

REPORTS.

SPECIAL REPORT.

I HAVE the honour to report that the Local Government (Amalgamation Schemes) Bill Committee to-day passed the following Resolution:—

“That the proceedings of the Committee during the taking of evidence be open to accredited representatives of the press, and that the Chairman do report this Resolution to the House and move that it be adopted and agreed to by the House.”

28th July, 1938.

J. ROBERTSON, for Chairman.

REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMALGAMATION SCHEMES) BILL.—On behalf of the Local Government (Amalgamation Schemes) Bill Committee I have the honour to present the following report:—

(a) *Evidence submitted.*—The Committee was appointed to consider the proposals contained in the Local Government (Amalgamation Schemes) Bill which was submitted to the House of Representatives in the 1937–38 session. As the Bill was not again introduced this session the Committee was, in effect, set up to hear evidence on the Government's proposals with regard to the amalgamation of local authorities in the Dominion. At the commencement of its proceedings the Committee issued invitations to some six hundred local authorities, of all classes, to submit to it their views on the principles and provisions of the Bill, and has been furnished with the opinions and criticisms of some four hundred and fifty local authorities, either through their central organizations, by direct representation, or by written statements. In addition to the evidence heard this session, verbatim reports of the evidence heard on the 30th November last year were supplied to the members of the Committee, and in making this report the evidence which was then tendered has been taken into consideration.

The proposals as outlined in the draft Bill submitted to the Committee do not provide for the amalgamation of specific local authorities or for any detailed plan as to the reorganization of local government in the Dominion, but are confined to the provision of machinery designed to facilitate local amalgamation schemes. The witnesses giving evidence were informed that as the Bill was concerned only with general machinery provisions, the Committee would not hear evidence on any specific amalgamation considered to be desirable or at any time proposed, but despite this intimation some of the evidence supplied was obviously directed towards specific amalgamations and is therefore not commented on.

The desirability of some reduction in the number of local bodies in the Dominion has been recognized by every Government in power for the last fifty years. On numerous occasions in the Governor-General's speeches, in Budget speeches, and in public statements by previous Prime Ministers and other Ministers of the Crown mention has been made of the intention to proceed with this desirable work, but up to the present time no real progress has been made. It is interesting to notice in passing that every witness examined by the Committee admitted the desirability and necessity of some scheme of amalgamation and some reorganization of local government in the Dominion. The Municipal Association of New Zealand, Incorporated, the New Zealand Counties' Association, and several other local-body associations have all endorsed the principle of amalgamation, subject in some cases to certain preliminary inquiries.

(b) *The Proposals.*—Briefly, the Bill acknowledges that there is a surplus of local governing authorities in the Dominion, that some reduction is desirable, that the local inhabitants and the local authorities should be given a considerable voice in the determination of the future government of any area, that the question of local government reform should be entirely divorced from party politics, and that the ultimate aim of amalgamation schemes should be the promotion of efficiency and co-ordination in local government in the Dominion. To achieve the reorganization which the Bill contemplates authority is given to the Governor-General to set up a Commission of inquiry for each proposal for reorganization in a particular area. The local authorities in any area are given the right to draw up a scheme for submission to the Minister of Internal Affairs, and if no agreement can be reached as to the details of the scheme by the local authorities in the area as a group, then any local authority in the area is entitled to submit a scheme, and, failing the submission of a scheme from the district itself, the Minister, if he considers that some reorganization is necessary, is authorized to require a local authority or group of local authorities in the area under consideration to draw up a scheme. If the local authorities still fail to prepare a scheme, the Minister himself may prepare a scheme. The Minister is required to submit the proposed scheme, however prepared, to the Commission mentioned above, which, after hearing evidence and making such other inquiries as it deems necessary, is required to report to the Minister on the proposals. The report may either endorse the scheme as submitted, make other suggestions, or suggest that nothing is necessary or should be done in the particular circumstances. On the receipt of the report the Minister is required to send a copy of the report to the local authority of every district affected by the scheme, and to publish in one or more newspapers circulating in these districts a notice setting forth the nature of the recommendations made by the Commission, and to give to local authorities and other persons affected an opportunity of