

(4) *Finance Act, 1938.*

Section 34 validates expenditure by local authorities in connection with the coronation of His Majesty King George VI.

Section 35 validates expenditure incurred by local authorities with respect to the exhibition of the coronation robes.

Section 36 authorizes contributions by local authorities to the Far East Relief Fund.

(5) *Lower Clutha River Trust Act, 1938.*

The Department has had before it since 1935 the problem of the administrative control of river and drainage work in the Clutha River area. For many years four Boards have been exercising jurisdiction in this area, these being the Clutha River Board, the Matau River Board, the Inch-Clutha River and Drainage Board, and the Otanamomo River Board.

Differences of opinion between the Clutha River Board and the other three Boards as to the proper expenditure of the income from endowments vested in the Clutha River Board led to representations being made to the Hon. Minister for the institution of a local inquiry into the whole position. After a full investigation of the facts, which were fully known to the Department, this request was declined.

Subsequently the Matau, Inch-Clutha, and Otanamomo Boards initiated proceedings for the promotion of a local Bill with the object of amalgamating under one local authority, to be known as the Lower Clutha River Trust, the activities and functions of the four existing Boards. The Bill was duly passed into law during the 1938 session, but certain provisions were inserted designed to continue for the benefit of the settlers in the upper parts of the Clutha River area the steamer and motor transport services formerly conducted by the Clutha River Board.

The amalgamation took effect as on and from the 20th December, 1938, and the Lower Clutha River Trust is now functioning as the sole river and drainage authority for the district.

(6) *Local Acts.*

Nineteen local Bills were submitted to the Department by the Local Bills Committee for examination and report. Representatives of the Department appeared before the Committee and gave evidence on several of these Bills. Seventeen of the Bills were passed into law, several being amended. Most of these measures are of a machinery nature, but two are worthy of special mention. The Opunake Harbour Act provides for the dissolution of the Opunake Harbour Board, which was constituted in 1908, and for the transfer of the functions, property, and endowments of this Board to the Opunake Borough Council. The Wellington City Housing Act, 1938, is of considerable interest in that it gives evidence of growing local authority concern over the admitted problem of housing. The Act authorized the Council to guarantee housing mortgages and to combine with financial institutions in making advances for housing purposes. Among the novel features of the Act is one which enables the Council to make advances for improvements to existing housing-accommodation. For the above purposes the Council is authorized to raise loans aggregating £60,000.

C. LOCAL-BODY ELECTIONS, MAY, 1938.

The triennial general elections of members of all local bodies were held on Wednesday, 11th May, 1938. This is the first occasion on which all local-body elections have been held simultaneously, and accordingly completed the scheme contemplated by the Local Elections and Polls Amendment Act, 1934-35, for the fixing of a uniform date for these elections. Partly as a result of unforeseen circumstances arising out of the fixing of a uniform date for the elections and partly because of changes in the law regarding voting-rights, the Department was called upon to investigate and advise on an abnormal number of questions arising out of the operation of local-government electoral laws.

It may be mentioned that a considerable number of requests for advice arose out of the fact that the elections for members of Hospital, Harbour, and Electric-power Boards are conducted either by Borough Councils or County Councils, and on this occasion it was necessary to consider these elections as part of the co-ordinated scheme.

In addition, the different hours of closing the poll prescribed in respect of the elections of the various classes of local authorities necessitated consideration being given to a large number of requests for an extension of polling-hours, so as to simplify and unify the taking of the poll in districts where two or more different local authorities were concerned. Orders in Council were issued extending polling-hours in the case of nineteen local authorities.

D. LOCAL-GOVERNMENT REFORM.

The Local Government (Amalgamation Schemes) Bill, which had been introduced into the House in 1936 and again in 1937, on both occasions for circulation purposes only, was not again reintroduced into the House in 1938, but the special Committee which had been set up and which had heard some evidence on the proposed Bill, was reconstituted as a Committee to hear evidence on the Government's proposals. The Committee met on numerous occasions and heard evidence from most national associations of local authorities and from many other interested bodies, including several individual local authorities.

In its report to Parliament (paper I-15, Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1938) the Committee endorsed the proposals of the Government as set out in the proposed Bill; the only amendment which it considered desirable was that clause 18 (which places on the local authority or person objecting to the scheme the onus of proving that an amalgamation scheme was not desirable) should be