

planning Conference was accepted, Mr. S. Hurst Seager, of Christchurch, consenting to represent the Government. His report on the proceedings, a very ably compiled and interesting document illustrated with plans and photographs, has been printed and circulated. Subsequently, the Minister having decided to call a Dominion Town-planning Conference, Mr. Seager was appointed honorary organizing director. The Conference itself took place after the close of the year, but it will not be out of place to refer here to the preliminary work done by Mr. Seager.

He began with the Department early in December, and in the next four months travelled through both Islands lecturing and organizing. In consequence of his efforts public interest in the subject was stimulated to a degree which undoubtedly ensured a successful gathering at the Conference. The Government and the people generally are indebted to his genuine enthusiasm and ability.

*Boroughs and Town Districts.*—The boundaries of only one borough (Birkenhead) were altered. No new boroughs were constituted. The boundaries of the cities of Auckland and Christchurch and of the Boroughs of Ohakune, Takapuna, and Birkenhead were redefined.

In previous years the growth of a metropolitan spirit in Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin resulted in extensions of the boundaries of these cities either through the medium of amalgamation with contiguous boroughs or by the inclusion of adjoining areas of counties which had become purely residential. In these three cities metropolitan activity seems to be resting for the moment, but in Wellington the spirit is moving indeed. The union during the year of Wellington and Onslow gave it a great impetus. In the Boroughs of Karori and Miramar, which are essentially but outlying portions of the city, amalgamation has become a live issue, and the cross-harbour suburbs of Eastbourne (a borough) and Day's Bay (a portion of Hutt County) are beginning to consider seriously the advisability of it. The position and geographical features of Wellington give it problems of its own, some of which—means of access and transport, water-supply, and drainage—are of such a nature as to demand, ultimately, one large body to deal with them. The creation of the Hutt Road Board alone, with its representation of all the suburban districts and its utilizing the City Council's plant and staff for the actual work of maintenance, has helped to familiarize those at present outside with city management, and to give the city a sympathetic understanding of the suburban point of view. But that which more than anything else is most significant of the metropolitan spirit in the capital is the fact that even in the Boroughs of Petone and Hutt the subject of amalgamation is now being discussed.

Now that the war is over, metropolitan government in the four cities can receive the attention it requires. In 1914 and 1915 the Department gave considerable thought to the question, and the possibility of legislation being required in the near future caused it to begin the task of collecting information. The reference made to this question in the annual report of 1916 is even more true of to-day, and this, in certain directions, not in spite of but because of the war. And the epidemic, if it did nothing else, has made more adequate legislation a necessity. I wish, with regard to legislation for the cities, to repeat the following from my 1916 report: "The needs of each, moreover, are so particularly and peculiarly individual that I doubt whether one Act dealing with the four of them would be sufficient. Each one of them needs special legislation, which in one case at least must make provision for metropolitan areas beyond the city proper."

Two new town districts, Nightcaps and Papatoetoe, were constituted, and one, Nightcaps, was declared not to form part of a county. The boundaries of Castlecliff and Papakura were altered. The number of members of the Kaponga Town Board was increased. A petition for constitution of a town district at Henderson was not granted.

*Counties.*—The report of the Northern Counties Boundaries Commission was given effect to, the boundaries of Bay of Islands, Hokianga, Hobson, Mangonui, Whangarei, and Whangaroa Counties being altered accordingly. The fact that only one protest against any of the alterations was received is a tribute to the thoroughness of the Commission's work. Other counties the boundaries of which were altered were Rangitikei and Wanganui, Waipatu and Waikohu.

The boundaries of Heathcote, Eden, Waimarino, and Waitemata Counties were redefined.

The policy of the Government for some years past has been to object to the constitution of new counties. In any comprehensive measure of local-government reform one of the most necessary provisions will be one considerably reducing the number of counties, extending the boundaries of those remaining, and endowing the Councils thereof with wider powers. This has been generally recognized, and Parliament itself has thrown out a number of County Bills of recent years. In the meantime, however, settlement has gone ahead in hitherto sparsely populated areas, and groups of settlers have found themselves altogether out of touch and sympathy with the rest of the counties within which their lands are situated. The conclusion to which this has led is that, pending new local-government legislation, there must be—but only under certain well-defined circumstances—a modification of the policy of no new counties. Last session the new Uawa County, comprising Tolaga Riding of Cook County, was constituted by Act, and has since been divided into ridings, the representation thereof fixed, and arrangements made for the first election. Two other County Bills—Inglewood and Hauraki Plains—were withdrawn, the Minister agreeing to set up Commissions to inquire and report as to the necessity for the new counties. The Commissions were duly appointed, and since the close of the year have reported.

Several questions of importance to County Councils generally received consideration during the year. A very vexed question is the power of County Councils to expend loan-moneys on existing roads. The Audit Office holds that loan-moneys may not be raised for or expended on maintenance of any public works. The first metalling of existing roads or the re-forming of them is clearly new work, but the difficulty arising out of the latter is what work actually amounts to remaking. Until it is possible to legislate or until it has been made the subject of a test case, the matter must remain in doubt.

County riding accounts kept pursuant to sections 118 and 128 of the Counties Act and various amendments thereof are the cause of much accounting difficulty, though some County Clerks have succeeded in drawing admirably clear forms. Power was taken in 1915 to make regulations prescrib-