

As to (2) above—namely, proposals under other enactments submitted to the Local Government Commission—a considerable number of these proposals have been considered by the Commission throughout the year, and it is recognized that these proposals will come to hand from time to time and must be dealt with. The consensus of opinion of such local bodies as have been involved in such proposals during the past twelve months has been that the Local Government Commission provides a much better background against which these proposals can be considered than was available under the existing statutes.

As to (3) above, several important investigations have been carried out and some are still being continued. The Commission recognizes that its function in this regard must be purely advisory, and is always willing to place the combined experience of its members at the disposal of the Minister and the Government and of the local authorities throughout the Dominion.

In the sequel, the work of the Local Government Commission during the past year will be discussed in detail.

III. PROCEDURE OF THE COMMISSION

When a proposal is before the Local Government Commission, either as a reorganization scheme under section 12 or as a referred proposal under section 24, the Commission immediately, through its officers, carries out some detailed investigation into the facts of the situation. The mere fact that a request is made for the Local Government Commission to act does not of itself commit the Commission to take any action. The Commission always satisfies itself before it takes any action, even in the direction of holding a public inquiry, that a *prima facie* case exists for some change in the existing structure and that the change would be to the benefit of the local authorities concerned and to the people in the area in particular. In some cases it has appeared that the local authorities and the ratepayers concerned have agreed as to the proposed change being desirable. The Commission, having satisfied itself as to the desirability of the change, has on several occasions without a public inquiry issued a provisional scheme providing for the change. Such a procedure has given to all persons concerned an opportunity to object to the scheme or to suggest desirable amendments thereto. This method has been very satisfactory, in that it has saved time and expense. In other cases where there have been objections to the proposals or where large public issues have been involved, the Commission has exercised the power given to it under section 14 of its Act to hold a public inquiry.

Prior to all public inquiries, full notice is given to all the parties concerned and to all the interested public and semi-public bodies, including the Ministers and Government Departments likely to be concerned, in the area. In addition, public notice by advertisement in newspapers circulating the district is always given. All interests, however remote, are notified of the inquiry and given an opportunity, if they so desire, to appear before the Commission and submit their points of view. Such notice is issued at least one month before the inquiry commences.

The Commission allows all parties to be represented at an inquiry either by counsel or in such manner as the party desires. In general, it has requested the parties to submit their evidence in writing, although there is no objection to such evidence being expanded orally or, in cases of private individuals who have no facilities for submitting their evidence in writing, to their giving the whole of their evidence orally. The various parties are entitled to cross-examine each other's witnesses. Although it is usual for the larger authorities to be represented by counsel, in quite a number of the inquiries no counsel have appeared, the case being conducted by the authorized representatives of the local authorities or parties concerned. Although, as far as possible, ordinary rules as to evidence and procedure are followed, strict adherence thereto is not demanded, for fear that relevant evidence may thus be excluded.