pirani as Recording Secretary. On 28 April 1891 the second District Assembly (covering Wellington Province, Hawke's Bay and Taranaki) met in Palmerston North and Pirani was District Statistician. On 19-20 July 1892 the fifth District Assembly met in Napier and Pirani was in the chair as District Master Workman. Pirani remained organiser for the Palmerston North Knights' at least until 1895.⁴² Pirani's connection with the Knights makes some discussion of their politics essential.

Leonard Pozzi's Modern Slavery and Civilization was published in Christchurch in 1883. It included the full twenty points of the Knights of Labour programme, but "seems to have followed slavishly the programme of the parent American organisation."⁴³ The Knights of Labour were strongly influenced by Henry George, and never approved of violence. The New Zealand programme started with a rhetorical flourish and employers were hostile, but the detailed demands were mild.⁴⁴ Despite the length of the programme there was no mention of either Maori policy or the licensing laws.

The Knights of Labour co-operated with Trades and Labour Council committees at the local level, and became involved in local issues like the early closing movement in Auckland after 1890, rather than emerging as a separate political force. Ballance recognised their value to the Liberals. "I hope Stevens will be returned, if so, it will be a great victory for our party. If the Knights of Labour were strong in the Rangitikei District, I should feel more certain of our candidate being returned."⁴⁵

Two district assemblies of the Knights were held in 1894, the first in Wellington and the second in Palmerston North. Pirani and P. J. O'Regan were amongst the delegates to the first, and Pirani congratulated the Knights on having a strong organisation of 50-60 assemblies, and on the passage of many of the measures they had advocated, despite their not seeking political influence. The Hon. J. Carroll apologised for the absence of Ministers but praised the work the Knights had done.

The Palmerston North Knights of Labour Assembly had inquired about Knights of Labour special settlements in March 1891. In May 1892 William Walsh, District Secretary-Treasurer of the Palmerston North Knights of Labour wrote to Ballance,

neither the two Land Associations in the Knights of Labour, nor the Pahiatua Forest Reserve Association desire the Freehold in preference to the lease in perpetuity as you now suggest. The five petitions purporting to have been presented by Mr Wilson on behalf of five Palmerston Associations must have been from Ashhurst and Marton as none of the Palmerston Associations have sent such Petitions. 47

At the second District Assembly during 1894 the land question was fully discussed, and an anti-freehold resolution was passed.

That this assembly is of the opinion that the acquisition of the freehold is not essential to the financial interests of this colony and that regulations preventing the obtaining of freehold are conducive to the prosperity of the colony, and this association trusts the government will not yield to any pressure that will be brought to bear on them with a view to altering the regulations. 48

After 1894 the Knights of Labour rapidly collapsed. Both the Wellington and Christchurch Assemblies found

that years on the land bred both lack of general interest and a more conservative attitude to the land issue. Despite his associations with them Pirani was never as radical as the Knights on land and became more conservative on the issue at an earlier date. With Pirani's interest in local organisations such as the Knights of Labour, and his own journalistic training, the purchase of a local paper was an obvious move. One possible reason for the choice of the Manawatu Evening Standard was its links with Ballance, who had assisted with its founding, and in July 1891 Pirani was advised by Ballance that the Manawatu Evening Standard would receive government advertising.⁴⁹

Though a political relationship is clear between Ballance and Pirani it is impossible to determine the extent of any personal ties. The incomplete Ballance Papers record six letters from Ballance to Pirani,⁵⁰ but only one in reply. Pirani confirmed during the 1893 election that he had offered several times to stand down in Palmerston North in favour of Ballance, but that Ballance had replied that he would succeed in Wanganui or retire. In 1893 Pirani feared that women's suffrage might remove Ballance's already precarious majority.⁵¹ Apparently in reply to one offer Ballance replied that he hoped Pirani would win the Palmerston seat, "and that it will be the beginning for yourself of a long political career which I should be sorry, in every sense, to prevent the fruition of."⁵² Ballance's unequivocal endorsement determined Pirani to stand in 1893. Writing to Joseph Nathan in Palmerston North Ballance said,

I do not know of any candidate for the Palmerston District, except Mr Pirani, who has fought hither to very hard for the party, and has shown his loyalty, in many ways, to the Government. I should therefore take it as a great favour if you are able to give him your support at the General Election. 53

In June 1892 Ballance assisted Pirani with objections to the Electoral Roll.

I have gone into the matter about lodging objections, and the way this is to be got over, the Act being positive, is by the Registrar himself lodging the objections. I would suggest, therefore, that a list of objections be taken to the Registrar, and prima facie evidence given that the persons had no right to be on the Roll, with a request that he would make the objections himself. 54

Six letters are not many, but it is more than might be expected from a Premier to a so far unsuccessful politician, and three of the six are concerned with general politics. Pirani's offer to stand down suggests loyalty beyond the political, but Pirani is not mentioned in the press cuttings on Ballance's funeral. Such uncertain evidence does no more than suggest a degree of personal friendship between Pirani and Ballance.

The 1893 election was fought under quite different conditions from those of 1890. The three years preceding 1893 had been frustrating for the Liberals; Some important measures had been passed, but many more had been blocked. Partly because of this the Liberals were more cohesive, and Liberal difficulties may have been one factor in causing Pirani to join them. Pirani's own electoral position had improved since 1890. The Manawatu Evening Standard was now owned by the Pirani family. From early 1893 Pirani was a member of the Wellington Land Board, and this would have made him better known. In 1893 J. G. Wilson successfully stood for Otaki, so there was no sitting member. Pirani was the official Liberal candidate; speaking at Feilding, Seddon made this quite clear. He argued that it was in the Party's interests to have only one official candidate, and he asked the others, however deserving, to accept the sacrifice. One reason for Pirani's later clashes with Seddon was the latter's

belief that this endorsement involved a considerably stronger quid pro quo than did Pirani. Seddon was probably particularly annoyed by Pirani's later attitude because he was far from always successful in gaining a clearfield for a single liberal candidate. In general liberal discipline was much stronger at the parliamentary level than the local.⁵⁵ In Hawke's Bay, for example, candidate selection was locally controlled throughout Pirani's period by the use of three methods - personal initiative, a petition to the proposed candidate, or a party meeting followed by a deputation to the proposed candidate.⁵⁶ The conservatives tended to avoid vote-splitting by having local notables select the candidate, with local opinion being used as a last resort. It was only the splitting of the liberal vote that saved Capt. Russell from defeat in Hawke's Bay in 1893.⁵⁷

Despite his improved position Pirani's victory was not a forgone conclusion. His two opponents, G. M. Snelson and J. P. Leary, were both local men. Snelson had stood before, in 1879 he had been third in a three-cornered fight for the Manawatu seat. Snelson, however, could point to an unparalled career of local service and office holding, which stretched back to the first days of Palmerston North. One point which might have counted against him was his less than whole-hearted commitment to politics. Snelson had been forced to resign from the Education Board by pressure of private business⁵⁸ and his first and last terms as Mayor of Palmerston North were separated by twenty years. In 1890 Pirani had been a self-proclaimed labour candidate, but he now espoused the non-class attitude of Ballance liberalism. When asked if he was a friend of the working classes he replied he "did not claim to be a friend of any particular class, but if elected he would do his best for all classes."⁵⁹

In an election address Pirani admitted that in 1890 he had said he would not stand again because of the financial sacrifice involved, when he had been obliged to give up his job as a printer with the Manawatu Times. He said only pressure from Ballance caused him to stand, given Ballance's loyalty to Wanganui he felt it a matter of personal honour to try and ensure that an opponent of Ballance did not win the Palmerston seat. Ballance might be dead, but Pirani believed his name was still an asset. He argued that Ballance's policy of financial self-reliance, by turning a deficit into a large surplus had done immense good to the colony's standing on the London market.

Judging from the election speeches of Seddon the main issues of the campaign were defence of the Land and Income Tax Act, as against the Property Tax; the extent of large estates; the obstruction by the Legislative Council; support for the removal of the Railway Commissions, who were judged undemocratic; the provision of cheap credit for farmers; and the provision of roads and bridges. On these issues Pirani was a solid Liberal;⁶⁰ he argued that by the replacement of the Property Tax with the Land and Income Tax "they had repealed a tax on industry, upon thrift, upon everything that was right and correct in our settlers, and instituted a tax which pressed most heavily upon the unimproving settler, upon the absentee, upon the lazy man."⁶¹

Pirani noted that the Legislative Council had blocked the attempt to have the basis of taxation altered from the improved to the unimproved value, but he believed it only fair that settlers who improved their land should not have to pay higher taxes than the neighbour who did not, when the latter gained through increased values. One of the most important points of Pirani's platform was a cheap money scheme; essentially the

scheme involved borrowing on the London Market, using that money to pay New Zealand's debts in London, while money accumulated in New Zealand, and previously used to pay debts in London, could then be lent to farmers. This idea had the apparent advantage that interest and exchange charges for transmitting funds between New Zealand and England need no longer be paid. Pirani did not make clear how the newly raised London debt would be repaid, but presumably this would be from future export or government income. Ballance had seen the scheme, but its origins and detailed workings were complex, and it was to involve Pirani in controversy both during the election and in later years. Ever concerned with the settlers' financial problems Pirani argued that the consolidated fund should pay for Hospitals and Charitable Aid, not just land-owners.

The Railway Commissioners, Pirani believed, were without merit. He "would never be a party to a system which placed in the hands of three irresponsible men the control of fifteen millions worth of public property,"⁶² men who were free to do anything they liked. The corruption in railway administration in the past was admitted, but Pirani contended that with manhood suffrage the control would now be democratic, and therefore honest; Pirani had surprisingly little to say about local interests, mentioning only a couple of roads that needed doing.

On land legislation Pirani admitted some disagreement with the government, believing that each selector should be able to choose his tenure; he also argued that each family should be restricted to 640 acres of first class land, rather than the then existing 640 acres for every member of the family over seventeen years old. Settlers with unsurveyed land took special risks, therefore, Pirani said, they should not need to pay survey fees in advance, an opinion which brought applause

from the audience. Pirani also argued that paying deposits to the Post Office, which could be refunded on production of the receipt was a simpler system than the existing, and one he had advocated at Land Board meetings. He continued to support it throughout his parliamentary life.

Pirani's Maori land policy seemed to show as much concern for settler feelings as it did for Maori interests. After taking a general swing at past corruption he advocated the resumption of all Maori land, and its administration on behalf of the Maoris by the Land Boards, with the revenue being returned to the Maoris. The West Coast Settlement Reserves Act was highly praised, as was the work under it of the Public Trustee, Warburton. Pirani was to continue to urge the adoption of this Act's principles as a general solution to the Maori land question. The Act also provided another link between Warburton and Pirani. Warburton was the origin of the cheap credit for farmers scheme that Pirani advocated, and as Auditor-General some of Warburton's actions were to be a source of bitter dispute between Pirani and Seddon.

Though Pirani claimed to be a representative of all classes it was clearly the settler interest which was his chief concern, in contrast to 1890. Only a few parts of his speech were primarily for the labour interest; the Labour Bureau he regarded as of considerable social and economic advantage because it took men who wanted it to work they would not otherwise be able to find. Pirani advocated, as of benefit to both the worker and settler, the abolition of customs duties on the necessities of life. This had been opposed by the Opposition when Ballance had advocated it in 1890, but he had promised in the House that it would be done at the earliest opportunity.

Second in importance only to land in the politics of the 1890's was the prohibition issue. Here Pirani

claimed to have held the same views for the previous twenty years, "that the people should have the right by a majority to say whether licensed houses should exist in their midst or not."⁶³ He expected that should the direct vote be granted, prohibition, of which he approved, would be the result, but he did not then believe this would happen for ten or fifteen years.

Education might not have been ranked by the voters as a major issue, but it was always important to Pirani, and he had both major and minor suggestions. He advocated standard books throughout the country, and a uniform standard for examinations, believing that experience had shown that the standard set in the Wellington district was below that of the Wanganui Board. Somewhat surprising in view of his later career was Pirani's advocacy of the replacement of Education Boards by a more centralised system of control. In general Pirani saw the merits of, and supported, a more centralised, more uniform system. More attention, Pirani said, should be paid to technical education, so that education was not just learning how to gain knowledge later in life, but also taught in school immediately useful information. Pirani also argued that insufficient attention was paid to those over fourteen years, and as a consequence of neglect by the state and by parents, became larrikins.

Strong feelings were apparently held at the time on the bankruptcy laws. Pirani was greeted with applause when he recommended they be abolished, on the grounds that "it is not right that a man should be able to relieve himself of just obligations which he had entered into".⁶⁴ Pirani argued that while genuine financial difficulties should be recognised, it should not be possible to permanently remove the obligation to repay debts. On Pirani's part this could have been a reflection of personal beliefs, of the high moral

tone that was present elsewhere in Pirani's views, or an echoing of popular feeling, or both.

The civil service, Pirani believed, was no longer a place where the friends and relatives of influential men could get a soft living at public expense, but he also believed that

there should be a competitive examination so that when a vacancy occurred those who showed that the most merit in those examinations, and who otherwise had a satisfactory career, should receive the best appointment.⁶⁵

The idea of a non-political civil service was not deeply entrenched in New Zealand, however, and on the use (or misuse) of civil service appointments Pirani was to clash strongly with Seddon.

In general it can be said that where Pirani disagreed with Liberal policy it was because he believed it did not go far enough. Pirani supported the more radical elective Legislative Council, and believed in prohibition. In 1893 some liberals believed that the future would bring radical change to both the structure and values of New Zealand society, change to which Ballance had been committed. As the Liberal grip on power was consolidated these liberals became disillusioned and impatient when the new world of their expectations was not realised. Pirani was one such liberal. It should be remembered however that the one topic on which Pirani disagreed with the Liberal Party but was not more radical was land tenure.

Pirani claimed he would not use the Manawatu Evening Standard in the election,

and if by accident ... anything was written in the paper during the next three months that reflected unduly upon any person or upon any candidate, he could assure the electors it would be without his consent ⁶⁶

When establishing this high standard of political morality Pirani might have been genuine, or might have been tongue-in-cheek, most likely it showed his degree of faith in his brother David. Pirani also said he would not indulge in personalities. None of this stopped personal attacks on him. "Palmerston Pirani is making a desperate effort to get into Parliament. £240 a year is not to be sneezed at - especially by the proprietor of a country paper."⁶⁷ Fair Play also accused Pirani of, amongst many weaknesses, inconsistency, and gave two examples. Pirani was now a prohibitionist, but once, presumably for popularity's sake, he had been a member of the Palmerston Working Men's Club.⁶⁸ Pirani admitted he had been President of the Working Men's Club, but said he had believed the Club would benefit Palmerston North, and that noted citizens such as Rev. Mr Harvey, J. P. Leary (particularly fortunate for Pirani as his questioner was a self-acknowledged supporter of Leary) and J. G. Wilson M.H.R. were amongst its first members, which belied a description as one of the worst drinking dens in Palmerston North.⁶⁹ Fair Play also reported Pirani claiming the cheap money scheme he proposed as his own, and being exposed by the Manawatu Times. Before and after 1893 several schemes for cheap credit for farmers were suggested. The one Pirani supported had originated with Warburton, been passed to Ballance, who in turn passed it to Pirani.⁷⁰ If Pirani did not always make this clear misrepresentation could easily occur, accidentally or deliberately. Pirani pitted his energy, and the liberal mantle, against the years of local service of Snelson, "a very steady, quiet commercial man, with a lot of commonsense."⁷¹ Pirani, too, was threatened on both flanks, because Leary was a very similar candidate, in terms of policies and personality.

Leary evinced a similar high moral tone, shown by a heavy emphasis on reluctance to stand, and sweeping condemnation of gambling and the party system.⁷²

Leary opposed legalising sweeps in New Zealand and favoured abolition of totalisators. Pirani made gambling a bete-noire throughout his political career, the ballot system of land allocation being a continuous target. Leary said the party system caused conscientious men to sell their honour, and led to endless corruption. He hoped women's suffrage would lead to a considerable improvement. His own position, he made clear, would be one of total independence. To replace party government Leary supported an elective executive, though he did not emphasise this point. Pirani acknowledged loyalty to the Liberal Party but also made his independence clear, and elective executive, a plank of the Knights of Labour, was supported by him throughout his parliamentary career.

Like Pirani, Leary fully supported direct vote on the licensing laws, adding that this should be without compensation. On land issues Leary argued for a duty on large estates, the exemption of improvements from taxation, and elective Land Boards. Pirani always supported the latter in the House. Leary differed with Pirani on the question of tenure, when he came out firmly for deferred payment, and refused support for perpetual lease, on the grounds that ownership of the land was better. He was silent on the lease-in-perpetuity, but probably would have approved of it. Regarding education Leary followed Pirani almost exactly.

Pirani had been silent on arbitration, but Leary supported the principle, and added strong support for inspection of conditions in factories and mines; and reduction of tariffs on necessities of life. On 'labour' issues in general he was more wide-ranging than Pirani, and may have appealed to some who resented Pirani's switch from 1890. He was not prepared

to go as far as Pirani on bankruptcy laws but did believe they should be tightened up.

The one part of the Liberal platform with which Leary clearly disagreed was the removal of the Railway Commissioners. Leary feared a return to political influence, believed the Commissioners had on the whole done a good job, and should therefore be left in peace. For Leary it was probably the wrong issue to differ on; because the Commissioners were independent of elected representatives people resented more what they believed to be wrong or unjust decisions, and Palmerston North was a major centre for railways and railway workers.

Leary's platform overall was clearly close to Pirani's. On the main issues Leary was distinctly different only on the Railway Commissioners. On other topics he was usually similar, and at times virtually identical; and there was also the similarity in moral appeal. Not surprisingly Leary was asked at a meeting who had advised him to use Pirani's platform, and was he deliberately trying to split the liberal vote, so that Snelson would win. Leary insisted that his platform was his own, and that he stood because he had been pressed to do so.⁷³ An interesting feature of the election is the minor role of two very controversial issues of the time, prohibition and religious education. Campbell noted that in Hawkes Bay both topics "were obscured by the calculated neutrality of the candidates."⁷⁴ The same appears to be true for Palmerston North.

Candidates such as Leary could cause confusion all round. John Duthie, the conservatives most successful organiser in the North Island, was perturbed when he heard of Leary's candidature for Palmerston in early November, as Snelson had been selected in March. He wrote to Rolleston saying he would try and get one of them to withdraw.⁷⁵

Brand has taken from this that Leary was a conservative who drew votes from Snelson, allowing Pirani to win. Leary's platform suggests the opposite was the case.

The final result was Pirani 1,754; Snelson 1,542; and Leary 400.⁷⁶ Pirani won by a reasonable margin, despite Leary. Clearly he had benefited from the Liberal mantle and Leary had shown that independence alone was not seen by the Palmerston North electorate as a virtue; and Pirani was now "the clever and enterprising Fred Pirani."⁷⁷

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- 1 Clarke J. C. "The New Zealand Liberal Party and Government 1895-1906". (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Auckland) 1962.
 - 2 Whitcher G. F. "The New Liberal Party, 1905". (Unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Canterbury) 1966.
 - 3 Goldman L. M. The History of the Jews in New Zealand. Wellington, 1958.
 - 4 According to Goldman H. C. Pirani's full name was Henry Cohen Pirani (see Goldman pp. 152, 156), and this is repeated in Scholefield's Newspapers in New Zealand, pp. 164, 246.
 - 5 Goldman, p. 152
Goldman's error apparently arose because he assumed a connection between F. Pirani's family, and that of Samuel Gabriel Pirani, who became a partner in a Melbourne law firm in the 1880's, and was believed to be of French and Jewish extraction. There is no evidence that a connection existed. See private letters to the writer from Braham and Pirani, 7 Jan. 1975, and from Sir Edward Cohen (S. G. Pirani's grandson), 13 Jan. 1976.
 - 6 Balkind V. "A contribution to the History of the Jews in New Zealand." (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Canterbury) 1928

Pitt M. S. "Early History of the Wellington Jewish Community (1840-1900)."
(unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Wellington) 1954.

The latter writer advised in an interview with the author that F. Pirani was not mentioned in the minute book of the Wellington Synagogue to 1900.

- 7 Private letter from Rev. M. R. Pirani to the writer, 16 Oct. 1975.
- 8 *ibid.*
- 9 Goldman, p. 156.
- 10 For biographical outlines of his career see Cyclopedia of New Zealand, Vol. 1 p.1142 NZPD 212, 21-23.
Scholefield G. H. A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography Vol. 2. Wellington, 1940. pp 168-9.
Scholefield G. H. Newspapers in New Zealand. Wellington, 1958.
Who's Who in New Zealand and the Western Pacific. Wellington, 1908. p. 136.
EP, 27 Oct. 1926 p. 10.
- 11 In 1883 Pirani served on the Blenheim School Committee, but in 1884 moved to Palmerston North. He became a member of the Borough Council (1888-1891, 1901-1903), the Wellington Land Board (1893-1896), chairman of the Palmerston Licensing Committee, President of the Manawatu A.&P. Association (1897), and played a prominent role in local athletic and friendly societies. In the field of education he was a member of the Middle District University Council, a member and sometimes chairman of local school committees, one of the Wellington School Commissioners, a member of the Wanganui Education Board from 1895 until the 1920's, and chairman from 1906. Peter Fraser, who knew Pirani "very intimately" in his last years, believed his strongest single interest was education. In the 1920's he became a member of the Kelburn School Committee and shortly before his death in 1926 a member of the Wellington Education Board. As well as the many years in the Palmerston North volunteer fire service Pirani served on the Palmerston North Fire Board, and later on the Feilding Fire Board. With his brother David he took over the Wanganui Standard in 1891, but this was quickly dropped for the Manawatu Evening Standard, which the brothers owned from 1891 until 1903. In 1902

- Pirani purchased the Petone Chronicle, but far more important was the purchase with his son Louis J. Pirani and T. L. Mills of the Feilding Star in 1906, which they owned until the 1920's. Pirani was a member of the New Zealand press delegation which visited the Western Front during World War I, and in his last years was a political reporter for the Dominion and an advocate in industrial disputes for the Newspaper Proprietors and Master Printers Association.
- 12 Letter to the writer from the Wellington Education Board, 16 Sept. 1975.
 - 13 Bohan E. "The General Election of 1879 in Canterbury". (Unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Canterbury) 1958 p. 81.
 - 14 *ibid* p. 85.
 - 15 *ibid* p. 252.
 - 16 FS, 2 Sept. 1890 p. 3.
 - 17 FS, 28 Aug. 1890 p. 3.
 - 18 FS, 18 Nov. 1890 p. 2.
 - 19 FS, 2 Sept 1890 p. 2.
 - 20 FS, 9 Sept. 1890 p. 2.
 - 21 FS, 13 Sept. 1890 p. 2.
 - 22 FS, 18 Sept 1890 p. 2.
 - 23 FS, 18 Sept. 1890 p. 2.
FS, 20 Sept. 1890 p. 2.
 - 24 FS, 23 Sept. 1890 p. 2.
 - 25 AJHR, 1892, H9 and H18.
 - 26 Drummond J. The Life and Work of Richard John Seddon, Premier of New Zealand, 1893-1906. With a History of the Liberal Party in New Zealand. London 1907. p. 133.
Richards K. H. "The Seddon Ministry" (Unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Canterbury), 1946. p. 21.
 - 27 Wierzbicka C. The Wilson Family. no place, 1973. p. 133.
 - 28 Wild L. J. The Life and Times of Sir James Wilson of Bulls. Wellington, 1953 p. 95.
 - 29 Wierzbicka, p. 133.

- 30 Brand M. C. "A Study of Conservatism 1890-1911." (Unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Victoria) 1949 p. 67.
- 31 Croucher W. J. - Manawatu History 1939 unnumbered. (a collection of press cuttings held by Alexander Turnbull Library).
One cutting describes an election meeting of a "Mr Brown", but internal evidence on the small size of the candidate, his political style, his link with the Knights of Labour, and a description of his later career as a local member lead to the conclusion that Mr Brown is Pirani, and that the meeting was held during the 1890 election.
- 32 *ibid.*
- 33 FS, 21 Oct. 1890 p. 2.
- 34 Wild, pp. 95, 101.
- 35 FS, 2 Oct. 1890 p. 2.
- 36 Wild, p. 96.
- 37 FS, 29 Nov 1890 p. 2.
- 38 FS, 4 Dec. 1890 p. 2.
- 39 Wild, pp. 96-97. It has not proven possible to trace booth by booth results for the 1890 election. They were not published in AJHR until the twentieth century, neither the Manawatu Evening Standard or the Manawatu Times are extant for that period, and neither the Feilding Star or the New Zealand Times included booth results for this electorate in their election result reports.
- 40 EP, 9 July 1902 p. 6.
- 41 For the Knights of Labour see Salmond J. D. The History of the New Zealand Labour Movement From the Settlement to the Conciliation and Arbitration Act (1894). M. A. thesis, University of Otago, 1924; published in edited form. pp. 151-168.

Salmond J. D. (edited Crowley D.) New Zealand Labour's Pioneering Days. The History of the Labour Movement in New Zealand from 1840 to 1894. Auckland, 1950. pp. 136-146.
- 42 Private letter from H. Roth to the writer 14 Nov. 1975.

- 43 Coleman P. J. "New Zealand : The evolution of a Social Democracy". (Unpublished M. A. (hons.) thesis, University of Texas), 1953 p. 57.
- 44 See Appendix II for the full text, taken from Salmond.
- 45 Ballance to W. Welsh esq., 6 June 1892, BPOC, Letter Book 3, letter 72.
- 46 Salmond, Pioneering Days, p. 142.
- 47 BP IC , folder 17, item 592.
- 48 Salmond, New Zealand Labour Movement, p. 166.
- 49 Ballance to F. Pirani, BPOC, Letter Book 2, letter 4.
- 50 Ballance to F. Pirani, BPOC, Letter Book 3, letters 10, 71, 156, 220, 229 and 310.
- 51 Seddon Papers 3/5; MES, 21 Oct. 1893.
- 52 Ballance to F. Pirani, BPOC, Letter Book 3, letter 10.
- 53 Ballance to J. Nathan, BPOC, Letter Book 1, letter 1.
- 54 Ballance to F. Pirani, BPOC, Letter Book 3, letter 71.
- 55 Campbell M.D.N. "Hawke's Bay Politics : 1890-1914. A Study in the Development of Party Politics". (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Victoria), 1967 p. 211
Clarke, p. 23.
- 56 Campbell pp. 55, 61.
- 57 Brand, pp. 16-18.
Campbell, pp. 93-96, 103.
- 58 FS, 27 Sept. 1884 p.4.
- 59 Seddon Papers 3/5; MES, 21 Oct. 1893.
- 60 see Seddon Papers 3/5; MES, 21 Oct. 1893 for a major election address.
- 61 *ibid.*
- 62 *ibid.*
- 63 *ibid.*
- 64 *ibid.*
- 65 *ibid.*

- 66 *ibid.*
- 67 Fair Play, 11 Nov. 1893 p. 2
- 68 *ibid.*
- 69 Seddon Papers 3/5; MES 21 Oct. 1893
- 70 NZPD, 121, 48 (30 July 1902).
- 71 Fair Play, 11 Nov. 1893 p.2.
- 72 Seddon Papers 3/5 pp. 39-40; Manawatu Times, 6 Nov. 1893, for a major election address.
- 73 *ibid.*
- 74 Campbell, p. 40.
- 75 Brand, p. 18.
- 76 AJHR, 1894, Volume 3, H-19. See Appendix III for booth by booth result.
- 77 Fair Play, 6 Jan. 1894 p. 6.

Chapter Three

Pirani's First Term, 1894-1896

The Origin of the Left Wing and Its Relationship With Seddon

Until the end of his parliamentary career Pirani regarded himself as a 'true liberal'. It was others, he explained, who had betrayed liberal precepts.

I will guarantee that the honourable member Hall-Jones cannot show one vote on a question of principle that I have ever cast in this House that I have recanted from, or one that was not in accordance with the principles of true Liberalism - not the shoddy article which passes current nowadays.¹

In general Pirani's views had remained constant, only on land was there a significant change. It was also true that Pirani's views in the years 1890-1893 were very close to the Liberal Party, but that from 1898 Pirani was voting with the conservatives. One can assume either that Pirani's analysis of what was liberalism was true, or it was false. If true we must conclude that the Seddon government, if liberal at all, was so only in a distorted and perverse sense. Given the legislative record of the Liberal Party in the years 1890-1912, such a conclusion could only be accepted after presentation of completely overwhelming evidence. If Pirani's analysis was false, and Seddon remained true to liberalism, the conclusion would seem to be that in nine years, with a substantive change of opinion on only one issue, Pirani altered from a liberal to a conservative, a conclusion barely less satisfactory.

To the extent that this dilemma is one of terminology, about the meaning in the New Zealand context of the words liberal and conservative, it is part of a problem common to any general discussion of New Zealand politics in the late nineteenth-century.² English politics of the period are no guide. New Zealand lacked a landed aristocracy with a centuries old lease on power, nor did the squatters desire to become one; they held on to their estates from necessity, not choice. Equally New Zealand lacked the vested urban interests produced by an industrial revolution. Until the late 1880's New Zealanders believed they had left the politics of social antagonism behind, because everyone would move upwards. Competition was between provinces, for roads, bridges and railways, not between social groups.³ With its different social structure and attitudes New Zealand lacked a clear Liberal-Conservative split, indeed, lacked any clear party divisions. It was, instead, province and personality that dominated politics. This is shown most obviously by the Stout-Vogel Ministry, and the chaos from which it emerged.⁴ At one stage even a Stout-Atkinson Ministry seemed possible.⁵ Some writers have gone on to argue that the terms liberal and conservative are therefore useless as tools of analysis for this period.⁶ I believe this is being too concerned that contemporary English usage was not transferable to New Zealand, and too attracted by the argument that because liberals and conservatives were not organised into parties, they were non-existent. "It would be a mistake to suppose that there was no one of conservative or radical views, because politics were organised on other principles."⁷ Equally it would be a mistake to argue that conservatism and liberalism did not exist because they did not decide elections. Though the conservatives lacked, in contrast to the Liberals,

the necessary cohesion of organisation and thought to be called a party it is argued that most politicians were either conservatives or liberals, though not consistently so, in thought or action.

A conservative will be defined as a person who would prefer not to make a change, who supports a change only because he believes it inevitable, and would rather control was in his hands than ones more radical. Rolleston opposed granting women's suffrage because there was not, he believed, any great demand for it; a typically conservative attitude. Conservatives sometimes showed real aversion to democratic values. "The bulk of the electors under our extended franchise are incompetent to think or understand for themselves. Such must be supplied with political opinions and guidance."⁸ Conservatives were more inclined to have candidates chosen by a small group of leaders. A liberal will be defined as a person broadly dissatisfied with society as it existed, from which followed a preparedness to support change which that person believed would bring social or economic benefit to deprived persons. These definitions are not the usage of late nineteenth-century England or New Zealand; nor are they original. They reflect the usage of many writers discussing the politics of many periods, plus the ideas of political theorists. They are simplistic, but serve a necessary purpose.⁹

The nature of the emergence of the Liberal Party suggests that liberalism and conservatism had existed, albeit submerged. Until the mid-1880's provincialism counted above the other '-isms', but as the depression deepened and became nationwide attitudes altered. One approach to the depression involved taxing the large land-owner, which, some added, should be carried far enough to break the estates up, hence solving the land settlement problem too. In reaction conservatives

joined in greater unity in defence of their interests, which they now feared threatened, and supported massive retrenchment as a necessary alternative.¹⁰ Liberals reacted strongly to the suggested degree of retrenchment, especially the proposed cuts in education. Atkinson's government of 1887-1890 did a bit of everything, but weakly; inactivity during the 1890 Maritime Strike was the final failure. From this weakness the Liberal Party emerged triumphant. For the present study it is important to realise that in 1890 it was a party without a national tradition. In the 1890's some of its policies were adopted from radical sources, some were a reaction to the conservative movement, and some such as opposition to borrowing, were imposed by force circumstances. Lacking the guidance of an established liberal philosophy or legislative history it will be argued that Pirani mistook the programme of a particular period, 1890-1893, for eternal principles, partly out of regard for Ballance. Pirani's personality meant a natural independence of attitude, and when Pirani entered politics the Liberal Party was still embryonic, but Pirani failed completely to understand that the emerging system of party politics signposted the future. The break with Seddon and apparent conversion to conservatism thus become explicable. The conservatives vigorously opposed many liberal measures, but did so without a clear conviction as to why. Seddon was sometimes accused of being a socialist, but after the initial flood of liberal legislation some conservatives claimed that they had been prepared under Atkinson, and that they would pass all that Seddon was passing, but more efficiently, and without corruption. It was not true, but Pirani came to believe that the conservatives were as likely to pass the legislation he cherished as Seddon; and he was temperamentally more suited to the non-party side of the House, which allowed him to ignore the very real differences between himself and the conservatives.

It is necessary to detail the steps of Pirani's break with Seddon. The 1893 election provides a useful guide to Pirani's beliefs and expectations when he first entered the House. Pirani soon accepted the Ballance myth,¹¹ a belief that Seddon had betrayed the ideas and ideals of Ballance. It was true that Seddon altered the emphasis of legislative interest, he was less concerned with labour legislation than Ballance; but increasingly Seddon was working under different circumstances, something liberal critics did not realise, or ignored. In Pirani's case the Ballance myth was based initially upon concrete things, support for the West Coast Settlement Reserves Act as a general guide for Maori land legislation, the Vaile system of railway charges, a free breakfast table, all of which Pirani believed Seddon was thwarting; plus the increase in party discipline, and the use of civil service patronage, both of which Pirani believed were contrary to Ballance's principles. The Ballance myth was shared by the rest of the left-wing in the 1890's. In Wanganui a local variation sheds light on the myth at the national level. There the Ballance myth

was in part a rhetorical device ... it gave legitimacy to one's position without necessarily saying very much about it. It also meant Ballance's emphasis on labour reforms; of opposition to monopoly and privileges; of vigorous, honest government.¹²

It opposed ideology, 'isms' in politics, or sectional politics; which was Pirani's attitude in 1893. Particularly significant is that the Ballance myth did not emerge in Wanganui until after 1899.¹³ It can probably be regarded as a local reaction to the Seddon years, a local manifestation of the belief that Seddon had betrayed the Ballance legacy. Once established its grip on Wanganui politics was real and deep, lasting until 1935.

At the national level the New Liberals of 1905, some of whom were elected in the late 1890's, put a great emphasis

on a return to the ideals of Ballance. The New Liberals platform of 1905 was a return to the 'golden days' of Ballance,¹⁴ While New Liberals as individuals showed an equally high regard for Ballance's memory.¹⁵ The New Liberals lacked direct acquaintance with Ballance, but they took from the Left-Wing its explanation of why Liberalism had gone wrong.

In one major area of policy making, borrowing, there was a departure in 1894 from the policy of Ballance. The policy of self-reliance was one of necessity, and contrary to the New Zealand norm established by Vogel. To what extent Ballance would have continued self-reliance once substantial borrowing was again possible remains probably unanswerable. Some later critics of the continued heavy borrowing deliberately evoked the Ballance memory.

Mr Ballance came into power during a time of depression, when hundreds were leaving our shores for other lands, yet he not only nursed the ship of state carefully to stop the exodus, but he arranged the colony's expenditure so judiciously that he added a mere trifle to the bill of the money lender We contend the extravagance displayed in financial matters by Mr Seddon is not what his dead friend ever dreamed of, as he always preached a policy of self-reliance.¹⁶

There can be little doubt that the change of policy was abruptly made, when Ward presented the 1893 Budget with a surplus of £346,711 he said a self-reliant policy would be followed, under which the public works would be covered in successive years by rising surpluses, and not by loans.¹⁷ During the 1893 election Seddon pointed out that in contrast to the successive loans of the Atkinson government, the Liberal Government was the first that had not passed a Loan Act during its three year term.¹⁸ Ward's borrowing commenced in 1894 with the Advance to Settlers Act, and was to be followed by loans for public works and special purposes. Much of the criticism was unjustified; Ward was taking advantage of favourable conditions in the loan market, and the fact that the

depression was lifting.¹⁹ If the economy's expansion was to be sustained then new capital was needed, and borrowing was the only source. Despite renewed borrowing the percentage of revenue absorbed by debt charges went down from 38.96 percent to 29.8 percent in 1902;²⁰ though it is also true that Ward did take some risks, the proportion of the Sinking Fund to the total debt was reduced by 1895 to $2\frac{1}{2}$ percent from $7\frac{1}{2}$ percent. As with other matters the Left-Wing had some support from liberal stalwarts. The Manawatu Evening Standard gleefully quoted Graham,²¹ a strong government supporter, as very critical of the government's financial policy, and of unchecked expenditure.

In the House Pirani never allowed even a hint of criticism of Ballance to go by without response. When Seddon was being criticised for holding company directorates Hall-Jones said that Ballance too had held directorates. Pirani replied that Ballance had not been a director of an agricultural company; his name had been on the original prospectus, but was withdrawn before the company was floated. He continued that while Ballance had been a director of the East Coast Settlement Company its failure had been beyond Ballance's control, and as its plans for assisting Maoris had been in the interests of land settlement they should not be a source of criticism, mistaken though they may have been.²² Pirani's own attacks on Seddon's financial extravagance often made use of disagreements between Warburton as Auditor-General and Seddon, and the Manawatu Evening Standard suggested that Warburton was a representative of the Ballance period struggling to maintain standards in changed times. Ballance had chosen Warburton to sort out the Public Trust mess after the 1891 Royal Commission. After that Warburton moved to the Audit Office, and was so effective, efficient and honest that Seddon had to pass special measures to by-pass him.²³

Pirani's split with the Premier was part of the history of the Left-Wing, which had objections to specific actions of Seddon as well as a general disquiet at Seddon's methods. When the Left-Wing railed against 'Seddonism' it failed to realise that many of its features, while new, were not the aberrations of an autocrat, but signposts to the future. "One ... development, which has to a large extent remained in relative obscurity because of the emphasis which has been given to the 'politicalities' of the time - this was the growth in the importance of Cabinet, and particularly of the Premiership!"²⁴ Atkinson had consulted advisers on a personal basis in 1890 to determine action, but both cabinet and caucus played important roles on the deaths of both Ballance and Seddon. Seddon's stump tours were not just quests for personal popularity, they were a way of personalising, of bringing to the people, the new system of more centralised control.²⁵ The electors approved of the new system; it worked in the very tangible way of legislation passed; it took credit for the economic revival, whether justified or not. As a consequence voters normally showed scant regard for those, however well-intentioned, who attacked the new party discipline and power.

With the individual member Seddon could enforce discipline in a rough fashion, as this exchange shows.

Thomson - Almost every speaker who has spoken tonight has condemned the Bill. Some of those who are going to vote for the second reading of the Bill have condemned it in the strongest possible manner.

Seddon - they are going to vote for it all the same, and so are you.

Thomson - No; I will not vote for it. I shall take my own course in the matter.²⁶

It was this naked assertion of power that particularly

ruffled the Left-Wing, even when acquiesced in. The Bill in question was the Advances to Settlers, and Pirani, though critical, voted for the second reading.

In 1893 Seddon was severely critical of the Auckland Liberal organisation for putting up its own platform, but local platforms had been the norm.²⁷ The designation of 'official' candidates, first done in 1893, was innovative, and was a part of the new party discipline. Though termed autocratic it was necessary to avoid being swamped with candidates, and was justified by results; the size of the 1893 victory was in part due to the relative avoidance of vote-splitting. Seddon "required all official Liberal candidates to deposit with him a written undertaking to support the government on all matters of policy."²⁸ The 'pledge' helped provide a secure parliamentary majority, so necessary for enacting the liberal programme. Before 1890

every ministry worked under a constant threat of defeat if it failed to retain the support of a section of its followers, for, apart from the possibility of electoral defeat, no member of the elected House was bound to show more than a fleeting loyalty to any one leader or faction.²⁹

At a minimum Seddon expected support on votes of confidence, and for practical purposes needed considerably more than that. It was for him to provide a programme the electorate wanted, and for the representative to support it. With an adequate majority from the completely loyal Seddon opposed independents, fearing they would gravitate to the opposition; or that the 'independent' label would be used by a conservative candidate.³⁰ Single-issue groups declined in electoral importance in the 1890's. Ballance had envisaged a National Liberal Federation, but Seddon was careful not to allow the emergence of an extra-parliamentary national liberal organisation until the Lib-Lab Federation in 1899, which he believed would be guided in policy matters by the parliamentary party.³¹

Another example of 'autocracy', this was resented by local liberal organisations, but amongst modern political parties it is the parliamentary party, not the extra-parliamentary organisation, that has ultimate control over policy.

At the parliamentary level liberal dissent from Seddon's methods was expressed mainly by the Left-Wing, a contemporary term which does not mean that the group's politics were 'left-wing' in any modern sense. With certain qualifications it is accurate to equate the Left-Wing with radicalism.³² The individuals of the Left-Wing tended to be most radical on different issues, causing dissension within; only after 1896 was a Left-Wing programme drafted. Even to list Left-Wing members presents difficulties. Using two important land and tariff votes³³ G. W. Russell, G. J. Smith, J. W. Kelly, McNab, Tanner, Hall-Jones, Pinkerton, Stout and Earnshaw were the hard-core in the years 1894-1896; but this list is misleading. Pirani deserves inclusion because of his general criticism of the government, and P. J. O'Regan because of his radicalism, especially his single-taxism. The included also require further explanation. G. J. Smith and W. Earnshaw were firstly followers of Stout, both were labour representatives, and strong advocates of prohibition.³⁴ Four of the eight labour members of 1890 - Earnshaw, Pinkerton, J. W. Kelly, and W. W. Tanner, are to be found in the Left-Wing of the period 1894-1896. Despite the significance of the labour element for the Left-Wing Stout himself played only a peripheral role, he found the House, from 1893 an increasingly alien place compared to that of the previous period. Despite his reservations and later strains McNab remained within the Liberal Party. Hall-Jones had started as a 'Ballance' man and in 1893 was government whip, but resigned to give himself more freedom.³⁵ Though he used it extensively he was apparently perturbed at the results, and in 1896 entered the cabinet. Whitcher listed the Left-Wing in

the period 1894-1896 as chiefly G. W. Russell, W. Hall-Jones, G. J. Smith, Stout, J. W. Kelly, W. Earnshaw and Pirani.³⁶ Like the key votes used above it is a useful, but not sufficient guide.

Beyond the hard-core existed a floating membership of those prepared to support the radicals only on particular issues, this included McNab, W. H. Montgomery, A. W. Hogg and T. L. Buick. The elective executive was introduced almost annually by W. J. Stewart, who was otherwise a reliable supporter of Seddon, and had been speaker in 1890-1893. Radicalism's high tide had been the 1890 election, and the difficulties of 1890-1893 had kept the Liberals unified; the Left-Wing did not emerge until 1894-1896, and even then was only an irritant within the party. In 1893 the nature of the liberal party altered, "eleven new liberals from rural constituencies joined the thirteen rural liberals who were returned from the old parliament."³⁷ The very scale of the victory made it more difficult to reconcile the rural and radical elements. Over land and tariffs the differences were not just of degree, but of kind. The rural liberals were prepared to accept Seddon's discipline, and they were the core of his majority. As a result issues declined in importance, and party discipline increased. In the 1893 election there was believed to have been a resurgence of prohibitionism, in the shape of a forty strong block behind Stout, but neither this or bible in schools could be translated into parliamentary strength, despite the controversy in the country at large.³⁸

- 1 NZPD, 120, 489 (18 July 1902).
- 2 The distinction between Liberal and liberal (and between Conservative and conservative) has been long recognised, but not consistently used. In this thesis, except where grammar necessitates otherwise, Liberal will be used to designate a member or supporter of the Liberal Party, liberal will be used to mean anyone whose opinions or actions were consistent with liberalism. The same kind of distinction will be used for Conservative and conservative.
- 3 Sinclair K. The Significance of the 'Scarecrow Ministry', 1887-1891 p. 103.
In Sinclair K and Chapman R. Studies of a Small Democracy. Auckland 1965.
- 4 Lipson L. The Politics of Equality, Chicago 1948 pp. 68-71.
Drummond, pp 57-62.
Harris V. F. "The 1884 Ministerial Crisis" (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Canterbury), 1968 pp. 48-50, 68, 105, 108-112.
- 5 Harris, p. 127.
- 6 Witcher, p. 2.
Bohan, pp. 281-283, 292-293.
- 7 Sinclair, p. 106.
- 8 J. Duthie to Rolleston, 27 Feb. 1899; quoted in Brand, p. 38.
- 9 Campbell, p. vi.
- 10 Sinclair, pp. 110-111.
- 11 It should not be assumed from the use of the term myth that the idea was completely untrue.
- 12 Stewart K. L. "The Ballance Tradition and its Permeation in Wanganui".
(unpublished M. A. thesis, Massey University), 1970 p. 23.
- 13 *ibid*, pp. 22, 24, 28-29.
- 14 Witcher, pp. 75-76.
- 15 *ibid*, pp. 62, 125.
- 16 MES, 9 Oct. 1901 p. 2.
- 17 NZPD, 79, 213 (4 July 1893).

- 18 Drummond, p. 198.
- 19 For the merits of Ward's policy see Richard K. H. "The Seddon Ministry." (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Canterbury), 1946 pp. 61-65.
- 20 *ibid*, pp. 87-88.
- 21 MES, 23 Aug. 1901 p. 2.
- 22 NZPD, 92, 198-199 (19 June 1896).
- 23 MES, 3 Nov. 1900 p. 2.
- 24 Foster B. J. "The Development of Unity and Organisation in the New Zealand Political Parties of the Liberal Era." (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Wellington), 1956 p. xi-xii.
- 25 *ibid*, pp 50-51.
- 26 NZPD, 86, 53 (18 Sept. 1894).
- 27 Foster, pp. 104-105.
- 28 *ibid*, p. 109.
- 29 Clifford E. M. "The Elective Executive Debate in the 1890's." (unpublished B. A. honours research paper. Massey University), 1973 pp. 1-2.
- 30 Foster, p. 105.
- 31 *ibid*, p. 117.
- 32 Radicalism will be used to mean support for more advanced liberal reforms, and support for specific policies to carry those reforms further.
- 33 see below pp. 60-62, 102.
- 34 Clarke, p. 57.
- 35 Clarke, p. 27.
- 36 Witcher, p. 14.

37 Clarke, p. 15 interprets the 1893 election as follows

<u>Type of Constituency</u>	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>Opposition and Independent</u>
City	6	6
Town	6	0
Balanced	7	0
Country-Town	8	3
Rural	24	10

38 Brand, pp 21-27.

Chapter Four

Pirani's First Term 1894-1896

The Events

1896 Election

The Left-Wing emerged gradually rather than abruptly. O'Rorke had been speaker before 1890, and was returned in 1893, after being defeated in 1890. In the voting between him and Stewart the Left-Wing divided, Earnshaw, Hall-Jones, Joyce, Maslin, Flatman, McNab, Pirani, G. J. Smith, Stout, and Tanner voted for Stewart; but T. L. Buick, Collins, A. W. Hogg, J. W. Kelly, Lawry, Montgomery, O'Ryan, and G. W. Russell voted for O'Rorke,¹ who had Seddon's support. This does not suggest any initial unity, though well before the end of the 1894 session 'Left Wing' had become a recognised term. Capt. W. R. Russell said the Left-Wing's opposition to late sittings was causing Seddon problems, and that he had decided to destroy it. Pirani and Earnshaw replied that the late sittings were justified by the Opposition tactics, and the importance of the legislation.² Discontent was still fairly muted.

It was the land issue which caused the first major radical dissention. Radicals had never been reconciled to the lease in perpetuity; a revolt in 1894 was stifled, but in 1895 G. W. Russell introduced his Periodic Revaluation of lands under Lease in Perpetuity Bill. Sixteen of its twenty-one second reading supporters were liberals,³ but they did not include Pirani, who in the debate sounded very much like a single-taxer.

Terming the Periodic Revaluation Bill crude, unworkmanlike and unjust, Pirani was particularly critical of the provision in the Bill which allowed forfeiture of

the land and improvements if revaluation was not accepted.⁴ He advised that Russell could obtain all he wanted "by giving everyone who requires it the freehold, and then using the land tax to take away for the State the unearned increment."⁵ Universal freehold, while compatible with the single-tax, was anathema to other land radicals, who believed that only leasehold gave the small settlers protection from large estates and speculators.

Put simply the Single-taxer believed that the rise in land values was due to community, not individual, effort, and therefore, being an 'unearned increment', should be returned to the state. A 100 percent tax on the 'unearned increment', would, supposedly, allow the abolition of all other taxes, and lead to numerous social benefits.⁶ Rogers said that "it has not been possible to find out the extent to which he advocated the Single Tax,"⁷ but that an outline of his career suggested "that Pirani's position depended upon general political factors rather than upon the Single Tax".⁸ Rogers has been misled by the occasional statement of Pirani's, and his general politics, in fact Pirani never explicitly said he was a single-taxer. In his support for rating on unimproved value and for individual choice of tenure he may have sounded like one. Single-taxers also tended to be strongly democratic and individualistic, and supporters of temperance; just as Pirani was. But Pirani was not a theorist, and above all else he was all too well aware from the experience of backblock settlers in his constituency how much any rise in land values could be due to personal effort at least as much as community assistance.

More than land it was the tariff issue which split the liberals in 1895. Ward's first schedule met such

criticism that he withdrew it and presented another. G. R. Russell praised Ward's substantial reduction of the tariff,⁹ but to avoid heavy revenue loss Ward increased fruit tariffs, and this the Left-Wing opposed. "I say that I am so much opposed to the import duty on fruit that sooner than see that duty imposed I would prefer that the whole tariff were left untouched."¹⁰ There were four divisions on the fruit tariffs, and despite strong statements by Ward and Seddon, Earnshaw, Montgomery, G. W. Russell, G. J. Smith, Stout and Pirani opposed the first tariff, to be joined on later divisions by McNab, Hall-Jones and J. W. Kelly. The defence of the necessities of life could not match the ministerial majority. The rural liberals then turned on the cabinet and had fencing wire included as duty free,¹¹ while a 5 percent duty on machinery scraped in by two votes,¹² with the Left-Wing at sixes and sevens.

Cabinet reconstruction was regarded as certain, and radical unity was not helped by the rumour that Seddon was offering posts to members of the Left-Wing; Russell and Pirani's names were especially mentioned.¹³ During the 1899 election, at an Ashhurst meeting, Seddon emphatically denied that Pirani was ever offered a cabinet post.¹⁴ Pirani was present but did not challenge the statement. When Hall-Jones entered the cabinet in 1896 Pirani's initial attitude was very naive.

I recognise that the Premier has taken a new departure, and is determined to reward a man not for his servile support but for his independence in advocating his own ideas.¹⁵

Pirani regarded the mention of the referendum in the Governor's Speech as a sign of success,¹⁶ which he believed would encourage the Left-Wing in its independence. Without question Seddon's intent was

just the opposite. Pirani's disappointment was rapid in coming. Hall-Jones mentioned him as one who had gone, if not to Seddon, then to other Ministers for funds, knowing that they would come from local body sinking funds.¹⁷ Pirani in reply accused Hall-Jones of deciding members motives on flimsy evidence, and attacking members with whom he had long been associated.¹⁸ Nor did Pirani's attitude mellow with time, in 1902 he accused Hall-Jones of changing his vote on the elective executive and assisting the Bank of New Zealand at Seddon's dictate.¹⁹ Pirani had neither sympathy nor understanding for the idea of cabinet unity, let alone party unity, nor did he consider the possibility that elevation to cabinet might alter one's perspective.

Pirani moved the Address in Reply in 1895, probably a sign that Seddon was assessing his position. By tradition the honour was granted to a recently elected back bencher. Pirani's speech was critical of the government on some issues. A review of the Address in Reply speeches for the years 1894-1899 supported conclusions for which other evidence existed. As the 1890's progressed Seddon found it increasingly difficult to find able and safe debaters to support him; and there was considerable support from safe liberals for issues on which radicals were critical of Seddon e.g. prohibition, the referendum, and local government reform.

Pirani's own speech gives a fairly complete picture of his own views in early 1895, and is worth detailed attention on that ground. His general political position was one of firm support for the government. He praised the government's action over Rarotonga, in railway administration, and termed Maori policy as the best in New Zealand history. He approved of the progress in quartz mining, while showing his antipathy for the larger or speculative investor or financial interest,

by strong criticism of speculators on the British share market, and his scant sympathy for the investors in the Midland railway. Pirani expressed the hope that the Licensing Bill would take a step towards temperance, and supported gold fossicking on the West Coast, and the proposed board of appeal for teachers. He advocated state assistance for attendance at secondary schools and more liberal scholarships. He made an especial plea for conservation of resources; he felt sure the House would readily pass legislation to reverse the decline in seal numbers noted in the Governor's speech, while he deplored the wasteful reduction in native forests, trusting that "the Government will take some steps to re-establish the Forestry Department that was inaugurated during the Stout-Vogel Ministry."²⁰ On other occasions before and after this Pirani was to be very critical of the government in the areas of Maori policy and education, but such criticisms were not voiced on this occasion. Pirani devoted the longest section of the speech by far to the land issue, and reflecting his two years on the Land Board, his ideas were detailed and practical. He advocated elective Land Boards, criticised the existing ballot system as gambling, and said that pre-selection should be in the hands of the Land Boards, advocated a much revised system for special settlements, and suggested that surveyors were not capable valuers of land. He believed that dummyism could be very simply prevented by limiting the amount of land held under the Land Transfer Act by any one person, and support was given to rating on unimproved value. J. McKenzie had his own very firm ideas however, and though Pirani still saw himself as a critical friend, his never good relations with McKenzie deteriorated when it became clear that Pirani's ideas were not to be adopted. Pirani gave support for using the surplus to free the necessities of life from duty, presaging his position on the tariff debate. The complete absence of a representative of the middle portion of the North

Island in the Ministry was seen as quite unfair.²¹ Pirani could hardly make an open statement, but it is possible that this was his way of saying that he was open to offers, though in later years both Pirani and Seddon denied that any offer was made.

Early in 1896 Pirani reported to his constituents at Apiti on the 1895 session. Pirani mentioned the Cremation Act, Fencing Act Amendment, Family Holdings Act, Licensing Bill, Lunacy Act Amendment, plus the amendments to the Advances for Settlers Act as all useful, in some cases particularly so. Pirani was critical of the ballot system for land, and the handling of the Bank of New Zealand crisis. A vote of confidence in the government was lost on a show of hands. This suggests that Pirani's move towards a more independent position would not do him any electoral harm.²²

Many radicals had been perturbed by the principle and method of the Bank of New Zealand rescue, and it became the main Left-Wing Cause in 1896. The Left Wing pressed for a narrow inquiry, being more pre-occupied with its belief that Seddon was diverting attention from the errors, or worse, of Joseph Ward. As a 'moral' question Pirani for one was prepared to push an inquiry until the full truth was uncovered, even if this severely damaged the immediate fortunes of the liberal party cause in 1896. Seddon wanted a wide inquiry, to fix blame on past policies of the bank's management. In two votes Seddon had ample majorities, though in the first G. J. Smith, G. W. Russell, W. H. Montgomery, W. Earnshaw, J. W. Kelly, W. W. Collins, Stout and Pirani voted against the government, to be joined by R. Thompson on the second.²³ Among possible supporters Joyce, Maslin, McNab, O'Regan, and Tanner all voted with the government. The Left Wing was an embarrassment to Seddon, but not a threat.

Pirani viewed himself as a constructive friend, but what he wanted would require the dismantling of the Seddon system.

While the present Government is strong in numbers, strong in supporters, it is not strong enough in resolution to be able to withstand the pressure that seems to be brought to bear by honourable members who are most subservient.²⁴

The vote in exchange for public works and other government assistance was a necessary part of the system that allowed Seddon to enact his programme. Pirani believed the Left-Wing's ideas would be passed in a House in which party loyalties were weak; Seddon believed Pirani would have to decide which side of the House he wished to be on.

In an 1896 Want of Confidence debate Pirani seemed no closer to the Opposition than in the previous year. He insisted that Left-Wing criticism had only the intention of improving the government,²⁵ and analysed the disunity of the Opposition. After speaking at length on what the Left-Wing stood for Pirani said he believed it had nothing in common with the Opposition, an antipathy which was reciprocated.

Do you imagine for one moment that we did not realise from the earliest exactly where the left-wing would be found when the division is taken - that it is more socialistic and more advanced Liberal even than my honourable friends opposite?²⁶

But Pirani had been sharply critical of the government, and was moving toward a position of independence. He solved his immediate dilemma by not voting on the confidence motion at all.²⁷

Seddon's 1896 election speeches suggest that continued obstruction by the Legislative Council; defence of the Lands for Settlement programme; the passage of electoral reform; economic progress, and the reduction of tariffs, especially on necessities were the main issues. Seddon made a defence of party government, but made only passing reference to the Left-Wing.²⁸ In a major speech Pirani²⁹ supported the abolition of duties on necessities, and the absence of a means test for old age pensions, in both cases this went further than Seddon's position. Pirani gave considerable time to administrative reforms, of the Legislative Council, which he suggested should be elected either by the Lower House or by local bodies, a proportion at a time; the elective executive was advocated, as was classification of the civil service,³⁰ and reform of the local government structure, where Pirani advocated fewer bodies of greater responsibility and an improved financial base. In the area of human rights Pirani suggested equal divorce laws, the removal of women's political disabilities, and the consolidation and simplification of statute law. On education Pirani repeated the views of previous years, views which remained basically unaltered in 1902. Abolition of all bankruptcy laws completed the specific proposals. The meeting gave Pirani a vote of confidence. Seddon spoke at Feilding, Apiti and Pahiatua, but made no reference to Pirani.³¹ Pirani won a two cornered fight by a small majority, 1603 votes to 1553.³² There would appear to be only one extant reference to a meeting of Buick's, at which to a question he advised that the Longburn Freezing Works was ruined long before he took over the chairmanship.³³ In the absence of a speech it is difficult to assess why Buick came so close to victory, it is possible that at a transition point in Pirani's career, it was the latter's weakness rather than the former's strength which caused the close result. At one of Pirani's meetings, at Spur Road School, a Mr Conway

took the chair, advising that he would not have done so three years previously, as he was a thorough conservative, but Pirani and Buick were so widely different in qualifications that he believed voters should

vote for the man who had fearlessly and honestly done his duty in Parliament in preference to one who would never be a success there. Therefore he intended to vote for Mr Pirani and he advised all those who had the true interests of the settlers at heart to vote against Mr Buick³⁴

Many who had supported Pirani in 1890 and/or 1893 might not have been so enthusiastic, and may simply have been confused as to where Pirani stood.

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- 1 NZPD, 83,6 (21 June 1894).
 - 2 NZPD, 85, 490-491 (6 Sept. 1894).
 - 3 They included G. J. Smith, Graham, Kelly, McNab, Tanner, O'Regan, Stout, Earnshaw, Hall-Jones, Collins, Millar, Pinkerton and Reeves. See NZPD, 88, 271 (26 July 1895).
 - 4 NZPD, 88, 256 (26 July 1895)
 - 5 *ibid.*
 - 6 Rogers F. "The Single Tax Movement in New Zealand". (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Auckland), 1952 p. 21.
 - 7 *ibid*, p.65.
 - 8 *ibid.*
 - 9 NZPD, 90, 238, (13 Sept. 1895).
 - 10 NZPD, 90, 267 (13 Sept. 1895, F. Pirani).
 - 11 NZPD, 90, 483 (24 Sept. 1895)
The Left-Wing split, Hall-Jones, Pirani, J. W. Kelly, G. R. Russell, G. J. Smith, Tanner and Earnshaw all voted with Ward; while Hogg, McNab, Montgomery and O'Regan voted against him. Ward lost 28-24.

- 12 NZPD, 90, 505 (25 Sept. 1895)
The Left-Wing split again - Pirani, Collins, Earnshaw, Hogg, J. W. Kelly, G. J. Smith, Tanner, and G. R. Russell voted with Ward; Hall-Jones, McNab, Montgomery, and O'Regan voted against him.
- 13 Clarke, p. 74.
- 14 Seddon Papers 3/23 p. 7. Manawatu Daily Times 16 Nov. 1899.
- 15 NZPD, 92, 198 (19 June 1896).
- 16 *ibid.*
- 17 NZPD, 96, 293 (29 Sept. 1896).
- 18 NZPD, 96, 294 (29 Sept. 1896)
- 19 NZPD, 120, 489 (18 July 1902).
- 20 NZPD, 87, 27 (21 June 1895).
- 21 NZPD, 87, 31 (21 June 1895).
- 22 FS, 27 Feb. 1896 p. 2.
- 23 NZPD, 92, 459 and 499 (30 June 1896).
- 24 NZPD, 95, 146 (27 Aug. 1896).
- 25 NZPD, 93, 677 (31 July 1896).
- 26 NZPD, 94, 202 (7 Aug. 1896, Capt. W. R. Russell).
- 27 NZPD, 94, 208 (7 Aug. 1896).
- 28 Seddon Papers 3/12 p.3. Hawera Morning Post 3 Nov. 1896.
- 29 FS, 11 Nov. 1896 p. 2.
- 30 'classification' was a descriptive term by which Pirani meant that civil service appointment and promotion should cease to be influenced by political factors, and the administrative structures of the various departments should be rationalised, so far as was possible. No overall reform was achieved until 1912.
- 31 Seddon Papers 3/12 pp. 2, 5, 6-8.
- 32 Seddon Papers 3/12 p. 23. See Appendix 3 for the booth by booth figures.
- 33 FS, 20 Nov. 1896 p.2.
- 34 FS, 2 Dec. 1896 p. 2.

Chapter Five

Pirani's Second and Third Terms, 1897-1902The 1899, 1902 and 1905 Elections

Overall the liberal majority went down in the 1896 election, and the rural blocks within the party was reduced both relatively and absolutely.¹ Though there was no wholesale attack on the Left-Wing successful efforts were made to defeat individuals, McNab and Russell lost their seats, J. W. Kelly and G. J. Smith were returned, like Pirani, as independents. T. E. Taylor was elected, and became the leader of the Left-Wing, in which Taylor, J. W. Kelly, G. J. Smith and Pirani were the hard-core. Relations between Seddon and the Left-Wing became more personalised, and bitter; the Left-Wing of 1897-1899 can be distinguished from that of 1894-1896 by a preparedness to vote against the government on confidence motions. This happened for the first time in 1897.²

Within a week of the session opening the Left-Wing had opposed Seddon in the Sergeant-at-Arms affair, then Rolleston moved a critical motion on Seddon's connection with the Anglo-Continental Gold Syndicate. From a caucus meeting Seddon knew that many liberals were unhappy, so he made the motion one of confidence, and even then secured a majority of only four. The Left-Wing voted en bloc against Seddon. To them the conflict of interest was clear, and Pirani viewed Seddon's action as a classic misuse of a no-confidence vote, because the issue was a personal one, not a matter of policy.³ The Premier's defence that such appointments were not new, and that no conflict of

interest existed, was not accepted by the Left-Wing. The years 1897-1899 were probably Seddon's most difficult. The Opposition had good debaters in Rolleston and Scobie MacKenzie, while beyond himself and J. MacKenzie, Seddon lacked equal talent, and the Left-Wing increased its nuisance value. Thirteen liberals, led by T. E. Taylor, opposed the sending of a military contingent to the 1897 Jubilee, which was passed with opposition support.⁴

Seddon's defence of Ward was another issue which infuriated the Left-Wing in 1897. Some confusion exists as to when the Left-Wing were excluded from the liberal caucus, mainly, it would seem, because they were not treated as a block. On the vote on Ward's status Graham, Joyce, Tanner, Montgomery and B. Thompson joined the Left-Wing, and in an adjournment vote the government received a fright. At the subsequent caucus G. Fisher was bitterly critical of the radicals, and Clarke said that Taylor, Smith, Montgomery and Pirani were excluded from caucus for the rest of the session.⁶ Pirani said it was not until two more meetings that they were excluded, after J. McKenzie had said that he would no longer attend if the Left-Wing were present.⁷ In a subsequent debate McKenzie explained Smith's ignorance of government amendments by advising that "they did not allow traitors at their caucus."⁸

"Prior to the 1898 session Pirani announced that he would not support the continuance in office of the Government."⁹ During 1898 the liberal caucus met weekly. This tightened the discipline of those within, but increased the estrangement of those excluded, including Pirani. Like other innovations under Seddon which had so disturbed the Left-Wing the weekly caucus also worried those who accepted it. The New Zealand Times, the official liberal organ, believed it could mean rule by unknown people by unknown means, and would remove effective discussion of policy from the chamber.¹⁰ As with other aspects of the Seddon system the weekly caucus caused qualms

at the time, and was seen by some as just another example of Seddon's autocratic behaviour, but it became an integral part of twentieth-century party politics.

Seddon had defended himself and Ward vigorously against attack, and it was viewed by the Left-Wing as done purely to preserve power; but in part at least Seddon equated the party leadership with the party itself, a concept which was to be much stronger in subsequent years.

It was during this period that the Webbs visited New Zealand. C. Trevelyn wrote to Reeves that the Left-Wing was the most effective political grouping after Seddon's followers. Taylor and Pirani were praised, and the Left-Wing regarded as "the best set in Parliament as far as opinions go and promise of ability."¹¹ The Webbs regarded any corruption Seddon was guilty of as minor, and blown out of proportion. They had come to New Zealand via the U.S.A. Pirani was probably in greater agreement with the Left-Wing at this time than any other. The land issue receded into the background, and the corruption issue allowed strong personal attacks on Seddon. The stress that forced members to pick sides meant Pirani could be more certain of his friends. The member praised more than any other was not the fiery Taylor but the quieter Montgomery, who had voted with the Left-Wing on the Sergeant-at-Arms, Anglo-Continental Gold Syndicate, seizure of Sinking Funds, and Ward issues, and believed that

if the Government went on legislating on the lines laid down by Mr Ballance, no one would be more enthusiastic supporters than the Independent Liberals, who had no desire to frustrate anything contained in a policy of true liberalism,¹²

and insisted that on essential liberal matters -

industrial and labour legislation, land and taxation policy, the Left-Wing voting had been impeccably liberal.

Once the split between the Left-Wing and the government became irreconcilable the liberals developed a campaign to eliminate the independents from politics. Ward said that rather than see the Left-Wing act as a balance, as T. E. Taylor expected, "the Government would stand shoulder to shoulder with the Opposition."¹³ Reflecting upon past events Cairncross shows the growth of sentiment for party unity and a party system.

they were all brainy, clever men, capable of being a great help to either party they loyally allied themselves with. There was no room for free lances. Men had to go straight with one party or the other.¹⁴

The breach between the Left-Wing and the Liberal Party required the former to clarify its position, and they became prepared to recognise a separate programme of objectives. In early 1899 Pirani listed these as follows,¹⁵ - elective executive, referendum, elective Legislative Council; the taking of administration out of direct political control - non-political board answerable to Parliament to run the civil service, status and remuneration of judiciary down to S.M. should be independent, the police should be under a commissioner and answerable only to Parliament. On land reform there was abolition of the ballot system in favour of list approved by Land Board, elected Land Boards independent of minister, revaluation of all leases issued in future at periodical intervals, all Crown tenants to have the right to freehold after specified improvements made, a limit on the area of crown land any one person can take up, all purchases under Land for Settlement Act to be approved by Parliament and all lands purchased to be controlled

by Land Boards; on local government the amalgamation of small bodies, increased functions for local bodies, all parliamentary grants to be subsidies added to local contributions. Pirani also included state farms, abolition of duties on necessities of life, simplification and consolidation of statute law, removal of political disabilities on women and popular control of the liquor traffic. The influence of Pirani is clear in some of these items, which he had long pushed for, the only one likely to have caused controversy within the Left-Wing was the revaluation of leases, which seems in conflict with the support for freehold, and was never mentioned by Montgomery when he made a major address to his electorate.¹⁶

Early in 1899 Pirani made his position quite clear to his constituents.

So far as Mr Seddon was concerned he did not believe that as Premier he was worthy of the confidence of any one. He thought a change of Government would do good, by allowing some of the dirty corners to be swept out.¹⁷

He added that

he was quite prepared to give a Ministry formed by Captain Russell an opportunity of proving itself worthy of support, but he did not attach so much importance to the personnel of a Ministry as to its principles.¹⁸

That Pirani believed he could so separate personnel and principles gives a crucial insight into his political attitudes. The broad social and economic interests of the liberals and conservatives were lost upon him, he was pre-occupied with matters such as 'purity' and for these either side was possible. Quite clearly it was the Seddon manner to which he objected.

There is a large section of the public which is weary and sick of the administrative abuses that have marked the recent political history of the colony.... Act after Act has been placed upon the Statute Book in such a form that, while ostensibly furthering worthy objects, it has tended to throw the distribution of patronage, the allotment of public moneys, and the control of the resources and industries of the country more and more into the arms of the Government. The essential principle of these ... measures are excellent, but there is an undoubted objection to the discretionary powers they confer upon the Government of the day.¹⁹

For this Pirani was prepared to join the conservatives. The Evening Post saw a combination of the Progressives and the Opposition as necessary to the early defeat of Seddonism, and it believed Pirani had shown he was prepared to meet the Opposition half-way. Now it was necessary for the Opposition to make clear that it was in no way the reactionary group Seddon labelled it. If this was done, and all who opposed the Seddon system united on the basis of that opposition the Evening Post did not believe Seddon would survive another election. Both the Evening Post and Pirani ignored the real political gulf between the Left-Wing and the Opposition, the fact that they represented quite different political outlooks. Most of the Left-Wing were not prepared to follow Pirani into the conservative camp, or form any kind of alliance with them.

The Hawkes Bay Herald noted that "there is much more bitterness and personal feeling between the two sections of the Liberal party than between the Government and Opposition."²⁰ Seddon was obliged to accept the existence of the Conservatives; indeed terming them reactionary encouraged liberal unity and presented the electorate with clear alternatives. The Left-Wing not only blurred this picture, but were 'traitors' into the bargain, and treachery is generally viewed more heinously than simply being the enemy. In the 1899

election a major Liberal objective was the destruction of the Left-Wing, and Montgomery, J. W. Kelly, T. E. Taylor and G. J. Smith all stood as independents and were defeated. The New Zealand Times insisted that the Left-Wing knew it could only damage the Liberals, so its persistence meant that it must be counted with the conservatives. If the people had a clear-cut choice the government would easily win; to ensure this "the spurious pretence of the so-called Left Wing Liberals must be swept aside, and they must be shown in their true colours as foes of Liberalism and progress".²¹ A. Morrison was equally critical of independents, advising electors that if they did not like Seddon they should vote for Captain Russell, "but for goodness sake let them avoid the independent candidate, who was neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring."²² Seddon quoted Rolleston to show that the Left-Wing was not accepted on either side,²³ and said that he hoped to see the left-Wing wiped out, and would prefer to see the Conservatives in office than the Left-Wing increase in strength.²⁴

Judging by his speeches Seddon saw the main points of the election as - do not vote for the Left-Wing, opposition to the elective executive; and emphasise on the success of the land policy. Electors were told that though the conservatives now accepted liberal legislation they could not be trusted, electors were reminded of the faults of the Atkinson government, and in a mild fashion the memory of Ballance was evoked. It was mainly part of Seddon's continued insistence on the two-party structure of politics, but now that detailed memories were fading the use of Ballance by Seddon was probably particularly galling to the Left-Wing.

The New Zealand Times termed Pirani the leader of the Left-Wing in the north, and Pirani had for some time been baiting Seddon to come to Palmerston North. He

did so in 1899 for the first time, and his speech clearly fits into the general campaign against the Left-Wing.

The platform Pirani presented to his electors²⁶ included much that was unaltered since 1896 - elected executive, elected Legislative Council, and abolition of duties on the necessities of life, other points which were new but fitted in with the spirit of the previous proposals, - the referendum,²⁷ the replacement of all local body subsidies by a single one at a £2 for £1 rate; on land Pirani's proposals remained unaltered since 1893. Also, naturally, Pirani gave prominence to the methods and 'abuses' of the Seddon government, the misleading financial figures, the Wrigg and Marine scandals, and the commission of investigation into the police force. Pirani explained his lack of formal resignation from the liberals or the House by pointing out that Seddon had never made a policy issue a confidence vote, hence he had not been given an appropriate occasion to do so.²⁸

Seddon's meeting in Palmerston North in 1899 is worth considering in some detail. Because we have lengthy reports from both sides²⁹ it is possible to see why relations were so bad, and it is an example beyond election results of the degree of local support Pirani enjoyed.

The meeting was the largest public meeting held in Palmerston North to that date. There was standing room only well before 8.00 p.m., and when the doors were locked hundreds were turned away. Seddon started his speech by saying that public men should be judged on policies, not personalities. He denied that Pirani had ever been offered a cabinet post; neither himself, Mr Ward or Mr Cadman could remember such an offer; and if Mr Reeves had made one it was without cabinet approval. Seddon continued that it had been difficult getting Pirani on the Wellington Land Board, and all ministers had objected to his re-appointment as inimical

to the interests of land settlement, so it was ridiculous to believe he had been considered for cabinet. Seddon then analysed Pirani's own position, arguing that he was distrusted by all and liked by none. By Pirani's own confession he worked through other members of the House for anything he wanted, but Seddon said he believed it would be better for the district if it sent to Parliament a member who could do his own work. Seddon argued that only two lobbies existed in the House, the 'aye' and the 'no', and that these interests were represented in Palmerston by Mr W. T. Wood, and Buick, conservative. They were, so far as Seddon was concerned, the only two men in the contest. It was a continuance of the campaign against the Left-Wing as a separate entity, designed to force the Left-Wing either to rejoin the Liberal Party or openly join the conservatives, rather than remain as independents who split and confused his party. Seddon then referred to land nationalisation, and to a Knights of Labour manifesto signed by Pirani, which had been brought to light by the Manawatu Daily Times; adding that he understood Pirani was a prominent member of the Knights. This was clearly an attempt to discredit Pirani with the small settlers, and presumably referred to a document some years old.

Seddon then defended the government's record, arguing that despite the number of corruption charges, very little had been proven, and Seddon gave at length his side of the bun-tuck affair, the marine inquiry and the Wrigg scandal. The earlier attacks on Pirani had led to considerable interjection, and either from disagreement or boredom disturbances erupted at the back of the hall which caused the meeting to be halted until they were sorted out. Seddon continued to defend past legislation, and stated his position on

some of the current issues. On some his statements were close to what Pirani wanted, but did not ring true, on others his disagreement with Pirani was clear. Seddon argued that the government should take over the Manawatu railway or tell the directors that for a certain period there would be no government interference. This was exactly Pirani's position, but in reality the government did neither. While unable to agree with the company over a selling price, the government refused to grant anything but short-term understanding. On the Legislative Council Seddon argued that if it needed reform it should be abolished, and said he believed that a referendum would favour such a move. Pirani agreed with this. On the other hand Seddon said he would oppose to the last an elective Legislative Assembly as this would restrict access to those with the money to afford it. This was Seddon at his more disingenuous. There seems to be no reason why his latter point should be any more true of the Legislative Council than it was of the House, and in practice Seddon never seriously considered abolishing the Council, he had found appointments to it to be too useful a political plum. Seddon then opposed an independent Board to run the Civil Service, as this would take the Service beyond democratic control, and argued that classification would achieve all the necessary reforms. Pirani preferred to see both classification and an independent Board, but more importantly, wanted to see classification pushed ahead at a much faster pace than was actually the case. Seddon opposed the universal old age pension on the grounds that it would by excessive cost wreck the scheme. He argued that the penny post could be introduced the next day by the government, but that the main benefit would go to commercial interests.

A motion was put giving a vote of thanks and support for the Premier, but Pirani had during Seddon's speech entered the hall, and he now rose to put an amendment.

The meeting erupted, with Seddon's and Pirani's supporters each trying to shout the other down. Pirani was by now on the platform, and forcefully insisting to the chairman that he had a right to be heard, and Seddon too was trying to get him a hearing. The chairman said this was clearly impossible, and that he would put the original motion. According to the Manawatu Daily Times this was put and carried by acclamation. The New Zealand Times reported that the uproar effectively prevented any formal business being done, while the Evening Post said that it had been quite impossible to tell what happened to the chairman's motion. As all agree on the prevailing confusion and uproar it seems likely that the motion was not put. At this stage Seddon left, and this was taken by the care-taker as a sign to switch off the lights, plunging the hall into darkness, apparently at about 10.30 p.m. A burly supporter raised Pirani on one shoulder and held a candle in the other, while Pirani tried to make himself heard. He was as much hindered by his own supporters as anyone, as they had formed a solid phalanx around him on the stage, and tried to drown out Liberals who remained. The chairman, W. T. Wood, and the police all asked Pirani to leave, but he refused. The Evening Post termed the scene as probably unexampled in the history of the colony, while the New Zealand Times said that the police were quite unable to control the situation. The Manawatu Daily Times said that the threatened bedlam was controlled by determined police action, but then said that the crowd surged from one end of the room to the other, with the stage in the wildest confusion, with chairs and forms being overturned in all directions. The police were slowly emptying the hall, and some people were leaving. At 11.30 Pirani put his amendment 'that the meeting had no confidence in the Premier or his government.' Though Pirani declared it carried unanimously both the New Zealand Times and the Evening Post agreed that it met with

considerable opposition. Pirani continued talking outside in the Square from the back of a buggy, claiming that the government had brought supporters from Ashhurst and Longburn to act as interjectors, as well as trying to stack the meeting. His final statement to supporters was that despite the attempt to silence him that night he would be heard on election day.

Seddon later said that he had received a fair hearing until Mr Pirani had arrived, and the general chaos which ensued had been due to a majority desire not to grant Pirani a hearing. This was because Pirani's supporters had previously disrupted a meeting of W. T. Wood, so both Liberal and Conservative supporters had decided to ensure that Pirani did not interfere with the Premier's meeting. It is a moot point whether this is the true explanation of the meeting's liveliness. Seddon agreed that a serious riot had seemed likely, and that though he had experienced pretty lively meetings on the West Coast, none had matched the latter part of the Palmerston North meeting. He claimed that the telegraphed report of the meeting had been sent out by Pirani himself, as the Press Association agent in Palmerston North, and also that both the Palmerston North papers were biased against him. The Poverty Bay Herald said that the Press Association report was done by a conscientious and impartial employee of the Association, and they had been informed that the hostility to Pirani which caused the uproar was due largely to a contingent of butchers and other workers from the Longburn works. Over a week later Seddon persisted with the statement that the telegraphed report had been written by Pirani, and at a Wanganui meeting said it was quite untrue that he had met with a hostile reception, and that he had never left the platform until he had seen Mr Pirani and his friends out of the hall. The latter cannot be regarded as a difference of opinion, it is simply untrue.

All reports were agreed that Seddon left the platform after the chairman had proposed a vote of thanks. The Evening Post suggests that Seddon remained in the vicinity after he left the platform, but this can hardly be stretched to cover Seddon's account at Wanganui.

Pirani had probably the rowdiest meeting he ever faced as speaker at Napier.³⁰ He was pelted with rotten eggs, and at first quite unable to get a hearing. The police at first were unable to act, as they could only arrest on instructions from the chairman. Volunteers tried to restore order but failed, Pirani himself ejected a prominent barracker from the front row. When a second appeal to the police failed the chairman, a Mr Logan, specifically named two people, who were then removed. It was not until after 11.00 p.m. that Pirani by sheer persistence presented most of his speech.

Pirani apparently sensed the strength of his position in Palmerston North. Though the Left-Wing in general fared badly in 1899, the election result³¹ - F. Pirani 1980, W. T. Wood 1465 and D. Buick 638 was for Pirani a personal triumph, and one that he felt confident enough about to spend part of the campaign making speeches in other centres. At first glance Pirani could have expected a very tough battle. No information about Buick's campaign appears to have survived, but he much earlier attended and spoke at a conservative political garden party, held in appreciation of R. C. Bruce by supporters in Rongotea.³² Captain Russell, F. Y. Lethbridge and J. G. Wilson also attended. While in 1899 Pirani stood as an opposition candidate, it was with the same spirit of independence as when he had stood as a liberal. Buick could be expected to have drawn votes from Pirani. The liberal candidate, W. T. Wood, was a strong one.³³

Nationally the year 1899 was particularly successful for Seddon.³⁴ In the midst of Seddon's victory "the most surprising result of all perhaps is the wonderful success of Mr Pirani, whose most sanguine friends only dared to hope that he would win by a small majority."³⁵ Pirani had firmly established his ability to win, essentially as an independent candidate, when facing candidates of both conservative and liberal hue, and in an election when the general trend was against such achievements.

The 1899 election left Pirani as the only front-rank member of the Left-Wing of the 1890's remaining, but also saw the election of a group of independent radicals - A. R. Atkinson, H. G. Ell, G. Fowlds and G. Laurenson, who were individually at least as able as the Left-Wing,³⁶ and who were added to in 1902. Pirani was uniquely placed to act as a mentor, and as a bridge between the old and the new, but he did not do so. Rather than lead a group Pirani espoused the rather extraordinary position that no parties existed at all,

there were now no parties in the House, and it was impossible for any one set of members to say that they alone were the supporters of the Government. Every member supported the Government - when they were right - and conscientious members opposed them when they were wrong.³⁷

There remained the refusal to make concessions that were necessary if any sizable grouping of anti-Seddon liberals was to be formed. In 1899 Seddon had said that a vote for Laurenson was as good as voting for the Opposition,³⁸ and in 1905 he was to become chairman of the New Liberals,³⁹ but the Manawatu Evening Standard persisted in regarding him as a Seddon man.⁴⁰ Having decided that no parties

existed Pirani returned, in the years 1900-1902, to a pre-occupation with issues, in particular education and local government reform. In this Pirani was being true to his own view of politics, his distaste for factions and parties was so strong that rather than take the opportunity that existed to lead one he pretended they did not exist at all.

Pirani announced to his electorate on 3 February 1902 that he would not be contesting the Palmerston North seat in 1902, and was retiring from politics for personal reasons. Despite a lengthy address he gives no details, but was apparently alluding to the break-up of his family. He was reported as clearly under stress, and speaking only with considerable difficulty to a large and sympathetic audience.⁴¹

Two daughters, Dorothy and Molly, sided with their mother and left home; the son, Louis, remained with his father.⁴² It was quickly suggested that the real reason was a belief that he would lose, to which Pirani replied by keeping open for a week an offer to contest the seat against any government nominee, including Seddon.⁴³ Either pressure was brought on Pirani to reconsider, or he had second thoughts, or both; for as late as July the Evening Post reported him as "definitely and finally decided not to seek re-election at the next elections,"⁴⁴ as if this was fresh news. To his private reasons were soon added reasons of health. He went to Rotorua for two weeks before the opening of Parliament, which could well have been for health reasons.⁴⁵ In early October he wired R. Essex regretted inaction over the local drainage scheme, but "I have been too ill to attend to anything."⁴⁶ Shortly after this he had an operation to save his eyesight, which was successful;⁴⁷ but this did not end his problems. He advised a meeting that he was going to Wellington

for an operation for an internal injury.⁴⁸ This too was apparently successful, two weeks later the Evening Post reported him as progressing satisfactorily and having taken his first walk abroad.⁴⁹ These health difficulties were probably the combination of personal stress and the accumulative effect of years of late sittings in the House, the years of constant travel between Wellington and Manawatu, not just as M.H.R., but to attend the Wanganui Education Board meetings. The Education Board would also have required frequent visits to back-country schools, in difficult conditions.

After the 1900 session Pirani apologised for not having been able to meet his constituents because of physical exhaustion. Clearly health problems were not new in 1902, and they probably contributed to his domestic difficulties. It seems quite likely that Pirani was too conscientious for his own good, and had worn himself out. Pirani's decision to retire was still firm when the session ended, but was abruptly reversed after the second successful operation. This suggests Pirani was in part influenced by a mental depression which was lifted by the success of his medical treatment. He received many offers to stand for the Manawatu seat, and admitted strong temptation, but believed that he could not interfere with the chances of Vale, the official opposition candidate; instead he announced himself a candidate for the Hutt seat,⁵⁰ and, according to the Evening Post, was greeted with messages of support from throughout the electorate,⁵¹ which was probably the case. The seat was held by Wilford,⁵² a staunch supporter of Seddon. Earlier a Dr Newman had denied having any interest in the seat, and a Rev. W. A. Evans considered a request to stand,⁵³ but apparently decided not to. The only other candidate was J. H. Collier, a weak Independent-Liberal, which meant that before Pirani arrived there was no strong candidate of any kind to oppose Wilford. Pirani worked under two difficulties, he was an outsider to the district, and his campaign

started very late. Wilford held a meeting in late October fully three weeks before Pirani's first, where he balanced local matters - the straightening of the Hutt line, and the relief of local authority from the need to build abbatoirs, with wider issues. Wilford advised the purchase of all Maori land, to be then split between the Maoris and the Public Trustee and opposed paying £ $\frac{1}{2}$ million to the Midland Debenture Holders.⁵⁴ Even before he was standing Pirani had an ally in the Evening Post which peppered Wilford with criticism, suggesting that the government promise of straightening the Hutt line was far less certain than Wilford suggests, and this was more important than the new station for Petone, which was in any case clearly a bribe.⁵⁵

Pirani's first meeting was the largest ever held in Petone. The most notable aspect of his speech was that Pirani did not sound like a local candidate, the speech was dominated by what had become his pre-occupations after nine years in the House. He criticised the Public Revenue Act, "adding it was desirable that any member of the House should be able to inspect the items of expenditure, and see the vouchers for any money expended."⁵⁶ He believed that local bodies should automatically get the 2 for 1 subsidy, so as to become more independent. He said he believed there should be a referendum on the Bible-in-Schools issue, but that if it came before the House he would support scripture lessons in schools, and that if this was carried assistance for Catholic schools should be considered. Pirani had never given prominence to the bible-in-schools position, and this marked a change from previous beliefs, where he had fully supported the secular principles of the 1877 Act. He then spoke in favour of a system of education administration which involved strengthening school committees, and the replacement of Education Boards by a central Council; this despite Pirani having been on the Wanganui Education Board for some years, and

where he was to continue to serve for another twenty years. On the land question he merely summarised existing views on tenure, the ballot and Land Boards. For Pirani one of the most important results of the meeting was that Collier's committee came over en masse to his support when Collier refused to withdraw. Collier termed himself an Independent-Liberal, but would not say how he would vote in no-confidence motions.⁵⁷ Lacking any clear position, policy or impact, he was squeezed out between Pirani and Wilford. Pirani's campaign experience enabled him to score off interjectors, when in the middle of his speech someone called for three cheers for Tom Wilford, and silence followed, Pirani presumed the interjector had been trying to quieten the meeting, and believed that calling for three cheers for Tom Wilford was the best way to do it.⁵⁸ In later meetings Pirani argued that the penny post and reduced telegram fees helped the merchant more than the working man. He was critical of Wilford's poor attendance at the House and at Harbour Board meetings,⁵⁹ the Evening Post termed Wilford "a dillettanti politician who contrives to sandwich short attendances at the House in between other occupations."⁶⁰

Pirani's campaign gives the impression of being a large number of small meetings. In the time he had, it being too late to organise many large meetings, he relied on visiting as many parts of the electorate as possible. This could not avoid the loss of the election by a wide margin. The result was Wilford 2115, Pirani 1673, and Collier 90.⁶¹

The Evening Post accurately assessed the victory.

Mr Wilford was born and bred in the district, he had behind him Ministerial influence, with all that it means in an electorate containing many Government employees, and he had a long start."⁶²

To defeat him was virtually impossible for a convalescent. Evidently Pirani's health was still not 100 percent; he had told the Hutt electors that he had not stood for Palmerston North for "physical" reasons, and when he met Wilford after the election and found he was going to England for medical reasons, he remarked to him that nothing drew people together like physical pain.⁶³ Despite this the election had decided Pirani against retirement from politics. He believed that his defeat was in part due to his being a stranger, and in a farewell letter to the Hutt electors he advised that he was "not politically dead but merely taking a rest until an opening presents itself, when I hope to be in better form to take my proper place in a contest."⁶⁴ He said he intended to settle in the Hutt and contest the next election, but then denied having sold the Manawatu Evening Standard and/or purchased the Petone Chronicle, believing "the publication of such a statement is detrimental to his interests and very unfair to him."⁶⁵ Nevertheless he was shortly to sell his interest in the Palmerston North paper and buy the Petone Chronicle.

In Palmerston North W. T. Wood won by a wide margin despite the existence of an independent-liberal in the field. The Manawatu Evening Standard had supported T. R. Hodder, the Opposition candidate, who had also received Pirani's personal endorsement.⁶⁶ The paper put Wood's victory down to his long residence and local popularity, noting that he had done better in the country booths.⁶⁷ Wood was to hold the seat until 1908, when it was captured by Reform.

The question is inevitably raised as to whether Pirani would have won had he stood in Palmerston North. Wood had certainly improved his position since 1899, but Pirani's local support had proved too

strong then, and there is no reason to suppose that it had diminished in the intervening three years. In 1900 Pirani had introduced his freehold bill, and in 1908 the seat was taken by Reform. The long-term trend of a seat strongly influenced by an increasingly-conservative small settler is clear, and it was a trend Pirani was going with, not against. The 1902 election in general was a heavy defeat for the Opposition, but it was also a good election for independents.⁶⁸ It therefore is reasonable to conclude that Pirani would have won in Palmerston North if he had stood, and could have continued to hold the seat for many years.

Pirani did try once more, in 1905, to win the Palmerston North seat. He stood as an Opposition candidate, officially endorsed by Massey; his committee chairman was Hodder, the candidate of 1902. Pirani was critical of what he termed the government's 'bastard-freehold'. He argued that as the government had parted with the land for 1,000 years, it was ridiculous to expect users to pay present value for freehold.⁷⁰ Pirani made it clear that he did not oppose the freehold, so long as individual holdings were limited. In other areas - government reform, local government reform, education reform, Pirani's views remained unchanged, and it is indicative of the degree of common ground in New Zealand politics by this time that Pirani's platform, which had remained largely unchanged for over ten years, could on nearly all points, have suited the Liberal Party just as well as it could Massey. After a vigorous campaign, which centred around who could do most for the district, Wood won by a comfortable margin, 3551 votes to 3037.⁷¹

1 Clarke, p. 39 analysed the result as follows

	Liberal	Opposition and In- dependent
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City	5	4
Town	4	2
Balanced	4	0
Country-town	10	6
Rural	18	14

- 2 Seddon Papers 3/18 pp 37-38. Lyttelton Times 28 April 1898, for a quite detailed account of the 1897 session and the Left-Wing position in the years 1897-1898.
- 3 Seddon Papers 3/18 pp. 58-60; MES, 28 May 1898.
- 4 Clarke, p. V.
- 5 Clarke, p. 66.
- 6 Clarke, p. 67.
- 7 NZPD, 110, 63-64 (27 Sept. 1899).
- 8 Clarke, p. 56.
- 9 Clarke, p. 70.
- 10 Clarke, p. 45.
- 11 Hamer D. A. The Webbs in New Zealand 1898. Wellington 1974 p. 60.
- 12 Seddon Papers 3/18 pp. 37-38. Lyttelton Times, 28 April 1898.
- 13 Seddon Papers 3/18 p. 27. Southland Daily Times, 12 April 1898.
- 14 Seddon Papers 3/18 p. 51. Taiari Times 21 May 1898.
- 15 Seddon Papers 3/24. Otago Daily Times 24 Feb. 1899.
- 16 Seddon Papers 3/18 p. 27. Southland Daily Times, 12 April 1898.
- 17 Seddon Papers 3/24 p. 41. EP, 28 March 1899.
- 18 *ibid.*

- 19 *ibid.*
- 20 Seddon Papers 3/24 p. 15. Hawke's Bay Herald
31 Jan. 1899.
- 21 Seddon Papers 3/24 p. 18. New Zealand Times
28 Nov. 1899.
- 22 Seddon Papers 3/23 p. 4. Evening Star
2 Nov. 1899.
- 23 Seddon Papers 3/23 p. 16. Auckland Star
29 Nov. 1899.
- 24 Seddon Papers 3/23 p. 1. New Zealand Times
10 Oct. 1899.
- 25 Seddon Papers 3/24 p. 18. New Zealand Times
28 Nov. 1899.
- 26 FS, 8 Nov. 1899 p. 2.
- 27 Although first suggested some years earlier the referendum was given increasing prominence by the Left-Wing in the late 1890's.
- 28 FS, 8 Nov. 1899 p. 2.
- 29 The Seddon Papers 3/23 have reports on the meeting from the New Zealand Times, Manawatu Daily Times, EP, and MES. Later reaction to the meeting is in articles from The Telephone, Poverty Bay Herald, Auckland Star and Wanganui Chronicle. Broad agreement exists over the events of the meeting, though even here agreement breaks down at crucial points. As all discussion of the meeting draws upon the clippings in the Seddon Papers an exact reference will be given for direct quotes only, or where it is considered important that the source should be known.
- 30 MES, 30 Nov. 1899 p. 2.
- 31 MES, 26 Nov. 1902 p.2. See appendix III for booth by booth results.
- 32 FS, 7 Jan. 1897 p. 2.
- 33 He had been in the district for a considerable time. His services to local education were considerable. By 1902 he had been chairman of the Campbell Street School Committee for eight years, and the MES regretted his defeat when seeking re-election to the Wanganui Education Board, giving high praise to his own ability and the worth of his assistance to Pirani. He was a City Councillor 1884-1888, 1892-1895, and Mayor 1895-1899. In 1902 he was elected Mayor for the seventh time. He was also

elected patron of the Institute Football Club (1902), President of the Operatic Society (1900), elected to the general committee of the A.&P. Association, and on the committee which organised the return home for Boer War troops. Despite opposing Pirani in 1899, and being opposed by the MES in 1902 no personal feud appears to have existed between Wood and Pirani. They were united on local education matters, and agreed in 1902 on the need for municipal abattoirs, an issue of some controversy at the time. The above information was drawn from the following sources,

- MES, 28 April 1902 p. 3.
- MES, 8 Aug. 1901 p. 2.
- MES, 1 May 1902 p. 4.
- MES, 25 March 1902 p. 4.
- MES, 4 Dec. 1900 p. 2.
- MES, 12 Nov. 1902 p. 3.
- MES, 8 March 1902 p. 2.

Bradfield A.G.S. The Precious Years, Palmerston North 1962 p. 2.

34 Clarke, p. 50., analysed the results as follows

	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>Opposition</u>
City	8	4
Town	6	0
Balanced	3	1
Country-town	13	3
Rural	21	11

Independents were classified according to their later votes, Ell as a liberal, Pirani as opposition. Of the four balanced seats Pirani's is the only one not held by a liberal.

35 FS, 7 Dec. 1899 p. 2.

36 Whitcher, p. 16.

37 NZPD, 119, 406 (15 Oct. 1901).

38 Seddon Papers 3/23 p. 6. The Star 11 Nov. 1899.

39 Whitcher, p. 43.

40 MES, 17 May 1901 p. 2.

MES, 7 Dec. 1901 p. 2.

41 MES, 4 Feb. 1902 p. 2.

- 42 Private letter from Rev. M. R. Pirani
16 Oct. 1975.
- 43 MES, 12 Feb. 1902 p. 2.
- 44 EP, 3 July 1902 p. 6.
- 45 MES, 9 June 1902 p. 2.
- 46 MES, 16 Oct. 1902 p. 2.
- 47 MES, 14 Oct. 1902 p.2.
MES, 16 Oct. 1902 p. 2.
- 48 MES, 23 Oct. 1902 p. 2.
- 49 EP, 7 Nov. 1902 p. 4.
- 50 MES, 8 Nov. 1902 p. 2.
EP, 8 Nov. 1902 p. 5.
- 51 MES, 14 Nov. 1902 p. 2.
EP, 12 Nov. 1902 p. 6.
EP, 13 Nov. 1902 p. 5.
- 52 Wilford became leader of the Liberal Party in
1919, and was later instrumental in the change
of party name to 'United'.
- 53 EP, 31 Oct. 1902 p. 6.
EP, 1 Nov. 1902 p. 5.
- 54 EP, 24 Oct. 1902 p. 2.
- 55 EP, 24 Oct. 1902 p. 4.
EP, 3 Nov. 1902 p. 4.
- 56 EP, 17 Nov. 1902 p. 2.
- 57 EP, 13 Nov. 1902 p. 5.
- 58 EP, 17 Nov. 1902 p. 5.
- 59 EP, 21 Nov. 1902 p. 5.
EP, 22 Nov. 1902 p. 5.
- 60 EP, 24 Nov. 1902 p. 5.
- 61 EP, 26 Nov. 1902 p. 6. See Appendix 3.
for booth by booth results.
- 62 EP, 27 Nov. 1902 p. 3.
- 63 EP, 18 Dec. 1902 p. 2.
- 64 MES, 27 Nov. 1902 p. 2.

- 65 MES, 18 Dec. 1902 p. 2.
EP, 6 Dec. 1902 p. 6.
- 66 MES, 23 Oct. 1902 p. 2.
- 67 MES 26 Nov. 1902 p. 2. See Appendix 3.
for booth by booth results.
- 68 Brand, p. 154.
Campbell, p. 130 counted the result as
47 Liberals, 19 Opposition and 10 In-
dependents.
- 69 MES, 9 Aug. 1905 p. 4.
- 70 MES, 10 Oct. 1905 p. 5.
- 71 MES, 7 Dec. 1905 p. 6. See Appendix 3.
for booth by booth results.

Chapter Six

Pirani and the Land Question

Land legislation was the outstanding political issue in nineteenth century New Zealand, and probably the debate over it reached a new level of excitement in the 1890's, but to understand this some discussion of preceding legislation is necessary.¹ The Land Act 1877 consolidated the provincial legislation, and divided the country into ten land districts, each with a Commissioner of Crown Lands. Land was classified as town, suburban or rural, and could not be sold in blocks of more than 320 acres, except for third class and pastoral land. To assist settlement deferred payment was adopted, the bulk of the price was paid in instalments, spread over 10 years for rural land. The settler also had to cultivate one-fifth of his land within four years, and make improvements of £1 per acre within 6 years. Local authorities received one-third of the purchase price to provide roads. Holdings of pastoral land could be up to 5,000 acres, and payment was spread over 15 years, but residence was compulsory. Where there was more than one applicant blocks were auctioned. Between 1877 and 1892, 7,687 selections totalling 1,028,023 acres were taken up under deferred payment. The next significant legislation was the Land Act amendments by Rolleston in 1882-1884. Pastoral leases were extended to 21 years, and endowment reserves were allowed to be leased by Land Boards; but the important innovation was the perpetual lease. This imposed an annual rent of 5 percent of the cash value, with a maximum holding of 640 acres. The lease was for 30 years, with a right of renewal for a further 20 years. Regulations on residence, cultivation and improvements

were the same as for the 1877 Act. Rolleston had wanted to encourage closer settlement, but had been concerned that freehold tenure would lead to the aggregation of holdings into large estates, and to the permanent alienation of most, if not all, crown land. A right to purchase freehold was imposed by the Legislative Council against his better judgement. The tenure proved popular, by 1892 4,525 selectors had taken up 1,327,632 acres; and by 1901 1,760 lessees had purchased the freehold of 608,314 acres for £494,872.

Ballance in 1885 tried a more varied approach. Small grazing runs of up to 5,000 acres were introduced. Rent was $2\frac{1}{2}$ percent of the capital value as determined by the Land Board, and the land was held on a 21 year base, with a right of renewal. The small grazing run was found very useful for good quality bushland which needed breaking in. No lessee could occupy more than 6,000 acres in total. Special Settlements used deferred payment on the perpetual base, holdings were small, up to 200 acres. Residence could be by substitute, and within the association the ballot was used to assign blocks. By 1892 98,018 acres had been taken up, the system was amended in 1892 and in 1893, after which 1,919 persons applied for 380,399 acres, nearly all in the North Island. The Village-homestead Special Settlement system placed small groups, 10-30 families, on plots with a maximum size of 50 acres. Additional income was to come from outside labour while the plots provided necessities and a small income. Rent was 5 percent of the capital value, and money was loaned at 5 percent to assist with the house and land clearing. The scheme was intended to help the unemployed, and though by 1901, when suitable land ran out only 30,000 acres had been taken up, rent and interest totalled £44,110,

with arrears of only £692. In its small way the scheme had been successful.

Richardson in 1887 switched direction by making it considerably easier for the settler to acquire the freehold, for which he was strongly criticised by the liberals. Deferred payment was spread over fourteen years, not ten, the pastoral holding held under a deferred payment could be switched to a small grazing run. Lot superseded auction and tender as the method of sales and an applicant could decide his tenure. The freehold could be acquired under deferred payment or perpetual lease as soon as the improvements were done, by cash at the outset, or payment could be spread over fourteen years. In 1889 Richardson passed the Selectors Land Revaluation Act which allowed wholesale downward revaluations, and hence reduced rents.

During this period, 1877-1890, New Zealand was undergoing an economic depression. The years 1877-1878 had seen a boom in land prices, the final fling of the Vogel period, but the longer term effects of this were unfortunate. The large estates had been purchased at inflated prices and became encumbered with mortgages. As the depression continued and worsened the owners hung on to their lands, to sell at the prevailing prices would have meant bankruptcy. All governments agreed on the need for closer settlement, but the problem remained, as to how. The estate-owners could not sell except at crippling losses, and would-be settlers could not purchase without considerable assistance. Into this nest of difficulties stepped John McKenzie. No discussion of the land in New Zealand politics in the 1890's can leave out the character and beliefs of McKenzie. His early years in the Scottish Highlands had made a deep and lasting impression. He had seen crofters

turned out of home and livelihood by the estate-owners, and he was determined that no similar situation should arise in New Zealand. McKenzie made his name on a Parliamentary committee looking at dummyism in Otago. "It seemed that the big Highlander was a victim of an obsession on the subject. In truth he was haunted by the fear of large estates."² The crofters had been powerless just because the land was freehold, as a result McKenzie was implacably opposed to the freehold, he "believed that freehold tenure was the source of all human misery."³ McKenzie's other overriding consideration was to see the settler upon the land. His greatest difficulty arose in 1892 when political realities meant that the two considerations clashed. McKenzie devoted himself to the land issue with a single-minded fanaticism that meant he knew the extremely complex land legislation better than anyone else, while being able to retain a general outlook. The result was a "deadly earnestness",⁴ and an almost total lack of humour, that had little feeling for opposition or criticism. The bad relations with Pirani were probably due as much to a clash of personalities as anything. Pirani had his own very strong ideas about some aspects of the land issue, and had about as much sense of compromise as McKenzie. That Pirani was a journalist hardly helped matters. McKenzie's size, accent, and temper made him an easy target for the press, and McKenzie replied with a dislike close to hatred, which could be turned on friendly or hostile papers alike. "Horsewhipping was the punishment that he always prescribed for editors of newspapers,"⁵ afterwards adding libellous journalists to the list.

Richardson's policy was to sell land to open it up, and to gain government revenue. His aims were laudable enough, but McKenzie believed this solution did nothing to halt dummyism, speculation, aggregation, or the state loss of good land.⁶

During the three years of Richardson's administration 1,325,842 acres of Crown Lands had been disposed of, leaving only 2,800,000 acres of first or second-class Crown Land⁷

By the time McKenzie was minister virtually all the good crown land was sold. Richardson was hence heavily censured by Reeves despite some useful reforms, such as the replacement of auction by ballot at a notified price, and rent reductions.⁸

Pirani's clashes with McKenzie started early. A long speech by Pirani during the 1894 Lands for Settlement Bill suggests that Pirani, with Land Board experience behind him, was telling McKenzie what the Bill should include, and McKenzie had not appreciated being instructed on land legislation by a first-session member. Equally clear is Pirani's high regard for the rights of the House apropos the cabinet. McKenzie had moved the third reading, and apparently hoped for a short debate, but was to be disappointed, the third reading covered forty pages of Hansard. This cannot be expected to have improved his feelings, for which Pirani showed little sympathy, in a lengthy self-justification.⁹ Pirani believed that the attempt to rush the bill through only delayed it further. It became a fairly regular complaint of Pirani's, that McKenzie listened to no-one. "The unfortunate part of the administration of the present Minister of Lands is that he rarely takes advice from anybody who is smaller than himself",¹⁰ which would exclude not only Pirani, but just about everybody else in the House. "Those members who know the Minister of Lands know he is about the best man to adopt any man's suggestions but his own, and I am sorry that is the case."¹¹ Pirani was to argue that this was particularly regrettable as neither McKenzie or Seddon had any practical knowledge of North Island bush conditions. At first Pirani was probably trying to be merely helpful, but as his relations with

Seddon worsened, so did they also with McKenzie, who was criticised for 'corruption'.

If he discarded political colour in regard to the roading of these settlements, and expended money in districts where it is wanted, without any other consideration, then I feel sure his land-settlement policy would be a very much greater success.¹²

McKenzie had equally strong feelings about the liberal rebels. It was only liberal unity, and then only with great difficulty, that enabled McKenzie to get his bills through. As a consequence he held it in high regard. Pirani became keen on finding fault with McKenzie's administration, and McKenzie on ducking wherever possible. When McKenzie was asked for details about particular valuations and advances, he refused point-blank, and said he would regard insistence as a matter of confidence in the Department. Pirani complained that McKenzie was hiding behind his colleagues, as such a vote could not be separated from a vote of confidence in the government, adding that he would have thought McKenzie would welcome the airing of possible irregularities.¹³ When Pirani asked an innocuous question about the possibility of holding crown land ballots outside Wellington McKenzie reacted very sharply indeed.

He was very much astonished at this question. When he said he was astonished he was not astonished; because the honourable member for Palmerston was, no doubt, endeavouring to make political capital out of this question.¹⁴

Pirani had a natural distrust for bureaucrats, and when there was added to this the belief that Seddon and McKenzie used departmental funds for purposes of bribery and to hide policy mistakes it was inevitable that he would be looking at every possible mistake by the Department of Lands, and McKenzie would view every such suggestion as a personal attack, which in some instances

was true. Pirani used a letter in the Otago Daily Times to suggest that a loan at first refused by the Advances to Settlers Board had been granted, even though it was no longer needed, rather than have it broadcast that Poma-haka rents were too high. Pirani believed this showed how far the government would go to prove that settlements were successful. McKenzie replied that he had not been on the Board at the time, and that Pirani was "very good at insinuating motives."¹⁵ Pirani termed the purchase of an estate in the Momahaki district as an example of bad administration, an estate of 1,200 acres was sold "in such areas and at such prices as to insure failure"¹⁶ despite resolutions of the Land Board and an appeal to Seddon by Pirani, and now all the original settlers had abandoned their land. Pirani said the fault lay with the department rather than the Minister, but that such errors were bound to continue while McKenzie spent so much time travelling the length of New Zealand, and was copied by the departmental chiefs, so that clerks were left to run matters in Wellington. Pirani's complaint may contain an element of truth, but one doubts that Pirani would have been happy had McKenzie travelled less, as one of Pirani's other complaints was that McKenzie understood little of the problems of the North Island bush settler. After a time McKenzie ceased to even answer all of Pirani's questions.¹⁷

Richardson's approach had been to sell land to generate government funds. McKenzie's was the opposite, to borrow money to buy the land. This can be seen in the 1892 Land Act and Ward's Advances to Settlers Act of 1894. McKenzie introduced his first Land Bill in 1891, including compulsory purchase of estates by the government. This was so badly mangled by the Legislative Council that he withdrew the entire bill rather than enact what was left. In 1892 McKenzie did get a bill through, but at a price. Compulsory purchase was dropped, and a new tenure - the lease-in-perpetuity, created.¹⁸ This granted a 999 year lease, with the

usual restrictions about size of holding, residence and improvements, at a rental of 5 percent of the capital value. A right to freehold after ten years also existed. An alternative tenure was perpetual lease at 4 percent rental. Other changes were that no person or company could hold more than one run, the conditions for small grazing runs were improved, associations could take blocks under the lease-in-perpetuity or occupation with the right of purchase, and under improved-farm settlements workers who cleared land could occupy it. The latter worked for a few years only, when suitable land ran out. Ballance had intended the lease-in-perpetuity as a tactical compromise only, but once it was passed McKenzie became its staunchest defender. It was leasehold, however attenuated, and it put settlers on the land; but this could not stop it causing splits within the Liberal Party. H. S. Fish, a single-taxer, regarded McKenzie as a traitor for replacing the perpetual lease by the lease-in-perpetuity because the latter, without revaluations, gave up the unearned increment.¹⁹ McKenzie was opposed by two clear groups of liberals, middle class radicals - Collins, Hall-Jones, Maslin, R. McKenzie, O'Regan, G. W. Russell and G. J. Smith; and urban representatives J. A. Millar, Earnshaw, W. Hutchison, J. W. Kelly, A. Morrison, D. Pinkerton and W. W. Tanner.²⁰ Against this McKenzie found sentiment in the North Island bush settlements strongly in support of the new lease. A. W. Hogg, representing Masterton, admitted that he altered from an opponent after consulting his constituents; Pirani too gave strong support to the leasehold.²¹ Urban radicals saw land as relieving unemployment; they tended therefore to always maximise settler numbers, sometimes advocating absurdly small holdings from the long-term economic view.²²

Running parallel to the tenure of the settler was the legislation which acquired the land in the first place.

This had two sides - the Lands for Settlement Acts, which enabled the purchase of estates, and the purchase of Maori land; as the latter is but one part of Maori policy it will be mentioned only in passing here. McKenzie tried to pass compulsory purchase powers in 1891 and 1893, but failed. In the 1893 election 17 of the 27 who had opposed the Bill lost their seats. In 1894 the Lands for Settlement Bill granted compulsory purchase with a budget of £250,000. It was criticised on one side as likely to be a financial burden, and as a danger to freehold; and from the other as giving huge sums to landlords, and creating a new form landlordism.²³ In 1895 the constitution of the Land Purchase Boards was fixed at three public servants, the Land Purchase Inspector, and a locally-knowledgable person appointed by the minister.

Separate again from tenure and land purchase had been the 1891 Land and Income Tax, indeed it was this very separation which annoyed land radicals. The Land Tax was at 1d in the £1 on properties over £500, plus a graduated tax, which reached a further 1d in the £1 at over £50,000 with absentee owners paying a further 20 percent. Only one in seven landowners paid any tax at all.²⁴

Collectively this legislation caused considerable controversy at the time and amongst later historians. Though Reeves said the Land Tax had had little impact upon either the fiscal system or ownership the Liberal myth was that primarily due to its legislation there was during the 1890's a major redistribution of land, and this was initially accepted by some historians. More recent studies do not however support this generalisation. It has been pointed out that many run-holders remained after the legislation,²⁶ that the compulsory classes were only used twice before 1900, that the government was offered far more land than it wished to buy, that new holdings come more from new land

than a decreased size in old holdings, and that larger estates disappeared after 1902 rather than before, for economic rather than legislative reasons.²⁷

Having obtained land for the settlers the government also needed to help settlers develop it. Like most liberal legislation this principle was not new when actually enacted in the 1890's, but Ward was the first person to make a large-scale scheme practical, under the 1894 Advances to Settlers Act. This authorised the borrowing of £3m. in 1894, a further £1.5m. being authorised in 1895; it was lent on first mortgage, initially up to £2,500 at 5 percent for up to ten years. From the start Pirani was critical of many of the details of the scheme, but could not argue with its basic principle; as a result in its first years while himself critical he defended it against attack from the conservatives. Pirani had no doubt that a public agency could make a profit, though conservatives had, pointing out that the Government Insurance Department and Public Trust Office already did so; and he was sure the government should borrow to lend to settlers, but "I do not for a moment believe in the system laid down by this Bill."²⁸ Pirani had championed an alternative scheme, which would have avoided any possible adverse effect in England which he believed might follow from the government itself raising large sums annually on the English money-market.²⁹ Undoubtedly Pirani was not the only one concerned that Ward's scheme involved large-scale borrowing overseas, but unlike some others Pirani was not prepared to cramp the scheme because of this. Montgomery moved to reduce the amount to be borrowed from £1.5m. to £1m., and when this failed, to make the £1.5m. a ceiling figure, not just a first-year limit. The votes were close, Ward won the second by a single vote, and agreed to a limit of £3m. over two years. Hogg and Pirani supported Ward on both votes.²⁹

Pirani was also concerned at the apparent growth in

bureaucracy the Act entailed. He objected to the appointment of valuers, arguing that the Crown Rangers were quite competent to do this work, he objected to the number of 'highly-paid' officials, and was concerned that the legislation would lead to an increased number of lawyers³¹ (lawyers were a particular dislike of Pirani). Ward replied that the government lawyers would also be doing the work of other government departments, and in fact valuation and legal fees were kept to a minimum. Pirani was quick to praise the reduced interest rates that were one result of the scheme.³²

Natural interest and his constituency made the land laws a major concern of Pirani, and added to this from 1893 was the practical experience with the Land Board of a large and complex body of legislation. The result was a stream of major and minor amendments to the laws, some of which were accepted, and some of which strained Pirani's relations with the cabinet, as can be seen in the case of the Advances to Settlers Bill. "The proposal in this Bill to lend on leasehold is a perfectly fallacious one",³³ because the loans could only be made when covenants are complied with, and for perpetual leaseholders this includes six years of improvements and ten years of residence.

It would be much better for the Bill and for the perpetual-lease holder if this class were left entirely out of the Bill, and they were enabled to raise money by means of the Trustee Act Amendment Bill.³⁴

Pirani also noted a lack of provision for the tenure of occupation with the right of purchase which in 1892 had superseded perpetual lease, and he did not see why it should be disadvantaged as against perpetual lease with the right of purchase or lease in perpetuity. Ward advised that it had originally been intended to include advances to leaseholders in the Trustee Bill, but was transferred in case the Trustee Bill did not

go through, which answers only part of Pirani's point.³⁵ Pirani later "moved to strike out subsection (3), with the view of inserting, 'crown lands held under Parts III and VI of The Land Act, 1892' " ³⁶ which covered Land on the Optional System, Lands for Occupation with Right of Purchase, Lease-in-Perpetuity, Special Settlement Associations, and Village Settlements. Stout moved to add small-grazing runs, and all this was agreed to without a division.

Pirani's attitude to the Advances to Settlers Act continued to be mixed. He noted the success of the 3 percent loan, despite his doubts about external borrowing, but remained certain that the Act was not working satisfactorily, partly because the public servants concerned were too busy to give many loans the attention they deserved.³⁷ The next year Pirani defended the legislation against the criticisms of J. Allen, argued that the writing off of preliminary expenses in the first year was a standard commercial practice, and hence the first year's results should not be taken as typical, adding that

the Advances to Settlers Department, I say, has been an unexampled success. I think it is a notable thing that, although this department has hardly been in working order for a year, it is able to do as well as it has done.³⁸

Pirani pointed out that the 1892 Land Act had not included licence within the definition of lease, as had been the case in the 1885 Act. As a result land taken under licence cannot be registered, and cannot therefore receive loans.³⁷ This was just the kind of arcane point Pirani would pick up. On occasions Pirani's suggestions were not welcomed. Once when he asked if a particular clause could be altered McKenzie replied "I feel sick at heart that we should waste the whole of this afternoon in discussing this Bill and it has been wasted owing to the action of the honourable member for Palmerston,"⁴⁰ adding

that he had nothing to do with the clause

and if the honourable member for Palmerston attended to his duties in the House as he ought to do, as a representative of the people, he would not have been ignorant of that fact.⁴¹

McKenzie was clearly annoyed at the Bill's delay, but contrary to his suggestion Pirani had not said that the clause was McKenzie's, so could not have caused any delay just because of that.

Crucial to the development of Pirani's opinions on land legislation was his term of office on the Wellington Land Board. There is little in published sources on the work of Land Boards, but they dealt with the detailed administration of the Acts, and could at times have an important influence on policy. The Board minutes for the period July 1894- January 1897 are not extant, which is unfortunate⁴² as this covers the second half of the period Pirani was on the Board, and saw some sharp clashes between the new-broom Commissioner, J. H. Baker, and Board members. The constitution of Land Boards had caused considerable debate over the years, and elective Land Boards were a popular platform amongst radicals, one which Pirani always supported. As with other radicals this was at first because it was more democratic, and would presumably ensure that settlers had the predominant influence on the composition of what was for them an important body. Later the proposal had the added incentive of cutting down ministerial power.

In 1892 McKenzie himself proposed elective Boards, but withdrew in the face of opposition. Pirani continued to regard elective Boards as better when he served on a Board as a nominated member, and indeed regarded elective Boards as necessary to a satis-

factory administration of the land laws.⁴³ One less obvious disadvantage of nominated Boards was that the Minister could cramp a Board's working by not appointing a full Board, and hence making transaction of business more difficult. Pirani was very critical when the Wellington Land Board had only three members instead of five for a considerable period.⁴⁴

The Otago Daily Times criticised elective Boards because it believed this would mean that they would be composed of legislators, not administrators,⁴⁵ but this was a somewhat separate issue, legislators were regularly appointed to the nominated Boards. When it was moved in 1897 that MHR's should not be on Land Boards Pirani said that he had originally agreed with the idea, but that his own experience had convinced him MHR's made very effective members, and that the job was far from a sinecure; he had averaged 225 letters a year about Board business. The travel and expense involved was confirmed by A. W. Hogg.⁴⁶ When Seddon said that he had doubts about the merits of members serving on Boards he received some sharp replies from members who did serve,⁴⁷ suggesting that Pirani was not the only one who found serving on a Land Board useful, even when arduous.

It seems clear from the Land Board's minutes that some of Pirani's concerns existed before he was on the Board, but that others grew out of his experience while on it. The first meeting Pirani attended was on 26 January 1893 (A. W. Hogg was already a member, and was to serve for some years after Pirani); Pirani was appointed just after an inquiry by the Board into the affairs of the Palmerston North Forest Reserve Farm Homestead Association, in which the Board decided that the chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of the Association were "the principal instigators and abettors of the proposed transfers for money considerations."⁴⁸

The Board normally met in Wellington but this affair had

required a special meeting in Palmerston North, and Pirani's appointment may reflect a desire to mollify local feeling by granting representation on the Board to defend local interests. Pirani certainly showed a strong interest in the needs of Special Settlements, and was particularly keen that they should succeed. Pirani's first motion as a member of the Board was that

the Board approve of Messrs Canton being allowed to take up the section in the Te Kapua Special Settlement Blocks of the Knights of Labour Special Settlement transferred to them by Mr J. O. Donnell.⁴⁹

This was carried. Special Settlements had a high failure rate, partly due to incompetent or corrupt officers, partly due to incorrect financial arrangements - especially with respect to roading, and partly, the Land Board believed, because the Department rather than itself dealt with administrative details. Pirani asked in the House why control of Village and Special Settlements had been transferred to the Commissioners, and would it be transferred back to the Land Boards, but McKenzie replied that traditionally the control lay with the Commissioners from administrative convenience, and the transfer had been done as advised by the Crown Law officers.⁵⁰

The Board also agreed to ask the Minister of Land if a test case could be stated for an opinion before a Supreme Court Judge to decide whether the Commissioner alone could regulate for deferred payment Special Settlements, Village Homestead Special Settlements, and Farm Homestead Special Settlements, or whether such regulations should be made and issued by the Land Board.⁵¹

At his first meeting on the Board Pirani had given a notice of a motion on the administrative procedure in relation to Small Farm Homestead Associations, again suggesting that his appointment was due in part at least

to the 'Forest Reserve' scandal. Pirani moved

1st. that applications for Blocks of Land for Small Farm Homestead Associations shall not be entertained until the said land is declared open for such selection, and at least one month's public notice has been given of such fact. That when there is more than one Association applying for one block it shall be decided by ballot which association shall have first choice.

2nd. That with the application for a block of land the association shall forward the survey fees, which sum shall be repaid in conformity with subsection 2 of section 65, of "The Land Act 1892".

3rd Directly a Block of Land is granted to an Association the administration of the affairs of the Association, so far as the Board deems necessary shall vest in the Land Board. Previous to the ballot for sections transfer of interests in the Association shall only be granted at meetings of the Land Board, subject to the following procedure :-

(A) A list of persons desirous of becoming members of any Association who have made the necessary declarations shall be kept by the Commissioner of Crown Lands, and upon a notification being received by the Board that any member of an association desires to give up his interest, the Board shall select from such a list by ballot, the name of any person to fill the vacancy, such person to repay to the original member the cost of Survey and any sums of money he may have legitimately expended in connection with his membership. 52

Clearly at least one object of these controls was to maximise the authority of the Land Board, so that it could protect the settler from corrupt or incompetent officers. Evidently this procedure was not or could not be transferred to all types of settlement, as Pirani said in regard to Special Settlement Associations that the appropriate land should be taken en masse by an association, and then parcelled out, by division or ballot, as this would give a much better type of settler, and mean that transfers of such land could be forbidden⁵³ (the latter is certainly too optimistic).

When by 1896 half of the original special settlers had left their holdings Pirani acknowledged that the schemes were a failure, but he was far from prepared to admit that failure was due to a faulty concept. He blamed instead the department, as ill-suited to helping the settlers; the lack of roads and bridges which made access so difficult; the poor quality of land chosen; and lack of selectivity in choosing settlers.⁵⁴ Pirani added to this corrupt officers. Captain Russell claimed in the House that an informant, Whibley, had told him that people in Hawkes Bay had been refused the right to take up land under special settlement schemes, and then asked how they had voted in the last election, in a letter signed by J. McKenzie. This McKenzie denied. Pirani defended McKenzie by attacking Whibley's integrity.⁵⁵ Pirani produced copies of an agreement Whibley had proposed to a lessee of the Salisbury settlement, the net effect of which was that if certain bush-felling was done the section would be transferred. Pirani called this "as distinct a violation of the Land Act as has ever come under the notice of a member of the Land Board."⁵⁶ Pirani said he did not believe McKenzie's supposed letter was ever sent, or that Whibley will ever produce it, "and I say the majority of instances where associations have failed ... arise because men like this Whibley get hold of the affairs and are able to work their own sweet will."⁵⁷ Faith in the essential virtues of the schemes remained despite all their problems, and though Lloyd, a very sympathetic observer, termed small-farm associations the least successful ventures New Zealand had made in land disposal,⁵⁸ the Manawatu Evening Standard noted with pride the annual report on village settlements,⁵⁹ which it believed showed a success despite all the abuse it had received, and the initial mistakes made.

Land valuations were an important topic to settlers, because they frequently determined not just rates, but

with the leasehold tenures the rent as well. It was an issue the Land Board gave considerable time to while Pirani was a member, and another in which the Board believed it could do a better job than McKenzie's department. Hogg moved that the Board inform the Minister that in its opinion the current method of valuing bush land was unsatisfactory, that the job should be taken from the Surveyors and be done by professionals who would take account of local features and access in an expert manner, and not classify by area as was presently done. This was supported by Pirani and carried 3-2. Hogg later successfully moved that in the Board's opinion it should approve all valuations of bush land before they are finalised.⁶⁰ Pirani too was critical of valuation by surveyors, which he believed judged mainly by nearness to settlement, whereas he believed value should reflect productive potential, and the need for improvements. He was also critical of the proposal to have revaluation for tax purposes by Assessment Courts controlled by Stipendiary Magistrates, who were strangers to the land concerned. It could only, Pirani believed, lead to anomalies.⁶¹ Years later Manawatu settlers remained dissatisfied. The Manawatu Evening Standard noted even greater anger than the previous year with the valuations within the Manawatu Road Board district, which had been increased despite the storm of the previous year.⁶²

The Board clashed with the Lands Department over specific projects, as well as the general method of valuation. It asked the Department to withdraw the plans and conditions of sale of the Momahaki Village Settlement as they differed with those authorised by Order in Council. The Board also believed that the proposed rents were too high, and that some of the best sections could be sub-divided for homestead sites. Adherence to the existing procedure, by which the Board

considered and approved all plans for selling Crown Lands, was also requested.⁶³ The Board's fears with respect to the Momahaki Village Settlement were apparently justified. Pirani noted that only 7 of the 11 sections were applied for, and two years later after the sections were surrendered and re-valued downward, only the original applicants applied.⁶⁴ Seddon claimed that the first valuation had been made by the Land Board, but this does not appear to be true. Pirani also complained about the way the Wellington Land Board had been illegally pressured by the Minister into making downward re-valuations in the Makuri and other districts.⁶⁵

The Land Board also devoted considerable time to roading in settlements. This was partly due to their importance, and partly due to the complex method of finance. Funding came from the 'thirds', which was a part of the purchase price which was handed to the relevant local authority, and could be used only for roads for the settlement from which the money had come. Initial requests for roads came from the settlers, and filtered through the road board to the Land Board, which could accept or alter the proposal.

Pirani argued that the priorities in planning settlement were the wrong way round. The existing system was to have the sections created first, then they were surveyed and roaded, the outcry for roads following settlement. Pirani argued that an engineer should go into new blocks first, mark the roads, then a valuer should go in to assess its potential for different uses, and lastly the surveyor would cut the block into suitable sections. This order, he believed, would result in a more satisfactory settlement.⁶⁶

Normally the Land Board collected the 'thirds' on behalf of the local body, and this could cause delays, confusion and buck-passing. The Commissioner replied to a report in the Evening Post that accrued thirds had not

been paid to the Pahiatua County Council because the Council had delayed sending in proposals for road projects.⁶⁷ When later asked by the Pahiatua County Council to collect back rates the Board asked for exact details as the government had remitted some rents in the relevant area.⁶⁸ The Board also needed to approve the plans before a Road Board could obtain a loan under the Loans to Local Bodies Act. Early in his parliamentary career Pirani moved for a return showing the amount of roadwork done for the Palmerston North Small-Farm Homestead Association, in return for the 'loading' for roads, and years later was to be complaining of the six-foot tracks that passed for roads in his district, which in some cases were merely goat-tracks.

When a R. Kent applied for more time to build a house and reside on his section at the Levin Village settlement the Board

resolved to inform Government the Village Settlers in this settlement cannot comply with the conditions of their leases or get timber to build their houses unless the roads are cleared and recommend that a grant be provided for this purpose.⁶⁹

Pirani pointed out to Ward that under the Government Loans to Local Bodies Act special settlements were unable to get loans for roadworks, but Ward, though sympathetic, said that the matter was a complex one. Pirani suggested that roads for which settlers had been waiting years should take priority over further land purchases.⁷⁰ The Manawatu Evening Standard was critical of Ward for supporting improved access to tourist spots while thousands of settlers regarded a road as a luxury rarely seen. The paper reported on a meeting at Te Kapua where settlers opposed using 'thirds' on roads as the sections already carried a 5/- loading, despite the fact that accidents showed the poor condition of local tracks.⁷¹

The various tenures, and attempts to make transfers from one type to another probably occupied more space in Land Board Minutes during Pirani's term than any other issue, and Pirani favoured the maximum freedom in tenure.

You will have to have the system of land tenure such that a man may have the choice of any system he pleases, and that, if he has taken up his land, he shall be at liberty to convert that holding into any other tenure he thinks is better for his purpose.⁷²

Pirani asked McKenzie whether he regarded it as reasonable that owners of small-grazing run leases could convert to perpetual lease with the right of purchase, occupation with the right of purchase, or lease-in-perpetuity; but village settlers did not have a right so extended to owners of 2,000 acres. McKenzie said he doubted that owners of small-grazing runs would transfer to tenures with higher rentals and greater restrictions,⁷³ but it remained true that others had rights which the small settler, Pirani's particular interest, did not. Pirani also requested a general proclamation that would allow all farm-homestead settlements to convert to lease-in-perpetuity if they wished, to replace the system of ad-hoc proclamations that were granted only on request. McKenzie's answer was ambiguous, saying the Department accepted the need for a Proclamation, but not clarifying what type was meant.⁷⁴

The Land Board received requests to change tenure to lease-in-perpetuity, and it granted these wherever possible, but depending on what type of lease the original was, legislation did not always allow a change. To the owner of a small-run section the best the Board could suggest was that the lease be surrendered and put up for selection again.⁷⁵

On the question of exchanging Small Grazing Runs for leases-in-perpetuity the Board decided to obtain an opinion from the Crown Solicitor,⁷⁶ but when this was received it was decided to forward the opinion to the Government and ask them whether in their opinion such an exchange should be allowed, eventually a later letter from the Surveyor General suggested a liberal interpretation, allowing an exchange wherever possible, and the Board decided to do that.⁷⁷ Between March and June 1894 the Board argued with the Land Department that it had interpretive powers which allowed it to approve exchanges of Special Settlement leases granted before 1892 for lease-in-perpetuity tenures, and at one point the Board agreed to request McKenzie that a test case be taken to the Supreme Court. Pirani and Hogg moved and seconded all the relevant motions, so they apparently took the lead on this issue and were in full agreement. Then in committee the Board decided to drop the matter for the moment.⁷⁸

The later 1890's saw Pirani shift to support for the freehold. In 1897 he believed that McKenzie "will have to give settlers the right to get freehold."⁷⁹ Pirani pointed out that many believed the 999-year leases were over-valued, and would press for reductions. He expected these to be granted, even though illegal, and in preference to this he believed the freehold should be granted. From 1899 the picture was complicated by the campaign of the Farmers' Union for freehold purchase at original price plus 1 percent compound interest. The Farmers Union played especially on tenants' fears that radicals would force revaluations of leases.⁸⁰ In 1900 Pirani introduced the Freehold to Crown Tenants Bill, which allowed lease-in-perpetuity tenancies to be converted to freehold, but Seddon withheld support as a matter of policy, and a first reading was refused 42-21.⁸¹ The Manawatu Evening Standard always gave

full encouragement to the Farmers' Union, defended it against labour criticisms, and ridiculed Seddon's Producers' Union; but the support was for the Farmers' Union as a settlers' interest group, rather than concern with the freehold. Pirani spoke at a Farmers' Union conference held in Palmerston North, but did not take a prominent role.⁸²

The complex regulations on improvements naturally occupied a considerable portion of the Land Board's time, particularly because many cases had to be treated individually. Partly this was straightforward administration such as the granting of extensions,⁸³ but it could also involve interpretation of regulations that came close to making policy.

Speculation and dummyism were important concerns of the Board, and they framed rules to try and prevent both. The Board granted the Commissioner the right to reject multiple applications for unsurveyed land unless the applications were for contiguous lands, and later granted similar powers for lease-in-perpetuity and occupation with the right of purchase sections. Dummyism was a particular bete-noire of McKenzie's, but Pirani believed it could be simply solved by restricting the area registered to one person under the Land Transfer Act, "if there were a limitation according to quality or value of the land, we should not have all the dodges that are tried at the present time."⁸⁴ Despite Pirani's sanguine hopes it seems unlikely, given the variety of tenures, that a solution was as simple as that.

Pirani's independence and hard-work on the Land Board could hardly go unrecognised.

Without doubt F. Pirani has been the life and soul of the Wellington Land Board, and the services he has rendered to the

settlers in this capacity cannot be over-estimated. He has championed their just rights, fought for the redress of their grievances, and shown an all-round capacity and intelligence that are not often to be met with in our public men.⁸⁵

Unfortunately it was Pirani's independence, and his preparedness to continually push his own ideas that was probably the main reason for his not being re-appointed to the Land Board. Typical of this was his ideas on the ballot. The existing system was that all who wanted a section entered the ballot, and sections allotted by chance. Pirani condemned this as unfair, immoral, and "one of the greatest curses of our land selection system"⁸⁶ at almost every opportunity. As an alternative Pirani argued that there should be a system of selection before the ballot, so that dummyists and speculators are removed from the list, leaving only the genuine settler; the selection being done by the Land Board or some similar body. At first Pirani accepted ballot for residue of applicants, but later said sections should be assigned in accordance with priority of application. Pirani was naive enough to see the selection process for lands for settlement leases as the first stage to the complete removal of the ballot.⁸⁷ One of Pirani's more surprising statements was his acceptance of his dismissal from the Land Board, accepting that because he and McKenzie differed markedly over the role the Board should play in land administration, and the degree of independence they should have, McKenzie was quite right not to re-appoint him; nor did Pirani believe there was any ill-will in either direction because of it.⁸⁸

As relations worsened between Pirani and the government he increasingly questioned the principles of legislation that he had previously accepted, but he continued to be willing to give the government credit over minor points. It was also true that some debates

drew Pirani closer to the government, while on some general principles one can detect differences between Pirani and the government at an early date. Pirani's movement away from the government on land issues was not, therefore, a step by step progression, and it is not possible to say that at a particular point in time a clean break was made. Pirani welcomed the Threshing-Machine Owners Lien Bill, which gave the machine owners a lien on a crop to the extent that it had been threshed, and suggested that it should be extended to grass-seed cutting.⁸⁹ Unfortunately this was a private bill, and it was not passed. Pirani congratulated McKenzie on the 1895 Fencing Bill, which he believed would remedy an issue which had caused injustice and high feeling in his district for years.⁹⁰ On the other hand he moved that when sheep were found to be infected with lice at public yards the Inspector should be able to proceed against the person who owned the stock prior to the sale he did not receive government support, and the amendment was lost 30-7 in committee.⁹¹ Pirani also asked if compensation could be given for cattle ordered to be destroyed, but McKenzie said that this was done in limited cases, and he would be wary of giving blanket compensation.

Pirani lined up behind the government against more radical land legislation. He was as critical of O'Regan's Free Land Bill as he had been of Russell's revaluation measure. O'Regan openly said he introduced the measure to enable a debate on the Single-tax, but Pirani said that

there are no doubt, many difficulties in the way of land-settlement, but nobody will say for a moment that the introduction of the single-tax in connection with our land-laws at the present time will remove those difficulties.⁹²

Pirani's first concern was the small settler, but he lacked commitment to any theoretical solution to settlement problems.

Pirani suggested to Ward that the Land-Tax could be collected from crown-tenants over a specific value. This he believed would increase revenue without creating any hardships.⁹³ Presumably those affected would only be the larger leaseholders; Pirani was critical when rebates were granted to lands for settlement tenants who paid promptly. He believed that those who could pay promptly, by definition, needed the help least, and that there was no demand for general rebates. Pirani joined the stone-wallers who tried to delay the measure, speaking at length, but with little relevance, and threatening to bring up 40 clauses during the committee stage. When there was added the liberals who wanted to extend the rebate to all crown leaseholders Seddon at one stage was relying on the Opposition for a quorum, but he eventually forced the bill through.⁹⁴

Pirani grew increasingly critical of the Lands for Settlement legislation. In 1894 he had suggested that for any district where estates were to be compulsorily purchased those with least improvements should be purchased first, and those with the most last. He later elaborated this to no compulsory purchase where unsold Crown land existed, and compulsion should be used in the sequence - absentee unimproved land, unimproved land, improved land.⁹⁵ Pirani's objectives were to ensure that purchases were so far as possible fair, and that purchases were carried out under a uniform policy. For the same reasons Pirani tried but failed to restrict the Cheviot Estate Disposition Bill so that only unoccupied crown land could be taken, rather than any land. He did make one technical improvement to the Bill, which had allowed repossession if any Order in Council made under the Act was not complied with; Pirani extended

repossession to include non-compliance with the Act itself.⁹⁶ The 1897 Lands for Settlement Amendment Act allowed the purchase of areas of under 500 acres, if within five miles of large cities, for workmen's homes. Pirani believed that this "justifies the strictures passed upon compulsory acquisition of land by the opponents of the Government several years ago",⁹⁷ that compulsory purchase endangered not just the large land-owner, but the small as well. Pirani grew increasingly critical of the actual purchases, saying that the land was unsuitable,⁹⁸ which in some cases was fair comment, even the sympathetic Drummond had to admit that Pomahaka had not been successful.⁹⁹ Pirani never switched to wholesale condemnation of the government, and the Manawatu Evening Standard was reluctantly forced to admit that the government sincerely desired to encourage closer settlement, and that the Land for Settlement Bill, though it could be improved in many ways, had general approval.¹⁰⁰ The promotion of J.W.A. Marchant to Surveyor-General was regarded as due recognition, "there are few men in the service with such a grasp of the principles of land settlement, and so well able to apply them to practical use;"¹⁰¹ while T. Duncan was equally praised.

If painstaking inquiries, untiring energy and a careful attention to the wants of settlers will make a successful Minister of Lands, the Hon. T. Duncan is bound to satisfy the people of the colony,"¹⁰²

elaborating on the favourable impression Duncan had made at a local meeting.

Always Pirani was looking for ways to minimise the difficulties of the settler, he regarded this as his sole purpose on the Land Board.¹⁰³ He argued against the provision that every applicant who does not pay a deposit in advance must attend the sale in person to pay it. Pirani suggested that all should pay a deposit

to the nearest Post Office, and receive it back if they did not obtain any land. Pirani believed this would be less confusing than paying the Land Office. This would also have the advantage that it would be certain that all applicants had the deposit, and hence any need for a second ballot would be avoided.¹⁰⁴

Pirani also suggested a change in the law that required each settler to pay £20-£30 for survey fees; he regarded this as too much cash to expect every settler to find. He also tried to get the dates of Wellington land sales altered, so that they didn't clash with Land Board meetings, which inconvenienced people who had to come to Wellington for Board meetings.¹⁰⁵

Pirani pointed out that the 1892 Land Act had made it "impossible for a married woman to become the lessee of any Crown land in the colony"¹⁰⁶ and that attempts to correct this had failed. McKenzie admitted that the failure was due to clerical error, but was somewhat casual about having it corrected. Pirani also believed that holders of perpetual leases or leases in perpetuity should be able to sub-divide, so long as the resulting sections were economic.¹⁰⁷ Pirani opposed the regulations that restricted, he believed unfairly, the number of sections that a family could take up. Applicants were restricted to one son over 21 per family, but Pirani argued that dummyism could be avoided without hurting families with several sons, especially as it is not sons, but daughters, who are normally used as the 'dummy'. Pirani tried to get the restrictions of only 2 members of a family being able to apply for allotments in the same block to applications for the same allotment, but this failed. He also tried to get the definition of family for this purpose defined as father, mother and children, and not all who are in prohibited degrees of relationship for marriage, but this too failed. Some years later a clause allowing family transfers was also lost.¹⁰⁸

Given the frequently poor land, and difficult access, the residence requirements often caused settlers difficulties, and these too received Pirani's attention. McKenzie opposed a blanket easing of the four years compulsory residence, as likely to lead to dummyism and speculation which would be difficult to regulate. Some years later Pirani moved a clause which would allow the residence requirements to be met by a substitute so long as the improvements were done, and the leaseholder was in permanent employment elsewhere. Pirani's normally uncritical admirer, the Evening Post, termed this a well-intentioned but debatable amendment which would greatly assist absentee speculators.¹⁰⁹

Always with land legislation Pirani's first concern was the interest of the small settler, especially the special settlements because they were particularly numerous in his district. He was only too well aware of the many difficulties of the bush settler, and he approached those difficulties without pre-conceptions. Pirani may once have believed in the Single-tax, but soon realised that it was of little of practical value to the pioneer. Part of the reason for Pirani's disagreements with the government over land legislation was that the government had half its mind on the 1880's. Pirani remarked quite truthfully that the Lands for Settlement legislation might work in Canterbury, but was of little value in North Island bush areas.¹¹⁰

The government spent nearly five million pounds between 1893 and 1906 on the purchase of one million acres of freehold land. Over the same period it spent about £650,000 on the purchase of some three million acres of Maori land in the North Island.¹¹¹

The government did not fully appreciate the economic importance of the North Island bush area, and hence did not pay it the attention it deserved.¹¹² Added to this was Pirani's natural distrust of bureaucracy, and his championing of the Land Board on which he had served. This came into direct conflict with the methods of McKenzie, and with neither McKenzie or Pirani readily prepared to give up an idea once adopted, a considerable part of Pirani's disagreements with the Liberal government must be regarded as due to personality clashes. The one important point in Pirani's favour was his nearness to what the disagreements were all about. He was more likely to be able to gauge settler needs; also it seems unlikely that Pirani could have been returned to the House in 1896 and 1899 as an independent unless the settlers believed he had a good understanding of their problems.

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Chapter Seven

Pirani and Financial Policy

Over financial policy as with other matters Pirani was initially full of praise for government's efforts despite the departure by Ward in 1894 from Ballance's policy of self-reliance. While Pirani had doubts about the extent of the borrowing, and the use to which the funds were put, he remained in 1895 a defender of the Ministry. When Stout and others accused the government of illegal use of sinking funds¹ Pirani pointed out that it was legal when the permission of the Auditor-General had been obtained, under an act that Stout had himself passed. Pirani looked at the sinking funds issue and the borrowing with a degree of pragmatism, not to say confusion, which was most unusual, and probably indicative of Pirani's continued desire at that stage to defend the government during major debates, while himself having increasing doubts over both major and minor matters.

It appears to me ... that all this cry about the sinking fund ... is really so much wasted time, because the honourable members themselves, if they were in power, would do it just as readily as it is done now, provided it is legal. No one argues that these moneys are not taken for the benefit of the colony; no one argues that they are not used properly, instead of being wasted as loan-moneys have been wasted in the past.²

This speech was particularly ironic when one realises that after 1896 the misuse of sinking funds was a major plank of the Left-Wing. Pirani was concerned with the re-commencement of borrowing, and clashed with the government during the tariff debates.

Ward had initially said that increased government expenditure would be supported by current account surpluses, not borrowing, but from 1895 the annual loans were raised to cover public works, and despite surpluses with the return of prosperity loans became an automatic part of the government's financial policy. Pirani objected to this on principle, and to the way he believed Seddon passed his financial measures, arguing that Seddon deliberately delayed the Public Works estimates until after the financial statement, fearing that those of his own supporters who were dissatisfied with the former might block the latter.³ Pirani also attached what he regarded as misuse of the Public Accounts Committee, and the deliberate hiding of expenditures by transferring amounts between accounts, sometimes illegally. The tagging of accounts became so regular as to be normal, and estimates were habitually out by hundreds of thousands of pounds. All the particular objections of Pirani to Seddon's financial policy were to him symptoms of one fundamental issue - whether the Ministry or the House should control finance. Behind all Seddon's actions and procedures in finance was the determination that he should control finance, to ensure that it was used to continue the liberals in power. For Seddon liberalism was a matter of policies, such as old age pensions; so long as these were passed he was not concerned with the methods used to pass them, or, more exactly, with the methods used to ensure the continuance of a liberal majority. Pirani was far more of a purist; Liberals had to be right also over the way a thing was done. To Seddon this was a kind of inexplicable heresy with which he was not prepared to compromise; he was not prepared to have the carefully balanced inter-relationships between departmental estimates, loans and public works handed on a plate to a House which, deliberately or otherwise, might mangle them beyond repair.

Pirani was critical of the law which allowed amounts to be shifted from one part of the railways vote to another, making nonsense of what the House had approved. He admitted that Seddon was not the first to do this, but instead of reform he believed such abuses had increased under Seddon.⁴ Pirani made pointed criticism of £32,000 of stock sold by the Railways to Public Works near the end of the financial year, supposedly to give the accounts a better appearance, and then sent back to the Railways shortly afterwards. The transaction became public when the Auditor-General refused to approve the transfer back.⁵ He contended that at least £81,000 of the railway surplus was bogus, as it had been taken from special funds, and in committee he tried to limit the scope of such transfers, but this was lost 24-17.⁶ Seddon replied by admitting that special transfers were made into railways, but argued that revenue had been anticipated to allow work to proceed, that the fuss was quite unnecessary as there was nothing unusual in this and in any case the House was now approving the action.⁷ This was a little disingenuous, as had it not been for the Auditor-General, whom Seddon termed 'over-zealous', the House would probably have never known the details.

Pirani was sceptical of the value of taking any such matter to the Public Accounts Committee. He pointed out that the Committee had extensively investigated the matter of the Railways accounts, but no report had been seen, while the session was close to its end; nor indeed, was the Committee under any obligation to disclose anything.⁸ Pirani did not always fail; when the government tried to have correspondence between the Treasury and the Auditor-General on a 4 percent Debenture Loan sent direct to the Committee he started reading parts of it to the House, and when the Deputy-Speaker supported his right to do so Ward

agreed, with reluctance, to have the papers printed.⁹ In general, however, Pirani saw the Committee as principally a successful method of frustrating the House; he noted that during the 1899 session it had been termed the 'Premier's burial ground', somewhere which a difficult problem could be sent with the assurance that it would not emerge again, while simultaneously ensuring that the matter could not be discussed by the House.¹⁰ During his parliamentary career Pirani had a series of personal clashes with G. Fisher, one probable reason for which was that Fisher was chairman of the Public Accounts Committee in the late 1890's.

Pirani also had strong objection to the order in which financial matters were handled by the House. He argued that it was made difficult for the House to control both totals and individual items, or even discover the actual state of events.

In fact no one is more at sea in that respect than the Colonial Treasurer himself, whose efforts at forecasting the current year's prospects, even after a third of it has expired, excite derision by the ludicrous inaccuracy of the anticipations.¹¹

Pirani made a lengthy criticism of expenditure incurred after 30 June, which had not been authorised by the House, and which Pirani therefore believed to be illegal. When the Auditor-General had for the same reason declined to approve the expenditures he had been by-passed by Order-in-Council. When Seddon replied that the Auditor-General had misread the law, Pirani argued that the Solicitor-General had not been given all the facts.¹² When the Appropriation Bill came down early Pirani believed it was very difficult to tell what expenditure was, and members objected to 'wasting time' during the Bill's passage; but by the time the estimates came down half the money had been

spent, so the colony was virtually committed. To this problem Pirani had two answers. One was to lay before the House the full details of items of expenditure, instead of members having to request information on specific points, and frequently meeting a smoke-screen of delays. Pirani went so far as to say that were this done he would not object to the Audit Office being abolished,¹³ as the House would then be equipped to function in its place. The other answer was to alter the order in which financial measures were presented. Pirani asked why the British system was not followed,

where they are actually not allowed to spend a penny after the end of the ordinary financial year unless not only the imprest but the estimates as well have been passed by Parliament.¹⁴

It worked perfectly well, and the only objection which Pirani could see was that it might be inconvenient for the government. Seddon, of course, would have regarded that as more than sufficient reason for not adopting the system.

Seddon's response to criticisms in the House, and the tagging by the Auditor-General was predictable, but quite the opposite to what Pirani wanted. It came in the form of the Public Revenues Bill of 1900, of which Pirani was to be bitterly critical. Introduced during the final days of the session, it had the effect of giving a vote legal authority over an Act. Pirani saw this new principle as very important because he believed it was easy to smuggle a vote past the House, while the Auditor-General was now virtually abolished. Seddon said that the Bill arose from a specific case in which the Auditor-General had refused to sign debentures which were to be rebated at above par, arguing that the extra was not authorised. Under pressure of the consequences, termed by Seddon

"too awful to contemplate",¹⁵ the Auditor-General agreed to approve the rebate on condition that the matter was raised in the House. Seddon admitted that the Public Accounts Committee (apparently not so servile as Pirani sometimes suggested) had agreed that in law the Auditor-General had been correct in his original position, and also that he had been wise in waiving the issue. Even so Seddon believed that "there ought not to be this confining to the strict letter of the law without deviation whatever when it is a question of interfering with the administration."¹⁶ This was the crux of the matter, to Seddon the Auditor-General's principle occupation seemed to be putting tags on the Public Accounts. To dismiss him when he was acting within the legal function of his office might cause a storm which could damage even Seddon's position, so he tried to by-pass him. To Pirani the Auditor-General was the last and best defence of democracy against the 'autocrat', given Seddon's grip on the House. Seddon argued that as debentures were issued under several Acts, and he did not want a repetition of the previous incident, a general act was required, hence the present Bill. The debate started on a mild tone, but Seddon had probably deliberately left the measure until the last moment, hoping to rush it through without difficulties. When the flak started the tone changed. He bluntly accused Pirani of having special access to information from the Auditor-General. In describing the essentially minor difference which had started the affair, debentures changing from £100 at 4 percent to £103 at 3 percent, his arguing became a plea, almost a whine, for sympathy.

That was the whole trouble, and no one knew what he went through. It was no fault of his, it was through no action of his for his own part he had never yet gone on his knees but was every little thing, from a penny stamp upwards, to be made the subject of a tag? 17

It was not vintage Seddon.

In criticising the legislation for being rushed Pirani was able to prove his case when he pointed out that the clause dealing with debentures was absent from the first draft presented to the House. Seddon admitted this was an administrative error, but it was particularly embarrassing as altering the law in relation to debentures was a principal objective of the bill. Despite this Pirani's attempts to alter the bill in committee were to no avail.¹⁸ The Manawatu Evening Standard pointed out that in addition to the main issue also allowed were transfers of money from one express vote to another at Treasury discretion; the ceiling on unauthorised expenditure by Ministerial approval was raised to £150,000; and the Post Office could allow payments to any departmental limit, without reference to Parliament. The latter had been allowed in small amounts previously, but large amounts had been questioned by the Auditor-General. It was also the Public Revenue Bill which allowed the Government to raise members honorariums beyond the existing statutory limit, and was hence authority for what critics termed the '£40 steal.'¹⁹

Pirani's opposition to borrowing has already been noted. Not unexpectedly he grew more critical of the increase in the national debt under Seddon. During 1895 he defended the increased debt, just as he defended the use Ward made of Sinking Funds; he also supported loans raised to repay other loans, but reduce the overall debt;²⁰ but this soon changed. He argued that the effect of money borrowed to purchase Maori lands was greater than realised because the resultant rents were not off-set against the money borrowed, but credited to the Consolidated Funds, and hence gave a false impression of the current situation. He also argued that the level of borrowing was itself encouraging the growth in the Civil Service, and that

borrowing could be reduced if the Civil Service was also reduced to reflect the 'true' economic position.²¹ Pirani suggested that much more benefit would flow if any surplus that did exist was used to reduce the duties on the necessities of life, rather than increasing the Civil Service. Some criticism of borrowing was made as early as 1895 when Pirani said that Ward

actually asked the House to believe that, because the debt had decreased so much per head, that there was an actual decrease in the public debt of the colony; and it is surprising that there were actually 'Hear, hears' and cheers from honourable members in support of such a ridiculous statement.²²

Ward's more sophisticated approach was far more tenable than Pirani suggested. The absolute increase in the debt could be quite easily sustained in the long term if the economy grew at least as fast, and to this the population total was a reasonable rule of thumb for Ward to use.

In his final three years Pirani increasingly adopted a doom and gloom attitude to the economy, predicting collapse in the short or long term. The Manawatu Evening Standard argued that a surplus need not be a good thing because it was a sign that the country was being taxed beyond its need, and that the ideal Treasurer would balance the books exactly.²³ To expect anyone to balance the national accounts exactly was clearly unreasonable, and to make its point at all it was necessary for the paper to accept the government's figures at face value, which Pirani had not been doing for years. Within six weeks the paper was not only predicting financial disaster, but doing so on the basis of alternative figures.²⁴

Talking to his Ashhurst constituents Pirani said that

taking the financial outlook altogether,
there was considerable cause for alarm

at the extraordinary manner in which the expenses of administration were mounting up, and if, in sympathy with the rest of the world, a time of depression came on New Zealand in the near future, he regretted that we were never worse prepared to meet it.²⁵

The Manawatu Evening Standard readily quoted government supporters who were critical of government financial policy, but three such editorials in one week suggests a shrillness born of desperation.²⁶

The paper also said that "surely the politicians hardly know what they are about when they commit the country inconsiderately to this huge extra amount of interest."²⁷ Ward had a fairly exact idea of what he was doing. New Zealand still had a frontier, and still needed large sums for capital development. Notwithstanding Pirani's distaste of borrowing, especially from overseas, the London money market remained necessary to New Zealand's future economic growth.

Pirani made continued criticism of the late delivery or complete absence of returns which had been requested; he said that he believed one return he had asked for had not yet been furnished only because its content would assist in criticism of government policy during the financial debate. Two other members, Wilson and McGuire, used the opportunity to make similar remarks.²⁸ During 1898 Pirani made a campaign of continued requests for the B-I, the government's accounts, and refused to take the need for complete accuracy as any kind of excuse, while admitting that the return was no later than normal.²⁹

From the late 1890's at least until Pirani left the House the Auditor-General put a series of tags on the public accounts, over both major and minor matters, and on several occasions refused to approve transactions which he believed illegal or contrary to the accepted procedures. With others Pirani became a

champion in the House of the Auditor-General and his office. Behind the disputes was a wider principle, the function of audit as a check independent of ministerial control. Seddon regarded the difficulties as a nuisance without any benefit to the country. Pirani saw them as a necessary check on the Seddon system, an absolutely necessary supplement to the control of finance by the House, especially as the House as a whole could not be relied upon to exercise its independence if the result was a severe embarrassment for the government.

Seddon was not the only Minister who did not appreciate audit tags, or who had little understanding of the function of an independent audit. Cadman, a minister for whom Pirani normally had considerable respect, said on one occasion that he believed he was being hounded for personal reasons by the Audit Department, and that if the Public Accounts Committee could prove he had done wrong he would resign.³⁰ The Feilding Star believed events had shown that the Auditor-General was doing his job fearlessly, and hoped this would continue.

Seddon argued that Pirani's support did the Auditor-General more harm than good, and that Pirani could only raise many of the matters which he did because he had special and improper access to the Auditor-General.³¹ Pirani never refuted this or asked for a retraction. Pirani had particularly sharp things to say about the Solicitor-General when his legal opinions allowed actions which the Auditor-General had not approved. On one occasion the Auditor-General had blocked public works under the Land for Settlement Bill, but the Solicitor-General allowed it to proceed by saying that under the Bill 'laying of roads' included their construction. This appears a not unreasonable interpretation but caused Pirani to comment that "an elastic conscience like that is a convenient

possession for a Solicitor-General under the present regime."³²

During 1899 there was a particularly strong clash between Pirani and Seddon over a tag of technical education funds.³³ The problem arose from mistakes which appear to have occurred in both Education and Audit Departments, which meant that the payments in question could not be made from unauthorised allowances. Pirani asked for correspondence from the Audit Department, but Seddon chose to believe he was requesting correspondence from the Dunedin and Wellington Education Boards, then expressed surprise that Pirani knew of the existence of correspondence from the Audit Department. Seddon seemed concerned principally to talk at great length without adding to anyone's understanding, while Pirani concentrated on exonerating the Audit Department from even the slightest blame, though Seddon said this was only causing the Auditor-General more trouble. "It is a pity, for the sake of a deserving public servant such as the Auditor really is, that he should have as an acquaintance the member for Palmerston, who is everlastingly bringing him into trouble."³⁴ To Seddon the continuous enquiries in the House were an embarrassment for which he in part blamed the Auditor-General personally. One minor result of the publicity caused by the Audit Department's actions was that salaries within the department were relatively low, Ward himself reluctantly admitted that this was possibly true.³⁵

The Public Revenue Act did not muffle completely the differences between the Audit Department and government. In 1901 the Bank of New Zealand was due to repay £500,000 in shares issued to the government in 1896. According to the Act of 1895 payment was to be made to the Public Trustee, but the government

wanted to pay the accrued dividends, £5,657 10s 6d, into Consolidated Funds, and this the Auditor-General opposed. Asked for a legal opinion the Solicitor-General said that it could be done, if, using the Interpretation Act, the Banking Act received such interpretation as would best achieve its intent. The Manawatu Evening Standard regarded this as little more than the government doing what it liked,³⁶ and the paper would seem to have a case, the Interpretation Act does not allow one to go contrary to the clear wording of an Act, even if doing so would be closer to the act's general intent. A £1.5 million repayment from the Bank of New Zealand was put into the common fund, not a special account, hence the Auditor-General tagged the Account of the Public Trustee. Ward was now faced to admit that both he and the Solicitor-General were wrong in his disagreement with the Auditor-General's action.³⁷ The Manawatu Evening Standard reported that relations between Warburton and Seddon were at a new low, and that Seddon was considering bringing a request to the House that the Auditor-General be suspended.³⁸ Not for the first time Pirani said that if Seddon could prove that the Auditor-General had knowingly made wrong decisions with the intent of harassing the government then Seddon should dismiss him.³⁹ Despite his difficulties Seddon was not prepared to go that far.

Financial policy and administration was not one of Pirani's strong points. Seddon's financial management techniques included a strong element of expediency, but Pirani's criticisms lacked focus. Possibly his moralistic attitudes, shown in condemnation of gambling, and his lack of sympathy for financial institutions, caused his simplistic approach to financial policy. Certainly his strictures against borrowing generally lacked precision, and where they did not they showed ignorance of even elementary economics. His defence of the Auditor-General was in line with his appreciation of clean,

correct administration, but was probably also due to Pirani viewing Warburton as a hold-over from the Ballance days. It seems very likely that Pirani did have access to confidential information, and it may be that Warburton was a personal friend, though there is no formal evidence of this. Neither borrowing nor accountability were issues that were likely to do fundamental damage to Seddon while the economy improved, as it clearly did from 1896. The shrillness of the Manawatu Evening Standard, and the economic doomsday that Pirani saw as just round the corner, from about 1899, only decreased Pirani's effectiveness. He could be on occasions a nuisance to Seddon, but in the financial field Pirani's own limitations left him without any more solid achievements.

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- 1 A sinking fund is a fund accumulated from normal income during the term of a loan to enable repayment of the capital sum. A number of sinking funds were created due to Ward's borrowing, but most controversy existed over the supposed misuse of sinking funds designed to repay the capital sums of loans for local body developments. The accumulated reserves of sinking funds can represent a temptation to a government in need of cash to balance annual accounts.
 - 2 NZPD, 88, 449 (6 Aug. 1895).
 - 3 NZPD, 103, 580 (6 Sept. 1898).
NZPD, 112, 150 (25 July 1900).
 - 4 NZPD, 104, 469-470 (30 Sept. 1898).
 - 5 NZPD, 105, 79-82 (17 Oct. 1898).
 - 6 NZPD, 105, 820-825 (4 Nov. 1898).
 - 7 *ibid.*
 - 8 NZPD, 105, 537 (28 Oct. 1898).
NZPD, 105, 820 (4 Nov. 1898).

- 9 NZPD, 117, 639-640 (28 Aug. 1901).
- 10 NZPD, 111, 215 (3 July 1900).
NZPD, 117, 642 (28 Aug. 1901).
NZPD, 120, 52-53 (8 July 1900).
- 11 MES, 17 Jan. 1902 p. 2.
- 12 NZPD, 102, 93-94 (28 July 1898).
- 13 NZPD, 122, 951 (3 Oct. 1902).
- 14 NZPD, 120, 15 (2 July 1902).
- 15 NZPD, 115, 312 (16 Oct. 1900).
- 16 NZPD, 115, 313 (16 Oct. 1900).
- 17 NZPD, 115, 313 and 317 (16 Oct. 1900).
- 18 NZPD, 115, 353 (16 Oct. 1900).
NZPD, 115, 406 (17 Oct. 1900).
- 19 MES, 20 Oct. 1900 p. 3.
MES, 26 Oct. 1900 p. 2.
- 20 NZPD, 85, 448 (5 Sept. 1895).
- 21 NZPD, 95, 145 (27 Aug. 1896).
- 22 NZPD, 95, 143 (27 Aug. 1896).
- 23 MES, 15 Sept. 1900 p. 2.
- 24 MES, 31 Oct. 1900 p. 2.
- 25 MES, 14 Dec. 1901 p. 2.
- 26 MES, 5 Sept. 1901 p. 2.
- 27 MES, 4 Jan. 1902 p. 2.
- 28 NZPD, 103, 353 (30 Aug. 1898).
- 29 NZPD, 104, 533 and 534 (5 Oct. 1898).
NZPD, 104, 469 (30 Sept. 1898).
NZPD, 104, 527 and 528 (5 Oct. 1898).
NZPD, 105, 38 (14 Oct. 1898).
- 30 FS, 19 Oct. 1898 p. 2.
- 31 NZPD, 105, 822 (4 Nov. 1898).
- 32 NZPD, 116, 538 (19 July 1901)
see also NZPD, 103, 191 and 192
(25 Aug. 1898).

- 33 NZPD, 107, 255 and 260 to 264 and 270
(28 July 1899).
- 34 NZPD, 107, 272 (28 July 1899).
- 35 NZPD, 115, 524 (19 Oct. 1900).
- 36 MES, 30 July 1901 p. 2.
- 37 MES, 24 July 1901 p. 2.
- 38 MES, 28 Aug. 1901 p. 2.
- 39 NZPD, 117, 547 (22 Aug. 1901).

Chapter Eight

Pirani and the Maori Policy

Pirani's consideration of Maori¹ policy was mainly with reference to Maori land, with only slight consideration given to the much broader question of the possible Maori role in New Zealand society. This reflected not only the interests of his constituency, but the contemporary outlook of pakeha, and to a lesser extent Maori, society. A series of Native Land Acts dominate legislative concern with the Maori in the 1890's; until the turn of the century the principle objective was to purchase Maori land for settlement in a way believed fair and satisfactory to the Maoris. The presumed settlement need meant that the possibility that only by not purchasing the land could the pakeha be just to the Maori was not considered. The attitude was readily tolerable to pakeha conscience because until after 1900 it was generally accepted that the Maoris were a dying race, and hence had no long term need for their land.

As his own solution to the Maori land question Pirani championed the principles of the West Coast Settlement and Reserves Act of 1892. The Act had never been intended as a general solution to the treatment of Maori land, and was never so regarded by the government. The legislation was concerned with Maori land in Taranaki which was leased by pakeha settlers. The legal disputes had been lengthy and complicated. Under the original agreement the value of improvements was to go to the Maori owners, but an Act of 1887 had given the improvements to the lessees. This in turn had been invalidated by the Supreme Court, and here matters rested until 1892. Ballance introduced the 1892 Act, and evidently had considerable influence upon its

drafting. This may explain in part Pirani's attitude to it, but the major reason was probably that it both allowed settlement, and kept ultimate land ownership in Maori hands. The principle of the Act was that rent was on unimproved, not improved, value; and the lessees were to pay the Maoris the full value of improvements.² If the lessee was unable to meet the full value of improvements the Public Trustee could advance the full amount and take a mortgage. In return for accepting this the lessees are granted security of tenure in the form of 21-year renewable leases. The position of the Public Trustee was an extremely powerful, pivotal one. He decided values in the event of disagreements, and he negotiated with the lessees on behalf of the Maoris; he also had control of the disbursement of the funds to the Maori owners. Though in theory the land remained owned by the Maoris, the Act appears to give fee simple title to the Public Trustee,³ and the Government could in any case purchase the freehold for its own purposes. It was feared this could be used by lessees as a back-door way of gaining the freehold.⁴ Carroll later added that the 1892 Act "gave the whole power of administration to the Public Trustee."⁵ In general the legislation was greeted on both sides of the House as a genuine attempt to be fair to both settlers and Maoris. Rolleston and others were wary of the powers granted to the Public Trustee, but few were seriously opposed to the measure as a whole.⁶ It is indicative of attitudes to the Maori that in 1893 the Act was amended to allow native owners themselves to lease the land without having to tender for doing so.⁷ When the Act was originally drafted control was completely taken out of the hands of the Maori, and the possibility that they might wish to work their own land overlooked. This fitted Pirani's attitude, while he believed in justice for the Maori he had no faith in the Maoris ability to control their own affairs.⁸

Pirani firmly believed that purchase of the Maori land by the state would not only allow settlement, but would end the speculation, corruption of the Native Department, and endless legal disputes, which had characterised the Maori land issue in the past.⁹

Pirani's belief that this could be done by taking the principles of the 1892 West Coast Act, and using them for all Maori purchases was never accepted by the government, which regarded the Act as a specialised piece of legislation only, intended to end a particular difficulty. Pirani believed this was in part due to a refusal by Seddon to follow through legislation passed by Ballance. Pirani argued that Ballance had intended the 1892 Act to be a try-out of the new principle, but there is no evidence that this was Ballance's intent. The Native Land Purchase and Acquisition Bill of 1893 allowed for leasing of Maori land by settlers, as well as purchase, but it did not become law, though it was given a third reading. Pirani's beliefs meant Maori policy became to him one area where Seddon had betrayed the Ballance legacy.

To Pirani one of the biggest advantages of the 1892 Act was that it avoided the need to spend public money on the purchase of the land, and hence extensive borrowing was avoided.¹⁰ Pirani used every available chance in the House to repeat his ideas, until he admitted that "I am tired of repeating the truism that in the West Coast Reserves Act the Government have the solution of the Native-land difficulty - economical, efficient, satisfactory, and just"¹¹

Certainly one would not be surprised to learn that the government was tired of hearing it. Pirani's refusal to mute his support for ideas which clearly were not going to gain general approval was one of the reasons for his worsened relations with the government.

Pirani remained able to score useful points for the Maoris, within the limitations he imposed upon himself. He defended the position and actions of the Public Trustee in respect to Maori lands, arguing that the suggestion that the Public Trustee be replaced by a Board, or at least that a new trustee, "do as he ought, in fairness to the settler,"¹² was trying to by-pass the fact that the trustee was obliged to administer solely in the interests of the beneficiaries. Pirani did not see the object of the exercise as merely taking land from the Maoris, he genuinely wished the end-result to be satisfactory to the Maoris. Pirani made a blistering attack upon the air of virtue behind which, he believed, the government muddled and tinkered while the Maoris gained little benefit because so much of their income was eaten up by costs. He gave an example of an income of £750 from which £288-19-10d was subtracted for legal fees.¹³ Pirani called for a review of the legislation as a whole by a special committee unconnected with land administration or transactions. His object was to replace the annual amendment acts by new and comprehensive legislation,¹⁴ then, Pirani believed, the Maoris would get the benefit of the revenues in full.

In 1898 Pirani introduced his own bill, the Administration of the Lands of Natives Bill. Seddon immediately raised the objection that it dealt with public money and with public reserves, as well as the Maori lands vested in the Public Trustee, and hence could not be introduced as a private measure. Pirani challenged this, so Seddon then argued that it was really only Seddon's own Bill of 1893 with a few additions. With this Pirani agreed, adding that as Seddon had so often made private members' bills government measures, he could hardly baulk at the reverse.¹⁵ The Speaker withheld judgement until the order of the day was reached, but Pirani had made his

point that he was only returning to ideas that the government had supported, and then dropped, but which he believed would solve all their problems.¹⁶

The Bill never went beyond a first reading.

By 1901 Pirani was willing to consider other solutions, though he remained as convinced as ever that Ballance's bill was the best. His support for Captain Russell's ideas may simply have been recognition that they were more likely to be accepted by the House, or may have been a reflection of his political shift to the conservatives and/or the prominence of the freehold issue.

If Maori titles are properly individualised under the system suggested by the member for Hawke's Bay, and if those individual titles were made incapable of alienation, I feel certain that it would result in very much greater satisfaction to the Maoris than administration by any committee or Council of Management, or any hybrid organisation, such as is proposed under this Bill

Maori Lands Amendment Bill . You will get no result, no satisfaction, but, as occurred in the case of Maori trustees and committees, heavy expense, with a good deal of waste and a good deal of humbug¹⁷

If Pirani believed strongly in justice for the Maori he just as strongly believed neither the Maoris or their institutions would achieve it alone. "The present system of holding Maori lands in common is detrimental to the natives from both a physical and financial point of view."¹⁸ Defending Pirani against Maori criticism of his attitude to the 1900 Maori Land Act the Manawatu Evening Standard said that

it is admitted by all who have had anything to do with Maori lands that, as a general rule, the Maoris themselves are utterly unfit to have complete control of their own

lands, that they are only too willing to sacrifice any future advantage for present gain. 19

Pirani saved some of his heaviest scorn for Maori trustees.

It is notorious, from one end of this Island to the other, wherever there is such a person as a Maori trustee, that he is not in the slightest degree aware of what a trust really is,²⁰

and as a consequence money goes astray, and income is far less than it could be. Pirani made no attempt to hide his belief that Maoris needed to be protected from themselves.

Like all idle people, Maoris are rather fond of litigation I think therefore it is necessary in connection with Maori legislation to protect the Maoris against themselves and against those who are always ready to prey upon them.²¹

Pirani believed that the Land Titles Protection Bill made a mistake when it gave Maoris the initiative to start action, suggesting that an independent tribunal would be better. In committee he tried to have the initiative transferred to a Supreme Court judge, but this was heavily defeated.²²

Motivated with good intentions Pirani was wary of carrying such a policy too far in case it removed innate rights of a British subject. This and the support for inalienable, individual holdings are the only pointers which suggest that Pirani saw the Maoris as having a permanent future in New Zealand, in which the Maori was the social and economic equal of the pakeha, but as Pirani never elaborated, one cannot be certain that he believed the Maoris would survive as a race, and if they did what their place would be in

New Zealand society. Reaction to the suggestion that Maoris go to the Boer War showed that, though qualified by protestations that no offence to the Maori was intended, it was going too far to have Maoris kill fellow whites, even Boers.

It is not surprising that the proposal to send a hundred Maoris with the sixth contingent has aroused a storm of indignation throughout the colony, Not that there is any intention to belittle the Natives or to cast a slur upon the fact that they could not in any sense of the term be called white troops, but because it would be a highly improper thing to raise the question of employment of aboriginals in a war between white races.²³

One is told droves about racial attitudes in Pirani's day if, while no 'slur' was intended, the suggestion remained 'highly improper'. Evidently London agreed with the Manawatu Evening Standard the Secretary of State for the Colonies cabled Seddon that "political considerations peculiar to South Africa render it impossible"²⁴ to accept Maoris for service.

Pirani was quick to come to the defence of Maoris where he believed they were unfairly treated, whether the matter was large or small. He made the Horowhenua land issue a particular interest, speaking on it at considerable length for several years.²⁵ Under the 1897 Native Land Act the Public Trustee had both to administer the land and advance money that was derived from it. Pirani argued that the Public Trustee had only to lend to himself for the Act to be misused to create a source of funds for the government. To avoid this Pirani "had succeeded in having the name of the Public Trustee struck out, with the result that not a single acre of land had been treated under the Act."²⁶ It was frequently complained in the House that Maoris received preferential treatment in

the payment of taxes and rates, but Pirani argued on more than one occasion that this was more than compensated by special taxes that the Maoris paid. He pointed out that in addition to special taxes at Parihaka a new government official had tried to impose full death duties, though this was beyond the means of the Maoris, but fortunately had been reversed by the Supreme Court.²⁷ When R. Thompson, Marsden, said that Maoris paid no taxes on their lands Pirani listed a series of taxes paid by some Maoris in Taranaki which were not paid by pakehas - a wheel-tax on every vehicle; two tolls within a distance of 32 miles; half the local rates levied by local bodies; the accumulated rates under the Crown and Native Lands Rating Act, something no European paid, which could be substantial; and 10 percent, he thought, on lands leased for more than 21 years. Pirani believed "the taxation was entirely out of proportion to the benefits received."²⁸ To cap it all the Land Registrar tried to impose a tax equivalent to what would have been paid had the land been freehold and held by a pakeha; which, Pirani pointed out, would on occasions have been many times the rental. He said that he believed in equal taxation, but applied with commonsense. "They should not put such burdens on the Natives as would make their land not only unprofitable to hold, but a positive nuisance to those who possessed it."²⁹

The same preparedness to learn the dry details which characterised Pirani on the land issue showed itself on the question of Maori policy. We have seen above his knowledge of local taxes. On another occasion Pirani was able to prove both Seddon and Stout wrong. Stout had said there was a 10 percent tax on Maori leases, but Seddon said that it had been abolished. Pirani said that it had been abolished in 1893, but re-enacted in 1894 at 7½ percent for leases over

21 years, and this was confirmed by Ward to be the correct position.³⁰ Ward said that when annual revenue came from the land he regarded a Maori contribution as only reasonable, but was willing to follow the feeling of the House, Pirani took the opportunity to say that it was "an iniquitous tax on the Maoris, and, if anything can be done to take that tax off, I think it certainly ought to be done."³¹

Pirani's strictures on Maori administration of the past, that it had been unjust, inefficient, and corrupt, were to a considerable extent justified. He had expected Ballance to alter this with broad, new policies, and when Seddon did not provide them, particularly when Seddon clearly had no intention of following Pirani's own suggestions; he came to believe not just that the government were not listening because they simply disagreed, but because they had more dubious reasons of their own. He argued that Carroll, by claiming that the Native Reserves Bill was largely a machinery one, was hiding the real purpose of the Bill, which was "to take away from the poor and distressed Maoris their share in the rents of the land,"³² adding that "the honourable member for Waiapu would soon earn the title of the Minister who was divesting the Maoris of their lands; at the rate he was going."³³ Pirani also pointed out that in addition to granting the Public Trustee the machinery to handle the appropriate money, the bill allowed appeal against the Public Trustee to the Minister and a judge of the Native Land Court; but Pirani argued that the latter, as a ministerial appointee, was unlikely to be completely independent; and that this granting to political officers powers which should be handled by non-political officers ran right through the government's Maori policy. This was something which Pirani had expected

would be changed by the Liberals but was not. The politicalisation of the public service was something which concerned Pirani in all government departments, but his objective of a 'cleaner' public service ran against a part of the Seddon system, which made use of government appointments to repay supporters. It was one area where Pirani found common ground with the conservatives, who called for the removal of politics from public service administration and appointments, and actually achieved it in 1912. Seddon was quite unwilling to alter his policy, pointed out that the Public Trustee had accumulated funds instead of disbursing them only because of a legal issue that was still being clarified, and said to Pirani that his "ignorance on the subject was in keeping with his consummate audacity."³⁴

During the Government Advances to Settlers Amendment Bill in 1896 Pirani asked McKenzie to consider the effect of a clause introduced by Hone Heke, which he believed would take from the Maoris all rights to gain loans under the Bill, despite the fact that Maoris had obtained them in the past, and more were pending, and were likely to succeed as some Maoris could offer quite adequate security.³⁵ Unfortunately the debate which followed became quite wide-ranging, and McKenzie became intensely annoyed at the delay caused in the passage of the measure. Pirani was an assiduous attender and participator of debates, and it was this which allowed him to raise points such as the above, when the less conscientious might miss the raising of Maori rights during a debate whose principle concern was not with the Maoris.

Unusually for Pirani he saved his kindest comments till last. He praised the 1902 East Coast Native Land Bill as a genuine attempt to solve a difficult problem, believed the freezing of the Bank of New

Zealand from litigation would prove beneficial, and commended Ward for his cooperative attitude in committee. A belief that Members should be excluded from the Board of Management, and that the term on the Board should be three years and not six, this did not alter the principle regret, that such satisfactory legislation had been delayed for so long.³⁶ It was the highest level of support Pirani had offered government sponsored Maori legislation since he had entered the House.

Pirani's general position on Maori policy remained unaltered. In his first two years in the House Pirani had termed government legislation the most just in New Zealand's history, but as the break with the Liberal Party came, though Pirani's actual ideas had not changed, his attitude towards government policy was quite different.

They the government have taken more of the Native lands away from them than any previous Government, and they have paid less for the Native lands. They have put more taxation on the Natives than any previous Government what the Government have done for the Native is promise, promise, promise; but so far as performance is concerned, they have not done very much. ³⁷

In his valedictory address Pirani chided members for their lack of interest in Maori affairs, emphasised the need for this to alter, and the benefit to be gained.

One matter, I think, is somewhat neglected by us, and that is that pakeha members do not take the interest they ought to take in Maori matters which come before this House. It is astonishing, if you do take a little interest in Maori affairs, what little games you discover going on, in spite of every attempt to do what is right in regard to Native affairs. And the Maori members are by themselves utterly helpless.³⁸

There is no evidence that Pirani had any special knowledge of Maori culture, and he does not seem to have envisaged any culturally independent future for the Maori people. What evidence there is suggests that Pirani expected the Maori people to merge with the pakeha. There is no evidence that Pirani's ideas on Maori land had the support of either the Maori members or the Maori people, and in fact history before and after Pirani appears to prove conclusively that the Maoris would not have accepted a solution which involved their alienation from the land, even if, in one sense, they remained the owners. The Manawatu Evening Standard supported equality in law.

The Natives should be brought under the same laws as the Europeans, and be called upon to pay their just share towards defraying the cost of roadmaking and other improvements which were directly benefiting their lands.³⁹

This could be no more than reflecting the expectations of the average settler in the Manawatu, who had to himself struggle long and hard for the same benefits. In a notice of amendments to the electoral law Pirani included the proposal that the Maori polls should be by ballot, as it was with pakehas.⁴⁰ Taken together this is not sufficiently conclusive to be certain about Pirani's general beliefs about the future of the Maori. His constituency did not require that Maori policy be a major concern of his. In the Manawatu the land disputes had all been settled before the 1890's, the settlers had the land, it was breaking it in that was the problem. This could partly explain why despite the evidently genuine concern for the Maori it was concern which seems unconnected with a realistic appraisal of either the Maori's present or his future. Unconnected with any constituency demand Pirani supported a solution to

Maori land which was compatible with what had happened in the Manawatu, the Maoris had sold the land and it was being developed by Europeans, but which was unrealistic in terms of the actual position in regions where large areas of Maori land remained unsold. The Maoris were not in fact interested in losing control, and settlers were only initially interested in taking land on the basis of long-term leasehold. They would soon have wanted the freehold, just as they did when the land was leased from the government.

Again, in the absence of constituency basis, Pirani's concern for Maori rights probably stemmed not so much from a concern for Maoris as such, but from the fact that Pirani was prepared to champion any group which he believed was getting less than a fair deal, any group which he believed the political process was not granting an equal hearing. It was in this sense an impersonal concern, not a concern which came from any knowledge or inner understanding of the Maori people. Such a concern was encouraged by the discovery of 'corruption' in Maori policy, it became another stick with which to attack Seddon, and may also have been influenced by a belief that Seddon as a South Islander had no understanding of the Maori question, though Pirani never actually said this.

1 In Pirani's day 'native' was the standard term, Maori was used only infrequently, but as it is now virtually impossible to use native as a value-free word 'Maori' has been substituted throughout the thesis, except where the change would clearly be confusing or misleading e.g. in the middle of a direct quotation, or the title of statutes.

- 2 NZPD, 75, 365 (8 July 1892).
- 3 NZ Statutes, 1892, p. 64 (clause 4 of the Act).
- 4 NZPD, 75, 368 and 375, (8 July 1892).
- 5 NZPD, 80, 339 (1 Aug. 1893).
- 6 NZPD, 75, 367-368 and 374-375 (8 July 1892).
- 7 NZPD, 80, 337 (1 Aug. 1893).
- 8 To the modern mind Pirani's attitudes might appear contradictory, not to say racist, despite the sentiments of concern for the Maori. However, it is not part of this thesis to analyse Pirani's beliefs by modern ideas of race relations, so there will be no discussion of the extent to which Pirani would today be regarded as a racist.
- 9 NZPD, 86, 195 (21 Sept. 1894).
- 10 NZPD, 95, 144 (27 Aug. 1896).
- 11 NZPD, 119, 717 24 Oct. 1901 see also MES, 8 Feb. 1902 p2.
- 12 NZPD, 94, 335 (31 Aug. 1896, E. M. Smith).
- 13 NZPD, 99, 561 (5 Nov. 1897).
- 14 *ibid.*
- 15 NZPD, 102, 101-102 (28 July 1898).
- 16 NZPD, 104, 411 (28 Sept. 1898).
- 17 NZPD, 119, 997 (31 Oct. 1901).
- 18 NZPD, 117, 998, (31 Oct. 1901).
- 19 MES, 8 Feb. 1902 p. 2.
- 20 NZPD, 96, 402 (2 Oct. 1896).
- 21 NZPD, 122, 386 (17 Sept. 1902).
- 22 NZPD, 122, 385 (17 Sept. 1902).
- 23 MES, 29 Dec. 1900 p. 4.
- 24 MES, 31 Dec. 1900 p. 4.
- 25 This dispute was a very complex one, the origins of which lay in events which happened years before Pirani entered the

House. Though he was very critical of the government's handling of the dispute I do not believe a detailed consideration of it would illuminate Pirani's position on Maori affairs, hence it will not be considered further.

- 26 Seddon Papers 3-18 p. 58; MES 27 May 1898.
- 27 NZPD, 92, 308-309 (24 June 1896).
- 28 NZPD, 94, 335 (13 Aug. 1896).
- 29 *ibid.*
- 30 NZPD, 90, 184 and 188 (12 Sept. 1895).
- 31 NZPD, 90, 184 (12 Sept. 1895).
- 32 NZPD, 96, 437 (5 Oct. 1896).
- 33 *ibid.*
- 34 NZPD 96, 438 (5 Oct. 1896).
- 35 NZPD 95, 328 (3 Sept. 1896).
- 36 NZPD, 121 690-691 (27 Aug. 1902).
- 37 NZPD, 108, 653 (1 Sept. 1899).
- 38 NZPD, 122, 974 (3 Oct. 1902).
- 39 Seddon Papers 3/5. MES 21 Oct. 1893.
- 40 EP, 17 July 1902 p. 5.

Chapter Nine

Pirani and Railways

Railways were a key factor in the economic development of late nineteenth-century New Zealand. They in some cases caused development, more usually they followed closely behind the frontier, allowing large-scale movement of goods out of the region, and materials and people in. This was particularly true for the Manawatu, and hence as we have seen, gave railways a crucial role in the development of Palmerston North. Pirani on one occasion denied the importance of a railway line to Palmerston North, but he was merely trying to score a debating point off Seddon.¹ The railways had allowed the economic exploitation of Manawatu's forests, and thereby carried the region's economy firmly beyond the subsistence level. In later years they were equally important to the movement of meat and dairy products exports from the region. Pirani once moved successfully to make Tanner and Wilson members of the House Railways Committee, as representatives of the southern half of the north island.²

The liberals were opposed to the control of the railways by three independent Commissioners, but Ballance in the years 1890-1893 was not prepared to dismiss them before the end of their terms. Pirani had advocated their abolition during the 1890 and 1893 elections. He argued that Parliament was now democratic, would reflect public needs, and therefore should control the railways. The Commissioners, he continued, made profits at the expense of the workers, and by letting rolling stock deteriorate.³ After the Commissioners were abolished in 1895, Pirani maintained that ministerial control had fulfilled his expectations of improvements, equipment had been improved, the service was superior, and the

worker safer. Personal conversation with railwaymen confirmed that morale had improved.⁴

Pirani's criticism of railway policy was always low-key in comparison with most major issues. This may have been in part because there was no major departure from the 'Ballance tradition', the one clear Ballance policy plank on railways, abolition of the Commissioners, was achieved. The critical importance of railways to Palmerston may also have been a factor, but it is also likely that personalities were significant. In 1896 Pirani said of Cadman, the Minister for Railways, that "there was no member of the Ministry for whom he had greater admiration, or of whose abilities he had a higher opinion."⁵ When Cadman retired Pirani praised him as the only Minister who had dealt even-handedly with the Left-Wing.⁶ Considering Pirani's strictures of the government's financial policies one might expect criticism to increase when Ward became Minister, but Ward pushed through a classification system of the railway service which Pirani had advocated in principle, and which he praised in detail. It is probably worth remembering also that Ward was the only person who ever looked a possible alternative to Seddon as leader.

Pirani had a continuous concern for working conditions within the railway service, frequently arguing that the railwaymen deserved special consideration because of the inconveniences which they accepted to provide the public with the desired service. In 1894 in reply to a question from Pirani Seddon said that a clause granting railwaymen a Court of Appeal would be inserted in the Railway Bill.⁷ Shortly afterwards Pirani objected to a clause which removed railwaymen's rights held under the Civil Service Act. Seddon did not believe, on grounds of expense, that the hours and conditions of railwaymen merited special treatment,

but he removed the clause.⁸ Pirani tried to gain half-day holidays for platelayers, claiming that this had been granted in the past; but Cadman said no, listed special privileges already open to platelayers, and added that public safety, the need for platelayers in the event of an accident, must come first.⁹ Pirani argued for a greater away from home allowance for the lowest grades, pointing out that Seddon had promised it the previous session. Seddon mentioned the expense of even a small increase, Cadman the difficulty of a solution to suit all types of work, but both showed good intentions.¹⁰ The mild tone of criticisms continued in later years. The Manawatu Evening Standard believed that Ward's administration of the railways had been generally satisfactory in difficult circumstances, but took "exception to the paltry manner in which the railwaymen are being treated in connection with the Queen's funeral."¹¹ The paper did not believe that the railways could not be stopped for a day, as a concession "to the hardest worked Government servants in the colony,"¹² especially as the service all but stopped on Sundays anyway, when only a few excursion services from the four main centres ran. When in 1902 the government introduced a superannuation for railwaymen Pirani suggested that provision should be made to allow employees of the Manawatu Railway Company and the Midland Railway to enter the scheme at a later date.¹³ To ensure satisfactory administration of the railways Pirani was prepared to waive his usual aversion to highly paid officials. He objected to the Under-Secretary of Public Works being paid an extra £100 to be Under-Secretary of Railways as well, on the grounds that the latter required a full-time person. Seddon replied that the arrangement had worked quite well, and brought all construction work under the one official; but a year later Pirani was still expressing doubts about the arrangement.¹⁴

When the Railways Classification Bill was first

introduced Pirani gave it general praise, though he said the salaries were pitched somewhat low, and he questioned whether fines for minor errors would work satisfactorily. He also mentioned rights held by railwaymen under the Commissioners which had since been lost. In committee Pirani had fines of less than £5 removed, but appeals over fines still went to the Minister, not the Appeal Board.¹⁵ That he had not yet broken with the Liberals had not restrained Pirani on other issues, so it is far more likely that in not mixing abuse with his criticisms Pirani reciprocated Cadman's own fairness. The following year, 1897, Pirani asked if an employee could be allowed to appeal against his classification as of right, instead of only by leave of the Minister. Cadman replied that the Government was prepared to give any complaint a hearing, but he was clearly not willing to make the change Pirani had requested.¹⁶ This may have been simply to keep the number of appeals manageable, it is significant that Pirani did not use Cadman's refusal as grounds for an attack on 'ministerial power' and 'autocratic government.' He found the government accommodating when he moved to strengthen the importance of length of service.¹⁷

Pirani's relations with the government over railway matters were ^{not} always so smooth. In 1901 a ballast gang at Palmerston North went on strike over presumed grievances, and Pirani became their champion, even though he believed the men were wrong in striking. There was considerable correspondence between Pirani and the Railways Department over the facts of the case, each step of which was reported. Significantly, Pirani blamed the Department, not the Minister, for any disagreements. "I can hardly believe that the Railway Department have placed a correct statement of all the facts ... before you."¹⁸ The crux of the issue was

the demand of the men for either a rise to 1/- per hour or a travelling allowance. The Manawatu Evening Standard pointed out that no travelling allowance was paid, even when delays were no fault of the men. They had recently spent a whole day travelling from New Plymouth to Palmerston North, and on another occasion had been delayed for two hours at a station waiting for the express to pass; but on neither occasion had they received compensation.¹⁹ Mills saw things somewhat differently. He said that the men lived in Palmerston North, and worked at Taonui, near Feilding. As they were granted free travel by rail from Palmerston North to the place of work, instead of camping, as was usual, the travelling allowance had been refused. When this was done all sixteen of the men had struck without warning. He repeated the departmental position that the men's original requests had been unreasonable, they had been replaced, and the department did not believe that it could now re-employ them.²⁰ Pirani, contended that much of this was untrue. Mill's reply to Pirani shows the different perspective on the issue of the two men. Mills wired that when men strike, despite the existence of appeal procedures, "the discipline of a service such as the railway, where the employees number over four thousand, must be maintained in all cases, or the service would become disorganised."²¹ Mills did also say, however, that full enquiries would be made into Pirani's statements, to ensure that justice may be done to all. The latter hope was probably a little optimistic, especially as Mills clearly rated 'the discipline of the service' somewhat higher than Pirani, who concentrated on getting a 'fair deal' for the few immediately involved, with little regard for the general implications of the result. The government compromised to the extent that the strikers chances of future employment would not be harmed by the incident, but the men hired to replace the strikers

were not to be fired.²⁴ This did not satisfy all parties because the dispute continued. The paper printed the full text of a letter from Pirani to Mills, which was critical of railways procedures as star-chamber methods. Pirani said he believed Mills would agree that 7s a day was insufficient for casual work which involves travel. "To show the spirit of intolerance displayed by the Department"²³ Pirani noted that passes were refused the men for them to return home despite the distances they had to travel. Whatever it showed about the department it also showed Pirani's unwillingness to see other than his side of a question. The department could quite reasonably point out that as the men had been dismissed they hardly qualified for free passes. Pirani's letter had started with that combination of certitude and self-righteousness which probably annoyed far more than it convinced. "As you know I generally take up the right side - if it is not always the popular one - and in this case I am convinced I have made no mistake."²⁴ This continued pressure resulted in an inquiry which was held at Palmerston North, at which Pirani represented the men, and from which a report went to Wellington.²⁵ Somewhat surprisingly the matter is never referred to again by the Manawatu Evening Standard nor did Pirani mention it in the House. This complete silence is difficult to account for, but one can only presume that the inquiry made no difference to the existing situation.

A running sore of New Zealand politics during the 1890's was the Midland Railway. The English company building the line ran into financial difficulties. The Government was obliged as a matter of good relations with the London money-market to reach an agreement satisfactory to the English debenture-holders. In addition some South Island interests continued to support the line, at least in part to ensure that the money was spent in the South Island rather than on the North Island Main

Trunk. As Pirani gave both the South Island and foreign financial interests a low priority he was always critical of doing anything for the line, a position common in members of North Island seats, and with radicals. On one occasion Pirani suggested that the line should be seized,²⁶ while a year later he argued that rather than the government take over a white elephant it should be given to the debenture holders, whether they wanted it or not.²⁷

The Vaile railway system in the long run was of less historical importance than the Midland Railway but probably is of more historical interest. The Vaile system was invented by Samuel Vaile, of Auckland, and was advocated from the mid-1880's until after Pirani left the House. Put simply Vaile suggested that railway charges work according to a very limited number of zones,²⁸ structurally similar to that used by the Post Office. On a visit to London Vaile had been horrified by conditions in the slums, and his system was intended to assist settlement, and hence the development of rural areas. He argued that if railways had a uniform charge for a large zone covering a rural area, rather than charging on a mileage basis, settlement would be encouraged. Carriage over long distances in rural areas would in effect be subsidised by high charges over shorter distances in the more densely settled areas. Ideally Vaile proposed that a single uniform rate exist for the entire railway system. Supporters of the system advocated, on the expectation that it was more immediately attainable, a trial of the system over a selected section of the railway network. Amongst other virtues supporters viewed the Vaile system as more 'equal' and hence more 'democratic.'

Ballance's position is not entirely clear. He made sympathetic statements, but did nothing to implement them. Given his widespread support from small and intending settlers it would probably have been unwise for him to oppose the Vaile system, whatever his actual

beliefs. S. Vaile was an assiduous correspondent, but Ballance's replies were dominated by polite evasions, which emphasised a preparedness to give the Commissioners a fair opportunity to make the existing system work.²⁹ During the 1890's the Vaile system had considerable support amongst back-bench liberals, but at no time was it a matter over which any liberals were prepared to break with the party.

In his first session Pirani moved that a trial of the Vaile system be made, arguing that the existing tariff structure, covering seventy-two pages, was beyond comprehension.³⁰ Pirani was forced to deny that the Vaile system was a differential one, which proposed cheap rates for particular products. As the system had already been advocated for eight years any misunderstanding was probably deliberate, to confuse the issue. More cogently Seddon argued that a trial over a section of the railway network was not workable, that the change required virtually handing the railways to S. Vaile, which would require new legislation, and for this reason Seddon argued that a decision should be delayed until the Railways Bill was before the House.³¹ Pirani's motion was lost 27-20. Pirani continued to advocate the Vaile system, but unlike some other issues his attachment to the idea did not increase as it became apparent that it was a lost cause. The Manawatu Evening Standard argued that if a trial succeeded the benefits would be immense, but in the unlikely event of a failure little would be lost.³² The government feared a failure would not be accepted by the scheme's proponents as evidence of intrinsic flaws, and could prove costly. This risk the government was not prepared to take, while blaming the failure of negotiations over a number of years on S. Vaile's refusal to compromise.³³

Of far more concern to Pirani was the future of the Manawatu Railway Company. This line ran from Wellington

up the west coast to Palmerston North, and was completed in 1886. It had been financed by private capital; though it was generously treated by the government, for example with respect to land grants.³⁴ Originally the line was to be purchased by the government when it was finished, but this did not happen, and negotiations continued in intermittent fashion until the line was eventually purchased in 1908. Atkinson refused to purchase the line because of his policy of austerity, Seddon because he believed he could pressure the company to lower its price.³⁵ Everyone, including the company, agreed in principle with government purchase, disagreement existed only over the terms.³⁶ The situation was complicated by the building of the Rimutaka line by the government in the 1890's. This line went from the Hutt Valley over the Rimutaka Range and up the Wairarapa, and through the Manawatu Gorge to Palmerston North. It was claimed that the principal function of the line was to assist the development of the Wairarapa, and for this it could be justified despite the engineering problems, as there was no alternative way of providing an outlet for Wairarapa produce.³⁷ The line was also put in direct competition with the Manawatu line for traffic going north and south; this was losing sight of commonsense. As a main trunk route the Wairarapa line was too long, while the Rimutaka Hills imposed severe restrictions on the total weight that could be hauled.³⁸ Mills in his thesis said that he believed Seddon was trying to bankrupt the company, so that its assets could be purchased cheaply.³⁹ At the time the New Zealand Times believed that the government was trying to slowly break the company, and termed such tactics 'unworthy'.⁴⁰ Despite government policy the logic of geography ensured the company a sound financial history;⁴¹ which encouraged the company to hold out.

Pirani found himself in a difficult position. In the long-term he wished the government to take over the Manawatu Railway Company, but in the short term he defended the company and those who used it against what he regarded as unfair methods of competition. This problem was not unique to Pirani, nor was it new in the 1890's. In 1887 the Feilding Star noted that, either by error or design (with the latter being strongly implied) Palmerston North was not on the railway maps of New Zealand issued for the guidance of tourists.⁴² In 1892 J. G. Wilson M.H.R had urged the purchase of the Railway, but had also argued that if the government was not prepared to buy it should state a period for which this would hold true, so that the company could plan ahead.⁴³ In the House four years later Pirani repeated those sentiments.

In justice to that the Manawatu Railway company, the Government should take steps to assure them either that they did not intend to take the line out of their hands or that they intended to do so within a short time.⁴⁴

The company's charter put it in an essentially dependent position. The company was not allowed to undercut government rates, so that the company found its own charges tied to whatever the government decided to fix for the Wairarapa line. The longer distance of the government line was no protection, as the government cut its prices in an attempt to impoverish the company.⁴⁵ The Christchurch Truth noted that wool from the Manawatu via the Wairarapa cost 4/11d a bale for 145 miles, while in the south the same distance cost 8/-.⁴⁶ Natural suspicion meant that the company was open to accusations of over-charging. The Evening Post gave considerable space to such accusations by the Farmers' Union.⁴⁷ Unrealistic rates on the Wairarapa line was not the only form of government pressure. Pirani complained that the

block on the line at Woodville meant that people going from Napier to Wellington or vice-versa faced a considerable delay as they changed lines, or were obliged to take the longer government route.⁴⁸

Publicly Seddon never admitted that the Manawatu Railway Company was given anything more than normal, commercial competition, nor did he admit that any disadvantages existed in both lines competing for the same traffic. He did not even admit at first that the government was particularly interested in the Manawatu line. "The Government had never been approached by the Company to take over the railway by purchase or lease, and they were not going to run after them."⁴⁹

Seddon professed to believe that any money available could be better spent on closer settlement. The Manawatu Evening Standard continued to believe that government efforts to harm the company were hurting the district, without bringing a solution any nearer. A public meeting showed considerable dissatisfaction, but also uncertainty.⁵⁰

When the government under Seddon did negotiate with the company, disagreement seems to have been over relatively small amounts. Seddon was not prepared to buy at over thirty shillings a share. The company said it would accept thirty-five shillings, and then lowered this figure, though not to thirty shillings.⁵¹ The government believed that time was on its side, so it continued its campaign of 'friendly rivalry', while letting the negotiations take a leisurely course. The one disadvantage with this approach was that until the Manawatu line was integrated with the government system the North Island network could not be used to full effectiveness. The company lowered its offer to

thirty-two shillings and ninepence a share, but Seddon would not go over thirty shillings, and said that many shares were held by speculators, which was a red-herring.⁵²

When by mid-1902 negotiations remained stalled Pirani led a deputation to Joseph Ward, the Minister. The deputation included Field and Haselden, fellow members of the House, plus representatives from Palmerston North, Feilding, the East Coast, and the live-stock industry. As spokesman Pirani said that the deputation was not concerned with the railway's purchase, but the continued uncertainty which stemmed from the failure to conclude negotiations; he emphasised in particular the need for uninterrupted communication, for both people and freight. Ward denied any desire to injure any district or inconvenience settlers, and emphatically insisted that the Government had never had any intention of breaking the connection between Wellington and Palmerston North. On the point, however, of the company's tenure, Ward was more evasive. He was not prepared to guarantee the company independence for more than a year, should the negotiations over purchase fail.

Were the government to purchase the Manawatu Line full utilization would only follow the completion of the North Island Main Trunk line. In his final years in the House Pirani played a prominent role in the pressure for just that.

Because the issue affected interests in much of the North Island he was associated with a grouping of Parliamentarians which crossed party lines. The Manawatu Evening Standard reported that Parliament was inundated with petitions from the North Island, particularly Auckland, urging a

rapid completion of the Main Trunk Railway. About the same time, at a meeting of twenty North Island M.P.'s on the Main Trunk Railway Pirani was elected chairman, and it was decided that Pirani, O'Meara, Witheford and Napier should make arrangements for sending a deputation to Seddon to request that the Main Trunk receive a vote of £250,000.⁵³ Seddon's announcement that the Main Trunk's needs would be considered along with other projects, but would not have a special priority, was greeted with consternation. When Witheford, subsequent to Seddon giving what he saw as an unsatisfactory reply to a deputation of North Island M.P.'s on 15 September 1900, threatened to move that the government's railway proposals were inadequate, Seddon said that he would make such a motion a matter of confidence.⁵⁴ Seddon clearly believed that back-bench resentment was a lesser evil than a cross-party North Island alliance. To some extent Seddon failed. A subsequent meeting of M.P.'s was called by Witheford and chaired by Pirani. In addition R. Thompson, Stevens, Lang, Symes, Harries, Monk, I. Lethbridge, J. Hutchison, Houston, Smith, Napier and Hogg were present, and they unanimously agreed that all effort should be made to have the Main Trunk finished within four years.⁵⁵ On the other hand the grouping never achieved a major embarrassment of Seddon, and the Main Trunk was not finished for a further eight years. At no time did the issue look like creating a major cleavage in Liberal ranks. It was another sign that the parliamentary Liberal Party of 1900 was very different from that of 1890.

Considering the importance of railways to Palmerston North Pirani raised its particular needs on relatively few occasions. One issue that neatly combined railway facilities and settlers was pressure for improved stock-loading facilities. In 1896 Pirani suggested that the Department apparently

expected the settlers to catch and handle bullocks as if they were sheep.⁵⁶ In 1897 Pirani raised the issue again. Though the work had been delayed two years because of lack of funds Pirani said that he hoped it would be included in the current vote, as some exhibitors at the recently held A. and P. show had been so badly served by the lack of facilities that they had said they would not return unless they were improved.⁵⁷

Pirani also pressed for a new railway station for Palmerston North. Initially Ward suggested that this await the purchase of the Manawatu Railway so that experience of the increased traffic flow was gained, but six months later the Evening Post reported that a start has been made on a new station.⁵⁸ Pirani communicated to the Minister the local demand for a twice daily service between Palmerston North and Foxton.⁵⁹ As with more general questions, Pirani's approach was more subdued than on other issues. This could be because he had greater respect for the successive Ministers, or because he did not wish to embarrass Ward, or because personal experience brought home to him the very real administrative difficulties. The truth probably includes something of all of these elements, but the most important element of all was probably Pirani's own sense of honesty, his loyalty to his conception of how politics should be, which did not allow him to press local needs any further than he believed should be necessary to have them satisfied.

1 NZPD, 95, 143 (27 Aug. 1896).

2 NZPD, 84, 59-60 (25 July 1894).

- 3 NZPD, 85, 591 (11 Sept. 1894).
- 4 NZPD, 100, 477 (8 Dec. 1897).
- 5 NZPD, 92, 525 (1 July 1896).
- 6 NZPD, 107, 335 (1 Aug. 1899).
- 7 NZPD, 84, 593 (14 Aug. 1894).
- 8 NZPD, 91, 403-404 (16 Oct. 1895).
NZPD, 91, 492 (18 Oct. 1895).
- 9 NZPD, 94, 375 (14 Aug. 1896).
- 10 NZPD, 87, 107-108, 113, 116-117 (26 June 1895).
- 11 MES, 1 Feb. 1901 p. 2.
- 12 *ibid.*
- 13 NZPD, 122, 725-726 (29 Sept. 1902).
- 14 NZPD, 91, 178 (8 Oct. 1895).
NZPD, 91, 564 (22 Oct. 1895).
NZPD, 95, 427-428 (8 Sept. 1896).
- 15 NZPD, 96, 583 (8 Oct. 1896).
NZPD, 96, 637-638 (9 Oct. 1896).
- 16 NZPD, 100, 16 (16 Nov. 1897).
- 17 NZPD, 100, 922-923 (20 Dec. 1897)
- 18 MES, 10 May 1901 p. 2. F. Pirani to C. H. Mills, who was apparently acting on Ward's behalf to ease the latter's workload.
- 19 *ibid.*
- 20 MES, 10 May 1901 p. 2.
- 21 MES, 11 May 1901 p. 2.
- 22 MES, 20 May 1901 p. 3.
- 23 MES, 28 May 1901 p. 4.
- 24 *ibid.*, p. 4.
- 25 MES, 6 July 1901, p. 2.
- 26 NZPD, 87, 310 (3 July 1895).
- 27 NZPD, 92, 202 (19 June 1896).
- 28 Lloyd H. D. Newest England, notes of a Democratic Traveller in New Zealand, with some Australian companions, New York 1900 pp. 76-81 for a reasonably clear and fairly detailed description of the Vaile system.

- 29 J. Ballance to S. Vaile 9 Feb. 1891, BPOC, Letter Book 2, letter 10. see also Ballance to John Parr Esq. 18 July 1891 BPOC, Letterbook 2, letter 303. Ballance to S. Vaile, 26 Feb. 1891, BPOC, Letterbook 2, letter 52. Ballance to S. Vaile, 29 July, 1891, BPOC, Letterbook 2, letter 322. Ballance to S. Vaile, 18 Aug. 1891, BPOC, Letterbook 2, letter 356.
- 30 NZPD, 85, 256 (29 Aug. 1894).
- 31 NZPD, 85, 256, 265-266 (29 Aug. 1894).
- 32 MES, 1 May 1902 p. 2.
- 33 EP, 24 July 1902 p. 6.
- 34 Mills G. A. "O'er Swamp and Range. A History of the Wellington and Manawatu Railway Company Limited 1882-1909." (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of New Zealand), 1928 pp. 73-75 Petersen, Centennial History, pp. 163-164 Buick, p. 388-389.
- 35 Mills, p. 106.
- 36 FS, 20 Feb. 1892 p. 2.
EP, 27 Sept. 1902 p. 4.
- 37 Scolefield, New Zealand in Evolution p. 275.
- 38 Mills, pp. 1-2, 5.
- 39 Mills, p. 107.
- 40 Seddon Papers 3/24 p. 47; New Zealand Times 6 April 1899.
- 41 Petersen, Centennial History, pp. 164-165.
- 42 PS, 29 Oct. 1887 p. 2.
- 43 Wild, p. 100.
- 44 NZPD, 94, 390 (14 Aug. 1896).
- 45 EP, 27 Sept. 1902 p. 4.
- 46 Hely A.S.M. "Some Effects of Economic Changes in Transportation Upon the Economic Development of the Manawatu 1816-1946". (unpublished M. A. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington), 1947 pp. 81-83.

- 47 EP, 23 Sept. 1902 p. 5.
EP, 25 Sept. 1902 p. 4.
- 48
- 48 NZPD, 103, 192 (25 Aug. 1898).
- 49 Seddon Papers 3/18 p. 57; FS 31 May 1898.
- 50 MES, 5 June 1902 p. 2.
- 51 Mills, pp. 112-115.
- 52 MES, 30 Sept. 1901 p. 2.
- 53 MES, 2 Sept. 1900 p. 4.
MES, 2 Sept. 1900 p. 3.
- 54 MES, 18 Sept. 1900 p. 3.
- 55 MES, 6 Oct. 1900 p. 2.
- 56 NZPD, 95, 141 (27 Aug. 1896).
- 57 NZPD, 100, 477 (8 Dec. 1897).
- 58 MES, 4 Jan. 1902 p. 2.
EP, 9 July, 1902 p. 6.
- 59 MES, 14 Sept. 1902 p. 2.

Chapter Ten

Pirani and Education

Education, not politics, was the nearest thing Pirani had to a consuming passion; education in the political sphere, and also as an administrator, after and independent of his political career. Pirani had clear and firmly stated ideas as to what changes the education system required. In the House he spoke with greater precision and at greater length about education than any other topic. This may have been one of the less obvious reasons for Pirani's antagonism to Seddon. With the passage of the Education Act of 1877 education had ceased to be a matter of major public controversy in New Zealand, except for the bible-in-schools issue, which was periodically controversial. Reeves as minister was primarily concerned with his labour portfolio, and in the years between his departure and 1900 one hears little of education. This is followed by five years of considerable activity, as it became clear that the structure established by the 1877 Act had become inadequate. Even so when education is considered no major change, or piece of legislation, is thought of as attached to Seddon's name or his period. It is the civil servants, W. J. Habens, and for reform, G. Hogben, whose names spring to mind. Studies of Seddon relegate education to a skimpy mention, almost an aside, towards the end.¹ Seddon's approach to education would to Pirani appear as another example of the unprincipled approach to politics of the Premier. McKenzie's view that beyond the limited, severely practical curriculum education was a waste of time was probably another reason for his poor relations with Pirani.

In the first decades after Palmerston North was established education had to make do with primitive conditions and meagre facilities. More remote settlements were even worse off. The Stoney Creek School was opened on 4 October 1877, the first building being notable chiefly for its draughts and leaks.² It was progress when a swing for the playground was suggested, followed by the idea that the playground should be fenced. "In wet weather, with only one fireplace at the end of the building, conditions were very miserable."³ When the Terrace End school opened in April 1884, with a roll of 130, half the pupils had to remain outside the one room shed that constituted the school. Partly because of the conditions the school had four headmasters in the years 1884-1893. Some stability was given by Fairbrother, who was headmaster from 1893 to 1922, though accommodation remained inadequate.⁴ Pirani was chairman of the school committee in 1892,⁵ but it has not proven possible to ascertain when he was first elected to the committee. The Education Boards had only limited resources, but inevitably each local school, and each district, believed that its needs justified priority. This may in part explain Pirani's election to the Wanganui Education Board in 1895,⁶ and hard work was the principal reason for his topping the poll for three vacancies to the Board in 1896,⁷ but Pirani would have been attracted by the wider scope election to the Board allowed him to influence education. Pirani always kept the wider issues, and longer-term viewpoint, in mind. In the 1902 election he repeated his belief that Boards should be replaced by a system in which an elected Central Council administered through district committees, the latter with considerably increased powers.⁸

Pirani was clearly aware of the advantages of a more centralised system, but he was critical of reforms that

originated with Hogben, nor was this simply to give himself another topic with which to attack Seddon. The essential difference between Hogben and Pirani was that the former centralised by increasing the powers of the Department, Pirani favoured democratic (in the sense of elective) control at the centre, so it was quite logical for him to support abolition of the Boards, but oppose the reforms of Hogben. Doing the latter, however, meant allying in the House with the quite large group of members who opposed Hogben because they supported the existing administrative structure. This, and Pirani's opposition to Seddon, probably caused Roth's judgement that Pirani's criticisms of Hogben were politically motivated.

Pirani had a vitriolic tongue, and he carried on a personal feud with the Premier. He seldom failed to speak on educational matters and as often as not attacked Hogben as a means of embarrassing Seddon."⁹

As I have suggested above, neither the making of political points, nor the conflict of two strong personalities, in Hogben and Pirani, should be seen as the main reasons for Pirani's criticisms of Hogben. Pirani's attention to detail led to an early criticism of the Department during Hogben's tenure. In July 1899 a list of recommended texts included Bible lessons, and Pirani in a question in the House suggested that this was religion-in-schools; Seddon said the texts were not compulsory,

Pirani then questioned the right of the Department to recommend religious readers at all, and, though Seddon stood by his previous reply, a new Order-in-Council was gazetted which omitted the offending book.¹⁰

When the Stoke school scandal about gross mal-treatment of children at a private school raged Pirani and

G. W. Russell tried to make Hogben scapegoat for the whole thing for making his first report to Seddon, not the police. Seddon resolutely defended Hogben, insisting that any blame must be taken by the government as a whole, not one recently appointed official.¹¹ Seddon never publicly criticised Hogben, though privately he probably did restrain him. The Manawatu Evening Standard reported in 1901 that Seddon, on his return from Australia, sensed the resentment of the Education Boards, and he bluntly told Hogben to halt his campaign against the Boards, and to use them as the proper administrative channel.¹² It was never part of the Seddon approach to unnecessarily antagonise a powerful interest group, and collectively the Education Boards were just that.

Pirani's criticism of the Department of Education did not start with the appointment of Hogben; in 1897 Pirani had argued that proportionately the South Island was getting far more funds for education than was the North Island, that over the previous six years the South Island had received £69 for every new pupil, and £849 for every new school, while the North Island had received £8 and £662 respectively; but that despite this the North Island had built more schools. He pointed out with respect to the Wanganui Board that while the grant for schools in special settlements was increased, the ordinary grant was lowered, so that overall the Board was no better off. The Board had asked for £17,000, and been given £4,000, Pirani argued that much more was needed if the back-country districts were to fulfill the requirements of the Education Act.¹³

From the turn of the century Seddon appears to have taken a greater interest in education. He realised that some overhaul of the structure laid down by the 1877 Act had become necessary, and he preferred to take direct charge of the reforms. There being a limitation to the

Workload of even Seddon the move did not improve the quality of day to day administration, and was an admission of dissatisfaction with his Minister. Pirani made pointed criticism of the Education Department for its back-tracking and evasion since W. C. Walker took "nominal charge." Specifically he noted that £400 had been promised for a technical school in Palmerston North, if the Wanganui Education Board and local residents each provided £200, but when they did the Department delayed two years before coming up with only £200. Pirani also pointed out that the Wanganui Board had some time before included residences in the costs of schools for newly settled districts, while the Department had refused to regard this as requiring subsidy, but had then in recent discussions with Dr McArthur of the Auckland Board conceded just this principle.¹⁴ In the following year Pirani made a long, bitter attack on the Minister, while the Evening Post reported that widespread dissatisfaction with the administration of the Department had been rife for some time, which allowed the House, on the motion of Ell, to reduce the Department's vote by £1.¹⁵ The Department's difficulties with the House at this time was in part due to its Minister sitting in the Legislative Council. Some members took this as a slight against the House of Representatives as a whole, others were piqued that they could not quiz the Minister directly.¹⁶

The continuous reports in local papers of Pirani's movements between Wellington and the Manawatu, and within the Manawatu, confirm that he conscientiously did all that was required of him as a board member. Visiting back-country schools was not easy in the Manawatu in the 1890's, even at the best of times. The files of the Feilding Star, and the available files of the Manawatu Evening Standard, until 1902, include only one letter critical of Pirani's performance on

the Education Board.¹⁷ This attacked Pirani for moving at an Education Board meeting the use of funds for the Palmerston North District High School that should have gone to backblock schools, and also for changing the regulations with regard to the sixth form, so as to increase the District High School's roll. The writer contrasted this with Pirani's statements during the 1899 election which had been sympathetic of the problems of back-country schools. Inevitably Boards had to continually disappoint because they only had the resources to do a part of what people wanted, hence only one letter of criticism is remarkable.

As a member of the Education Board Pirani was one of the Governors of Wanganui Girls' College, and he was later to become chairman of the Board of Governors. This meant still more travel.¹⁸ Typically when connected with an organisation Pirani defended its existing rights, even if this appeared to clash with his normal beliefs. Wanganui Collegiate School was excluded from the 1900 Manual and Technical Instruction Act, and the 1903 Secondary School Act, which allowed for the granting of free places. "Wanganui Girls' College did not open its doors to free pupils until forced to do so by the Education Act of 1914."¹⁹ To a person who could for decades serve on an Education Board, while believing in general that Boards should be abolished the exclusiveness of Wanganui Girls' College presented no problems.

The impression given of Pirani's educational activities is that he lacked interest in the tertiary level, but this may be false. In the early 1890's Pirani took considerable interest in the campaign to establish a University College in Wellington. By the time one was established Pirani was fully occupied.

The Senate of the University of New Zealand passed a

series of resolutions supporting the case for a University College in Wellington, in 1881 (twice), 1883, 1888, 1889 and 1890.²⁰ In reply to a question in the House the government advised that it "could not see its way to establish at present a College in Wellington."²¹

Stout introduced his Middle District of New Zealand University College Bill in 1894. Some questioned the need and expense of the measure but in general it was passed with very little comment.²² Pirani voted for the measure but did not speak. Getting the Bill passed was only Stout's first problem. He asked when the Middle District University Council would be appointed and Reeves replied when Cabinet found the time, which obliged Stout to repeat the question.²³ Though the Act made elaborate provision for a Council, through a combination of election and appointment,²⁴ it was not until the following year that Gazette notices appeared on the electoral procedure, and the first Council was formed.²⁵ As the Council was never given any funds to use its existence remained a shadowy one.²⁶

The 1897 Cyclopaedia noted Pirani as having been a member of the Middle District University Council.²⁷ When Stout asked when endowments were to be made to the Council Reeves said this would be done when McKenzies found the time.²⁸ Given McKenzies' own antagonism to higher education this was not an encouraging reply. In response to further questions Pirani, Dr Newman and Stout received at best non-committal answers.²⁹ Stout's motion that the Middle District University Council receive a cash grant was easily defeated.³⁰

The following year Seddon altered his stance. He now felt that the colony "should insist on an opportunity being given to the sons and daughters

of poor people to obtain a university education."³¹ The Victoria College Bill was passed with relatively little debate. When the Legislative Council made amendments Seddon termed this a breach of privilege and threatened to drop the Bill. Pirani argued that Seddon had intended to use the original draft as a move towards a denominational system of education.³² Pirani's fear appears to have been that open scholarships would be available to students from private schools, but in the late 1890's Pirani on a number of occasions accused Seddon of breaking the non-denominational principles of the 1877 Act, on the basis of very little evidence. Pirani felt strongly enough about the clauses to vote against them,³³ and thus threaten passage of the Bill as a whole. Clause 47 of the Victoria College Act repealed the Middle District of New Zealand University College Act of 1894, and all the elections and appointments made under it.³⁴

The most that can be concluded is that Pirani's connection with the Middle District University Council shows that he had definite interest in tertiary education, but that as his time became occupied with his other responsibilities he ceased active interest without particular concern.

Pirani's work on the Education Board existed at several levels, the important and the mundane, the financial and the non-financial. The Education Boards were a critical part of the administrative structure of New Zealand education, on both financial and administrative matters, and inevitably the question of funds was vital, both with regard to the general level of capitation, and the detailed allocation of expenditure. Predictably there was continuous tension between the Boards and

Wellington, the Boards were a very powerful group, the resources of the Department in Wellington were limited, but it was from Wellington that in the end power and finance came. The Boards were continually concerned with protecting their position from encroachment by the public servants in Wellington. In 1899 the primary function of the Department was to distribute funds to the Boards, and to regulate the 1877 Act.

The education boards, on their part, carefully scrutinized every action of the Department to prevent any encroachment on their privileges (and the political patronage that went with them) and their weighty representations in Parliament, which transcended party divisions, ensured vigorous defence of their interests."³⁵

Pirani and Hogg were noted as prominent Parliamentary spokesmen for the Boards.

Pirani had complained to Reeves as far back as 1895 that for funds supplied, and considering the number of new schools and pupils being catered for, Taranaki and Wanganui were amongst the worst off of any boards in the country, and Wellington only fractionally better.³⁶ The three boards between them covered a considerable part of the North Island. The appointment of Hogben, however added a new tension, because his 'new-broom' ideas involved increased control from the centre, and hence threatened the power of the boards. Pirani argued that costs at the centre were excessive because the Department duplicated work which should be done by the Boards, and was being done by them.³⁷ The Manawatu Evening Standard showed what was probably an excessive sensitivity on the tone of correspondence. "No one would dream that such a thing as courtesy had found a place in the curriculum of the Department,

cool threats of what would be done to the Board in certain contingencies being mingled with sentences of cutting brevity."³⁸

The system of capitation was a source of considerable controversy. Pirani suggested that education boards capitation should be determined by the size of the roll, not the average attendance, so long as attendance is 80 percent. Not surprisingly he was supported by the Manawatu Evening Standard but Hall-Jones was somewhat doubtful. He said he would give the idea thought, but believed it would lessen encouragement to attend.³⁹

Pirani objected to the way the government made protestations of encouragement to boards on the one hand, while the Wanganui Board found one grant reduced from £200 to £45, plus suffering the removal of fare-concessions for teachers.⁴⁰ The attempt to maximise available funds involved the Board in lengthy disputes with the Department over minor points, as when the Department declined to pay the exchange on teachers' cheques.⁴¹ When Seddon took a real interest in education, and Hogben was appointed, a degree of confusion as new legislation faced criticism, was inevitable. Pirani said the government should give an extra five shillings capitation, whether or not the Public School Teachers Salaries Bill, which set uniform salaries, was passed; Seddon said the two were linked, and that the Government had never been committed to automatically giving the five shillings, nor did it intend to do so.⁴² When new regulations were passed Pirani's attention to detail, and previous experience from the debates meant that he alone of the Wanganui Board understood what the government meant. Even as the Department clarified the Board's uncertainty it advised that further help would come from

regulations yet to be issued.⁴³

His position on the Board was something of a platform from which Pirani could both expound and encourage his educational ideas. Pirani supported giving leave to teachers to receive training for kindergarten teaching.⁴⁴ It was on Pirani's motion that the Board asked all the women teachers whether they could teach singing to infant classes.⁴⁵ When the government made available money to encourage the teaching of swimming Pirani obtained the word of the Chairman that a portion of the grant given to the Board would be available to Palmerston North, so long as the necessary conditions were complied with.⁴⁶ It is worth remembering that Board members were elected by school committees, and Pirani had in part at least to put the needs of Palmerston North before the needs of the district as a whole. Pirani was also a believer in the value of drill.

It was decided, on Mr Pirani's motion, to apply for the services of a Government drill instructor for teachers to give instruction at Hawera, Wanganui, and Palmerston, free passes being offered by the Government to teachers to attend such instruction.⁴⁷

A Mr L. G. West had requested that his daughter be allowed to by-pass the first year of a scholarship and take up the second. The chairman of the board opposed this, but Pirani moved successfully that it be allowed.⁴⁸ Such actions on behalf of the individual was typical of Pirani.

A somewhat shadowy group whose meetings Pirani attended regularly were the Wellington School Commissioners. They regularly disbursed quite large sums, as when they gave £1,200 to the Wanganui and

Wellington Education Boards for primary schools and £150 for secondary schools,⁴⁹ but as the reports of the meetings are terse, the exact function of the Commissioners remains unclear.

The years 1900-1902 saw a series of Acts concerned with education. In the case of some measures Pirani had considerable agreement with at least the principle of the measure, but he was frequently critical of the way a bill was handled. Partly this was his usual objection to the Seddon system, but it was also a mark of zealous regard for the rights of education boards, and antagonism to the centralising tendencies of the Department of Education.

The Public School Teachers' Salaries Bill, first introduced in October 1900, proposed the principle of a national pay-scale, but left the details to the Department.⁵⁰ The Education Boards were not prepared to give the Department carte blanche; Hogg was critical of the government's motives, especially those of Hogben. In debate the opposition was not very successful in forcing out details, but it was clear some had been leaked to Pirani. The Bill was severely treated in committee, and a compromise was proposed. This allowed for an interim increase of 5 shillings in the capitation to the boards, but only after the boards and the Department had agreed on how it would be distributed. The latter proved impossible. Pirani advised the Wanganui Board to accept the interim agreement, leaving its objections until later, to avoid the scheme simply lapsing, and this the Wanganui Board did. The Wellington Board, including Hogg, could not accept the Department's proposal, hence did not receive any additional assistance.⁵¹

In a move which was probably designed largely to

spike a major critic the government established under Hogg a Royal Commission to suggest some more permanent solution. Hogben's proposals had met criticism not only because of the manner of introduction, but also because of the content. His staffing provisions were "too liberal even for the New Zealand Journal of Education, while the principle of equal pay was still more hotly attacked".⁵²

Here at least Pirani and Hogben were on common ground. In 1899 Pirani had asked if the capitation could be increased to allow equal pay for women teachers. Pirani had pointed out that some areas could not get adequate teachers, yet women were doing the job equally as well as men, but not receiving the same financial encouragement.⁵³ Seddon took charge of the salaries bill in 1901 to ensure its passage.

Opposition to the bill crossed party lines. About 30 members who were particularly concerned with the reduction in the powers of the Education Boards held a meeting, with Meredith in the chair.

A committee consisting of Captain Russell, and Messrs T. MacKenzie, Pirani, Meredith, Buddo, and Hogg were appointed to draw up reasons for opposing the Bill.⁵⁴

The committee suggested that the existing bill be dropped, that a tentative salary scale be sent to Education Boards and Teachers' Institutes for comment, and the result referred to a select committee.⁵⁵ Clearly the concern here was more with the method of approval than with merits or otherwise of a particular scale.

Any new measure such as the one on uniform salaries was likely to have its faults, and probably the

government's attitude could have been more accommodating, but the measure's critics appear to have opposed from fear of government power, rather than on the measure's own merits or disadvantages. The critics were not prepared to concede that centralisation and uniformity were being pressed with the best of intentions, and not by a Department pre-occupied with self-aggrandisement. The Manawatu Evening Standard had itself decried the lack of uniformity in text-books used, even within Education Boards, let alone on the national scale. Uniformity of payment to teachers was surely a more essential change.

The *mêlée* of 1900 had some beneficial effects, the government realised the need to accommodate some of its critics, and as a result disagreement in 1901 was concerned far more with concrete details than with emotive and unproductive generalisations. The Manawatu Evening Standard concerned itself with precise statement of the faults which it believed existed in the recommendations of the Royal Commission - that better qualified teachers received no financial benefit, that only two teachers are allowed until attendance averages over 91, which could mean a roll of up to 130. The paper argued that the drop in the number of pupil-teachers would create openings in the short-term, but have the opposite effect for cadets in the long-term. Overall the increased ratio of permanent teachers was expected to result in greater stability, and was welcomed.⁵⁶ Likewise in the House Pirani's objections were exactly detailed, in contrast to the previous year. He was critical of the absence of equal pay for women, and regarded payment according to the rate of work as unfair. He doubted that the railway or post office workers would have accepted it. Payment on attendance figures alone he believed could be unfair, attendance could drop for

reasons beyond the control of either teacher or school, such as an outbreak of measles. Pirani suggested a system based half on attendance, and half on the nominal roll. He believed Boards needed powers to transfer teachers not suited to a post, but who could be very useful elsewhere, that there should be an allowance to cover relieving teachers, instruction of pupil teachers, and that the house allowance should be on the size of the school, not the teacher's family.⁵⁷ These were all suggestions which, when presented without rancour, could be considered by the government on their merits. Even with two years' debate it was left to the Department to work out the details of the scales, and the Manawatu Evening Standard doubted that the Department had the experience to handle the job, unless it sought considerable help from the education boards, which it had not yet done. The paper did admit, however, that the complexity of the matter made it virtually impossible to be fair to everyone, especially as attendance fluctuated wildly.⁵⁸ This was an improvement on blaming everything on departmental arrogance and ineptitude.

Despite the attention the bill had received, not all the results were satisfactory. The Feilding Star insisted that Lethbridge and Pirani do something to assist a local teacher whose sick leave had been stopped to cover the costs of the relieving teacher. The Manawatu Evening Standard said that nothing could be done, and that Pirani had pointed out this possible eventuality when the bill was being passed, but had been ignored. A month later the government announced temporary arrangements for payment of relieving teachers until Parliament approved permanent rules.⁵⁹

During a debate on a School Attendance Bill in 1894 Pirani had moved that School Committees, not education boards, should be able to grant exemption from attendance, the boards being, he argued too distant to know the facts.⁶⁰ As with salaries, however, attendance regulations were not given detailed examination until years later. In 1900 Pirani introduced his own bill. Though it did not receive government support, it apparently had some influence. In 1901 the government introduced a measure which differed only slightly from Pirani's of the previous year. During recess Pirani had received comments from education boards and their officers, and as a consequence had made several modifications to his draft, so he introduced his bill again, in the modified form. This became in 1901 the School Attendance Bill No. 2. The New Zealand Times summarised the changes Pirani had made from his bill of the previous year, and the law as it would stand were Pirani's Bill passed.

The alterations to the existing legislation briefly consist of including Maori and half-caste children attending public schools; the age of compulsory attendance is altered from thirteen to fifteen, and an attendance is defined as at least two hours instruction. The grounds for exemption include residing more than four miles from a public school, or that a child cannot reach school by railway, that sickness, danger of infection, temporary or permanent infirmity or other unavoidable cause; that the child is under efficient and regular instruction elsewhere; that the road between the child's residence and the school is not sufficiently passable; or that an inspector or head-teacher has certified that the child has passed the standard prescribed by regulations. Parents are required to send their children to school within one week of receiving notice to that effect, four attendances have to be made when the school is open six times, six attendances where the school is open

eight times, and eight times when the school is open ten times; the onus of proving that a child is not liable to attend school is placed on the parent or guardian; and provision is made for the payment of fines into the Board fund.⁶¹

The extension of the age limit to fifteen, the definition of attendance as two hours of instruction, the requirement for parents to act within seven days of receiving notice, and fines going to the Education Board were all modifications on Pirani's bill of 1900, but the change which concerned the government most was that Pirani's bill gave control to native committees, and took it away from the Department. Hall-Jones said this should be looked at very carefully before being accepted.⁶²

The government appears to have been somewhat uncertain how to proceed. The need for some measure was accepted. Their own bill was similar to Pirani's of the previous year, and Pirani's current bill was only a modification of this. Pirani's measure obtained a second reading, and Pirani thanked the House for its kind treatment, even that of Fisher, a member with whom Pirani had had several very sharp clashes.⁶³ It seems likely that this was followed by some behind the scenes negotiations and agreement. In committee Pirani moved a series of amendments to his own bill, including the striking out of compulsory attendance at native schools, and the return to control by ministerial regulation. Later Pirani successfully moved a series of amendments to the government bill;⁶⁴ evidently with prior understanding. The only amendment Pirani moved which did not get passed would have allowed police officers to act as Truant Inspectors.⁶⁵ The Act appears to have had an immediate effect according to the monthly report by the truancy officer for Palmerston North schools.⁶⁶

What seems particularly surprising is that at this stage in his parliamentary career, when Pirani had become a bitter critic of the Seddon government, he should meet this degree of cooperation, and that Pirani himself was able to put personalities aside. One reason is certainly Pirani's deep interest in education, which allowed him to approach the issue without a political axe to grind. For his more usual sarcasm and seeking after abuse of power Pirani could substitute his wealth of practical experience. Seddon had recognised the need for changes, and when Pirani showed willingness to eschew his usual flamboyance, Seddon was prepared to meet him half way.

On several occasions Pirani pressed the need for assisting with the cost of teachers residences, as well as new schools. In 1898 Pirani asked if there was any objection to the Wanganui Board spending part of the grant for new areas on residences as well as schools, because they were viewed as essential, whether they received a grant for that specific purpose or not.⁶⁷ Evidently Pirani did not receive any satisfaction, as he raised the issue the following year.⁶⁸ In 1900 Pirani asked if the £5,000 surplus could be spent on teachers' residences in the back-blocks, as the Boards were fully aware of the need, but the schools themselves were relatively expensive to run, which meant that Boards could not meet the expense from their own budget. Hall-Jones, on behalf of the Minister, sympathised with the difficulties Pirani had pointed out, and advised that the £5,000 would be spent according to applications received.⁶⁹ This issue suited Pirani ideally, combining his concern for education with his concern for the back-block settler.

The feeling of dissatisfaction which existed in many of the education boards with many aspects of

education found expression at an education conference in 1902 when Pirani represented the Wanganui Board.⁷⁰ Pirani moved that capitation be increased by 3s 3d to cover administrative expenses, but he was effectively diverting to incidental purposes the extra 2s 6d set apart for teachers by the 1901 Teachers Classification Act, and the ninepence allowed for school committees. A formal protest was made against the increased number of returns demanded by the Department. Increased funds were requested for building funds, for training teachers, and for extending free secondary education. It was proposed that all primary and secondary education should come under the Boards. The unanimity at the conference was impressive, and six out of ten delegates supported election to the Boards by a wider constituency, so the representatives were generally prepared to be influenced by those whom their decisions affected. One possible reason for the unanimity was that the Auckland Board, which had more faith in the government than the others, chose not to be represented, because it believed too short a time had elapsed to form a mature judgement upon the new financial and other arrangements.⁷¹

Pirani was a strong advocate of technical education, which in this period meant emphasis on specific manual and artistic skills, and learning by doing, rather than education in the usual academic subjects. The issue was the extent to which technical education should be a part of the syllabus, and how much help it should be given. Seddon introduced a series of bills in the late 1890's, before an Act was passed. His early efforts came under strong criticism as attempts by stealth at denominational education, a viewpoint which Pirani agreed with. Seddon dropped his first bill in 1897 after it was strongly criticised by

Pirani and others for the assistance it would give to religious schools.⁷² Seddon's measure fared no better in 1898, and Seddon refused to grant one for subsidies, arguing that piecemeal legislation would cause confusion and be "ineffective".⁷³ As Pirani had on many occasions objected to piecemeal legislation he could not directly object, but argued that Seddon had been insincere from the start, and that the legislation had been blocked because Seddon had linked it with the denominational issue.⁷⁴

Pirani regarded the Manual and Technical Instruction Bill of 1900 as an improvement on those of previous years, but that did not stop the usual fierce debate. Pirani suggested that assistance be limited to primary schools, as district high schools could not benefit.⁷⁵ Seddon delayed debate until the early hours, but was soon forced to accept the removal of two Church of England schools from those getting assistance. In the debate on the Industrial Schools Bill Seddon cajoled and stonewalled until he thought he had a majority, but when J. A. Miller moved the halting of assistance to all private schools, not just those supported from outside the colony it was carried 28-27.⁷⁶ Seddon ascribed the striking out of the Wanganui Collegiate School in part to Pirani, but Pirani replied that if he had helped remove denominationalism from the technical education act he was proud.⁷⁷

This deeply-held belief that Seddon was trying by back-door methods to dilute one of the chief principles of the 1877 bill affected the passage of several acts in the late 1890's, and to a considerable extent shifted the focal point of the debates. In general debates such as the address in reply Pirani frequently spoke in favour of technical

education, but in the debates on the bills seemed more concerned with the supposed dire consequences of extending the proposed benefits to private schools. There is no reason to suppose that Seddon was acting deviously, he simply saw no reason why the private schools should not benefit. One apparent consequence of this emphasis in the debates on private schools was that the merits of technical education were lost on the public. The Manawatu Evening Standard lamented that many parents remained unaware of the courses offered in technical education in Palmerston North.⁷⁸

Industrial schools, state and private, were for boys who for various reasons were committed to the care of the schools. Their function was therefore both educational and social, and there were diverse suggestions on how they should be organised. In the House Pirani praised the 'cottage-home' system whereby each boy lived with a family in a separate dwelling as quite good, but regarded the 'scattered-home' system, whereby small groups of children are supervised by a married couple, as best, doubting that any alternatives would be as effective or as cheap.⁷⁹

Government policy on Industrial Schools became entangled with the Stoke School scandal, in which brutal treatment of children was proven. The school was private, but opposition members blamed government negligence for the events, and criticised Hogben and Seddon for trying to cover-up the affair. Pirani had become so important a figure on the issue that according to the New Zealand Times his absence from the House held up consideration of the Private Industrial Schools Regulation and Industrial Schools Amendment Bill.⁸⁰

Having a firm idea of the type of education that

would benefit children most, Pirani was not a believer in self-education. There was widespread support for drill in school. To a combined Palmerston North schools committee Pirani outlined ideas drawn from Victoria and the North Canterbury Schools Association for organised drill and athletic activities.⁸¹ Pirani supported the State School Children Compulsory Drill Bill. Ever mindful of the position of Education Boards Pirani had in committee a clause removed which allowed for the fining of Boards which did not comply with the Act. Pirani argued that if the Defence Department provided instructors for all boards, as it had done for the North Canterbury Board, there would be no problem.⁸²

It was in the area of education that Pirani was to lead the nearest thing to a monument in Palmerston North, in the form of the District High School. Its beginning can be traced back to the late 1890's, but the school was not established until 1902, and it required considerable nurturing at both the local and parliamentary level. Pirani was one of the four or five people vital to the school's foundation.

Pirani first pressed for government assistance in 1898, for a Palmerston North Technical School. He was told that assistance had been delayed because of the difficulties legislation on technical schools had met, and because of the lack of necessary returns from the Wanganui Board.⁸³ Pirani believed the delay was because the government favoured town over country. Pirani believed the technical school would act as a focal point for the rural area around Palmerston North, and hence encourage skills which would otherwise be available only in the main centres.

A subsidy was again requested in 1899, when Pirani pointed out that the Wanganui Board sent a teacher

weekly to Palmerston North to conduct the classes. Seddon said that the government would not provide its £400 unless it was advised who had provided the £400 locally, even though Pirani said that the amount was made up of many small contributions.⁸⁴

In 1900 at a meeting of local school committee representatives⁸⁵ Pirani said that the Minister had offered £400, but this had been repudiated by Seddon, a statement which was probably less than fair to the Premier. Pirani said that he did not favour a high school in conjunction with a primary school, instead he proposed a combined technical and High School, which would not be attached to any one primary school. Pirani's ideas were adopted unanimously, and a deputation formed of local people, but not including Pirani himself. Pirani introduced the deputation to Seddon, who said that the Minister of Education would consider the proposal and reply in a week.⁸⁶ Seddon expressed a preference for secondary schools attached to primary schools on economy grounds, but also said that other proposals were acceptable. To W. T. Wood he said that he believed legislation to assist technical schools would be passed that session, as it was.

Nothing appears to have happened for the following six months, but from subsequent events it is likely that Pirani and others were reluctantly realising that government assistance was far more likely for a district high school, as opposed to a high school. At a meeting⁸⁷ of the combined schools committee Pirani explained the position as follows. A district high school was attached to a primary school, a high school was not. Pirani advised that both he and the Wanganui Board were against district high schools, but the Minister favoured them, and gave them special

financial assistance, and that advantage should be taken of this as a district high school did not preclude the possibility of a high school at a later date. He explained that the Education Board was proceeding with the building of the technical school from its own resources, and defended the technical school from criticism that its pupils would not be on a par with those learning on the job by full-time work. Others expressed similar sentiments to Pirani, but the impression is that Pirani was a dominant figure at the meeting.

Shortly thereafter Seddon came to Palmerston North, ostensibly to attend the flag unfurling ceremony of Campbell Street School, which was a major public event, and saw quite a gathering of local notables. W. T. Wood was the school committee chairman, and he introduced Seddon, who gave a speech emphasising the flag as a national symbol, sentiments which even the Manawatu Evening Standard could not disagree with.⁸⁸ At the ceremony itself Pirani kept well in the background. After the ceremony, however, Pirani, Wood, and others from the Wanganui Board discussed the high school with Seddon. The idea of attaching the high school to the technical school, which would be built anyway, was emphasised by Wood and Pirani. Pirani pointed out that with three local schools having a claim to the district high school, to choose would have the appearance of giving that school an advantage. Dr Smyth, the chief inspector for the Wanganui Board, added that a high school provided a good chance for experimentation. Seddon replied that he supported them if they could devise a way of including fifth and sixth formers, but he was sceptical of high schools because they sometimes became schools of the wealthy.

Shortly afterwards an official deputation of Pirani, W. T. Wood, Larcomb, Perrin and Dr Smyth saw Seddon, who promised to take to cabinet detailed proposals when they were received.⁸⁹ At a combined school committee meeting the deputation made its report. To the meeting Dr Smyth emphasised a preference for the existing technical school being enlarged to a high school. He argued that high schools had a classical bias, which aimed at feeding the universities, where only a few of their pupils would actually go. The school he proposed would cater for the other 90 percent, by replacing Latin with English Literature, and emphasising commercial subjects such as arithmetic and shorthand. Syllabuses would be flexible, to suit local needs, rather than cut and dried.⁹⁰ General support was expressed for Smyth's ideas, and an executive was formed to look at the site question, and other matters; Wood was on this executive, but Pirani was not. At the next Borough Council meeting Pirani introduced a deputation from the combined schools committee, which requested that the existing site for the technical school be exchanged for a nine acre site in Featherston Street, to be used for a combined Technical and High School. Pirani spoke on the value of the proposal, and the need for urgency if the necessary local legislation was to be passed quickly. On the motion of Pirani and Wood the Council agreed not to oppose the legislation's passage.⁹¹

The technical school continued to expand, L. J. Watkins reported 46 students the previous quarter, and more in the current,⁹² but the meetings of April and May were followed by months of apparent inactivity, though there was probably further private discussion on the extent to which

Palmerston North should hold out for a high school, and if not which school should get the district high school.

In the end a further deputation went to see Seddon, with Walker, the Minister of Education, and Hogben, also present. Pirani, Dr Smyth, and Lethbridge, who like Pirani was a member of the House and on the Wanganui Board, formed the deputation.⁹³

Pirani said that since Seddon's visit to Palmerston North Dr Smyth had developed his ideas in greater detail. Both he and Dr Smyth said that it had been impossible to reach agreement on which of the three primary schools to attach the district high school, and Palmerston North would in any case benefit more from a technical or commercial school of independent status. Seddon was told that the borough had granted nine acres, and that if the government gave the cost of the buildings less the £200 raised locally for a technical school this would be no more than would in any case be given to a district high school. Likewise with regard to running costs, if the government gave the normal district high school grant, plus a £400 subsidy similar to that which had been given to the Blenheim high school, this plus fees would cover normal expenses. Dr Smyth pointed out that Palmerston North was less well off with regard to secondary education than some very much smaller towns, and with the local disagreements being what they were, his scheme had practical and educational advantages.

Pirani then asked what the department's objections to Dr Smyth's scheme were. Hogben replied that he could see no reason why Dr Smyth's scheme could not work in a district high school attached to a primary school, and added that if Palmerston North received a special subsidy every other town would

ask for it, and this would cost between £6,000 and £10,000. He saw no reason why Palmerston North could not adopt the Department's scheme. Seddon then asked for a statement of costs for both schemes. Hogben asked if this was for the whole colony, Seddon said yes, but particularly for Palmerston North.

On this inconclusive note the meeting ended. Its chief value, to us and possibly to the participants, was its clarification of positions. The Palmerstonians were concerned principally in obtaining a school, which involved, as well as the possibility of educational advantages, the least ruffling of local feathers. Hogben represented the national administrator. His department has evolved a structure which it believed suited New Zealand's needs and could be readily assimilated by the existing system. Hogben had a natural and practical aversion to changes in that structure, particularly changes which to him were being requested principally to avoid the petty, parochial outlook of local school committees. It is clear that Hogben believed giving ground on Palmerston North could lead to a plethora of local schemes which would be expensive to run and impossible to coordinate. Pirani was concerned with the problems of Palmerston North, the need to find some scheme acceptable to all local interests; and the possibility for experiment provided by a school not directly linked with the administration, curriculum and methods of a primary school. Seddon retained a fluid position. Clearly he was concerned with the economic cost, and more aware even than Hogben that what he gave to Palmerston North he must be prepared to give to others, or accept the political price of not doing so. He was also aware

of how important to Palmerston North the school was. Not to provide a solution acceptable to that community was to present Pirani with a superb gift for the 1902 election. By bringing matters back to finance Seddon gave himself breathing space, and depending on what the costing information showed, could provide a basis for supporting or rejecting the proposed scheme.

It was a compromise that eventuated. The Manawatu Evening Standard reported that the government was unlikely to accept the proposals of the Wanganui Education Board, and that Pirani was to propose at a board meeting a scheme which linked a district high school with one of the primary schools, but made use of the Featherston Street site, and incorporated most of the original concept.⁹⁴

A final agreement still required considerable pressure, both in Wellington and Wanganui. On the 6th November Pirani emphasised to the Minister the need to reach a decision on the £1,000 for the Featherston Street site by that Friday, when the Education Board met. The Minister advised he would be writing to the Board that same day.⁹⁵ At the Board's special meeting Pirani was authorised to convene a meeting of Palmerston North school committees to discuss the new proposals. If that meeting approved them the list of thirty-three applicants for headmaster was to be sent to the College Street committee, with a recommendation in favour of one of the applicants.⁹⁶

The meeting of school committees was held on 12 November.⁹⁷ Pirani outlined the history of events, and that after discussions with Dr Smyth it had been decided to ask government to establish a district high school, and to build on the

Featherston Street site, with a nominal connection to College Street School. Pirani made it clear that he regarded this as a compromise, not the ideal.

Personally, he was averse to the establishment of a district high school, if they could get a Commercial College proper, but for the present he thought it advisable that they should take all they could get. ⁹⁸

Pirani added that the Department of Education had approved the scheme, but required exact plans before committing specific sums. College Street School had accepted the Education Board's recommendation of Mr Gray as headmaster. The intention was that eventually the new school would take all local seventh standard pupils. This meant that College Street would become a district high school, with Commercial and Technical Colleges attached but separate. This arrangement, as outlined by Pirani, was carried unanimously. Mr G. S. Bridge, the chairman of the Wanganui Board, went to Wellington to acquaint the Minister and Secretary for Education with the latest plans, and Hogben agreed to visit Palmerston North within the fortnight to get full details.⁹⁹ Hogben was met at the station by Pirani, and by the Rev. C. C. Harper, chairman of the College. The plans were explained in detail to him by Pirani, and he visited the three existing schools as well as the site of the new one.¹⁰⁰ The Presbyterian Church granted temporary use of the Sunday school room while the permanent building was being erected.¹⁰¹

It was only by this step at a time procedure that the District High School became a reality. Many administrative details remained settled, and avenues of financial support uncertain. At a meeting

of the Wanganui Board it was passed after being moved by Pirani

that during the existence of the District High School at Palmerston no pupils who have passed Standard VI be taught at Terrace End, Campbell Street and College Street (Palmerston North), and Longburn, Kairanga, Taonui, Kelvin Grove, Stoney Creek, Fitzherbert East and Tiritea Schools. 102

At the request of the College Street School Committee it was agreed to form an advisory committee for College Street, of the chairman of each of the Palmerston North school committees, and Pirani.

At a meeting of the Wellington School Commissioners yesterday, at which Mr Fred Pirani, M.H.R., presided, a legal opinion was read to the effect that secondary school reserve revenue could be paid to district high schools, providing the money was used exclusively for secondary education. 103

This meant that so long as the Wanganui Board supplied vouchers which showed that the money was being spent on secondary education, the Palmerston North District High School would get £60 out of £350. Pirani also suggested that income from secondary school reserves that was not earmarked for a particular school should be used only for district high schools, contending that the urban schools would still flourish when deprived of the income, but that it could be the making of rural schools.

In January Pirani was authorised by the Wanganui Education Board to make the necessary arrangements for the opening of the District High School in

St Andrews Hall, on a temporary basis. ¹⁰⁴

Pirani's concern had been for the technical school rather than the District High School, and he continued to fight for every obtainable benefit in that direction. He formed part of a deputation to Seddon to try and obtain a grant towards a building for the technical school. Seddon and Ward were sympathetic, but the regulations created difficulties, ¹⁰⁵ Hogben, a little later, advised Pirani that the Department had put a proposal to Cabinet. ¹⁰⁶

The history of the technical school's establishment was to some degree separate to that of the District High School, functionally the two were quite separate. In reality the same people were responsible for the founding of both, and the two schools had facilities in common. The technical school had first been raised in the House by Pirani in August 1899. In 1902 a public meeting was held in connection with the starting of continuation classes. ¹⁰⁷ Pirani was the first speaker, and he said all credit for the classes should go to Mr Gray, of the Palmerston North District High School, and emphasised the many advantages that would accrue to young people who availed themselves of the opportunity the technical classes offered, he added that the successful art classes of Mr Watkins would be extended. Dr Smyth in his speech noted the success of similar classes in Dunedin, and also overseas, particularly in Germany.

At first the technical school and the District High School were controlled by the one principal, but early in 1903 they kept separate minutes. When the District High School was formally established in 1903, and a Board of Governors established, the Wanganui Education Board retained control of

technical education.¹⁰⁸ In May 1905 the District High School Board advised the Wanganui Education Board that it intended to assume control of the technical classes at the year's end, and receiving no objection, did so in 1906. A year later the roll required a separate principal for the technical school, and in 1908 a new and separate main building was opened.

Gray had originally applied for headmaster of the District High School in 1901, and when he first arrived in the North Island he proceeded to Wanganui to confer with the Wanganui Education Board, and with Pirani.¹⁰⁹ Gray wrote to Murray of the early days "we were all keen and enthusiastic and everything boded well. Of the men who were active with me at my right hand I remember Fred Pirani."¹¹⁰ Gray also singled out three others for mention by name. Murray himself believed Pirani was at least as responsible for the school as any one other individual. Gray had barely taken up his appointment when Pirani persuaded him to succeed Dr J. Smyth as Chief Inspector of Schools for the Wanganui district.

Pirani prevailed on me to accept what he argued was a position with greater scope and one in which I could influence the education system, and particularly be of service to the teachers at a period of transition and change. This 'wider idea' decided me. ¹¹¹

At the opening ceremony on 4 March 1903 Mr Bridge, the chairman of the Wanganui Education Board indicated that the very existence of the school was due to the efforts of Pirani.¹¹² In his own speech Pirani said the school owed its existence to Dr Smyth as much as anyone. He admitted that he had undergone a week of internal doubts before deciding to take Gray from the school, for services of wider value to the Wanganui Education Board, adding that Gray's appointment to such an important post without

inviting applications was probably without precedent. Pirani then used the opportunity to discuss future expectations, particularly with respect to technical education.

The work already accomplished was only a beginning, for he desired to see a training college for teachers established at the school, the inauguration of extension lectures in connection with the Victoria College Council, and a very much wider technical school curriculum, embracing instruction in subjects likely to prove useful in agriculture, dairying and kindred subjects, as well as continuation classes for those who could not attend school in the daytime.¹¹³

Pirani returned to the topic when he attended the 1905 break-up ceremony.

In respect to technical education ... he looked upon it simply as the application of knowledge acquired in school days. He did not think they had taken more than the very first step forward in the direction of true technical education. There were many ways in which this side of the subject might be developed. The end and aim of existence was not to make money, but school life should certainly fit the children to become better men and women.¹¹⁴

It seems likely that Pirani's political activities pre-date his educational though he was chairman of the Terrace End School in 1892¹¹⁵ and the latter may at first have been nothing more than a support for the former. It is probably not without significance that Pirani's successor as Palmerston North's representative in the House, W. T. Wood, first gained local prominence through his work in the field of education. In the case of Pirani, however, the tail did in the end wag the dog.

Though he continued an interest in politics, and tried on three occasions to re-enter the House, it was his many years on the Wanganui Education Board, and the many duties associated with his position, that became his chief interest in later life. In 1902 he remained on the College Street School Committee; and was frequently attending school functions, such as the annual picnic of the Stoney Creek School, the opening of the West End School, and the presentation to Miss Curtis for her long service to the Terrace End School.¹¹⁶

Pirani's move to Feilding subsequent to 1905 need not, and did not, affect his ability to serve the Manawatu in the education sphere. It did however shift his local focus of attention somewhat. Even so there is no monument to Pirani in Feilding such as is provided in Palmerston North by the District High School. It was not all that Pirani had wanted, but Pirani was a difficult man to please. It remains fitting that the one outstanding, lasting asset to Palmerston North that dates from Pirani's years in Parliament should be in the field of education.

1 Drummond J. The Life and Work of Richard John Seddon, Premier of New Zealand, 1893-1906. With a History of the Liberal Party in New Zealand. London 1907. Education is mentioned briefly on pp. 284-285.

Richards K. H. "The Seddon Ministry" (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Canterbury), 1946. Education is mentioned on pp. 215-217, as part of a final chapter on "the Humanities."

- Burdon, R. M. King Dick A biography of Richard John Seddon, Wellington 1955 p. 302, has one paragraph on education.
- 2 Stoney Creek School, Jubilee Souvenir p.2. (Stoney Creek is now Whakarongo School).
 - 3 *ibid*, p. 9.
 - 4 Terrace End School, Palmerston North. 75th Jubilee Celebrations, 1884-1959 pp 5-8.
 - 5 *ibid*, p. 31.
 - 6 FS, 14 May 1895 p. 2.
 - 7 FS, 10 March 1896 p. 2.
 - 8 EP, 17 Nov. 1902 p. 2.
 - 9 Roth H. George Hogben, A biography. Wellington 1952 p. 85. I am indebted to Miss P. Gregory for bringing this reference to my attention.
 - 10 *ibid*, p. 86.
 - 11 *ibid*, p. 91.
 - 12 MES, 9 March 1901 p. 2.
 - 13 NZPD, 98, 255-256 (5 Oct. 1897).
 - 14 MES, 20 March 1901 p. 2.
 - 15 EP, 13 Aug. 1902 pp. 4-5.
 - 16 MES, 13 Aug. 1902 p. 2.
NZPD, 121, 271 and 273 (12 Aug. 1902, F. Pirani).
 - 17 MES, 6 March 1902 p. 2.
 - 18 MES, 30 Nov. 1900 p. 2.
MES, 7 Dec. 1901 p. 2.
 - 19 Roth, pp. 114-115.
 - 20 See Minutes of the Senate of the University of New Zealand. National Archives papers of the University; series 1 volumes 3 and 4 are the Senate's minutes for the years 1881-1891.
 - 21 *ibid*, volume 6 p. 1.

- 22 NZPD, 84, 613 (14 Aug. 1894).
- 23 NZPD, 86, 607 (10 Oct. 1894).
NZPD, 86, 897 (18 Oct. 1894).
- 24 NZ Statutes, 1894, pp. 50-52, An Act to found a University College for the Middle District of New Zealand, clauses 4 and 5.
- 25 NZ Gazette, 1895, Volume 1, pp. 377, 709, 847.
- 26 National Archives Papers of the University of New Zealand Series 13 Volume 11 is the Letter Book of outward correspondence of the Senate for the period 15 September 1893 - 15 July 1898. No letter to the Middle District University Council is listed. As only the outward correspondence was indexed inward correspondence was not looked at.
AJHR, 1895, Volume 2, E1, p. xiii noted the appointments and elections to the Council, but no further mention of the Council is made in the Appendices and Journals of the 1890's.
Victoria College Calendar for 1900 makes brief reference to the 1894 Act and the Council, but adds nothing to what is found in parliamentary sources. The same is true for the University of New Zealand Calendar for 1898-1899.
The Minutes of the University of New Zealand Senate make brief mention of the Council, and the need to endow it, 1895 p. 18, 1896 p. 11, 1897 p. 20, but the references are briefer and milder than might be expected (National Archives papers of the University of New Zealand, series 1 volumes 6 and 7 covered the Senates minutes for the years 1894-1899. The minutes are re-paged annually.).
- 27 Cyclopedia of New Zealand, Vol. 1, Wellington 1897, p. 1142.
Pirani is not mentioned in the Gazette notices for 1895. It is possible that the Cyclopedia is factually incorrect, and that Pirani was not a member of the Council, but the Cyclopedia was so close in time to the event that this seems unlikely.
- 28 NZPD, 91, 845 (29 Oct. 1895).
- 29 NZPD, 92, 507 (1 July 1896).
NZPD, 92, 646 (7 July 1896).
NZPD, 96, 839 (15 Oct. 1896).

- 30 NZPD, 96, 846-847 (15 Oct. 1896),
by 35 votes to 20.
- 31 NZPD, 97, 168 (10 April 1897).
- 32 NZPD, 100, 904 (20 Dec. 1897).
- 33 NZPD, 100, 907 (20 Dec. 1897).
- 34 NZ Statutes, 1897, pp. 59-67.
- 35 Roth, p. 85.
- 36 NZPD, 89, 339 (22 Aug. 1895).
- 37 NZPD, 119, 260 (8 Oct. 1901).
- 38 MES, 21 Nov. 1900 p. 2.
- 39 NZPD, 99, 193 (26 Oct. 1877).
MES, 20 July 1900 p. 2.
- 40 NZPD, 99, 193 (26 Oct. 1897).
- 41 MES, 11 Jan. 1902 p. 4.
EP, 19 July 1902 p. 5.
- 42 NZPD, 117, 145 (12 Oct. 1900).
- 43 MES, 19 Nov. 1901 p. 2.
- 44 MES, 22 May 1901 p. 4.
- 45 MES, 28 Jan. 1902 p. 2.
- 46 MES, 10 Feb. 1902 p. 2.
- 47 MES, 18 Sept. 1900 p. 2.
- 48 MES, 19 Feb. 1901 p. 3.
- 49 MES, 4 April 1901 p. 2.
- 50 Roth, pp. 93-97, for a brief history of
the Bill's progress.
- 51 MES, 1 March 1901, p. 2.
- 52 Roth, p. 96.
- 53 NZPD, 108, 377-378 (24 Aug. 1899).
- 54 MES, 16 Oct. 1900 p. 3.
- 55 *ibid.*

- 56 MES, 5 Aug. 1901 p. 2.
MES, 9 Aug. 1901 p. 2.
- 57 NZPD, 119, 629-631 (22 Oct. 1901).
- 58 MES, 23 Dec. 1901 p. 2.
- 59 MES, 17 April 1902 p. 2.
MES, 15 May 1902 p. 3.
- 60 NZPD, 86, 160 (20 Sept. 1894).
- 61 quoted, MES, 12 July 1901 p. 3.
- 62 NZPD, 117, 121-122 (31 July 1901).
- 63 NZPD, 117, 132-133 (31 July 1901).
- 64 NZPD, 118, 616-617 (18 Sept. 1901).
NZPD, 119, 1168-1169 (5 Nov. 1901).
- 65 And this would have been in contradiction to Pirani's own beliefs of a few years earlier. In 1896 he had opposed the use of policemen as truant-catchers. He had argued then that the offence was not so important, that policemen were quite busy enough, and the truant officers employed by the Wanganui Board operated effectively. NZPD, 95, 225 (1 Sept. 1896). In the intervening years either Pirani had become more concerned with the truancy problem, or the effectiveness of the truancy officers had decreased, or both. The use of policemen would, have created public relations problems, which was probably one reason why it was defeated.
- 66 MES, 20 July 1901 p. 2.
- 67 NZPD, 105, 132 (18 Oct. 1898).
- 68 NZPD, 108, 22 (11 Aug. 1899).
- 69 NZPD, 115, 16-17 (9 Oct. 1900).
- 70 EP, 19 Aug. 1902 p. 5. and
EP, 20 Aug. 1902 p. 6. for reports of the conference.
- 71 EP, 2 Sept. 1902 p. 4.
- 72 NZPD, 100, 948 (21 Dec. 1897).
- 73 NZPD, 105, 431 (26 Oct. 1898).
- 74 NZPD, 105, 431-434 (26 Oct. 1898).

- 75 NZPD, 114, 471 (2 Oct. 1900).
- 76 MES, 6 Oct. 1900 p. 2.
- 77 NZPD, 114, 618 (5 Oct. 1900).
- 78 MES, 8 Feb. 1901 p. 2.
- 79 NZPD, 114, 217 (26 Sept. 1900).
- 80 MES, 15 Oct. 1900 p. 3.
- 81 MES, 26 April 1901 p. 4.
- 82 NZPD, 116, 486 (18 July 1901).
- 83 NZPD, 104, 534 (5 Oct. 1898).
 NZPD, 104, 431 (29 Sept. 1898).
 NZPD, 104, 526-527 (5 Oct. 1898).
- 84 NZPD, 107, 474-476 (4 Aug. 1899).
- 85 MES, 11 Sept. 1900 p. 4.
- 86 MES, 26 Sept. 1900 p. 3.
- 87 MES, 6 March 1901 p. 4, for a report
 of the meeting.
- 88 MES, 18 April 1901 p. 2.
- 89 MES, 26 April 1901 p. 4.
- 90 *ibid.*
- 91 MES, 2 May 1901 p. 4.
- 92 MES, 22 May 1901 p. 4.
- 93 MES, 5 Sept. 1901 p. 3, for a detailed
 report of the meeting.
- 94 MES, 21 Oct. 1901 p. 2.
- 95 MES, 13 Nov. 1901 p. 4.
- 96 MES, 8 Nov. 1901 pp. 2-3.
- 97 MES, 13 Nov. 1901 p. 4, for a full
 report of the meeting.
- 98 MES, 6 Nov. p. 3, a Wednesday.
- 99 MES, 27 Nov. 1901 p. 2.
- 100 MES, 18 Dec. 1901 p. 2.

- 101 MES, 28 Nov. 1901 p. 2.
- 102 MES, 28 Jan. 1902 p. 2.
- 103 MES, 6 Feb. 1902 p. 2.
- 104 MES, 11 Jan. 1902 p. 4.
- 105 MES, 24 March 1902 p. 3.
- 106 MES, 24 April 1902 p. 2.
- 107 Palmerston North Technical School 1906-1956.
Golden Anniversary Souvenir booklet.
Palmerston North 1956. p. 17.
- 108 *ibid*, p. 13.
- 109 Murray J. Palmerston North High School.
Historical Survey 1902-1951.
Palmerston North 1952 p. 3.
- 110 *ibid*, quoted p. 3.
- 111 *ibid*, quoted p. 4.
- 112 *ibid*, p. 12.
- 113 *ibid*, quoted p. 13.
- 114 *ibid*, quoted p. 21.
- 115 Terrace End School, Palmerston North.
75th Jubilee Celebrations 1913-1963.
Palmerston North, n.d., p. 12.
- 116 College Street School Palmerston North
1893-1943. Souvenir of Jubilee Cele-
brations. Palmerston North 1946 p. 26.
Stoney Creek School Jubilee Souvenir
p. 15 (now Whakarongo School)
West End School, Palmerston North
50th Jubilee Celebrations 1913-1963.
Palmerston North 1963 p. 13.
Terrace End School, p. 59.

Conclusions

This thesis has been primarily concerned with outlining and explaining the political career of an individual. For reasons of time and space it has not proven possible to make a complete study of Pirani's political career. His service on the Palmerston North Borough Council, and some issues in which Pirani was deeply interested e.g. local government reform, and individual rights (particularly equality for women), have been mentioned only in passing. While chapters on these topics would have improved our understanding of Pirani, and made the study much nearer a definitive one, it is most unlikely they would have altered the conclusions.

As the first study of a back-bencher of the 1890's it was suggested in the introduction that fresh light might be shed on the politics of the period. The result, in my opinion, has justified the expectation. Pirani's career has shown the importance of the changes in the parliamentary Liberal party in the 1890's, particularly with regard to organisation. His career also suggests that the electorate may well have been considerably more complex than the series of sweeping liberal victories suggests.

The complete absence of any studies of local Manawatu politics was noted in the introduction. Some consideration of the economic and social environment of the Manawatu, of the needs and expectations of the electorate, has been essential to an understanding of Pirani's career. It is hoped that this thesis will encourage other researchers to

look in greater detail at this topic. Paradoxically, by concentrating on the career of an individual the importance of local factors to parliamentary politics has been made abundantly clear. There can be no definitive answer to the question of the correct balance between local and national factors in a study such as this, and the division is to some extent an artificial one. If anything the attempt to avoid what has probably been an excessive pre-occupation with local factors in some previous theses has resulted in an insufficient study of local factors as illuminants of local history in the present work. However it is suggested that the result has shown the truth of the proposition suggested in the introduction, that local politics should be taken in conjunction with parliamentary politics, by an approach designed to explain the link between the two, if correct conclusions are to be drawn about the significance of events at both levels. While the biographical need not be the only way to achieve this it is suggested that this thesis has shown that it is a possible way.

The primary concern of this thesis has been to study in detail Pirani's political career so as to explain how it was possible for Pirani to enter the House as a liberal in 1894, be voting with the conservatives in 1902, yet be able to regard himself as a 'true liberal', and give plausibility to this description by pointing out that on no major issue had his views altered in the years since he had entered the House. That Pirani's views had actually altered on the land issue is hardly alone sufficient to discredit Pirani's view of himself. As has been shown the explanation involves several strands.

There was the circumstances surrounding Pirani's entry into politics. While it has not been possible

to prove a personal relationship with Ballance, Pirani's admiration for the liberal leader is certain. Also there is the influence on Pirani of the somewhat radical political ideas of the Knights of Labour. While Pirani's concern with labour legislation weakened he continued unstinted support for the rights of individuals, such as orphans, Maoris and women. In addition Pirani almost invariably supported the "democratic" method of administration. He had faith in the judgement of people, and always supported the elective principle, whether it be the executive, an education board or a land board. This would be clearer had it proved possible to include a chapter on human rights and Pirani's attitude to the political and administrative system. Pirani believed that while Ballance had been leader the Liberal party had always been true to these principles because Ballance himself had believed in them. Essentially this was for Pirani the reality of the Ballance-myth, and the main area where Seddon had betrayed the Ballance inheritance. Financial policy, though important, was secondary in comparison. Where Pirani believed Seddon's betrayal of Ballance was complete was in the organisation of the parliamentary political party. As has been explained, with respect to the power and unity of cabinet, of caucus, the use of the 'pledge' at elections etc., what Pirani regarded as Seddon's new and immoral 'autocracy' was but the growth pains of the new party system. Much of the rest of Seddon's system, such as the use of patronage, was a continuation of previous practices, and they disappeared as the new party system of government matured.

Pirani believed that while the political cement of patronage and public works bribery should be dispensed

with there was no requirement to replace it with a new cement. While one is forced to admit that Seddon was at times brutal in his handling of people, and rather too prone to lying his way out of difficulties it is equally clear that Pirani's admirable ideals were also hopelessly unrealistic, and that much of the Seddon system was essential if the Liberal party was to enact its programme.

A further strand in explaining Pirani's career was his personality. While he was quick to point out the errors of others, and was a biting debater, he was at times thin-skinned. This resulted in many of his speeches becoming more concerned with personalities than issues. In this he reflected his profession and his constituency. Small-town journalism in New Zealand was notable for a style that could be downright vicious, and rarely was it elevating. When Pirani carried that style of journalism into the debates in the House he rapidly accumulated enemies. The two individuals with whom Pirani clashed most were Seddon and McKenzie. In both cases, particularly the latter, the differences were in part a matter of personalities.

Consideration must also be given to Pirani's personal values. They were what one might expect in the representative of a small-town, which was barely thirty years old when Pirani's term ended. There is emphasis on hard-work and honesty, but it is combined with a certain intellectual narrowness. Sincerity and logic have this in common; neither need have anything to do with the truth. To realise this, to try and appreciate and understand the other view, was never part of Pirani's philosophy. It is impossible to say to what extent Pirani's sense of moral purity

reflected the town he represented, and almost certainly it was largely a question of genuinely held personal values, but they were also the values of many in Palmerston North, who probably believed that such values were essential if the town was to shed many of the features of its frontier years. Add this sense of self-righteousness to Pirani's abrasive style and it is not surprising that despite his good points Pirani was never a leader of even a small group in the House.

In Pirani's mitigation it should be pointed out that some of Pirani's policy criticisms of the government were valid. In 1890 the Liberals, with respect to the land issue had been concerned primarily with the big estates. In the Manawatu there were no big estates to break up. The settlers in the Manawatu had a different set of problems, and Pirani, with a certain amount of justification, believed that neither Seddon or McKenzie had much understanding of the needs of North Island bush settlers.

The flaw in Pirani which caused him to follow an essentially dead-end path was his intellectual narrowness. It is not finally a question of whether or not there was much in Seddon's methods which could be criticised, and which were even dangerous to New Zealand democracy, though certainly this was true. The critical point about Pirani was that he offered no real alternative. His idealism mixed with his obstinacy led Pirani to avoid not only party politics, but even faction politics. After 1899 Pirani refused the possibility of leadership of the newly-elected radicals and denied even the existence of parties. His personal honesty and hard-work won him the admiration of his electorate, but Pirani had no

political vision, programme, or method that could be of practical value to the country as a whole. He entered the House at a particular point in time and thus combined with his personality and values a particular programme and method of parliamentary politics. What Pirani completely failed to appreciate was the place of all this in the broad sweep of New Zealand politics.

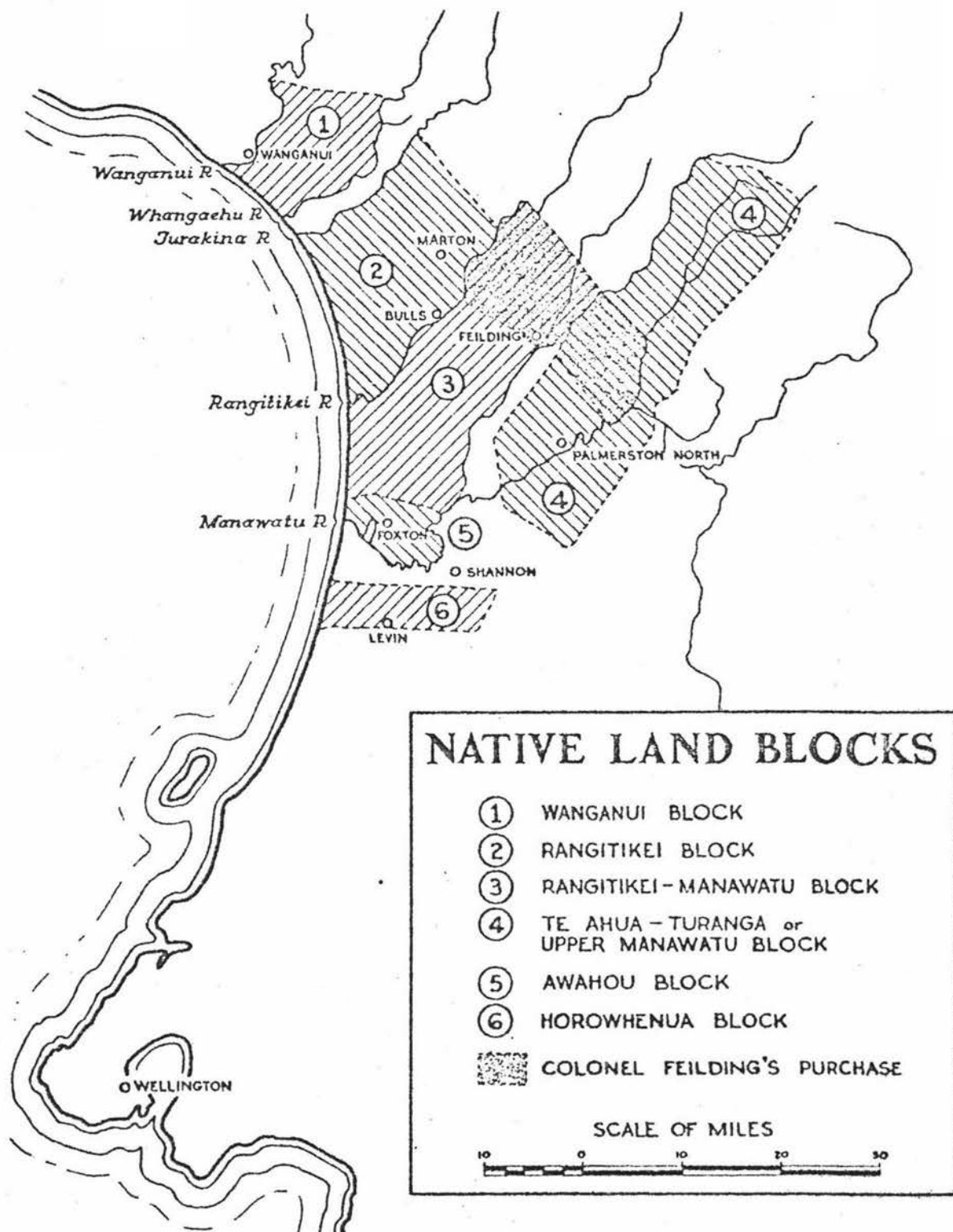
This was unfortunate because Pirani had much to offer. He had a tremendous capacity for hard-work, and on several issues a preparedness to study the problem and related legislation in detail. His honesty, allied with other aspects of his personality, was almost a liability, but this need not have been so. Because Pirani could see the small things more easily than the large, he drifted into the conservative camp without ever realising the full implications of what he had done. In the same way Pirani was prepared to deal with the short-term as it was, so as to be useful in the immediate situation. Hence he accepted nomination for the Land Board, even when he believed it should be elected, and hence also he served for over twenty years on an education board he believed should be abolished. What he failed to appreciate was that the short-term could become an end in itself. For Pirani criticism of the government and opposition to the Seddon system became ends in themselves, and Pirani joined with whoever agreed with him. Incongruously this led him to join ranks with the conservatives, with whom he remained in fundamental disagreement, and whom he would surely have pilloried had they been the government. All this, however, was lost on Pirani while he focused on Seddon as the enemy.

The question clearly arises what value has this study of Pirani been in a general way, if it is accepted that Pirani's own career was quite exceptional, and

due largely to unique features. It remains true that on many issues a detailed study such as this tells us something about that issue's place in the politics of the period. Pirani's political career may have been unique, but Palmerston North was not, and it must be remembered that Palmerston North certainly approved of Pirani, hence his success also tells us a great deal about the town. Pirani's success could not have withstood the pressures it did unless Palmerston North had not believed in the values and policies that Pirani put forward.

Appendix 1

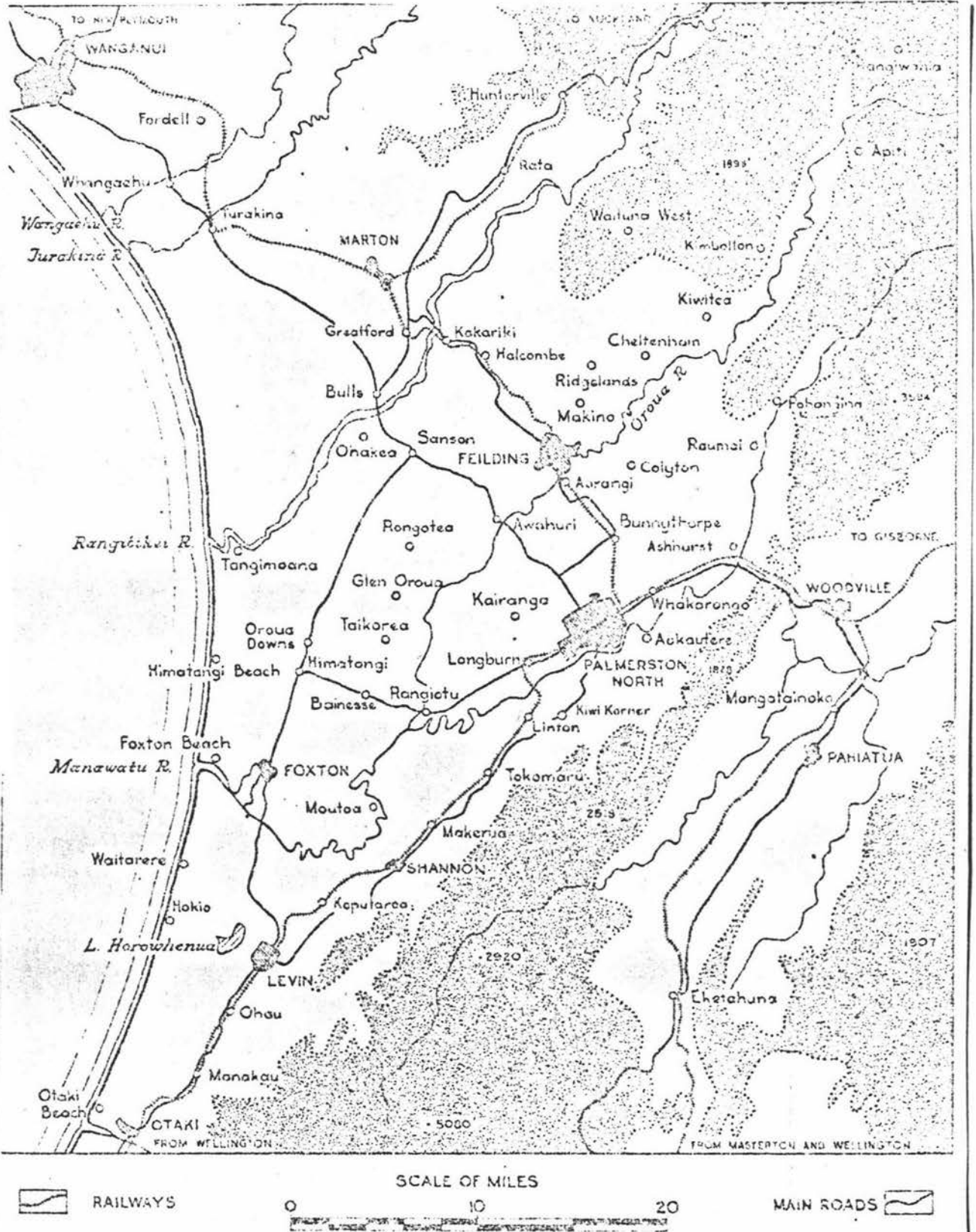
Figure 1 : Native Land Blocks



Source : Saunders and Anderson, p. 3.

Appendix 1

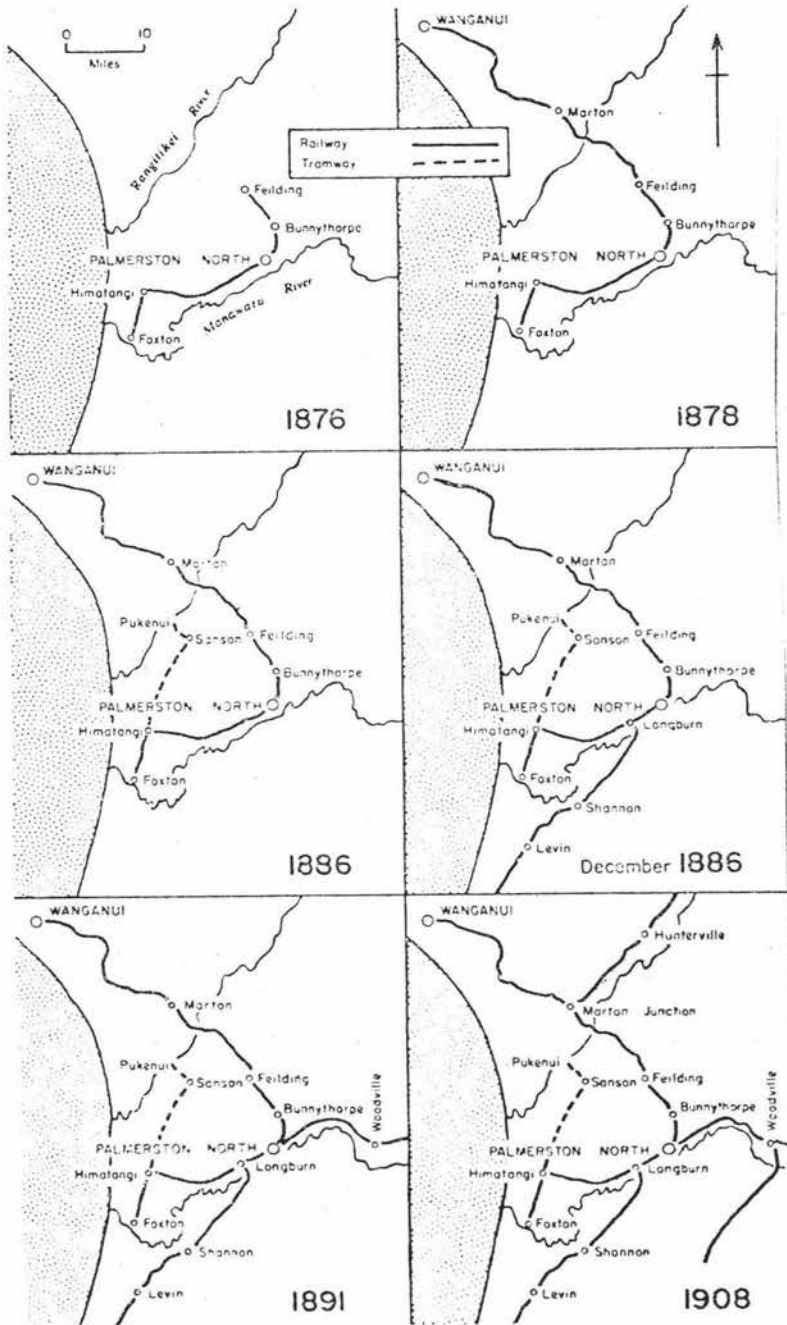
Figure 2 : The Manawatu



Source : Saunders and Anderson. Un-numbered pages at the front.

Appendix 1

Figure 3 : The Growth of Railways in the Manawatu



Source : Warr and Saunders, 1964 p. 187.

Appendix 1Figure 4 : Palmerston North Population Totals

<u>DATE</u>	<u>SOURCE</u>	<u>CITY</u>
1872	Hadfield "Precious Years" (1962).	61 families
1874	Census : Oliver Unpub M.A. Thesis.	193 persons
1877*	Buick "Old Manawatu".	800
1878	Manawatu Standard 2. 1963.	880
1881	Hadfield "Precious Years" (1962).	1,364 (1,366)
1886	28th March Census.	2,606
1887	Manawatu Standard 2. 1963.	2,610
1888	Gavey J. E. P.N.C.C.	3,000
1889	" " "	3,500
1890	" " "	4,000
1891	5th April Census.	4,303
1892	Gavey J.E. P.N.C.C.	5,000
1893	" " "	5,793
1894	" " "	5,730
1895	" " "	6,543 (?)
1896	12th April Census.	5,910
1897		
1898	Gavey J. E. P.N.C.C.	6,000
1899	1st April est. N.Z. Year Book (1898)	6,200
1900	Gavey J. E. P.N.C.C.	6,260
1901	31st March Census.	6,534 (6,450)
1902	Gavey J. E. P.N.C.C.	7,154
1903	" " "	7,828
1904	" " "	8,975
1905	" " "	9,795
1906	29th April Census.	10,239
1907	Gavey J. E. P.N.C.C.	10,243
1908		
1909	January est. N.Z. Year Book.	11,650
1910	December est. " " "	12,000

*Palmerston North declared a borough.

N.B. Early records excluded Maoris (until 1920).

Source : Population of Palmerston North 1872-2000
Palmerston North City Corporation Town Planning Department, Research Section Report No. 5, Jan. 1969. p.2.

Appendix 2Preamble and Declaration of Principles of the
Knights of Labour

The alarming development and aggressiveness of the power of great capitalists and corporations under the present industrial system will inevitably lead to the pauperization and hopeless degradation of the toiling masses. It is imperative, if we desire to enjoy the full blessings of life, that unjust accumulation and the power for evil of aggravated wealth shall be prevented. This much desired object can be accomplished only by the united efforts of those who obey the divine injunction - "In the sweat of they brow shalt thou eat bread." Therefore, we have formed the order of the Knights of Labour for the purpose of organising, educating, and directing the power of the industrial masses.

It is not a political party - it is more - for in it are crystallised sentiments and measures for the benefit of the whole people; but it should be borne in mind, when exercising the rights of suffrage, that most of the objects herein set forth can only be obtained through legislation; and that it is the duty - regardless of Party - of all to assist in nominating and supporting with their votes such candidates as will support these measures. Under no circumstances shall any member be compelled to vote with the majority.

Calling upon all who believe in securing "the greatest good for the greatest number" to join and assist us, we declare to the world that our aims are -

Appendix 2 continued

1. To make industrial and moral worth - not wealth - the true standard of individual greatness.
2. To secure to the workers the full enjoyment of the wealth they create; sufficient leisure in which to develop their intellectual, moral, and social faculties; all of the benefits, recreations, and pleasures of association; in a word, to enable them to share in the gains and honours of advancing civilisation, and securing a universal half-holiday.

In order to secure these results, we demand at the hands of Parliament :

3. The land - including all the natural sources of wealth - is the heritage of all the people, and should not be subject to speculative traffic. Occupancy and use should be the only title to the possession of land. The taxes on land should be levied upon its full value for use - exclusive of improvements - and should be sufficient to take for the community all un-earned increment.
4. The abrogation of all laws that do not bear equally upon capitalists and labourers; and the removal of unjust technicalities, delays, and discriminations in the administration of justice.
5. The enactment of laws to compel corporations to pay the employees weekly, in lawful money,

for the labour of the preceding week.

6. The abolition of the contract system on Colonial and Municipal works.
7. The prohibition, by law, of employment of children under 15 years of age.
8. To prohibit the hiring-out of convict labour.
9. The establishment of a national monetary system, in which a circulating medium in necessary quantity shall issue directly to the people, without the intervention of banks; that all the national issue shall be full legal tender in payment of all debts, public and private; and that the Government shall not guarantee or recognise any private banks, or create any banking corporations.
10. That interest bearing bonds, bills of credit, or notes shall never be issued by the Government; but that when need arises, the emergency shall be met by issue of legal tender, non-interest-bearing money.
11. That the importation of foreign labour under the contract be prohibited.
12. That the Government shall retain possession of all telegraphs, telephones, and railroads; and that hereafter no charter or licence be issued to any corporation for construction or operation of any means of transporting intelligence, passengers or freight.

Appendix 2 continued

13. And, while making the foregoing demands upon the Government, we will endeavour to associate our own labours. That a uniform set of school books for the whole Colony be furnished at the expense of the State.
14. The system of Party Government be abolished, and an Executive, elected by the House of Representatives, be substituted.
15. That the Government bring into force a system of State Fire Insurance.
16. That National, District, and Municipal Courts of Arbitration be set up for the administration of civil, criminal, and national disputes as they may arise.
17. The acquisition and working by the State of all coal mines.
18. The establishment by the State of a Coastal Marine Service.
19. A system of Old Age Pensions for all persons over the age of 65 years who have been in the Colony for 25 years, be instituted.
20. The extension of the Municipal Franchise to all householders of over 12 months' residence.
21. The Abolition of Customs Duties on all the Necessaries of Life.
22. That the Poll Tax on Chinese be increased to £100, and Asiatic Hawkers' Licences be abolished.

Appendix 2 continued

23. To establish co-operative institutions, such as will tend to supersede the wage system, by the introduction of a co-operative industrial system.
24. To secure for both sexes equal pay for equal work.
25. To gain some of the benefits of labour-saving machinery by a gradual reduction of the hours of labour.
26. To persuade employers to agree to arbitrate all differences which may arise between them and their employees, in order that the bonds of sympathy between them may be strengthened, and that strikes be rendered unnecessary.

Source : Salmond, the History of the New Zealand Labour Movement pp. 498-501.

Appendix 31893 Election Result, Palmerston North

<u>Polling Places</u>	<u>Leary</u>	<u>Pirani</u>	<u>Snelson</u>
Palmerston	186	1096	895
Longburn	23	75	28
Oroua Bridge	1	23	7
Linton	4	26	27
Fitzherbert West	2	6	15
Tokomaru	2	11	3
Fitzherbert East	0	15	28
Kairanga	15	11	35
Taonui	18	23	55
Awahiri	21	9	63
Bunnythorpe	20	70	68
Colyton	19	66	65
Upper Taonui	3	19	23
Harbour Board Block	1	16	15
Pohangina	11	29	18
Apiti	10	37	15
Bell's Woolshed	1	5	6
Coal Creek	1	16	1
Pohangina River	0	6	3
Foxton SF Block	4	23	23
Ashhurst	31	115	86
Stoney Creek	7	40	35
Hiwinui	2	11	9
Jackytown	<u>8</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>18</u>
	<u>390</u>	<u>1754</u>	<u>1541</u>

Majority 213

Source : 1893 Feilding Star

Appendix 31896 Election Result, Palmerston North

<u>Polling Places</u>	<u>Buick</u>	<u>Pirani</u>
Court House	393	361
Fire Brigade Station	296	268
Campbell St	150	164
College St	82	121
Terrace End	151	90
Longburn	55	62
Oroua Bridge	20	8
Linton	42	22
Tiritea	11	7
Fitzherbert East	27	26
Kairangi	41	39
Taonui	48	46
Awahiri	18	12
Bunnythorpe	74	85
Upper Taonui	10	5
Ashhurst	70	138
Stoney Creek	38	43
Hiwinui	3	28
Jackytown	36	32
Kelvin Grove	<u>14</u>	<u>26</u>
	<u>1553</u>	<u>1603</u>

Majority 50.

Source : Seddon Papers 3/12 p. 23.

Appendix 31899 Election Result, Palmerston North

<u>Polling Places</u>	<u>Buick</u>	<u>Pirani</u>	<u>Wood</u>
The Courthouse	217	519	444
Fire Brigade Station	92	294	236
Terrace End	38	181	128
Campbell Street	35	110	85
College Street	47	116	58
Longburn	9	68	86
Oroua Bridge	9	12	20
Linton	28	44	45
Tiritea	6	23	4
Fitzherbert East	8	46	11
Kairanga	22	52	18
Taonui	14	87	30
Te Awahuri	7	15	26
Bunnythorpe	21	94	94
Upper Taonui	8	6	11
Ashhurst	38	138	99
Stoney Creek	17	43	24
Hiwinui	1	41	2
Jackeytown	10	25	17
Kelvin Grove	9	44	10
Spur Road	1	8	14
Midland Road	<u>0</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>3</u>
	<u>638</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1465</u>

Majority 525

Source : MES, 26 Nov. 1902 p. 2.

Appendix 31902 Election Result Hutt

<u>Polling Places</u>	<u>Wilford</u>	<u>Pirani</u>	<u>Collier</u>
Petone	935	682	33
Kaiwarra	172	103	12
Wadestown	110	111	6
Khandallah	50	94	3
Ngahauranga	54	26	8
Belmont	20	26	13
Lower Hutt	404	244	0
Muritai	35	20	1
Wainui-o-mata	26	15	14
Taita	49	113	0
Silverstream	72	34	5
Upper Hutt	139	181	0
Kaitoke	29	15	3
Akatarawa	<u>20</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>0</u>
	<u>2115</u>	<u>1673</u>	<u>90</u>

Source : EP, 26 November 1902 p. 4.

Appendix 31902 Election Result Palmerston North

<u>Polling Places</u>	<u>Wood (L)</u>	<u>Hodder (Opp.)</u>	<u>Manson (I-L)</u>
Courthouse	726	464	119
Campbell St.	102	123	22
Terrace End	215	147	38
College St	62	119	16
Fire Brigade	507	382	150
Longburn	100	61	10
Oroua Bridge	38	16	4
Linton	52	59	8
Tiritea	14	32	3
Fitzherbert East	23	45	3
Taonui R.L.	49	46	39
Awahuri	41	21	11
Bunnythorpe	83	90	29
Upper Taonui	18	20	4
Bogan's	7	10	4
Stoney Creek	36	43	9
Hiwinui	17	25	1
Jackytown	25	37	5
Kelvin Grove	24	22	18
Conway's	4	6	1
Lower Aorangi	6	11	8
Trass (Ashhurst)	56	58	2
Kairanga	<u>21</u>	<u>56</u>	<u>7</u>
	<u>2226</u>	<u>1893</u>	<u>511</u>

Source : MES, 26 Nov. 1902 p. 2.

Appendix 31905 Election Result Palmerston North

<u>Polling Places</u>	<u>Wood</u>	<u>Pirani</u>
Zealandia Hall	1616	1187
Campbell Street	379	345
College Street	245	252
Terrace End	370	296
Longburn	163	100
Oroua Bridge	46	14
Linton	69	71
Tiritea	15	38
Fitzherbert East	41	49
Kairanga	44	64
Taonui	61	81
Awahuri	43	38
Bunnythorpe	124	138
Upper Taonui	18	9
Bogan's	9	20
Stoney Creek	69	54
Hiwinui	16	23
Jackytown	40	45
Kelvin Grove	38	40
Conway's Spur Road	7	8
Tattersall's	21	28
Trass (Ashhurst)	57	91
Linton	14	0
Ridge Road	10	0
McGregor's	19	10
Aorangi	<u>17</u>	<u>22</u>
	<u>3551</u>	<u>3037</u>

Majority 514

Source : MES, 7 Dec. 1905 p. 6.

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