

board would consist of at least three members, but the number in every county would be much smaller than under the existing system. As far as the rather limited business of the county is concerned, this was at least an approach to the spirit of the Virginia plan, with its concentration of power in the hands of a few. But the main purpose of the supporters of the new plan was to have a smaller body to transact county business, and at the same time to adjust the number composing it to the population and public business of each county. The system in which each town furnishes a member of the county board, making a comparatively large number in that body, was regarded as too cumbersome and expensive for the newer and more thinly settled counties of the state. It was thought that, in these at least, business would be transacted with greater efficiency and dispatch by a board of three or five members. On the other hand, in the older counties, where population was denser and more compact, and where local affairs had attained a great extent and a considerable complexity, a larger board, securing representation to each small locality, was deemed necessary. The extent of the financial and general interests involved in such counties demanded a large body to secure careful attention to the interests of each locality.

The people of these counties, therefore, regarded the new plan as a step backward; as a return to the spirit of institutions that the constitution had specially sought to avoid. The petitioners generally used the term "county commissioners" to express the desired system, but the legislators who framed the law used the word "supervisors," and thus evaded the plain and well-known intent of the constitution.

The opponents of the proposed plan accordingly argued that it was unconstitutional, and also urged its repugnance to the spirit and forms of democratic institutions. The minority report of the committee on town and county organization¹ declared that the bill "contracts the representative privileges of the people and concentrates power in the hands of the few." Further,— "Person and property are periled.

¹ *Wis. Assembly Jour.*, 1861, p. 563.