

of local government was introduced into the House. It is interesting to note that under this Bill a Commission was to be set up with definite instructions that there should not be more than 40 counties in the Dominion. The Bill was not proceeded with, however. Another local-authorities Bill was introduced in 1897, but again was not proceeded with. The next attempt to bring about local-government reform was in 1912, when a local-government Bill was again introduced. This Bill proposed the setting-up of a Local Government Board, and also proposed sweeping changes in local government which aimed at a system of Provincial Councils to exercise control over charitable aid, public health, education, harbours, main roads and bridges, river protection, and drainage and water-supply. The Bill also proposed the abolition of Education Boards, and the transfer of their functions to the Provincial Councils. It is worthy of note that this Bill was introduced within a year of the last County Subdivision Act—the Ashley Subdivision and the Waimakariri-Ashley Water Supply Board Act of 1911. This Bill also was not proceeded with, however.

A change of Government occurred in that year, and the Bill was redrafted and submitted to a representative conference of local bodies. The Provincial Council idea had been dropped, and the Bill now proposed that there be only two forms of local government—*counties in rural districts* and *boroughs in urban districts*. The Bill also aimed at reducing the number of counties to half, but eventually it was not proceeded with, due to a further change of Government. Owing to the intervention of the first world war, the question remained dormant until the onset of the economic depression, and in 1932 the Government set up a departmental committee to collect data on the question of merging or condensing local organizations. It would appear that the idea underlying the appointment of that committee and the other reform measures referred to was to create stronger and larger counties which could absorb some of the *ad hoc* authorities within their structure.

In 1936 the Government introduced the Local Government (Amalgamation Schemes) Bill, and after its first reading the Bill was widely circulated among local authorities.

The 1936 Bill, slightly amended, was reintroduced into the House in 1937, and immediately referred to a Select Committee of the House. Evidence was taken from interested parties, and, in general, the parliamentary Committee endorsed the proposals and agreed that the problem of reorganization of local government in the Dominion was a matter of urgency. On the outbreak of war the Bill was deferred.

In 1944 a Select Committee of the House of Representatives, comprising fourteen members representing both sides of the House, was appointed to inquire into and report on all phases of the local-government system in the Dominion. The report of this Committee was presented to the House in 1945.

At page 154 of the report, comment was made regarding county government, and reference is made to the following section:—

At the present time, therefore, in many areas there are more County Councils than are necessary for the carrying-out of the work. Here, again, there is duplication of administrative and technical staffs, as well as of administrative officers and general administrative procedure. This is particularly the case in the North Canterbury area, where there are a number of diminutive counties. As was mentioned earlier, the primary function of these Counties to-day is the maintenance of roads, somewhere about 87 per cent. of their revenue being spent thereon. There was a strong plea from the Counties Association and from a number of individual counties for greater responsibilities to be allocated to County Councils. We are wholeheartedly in accord with this proposal. The territorial local governing authorities should be the basis of local government, and their responsibilities should be enlarged, but it must be obvious that if responsibilities are to be enlarged, then the area of their jurisdiction must coincide with the area of the services which they are required to perform. It is obvious that, as at present constituted, County Councils could not carry out the work of Catchment Boards, because the catchment area normally extends over a much wider area than that of a single county.