

SPECIAL REPORT

By direction of the Local Bills Committee, I have the honour to present the following supplementary report in connection with the local Bills referred to the Committee during the present session:—

The Committee desires to draw attention to the frequency with which Standing Orders 361 and 366 have not been complied with and have been suspended by the House. These Standing Orders provide, *inter alia*, for notice of intention to introduce a local Bill being published not later than thirty days after the commencement of the session, and for the Bill to be introduced not later than forty-two days after the commencement of the session.

During the war years, owing to uncertainty as to when sessions of Parliament are to begin, it has become somewhat difficult for local authorities always to comply with these provisions, and consequently it has become customary for them to be relaxed. Whilst the Committee recognizes that promoters of local legislation have in this regard often been placed at a disadvantage, it is of the opinion that, in many instances, the willingness of the House to assist them in the matter has been unnecessarily taken advantage of and that the indulgence granted has been abused. For instance, although the present session opened on 22nd February and continued, prior to the adjournment, until 4th April, and it was generally known for a considerable time before February that Parliament would meet in that month, only three local Bills out of a total of fifteen were introduced during the first part of the session. Furthermore, a number of them were not introduced within six weeks of the opening of the second part of the session. It would therefore seem that an undesirable precedent has been established. Apart from the general principle involved, the tardy introduction of local Bills, which in most cases could be introduced within the prescribed time, results in short-staffed Government Departments being obliged to devote much time to studying and reporting on them during the latter part of the session, when the pressure of Government business is heaviest. This particularly applies to the Law Drafting Office, the Department of Internal Affairs, and the Surveyor-General's Office. As members may be aware, considerable revision to Bills has usually to be made by the first-named office and lengthy amendments drafted after long consultations with Government Departments and other parties concerned. The Surveyor-General, too, sometimes finds that insufficient time is given him in which to check and certify to the correctness of the land schedules and the plans, and he has, in fact, on several occasions suggested that local authorities be required to submit the same to him during the recess. Other Government Departments are similarly affected, though not usually to the same extent.

The Committee considers that the tendency to ignore the Standing Orders is one that should be checked and that suspension of them should not be agreed to without a full explanation of the circumstances rendering it necessary being given in every case.

In view of the facts set out above, the Committee has the honour to recommend:—

“That a new Standing Order be framed to provide that all motions for the suspension of the Standing Orders relating to local Bills shall stand referred to the Local Bills Committee, which shall be required to investigate the reasons for the applications for suspension, and which shall report to the House whether, in its opinion, the suspension is warranted.”

Should the Committee's recommendation be adopted, it is suggested that the Department of Internal Affairs be instructed to circularize local authorities acquainting them with the course which will in future be followed.

29th November, 1944.

ENGINEERS REGISTRATION AMENDMENT BILL

THE Local Bills Committee, to which was referred the above-mentioned Bill, has the honour to report that it has carefully considered the same and taken evidence thereon, and recommends that it be allowed to proceed, with amendment as shown on the copy of the Bill annexed hereto.

30th November, 1944.

J. W. MUNRO, Chairman.

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