

REPORT

I. INTRODUCTORY

IN presenting our annual report for 1949 we have not considered it necessary to make further reference to the functions and procedure of the Commission, which were dealt with fully in our last report.

The various matters considered by the Commission during the past year have been tabulated in the Appendix hereto.

It is apparent that the functions of the Commission are becoming more widely known, and its services are being availed of by local governing authorities, as well as by the public in general. The volume of inquiries made by organizations not directly connected with local government, and by individuals throughout the country, is an indication that renewed interest is being taken in the conduct of local affairs.

II. PROGRESS OF GENERAL REVIEW

Without recourse to an increase in the staff of the Commission to undertake preliminary factual investigational work it has not been possible to make an over-all general review of territorial local government during the year on account of the numerous urgent matters with which the Commission has had to deal.

In accordance with the policy which we have laid down, preliminary investigations by our own officers have proceeded in order that the Commission might have before it all the facts so far as they are ascertainable. The collection and co-ordination of factual data has been no inconsiderable task.

It has been possible, however, during the twenty-two months since the Commission was constituted to formulate certain principles in regard to the relationship of urban local government as it affects adjacent lands under rural control. The experience thus gained will be a valuable factor in determining the best type of county unit and the degree of responsibility of County Councils regarding administration of urban pockets within their boundaries.

A preliminary investigation of counties, for instance, is being undertaken, and it is hoped to complete this during the coming year. Such investigation is necessary to determine certain principles, such as the most suitable area which can be administered efficiently as a county unit. The trend of present-day costs relating to the administration and work associated with local government has accentuated the need for an overall review in order that the best services can be given to the people generally. This, however, must be related to the democratic rights of the individual, and in making our decisions, on territorial adjustments in particular, we have found that this aspect has created intense interest and no little difficulty. We have, however, made every endeavour to give consideration to the interests of the greatest number, although some of our decisions may have appeared, at the time, to have detrimentally affected certain sectional groups or individual interests. Any form of reconstruction to meet the modern demands of technical efficiency and economy in local government, particularly where population is concentrated, must of necessity conflict to some degree with the democratic rights of the individual.

However, as a safeguard to what we consider to be the essence of good local government, the Commission has given considerable thought to recommendations for the institution of local committees in larger urban units. We consider that, given statutory recognition and certain minor functions, these local committees will adequately safeguard the interests of the people and enable purely local matters to be dealt with expeditiously, particularly if there is co-operation between the local committees and the elected representatives of the local governing urban authorities and their administrative and technical staffs.