

*Legislation of 1915.*—Very little legislation affecting local government was passed in the session of 1915, the most important being the Cost of Living Act, the Local Authorities Empowering Act, the Lake Coleridge Water-power Act, and short amendments of the Municipal Corporations and Counties Acts.

Regulations have been drafted under the Cost of Living Act, but not yet issued. So far there has not been any demand on the part of local authorities for the powers conferred by the Act. This is to be regretted, as the powers therein conferred upon Borough Councils are capable of being employed by them in not only reducing the cost of living, but also in securing supplies of pure food.

Two applications under the Lake Coleridge Water-power Act for the powers of Borough Councils with respect to lighting and the supply of electricity have been received from County Councils, and are at present under consideration.

The Order in Council contemplated by section 5 of the Counties Amendment Act giving extended powers for the licensing of vehicles in certain counties has been issued.

One application (by the Heathcote County Council) under section 12 of the Counties Amendment Act, for the powers of Borough Councils with respect to drainage and sanitation, has been received, and the necessary Order in Council has been gazetted.

*Future Legislation.*—The war has naturally interfered with prospective local-government legislation, and the accumulation of requests for amendments of various Acts is now even greater than before the session of 1913, when everything in hand was disposed of. The Municipal Conference met in 1914 as usual, and the result of its deliberations was over one hundred requests for legislation. The Counties Conference, due in 1915, was abandoned, and the Municipal Association has decided not to hold its conference this year. Thus the two head bodies connected with local government have recognized the necessity to subordinate legitimate local needs to the national interest during the war. At the same time the fact must be recognized that the war itself—the drain that the cost of it will be on the Dominion when hostilities finally cease—has raised problems with respect to local government that even now in the midst of war cannot be altogether laid aside.

It has been recognized for some years that the administrative cost of local government generally should be reduced. The war has made this a necessity. The finances of the Dominion cannot be allowed to suffer by the diversion of money to a channel that is already, in a manner of speaking, full to overflowing. At the same time the legitimate and necessary expansion of local government to meet local communal needs as they arise must be provided for. The restriction of the one, while providing the necessary powers for the other, is a task that cannot be accomplished at once, and yet its consummation can be hastened by a study of the whole question now, with a view to legislation when the opportune time arrives.

A casual study of the local Acts of Parliament during the past few years, of the resolutions forwarded from the Municipal Conference, and of the difficulties that in actual practice confront them, reveals the undoubted fact that even at present the needs of the four cities at least are not only of a different nature from those of other boroughs, but, further, that the present legislation governing their activities—particularly the Municipal Corporations Act, 1908, which is the foundation of their existence—does not adequately endow them with powers. So long as the statute law of the Dominion does not distinguish them other than by conferring on them the at present empty title of "city," so long must their future progress be hampered.

Requests are constantly made for amendments of the Municipal Corporations and other Acts which, while at least desirable for the cities and larger boroughs, should not be granted to smaller boroughs. Even the machinery of the local Bill as a means of widening their powers can, I think, be proved to be ultimately a hindrance rather than a help. 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.

Here again is a matter that does not admit of undue haste. Special study extending, may be, over some years will be necessary, but this study cannot be started too soon. Undue delay, on the other hand, will operate against the consummation of any scheme, for the suburban areas will in a few years be so heavily rated for purely local needs by small local bodies as to make the necessary operations of the metropolitan body an almost unbearable burden. In particular, as the cities and secondary centres of the Dominion extend, the want of a town-planning scheme becomes increasingly evident. The immediate suburbs and outdistricts of to-day will in the not distant future become parts of cities and towns, and provision should now be made that in cutting up lands for sale as residential sites the necessities of drainage, water-supply, school-sites, recreation reserves, and sites for State requirements should be considered.

The local-government question generally, apart from the special case of the cities, has received considerable attention in the past. It has been the subject of Bills and a conference of local bodies—that convened by you in 1912. Opinion is alive to the necessity for new methods and the necessity for better provision being made for the amalgamation of existing local authorities, and, above all, for the codification and simplification of the entire law dealing with local government, which is now spread over so many different Acts.

One further particular phase of the matter has come into prominence during the past two years—the necessity for new and more comprehensive methods of dealing with river-conservation. The existing practice of dealing with small stretches of a river by River Boards constituted under the River Boards Act, 1908, while having been of value where but a small length of river needs conservation, is proving utterly futile in cases like the Orari and Waihi Rivers in South Canterbury, and the Manawatu River in Wellington, where the nature of the rivers and the value of the lands endangered render it absolutely necessary for one authority with an adequate rating-