

(f) *A Poll of Ratepayers.*—Several witnesses commented that there was no proposal in the Bill for a poll of ratepayers of the districts concerned, and requested that such a provision should be inserted in the Bill. Your Committee, however, would point out that section 141 of the Municipal Corporations Act, 1933, and similar provisions in the Counties Act, 1920, provides for amalgamation after a poll of ratepayers. Some of the witnesses argued that the present Bill was unnecessary, as sufficient power was already given in the existing statutes. These provisions have been in existence for many decades, but have been taken advantage of to only a slight degree, with the result that there has been but a small reduction in the number of local bodies, and even this has been offset by the creation of new bodies for separate purposes, and in some cases the multiplicity of local governing authorities does seriously militate against effective government of the area as a whole.

It is important too, to notice that the legislation at present in existence provides only for the amalgamation of adjoining local authorities of the same type, and does not, as the present proposals, permit the absorption by a central strong local authority of the powers and functions of numerous small administrative bodies within a given area. There is no legislation on the statute-book at the present time permitting such reorganization. Further, the structure of local government in the Dominion is a problem of national importance. When, for instance, the time arrived in 1876 for the abolition of the provinces, no vote of the people was taken. Local interests are adequately safeguarded by the proposal to institute a separate Commission for each amalgamation scheme proposed.

The appointment of a Commission of inquiry with judicial powers and with an obligation to hear the evidence of interested parties is more than a sufficient protector for democracy. After all, the desires of some small section of the community must not be allowed to stand in the way of desirable progress. Experience of recent polls has clearly shown that personal and vested interests have succeeded in clouding the real issues and prevented ratepayers from appreciating the questions at stake.

Some of the witnesses who were strongly in support of a Royal Commission and a poll of ratepayers admitted under cross-examination that if a Royal Commission were set up they would not press for a poll. We have pointed out above, however, that local interests are more definitely safeguarded by the Commissions proposed by the Bill than if a single Royal Commission were set up, and consequently, if a poll is not demanded after a Royal Commission, then *a fortiori* it is not necessary after a district Commission. We are of opinion that the insertion of a clause requiring a poll of the ratepayers before the Commission's report is put into force would completely nullify the effects of the Bill, and therefore we cannot recommend such a provision.

(g) *Evidence before the Commission.*—Strong exception was taken by several witnesses to the provision in clause 18 of the Bill placing the onus of proving that an amalgamation scheme was not desirable on the local authority or person objecting to the scheme. The Committee consider that this clause should be omitted. The net result would be that the Commission would then be required to adjudicate impartially on the evidence submitted and its own investigations, and the objecting local authorities would not be placed in a disadvantageous position.

(h) *Conclusions and Recommendation.*—Finally, apart from the questions raised above, there was very general acceptance of the proposals outlined in the Bill. Objections came usually from small local authorities who feared that they may lose their identity, or from people who obviously had in mind some particular possible amalgamation scheme. We do not think we are called on to comment on the questions raised by the Rabbit Boards' Association, the Electric-power Boards' Association, and several other specific *ad hoc* bodies. Questions such as these must obviously be left for the examination of the Commission when particular reorganization schemes are under consideration. It is clear that whatever may be the machinery provided for local government reform, no amalgamations or readjustments can be hastily made; they can be carried out only methodically and after careful consideration of each case. We are of opinion that the proposals as outlined in the draft Bill before the Committee (with the amendment suggested in paragraph (g) of this report) should be given legislative effect, so as to open the way for a solution of the admitted problem of local government, consistent with efficiency in administration and also with the principles of democracy.

15th September, 1938.

D. W. COLEMAN, Chairman.

SPECIAL REPORT.

I HAVE the honour to report that at its final meeting, held on Tuesday, the 13th day of September, 1938, the Local Government (Amalgamation Schemes) Bill Committee unanimously passed the following Resolution: "That this Committee desires to express its appreciation of the able manner in which the Chairman, Mr. D. W. Coleman, has conducted the business of the Committee, and directs that this resolution be reported to the House."

J. ROBERTSON, Member of the Committee.

15th September, 1938.

SPECIAL REPORT.

I HAVE the honour to report that at its final meeting, held on Tuesday, the 13th day of September, 1938, the Local Government (Amalgamation Schemes) Bill Committee expressed its appreciation of the services rendered by the Clerk, Mr. W. J. Organ, and directed that this be reported to the House.

15th September, 1938.

D. W. COLEMAN, Chairman.

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