

The desire to amalgamate contiguous local authorities purely for the sake of size does not appeal to the Commission as the most satisfactory way of solving the admitted local-government problem in the Dominion. Amalgamations may be desirable, but unless it can be proved that the people will benefit not merely in a material way, but also in those intangible ways best summed up by the term "democratic," amalgamations may result in beaurocratic control divorced from local interest.

Local government, to be satisfactory, must retain local interest. This is not to say that large local authorities such as Wellington do not retain that local interest. This remark is merely to indicate that the Commission realizes the importance of this element of our national life and has decided to take it strongly into account in all its investigations.

One of its early decisions, therefore, was that, before any positive steps were taken either to hold a public inquiry or to proceed with any major reorganization, investigations would proceed so that the Commission would have before it all the facts, as far as they are ascertainable, before any formal or final steps are taken.

It will be realized that the collection of such data is not an inconsiderable task, and the officers of the Commission have for a considerable time been engaged, among other things, on the collection of this data necessary for major reorganization schemes. As far as Christchurch is concerned, the investigations had, by the end of the financial year 1947-48, proceeded sufficiently far to warrant the Commission giving public notice that the inquiry into the reorganization of local government in the Christchurch metropolitan area would commence on the 18th May, 1948. It is anticipated that this inquiry will take a considerable time. Every opportunity will be given to all interests to state fully their attitude towards the problems at issue.

One of the difficulties which has emerged during the past year has been that in public inquiries local authorities have, to an undue extent, relied on unsupported opinion. In quite a number of cases there have been no detailed investigations by the local authorities concerned before supporting or opposing any particular proposition. In one case recently, where a proposal for the alteration of the boundaries between two adjacent counties was at issue, neither County Council had made any investigations as to the financial implications of such adjustment. The Commission feels that mere opinions unsupported by facts on questions of this kind are not sufficient to warrant drastic action. In another recent case where a petition for the exclusion of certain lands from a borough was being investigated, it transpired that the borough, although opposed to the proposal, was unable to assist the Commission as to the general lines of development of that particular town. There was no appreciation of the necessity for town-planning surveys, quite apart from the preparation of a town-planning scheme. In general, however, local authorities are appreciating more clearly the necessity to undertake adequate investigations before approaching the Commission.

In connection with the reorganization of hospital districts in North Auckland, which was one of the matters specifically referred to by the parliamentary Select Committee on Local Government, extensive investigations had been carried out in this field for a number of years by various Departments, and hence it was possible, after some further financial investigations by the Commission's investigating staff, to undertake and complete this inquiry within six months of the Commission's appointment.

Other investigations of a major character are still continuing, and, although the Commission realizes the importance of many of these problems, it is felt that until a thorough background is available no hasty decisions should be made.

Apart from these major questions, a number of important proposals have been submitted to the Commission under the provisions of section 24 of the Local Government Commission Act. Practically all of these proposals, which have been investigated either by public inquiry or otherwise, would have involved a separate Commission if the Local Government Commission had not been in existence. The Commission,