

In the intervening years, from the "eighties" until the present day, practically all road districts excepting those which are urban or semi-urban in character have been abolished. While, generally, there may be little analogy between the conditions which necessitated the elimination of Road Boards and the present form of rural local government by County Councils, the need for reform and alteration to make the existing structure suitable to the wants of the country cannot be too strongly emphasized. The improvement in access to rural areas, and the effect over the last two decades of modern transport with its virtual shortening of distances, has reorientated the problems of social and commercial life.

The need for specialization in personnel, administratively and technically, the use of modern equipment, and the ability of members of local authorities to keep in close touch with their electors over much wider areas are some significant factors which, when applied to the functions exercised in many parts of the districts of local authorities established in the early 1900's, reveal the need for reorganization to meet the impact of the demands of the people arising from the changing conditions.

Forty years ago a member of a County Council in many instances would have required days, by horse transport, to cover the riding he represented. To-day a County Councillor and the Council's officers can cover the district in a matter of hours. The fact that 89 of the present 125 operative counties have taken advantage of the legislation passed in 1931 which enabled counties to abolish riding accounts indicates the broadening outlook of County Councillors. The replacement of the kerosene lamp by electricity, the coach by modern bus or motor-car, and crude metalled or grass roads by modern highways, have all broadened the outlook of modern local authorities, brought new responsibilities, and accentuated the need for modern methods of dealing with them. If local government is to be geared to meet present-day needs, some of the functions which are local in character and which, in some instances, are undertaken by the central Government may be more effectively undertaken by local authorities. Some of the larger municipalities' districts have been increased in area, and the ability to undertake the impact of the demands of the people in such matters as transport, transport control, highways and streets, milk treatment, the provision of recreational facilities and libraries, town-planning, sanitation, building control, and so on has been clearly evidenced by the successful operation of such functions by large urban authorities. These local authorities, with large districts and greater revenue potential, equipped with modern plant and facilities, and employing highly skilled administrative and technical officers, have to a large extent been able to meet the present-day demands of the people.

The broader issues relating to local government have been the subject of frequent discussion by legislators in New Zealand from 1895 to 1946, when statutory provision was made for the setting-up of the Local Government Commission. In the last decade particularly, views have frequently been expressed that the local-government system, comprising more than 700 local authorities, is irrational and leads to considerable overlapping. While such a view may be generally correct, the demands of efficiency and economy should not, in our opinion, outweigh, or largely tend to detract from, the democratic ideals of local government. This particular factor was the essence of the Commission's recommendation relating to the provision of local district committees in its decision relating to Christchurch metropolitan local government.

The inquiry held at Christchurch was the first major inquiry concerning rural local government undertaken by the Commission, and before proceedings were commenced it made an exhaustive survey of the legislative developments from time to time. The following is a condensed summary of the position :—

Prior to the subdivision of the counties in New Zealand in the early part of this century, the subject of local-government reform was frequently mentioned in Parliament, and as early as 1895 a local-government Bill which contemplated complete reorganization