

mention of which was made in my last report. By means of this Act two new counties—namely, Otorohanga and Taumarunui—were constituted, the Awakino and Waitomo Counties were united, and important adjustments were made between the boundaries of five counties. Five road districts were abolished, and one new road district constituted at Taupo, where there was no local governing authority. In addition a considerable portion of the West Taupo County, in which the Counties Act was not in force, was brought under county control, and the remainder of the county united with the East Taupo County, forming now only one county in that district in which the Act is not in force. The abolition of the Road Boards was brought about as the result of the bringing of that portion of the West Taupo County under county control, and of course means a considerable step forward in the local government of that district. It is, however, fitting to place on record here the useful work done by the Boards of these road districts as a temporary expedient pending county control.

The boundaries were adjusted between ten counties, and the necessary action taken to alter the riding boundaries consequent thereon; the boundaries of eight counties were redefined consequent upon the alteration or constitution of boroughs; six County Councils passed special orders altering the boundaries of ridings; certain ridings in the Southland County were altered by Order in Council so as to bring them into conformity with the Counties Act.

An extension of time was granted for holding the annual meeting of Councillors in three counties, and for the preparation of the valuation rolls of one county. The Rodney County adopted the system of rating on the unimproved value.

The Counties Conference was held in September, and, as usual, various remits were forwarded to the Department for consideration for legislation. It was not found possible to bring down legislation dealing with all these matters last session, but a Counties Amendment Act was passed containing some of the more important matters. The remainder have been noted for consideration when it is found possible to deal with the measures affected thereby.

*Boroughs.*—Two new boroughs, Raetihi and Avondale, were constituted, and the Woolston Borough was united with the City of Christchurch. The boundaries of four boroughs were altered, and ten redefined. The Geraldine and Timaru Boroughs adopted the system of rating on the unimproved value. The number of members of the Whangarei Borough Council was increased. The Wellington City milk-supply was declared a trading undertaking as defined by the Municipal Corporations Act.

There has been considerable activity in regard to municipal boundaries, and several matters involving somewhat comprehensive alterations in the boundaries of a number of boroughs were under consideration at the close of the year.

*Road Districts.* In my last report I made reference to the rapid decrease in the number of road districts in the Dominion, and the past year has been no exception to this rule, for during the year no less than thirty-three road districts were either merged in their respective counties or included in some other district, leaving only forty-nine in existence, as against eighty-two at the close of last year. The power given by section 30 of the Counties Act, 1920, has been exercised in merging some of the smaller road districts in counties where the total area covered by such districts comprised only a small portion of the county. One of the principal objections to this form of control is that the existence of Road Boards means increased administrative expenses. Nevertheless, it is impossible to say too much of the valuable work performed by Road Boards in the early development of the country districts.

A short Road Boards Amendment Act was passed containing purely administrative provisions, but it is not considered necessary to bring down any comprehensive amendment in view of the rapid decrease of this form of local government.

The Avondale Road District was raised to the status of a borough.

*Town Districts.*—Four town districts were constituted, the boundaries of two town districts were altered, one town district was declared not to form part of the county in which it was situated, and the number of Commissioners of one district increased. Power was taken to increase two districts beyond the statutory limit of two square miles.

The Town Boards Act was not dealt with last session, but it is recognized that it must be dealt with at the earliest possible moment, as it is now very obsolete. The finances of Town Boards were temporarily dealt with by the insertion of a clause in the Finance Act of last session, increasing their rating-powers so as to bring them into line with those of Borough Councils; but apart from this it is of the utmost importance that the whole Act be remodelled.

*Land Drainage Districts.*—Two drainage districts were constituted and two were united, whilst three were abolished. The boundaries of five districts were altered. The cost of reconstruction of the Mangapiko Stream, and the cost of maintenance of the Gordonton—Motunaoho Road drain was apportioned among the various local bodies concerned.

A question which is of considerable importance and which has caused the Department much concern is the conflict of powers which frequently exists by reason of both a Drainage Board and a River Board controlling the one area. This position exists in several parts of the Dominion, but more particularly in the Waikato and Manawatu districts, and it has been exercising the attention of the officers not only of this Department, but also of the Public Works and Lands Departments, as to how such positions could be overcome. The ultimate solution appears to be a comprehensive scheme embracing both river-conservation and land-drainage under one Board, and reports have frequently been obtained recommending the adoption of such a course in certain districts. This object has, however, been defeated in the past, and is still being defeated by the formation of small Boards, brought about by reason of the fact that settlers whose lands are low-lying and require drainage cannot wait for a larger scheme, and form themselves into small Drainage Boards for the purpose of providing a temporary means of draining their lands. Whilst this is in many cases very necessary the unfortunate part of it is that very often the drainage-works carried out by these small Boards