

**The Canberra Times 13 March 1930**

## **NEW ADVISORY COUNCIL**

### **TERM ONLY TWELVE MONTHS**

### **MINISTER INTRODUCES NEW BILL**

### **TO ABOLISH COMMISSION**

Disappointment was general among Canberra residents who listened from the gallery in the House of Representatives yesterday to the Minister for Home Affairs (Mr Blakeley) in introducing the bill for the abolition of the Commission.

The term for which the new advisory council is to be elected is only twelve months and both the speech and the bill fail to give any indication that the residents will be any better off ultimately than under Commission rule.

It is regarded as inevitable that under the new scheme Parliament will be worried more than ever by local troubles.

The Minister announced that the present functions of the Commission will be divided as follows:-

### **HEALTH**

- Protection of public health
- Sanitation - omitting night soil and garbage removal
- Medical inspection of school children
- Control and preparation and sale of drugs and food - including abattoirs, dairy supervision, milk supply, sale of meat.
- Hospitals
- Control of stock diseases
- Orchards, fruit and plant pests.

### **WORKS**

- Construction and maintenance of all engineering works including roads, footpaths, bridges, culverts, levees, sewers and treatment works, water courses, drains, water supply, dams, reservoirs, electric power stations, mains and services, mechanical works, etc.
- Construction and maintenance of all buildings and residences other than those constructed privately.
- Provision of electricity and water.
- Acquisition and disjurement(?) of all public buildings excluding hotels, private buildings and residences.
- Control and management of factories and workshops, brick works, quarries, cement products etc.
- Plant required for construction of all works.
- Purchase and supply of material and stores.
- Supply of furniture and fittings for all Commonwealth requirements.
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### **ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S**

- Registration of titles
- Preparation of ordinances, by-laws, regulations, etc, for the government of the Territory.

### **HOME AFFAIRS (CIVIC)**

- Development of the city according to the Griffin plan.
- Special local government activities.
- Social Service
- Preparation of balance sheets.
- Collection and accounting for all amounts due for rents, rates, electricity, water, garbage, etc etc
- Approval of designs etc of all buildings erected in the Territory.
- Subdivisions.
- Fire Brigade etc.
- Land valuation.
- Control and management of Crown lands.
- Levying and collection of rates.
- Forestry.
- Destruction of vermin and noxious weeds.
- Disposal of residences, including sale, letting and inspection.
- General municipal government,
- Education.
- Hotels and boarding houses.
- Bus and transport other than for works, tractors and cars for works inspectors.
- Collection of charges for electricity, water and sewerage.
- Markets and weighbridges, pounds.
- Sanitation, garbage removal.
- Industrial matters, including tribunals.
- Cemeteries and burials
- Parks and gardens, recreation grounds.
- Administration and accounting for above.

This allocation of responsibilities was made at a conference of permanent heads and the Commission and the Departments are ready to function in their new capacity as soon as this bill is passed.

An Advisory Council will be created consisting of the Civic Administrator as president, the secretaries of the Home and Affairs and Works Departments, the Director-General of Health, and three residents of the Territory elected for a period of twelve months under the ordinary adult franchise system.

It is proposed to pay each of the elected members of the Council an honorarium at the rate of 100 pounds per annum.

The functions of the Council are to advise the Minister in relation to any matter affecting the Territory including advice as to the making of new ordinances or the repeal or amendment of existing ordinances.

The Minister informed Parliament that this change will be effected by ordinance. The reason for not including the terms of the ordinance in the bill is purely for convenience.

In moving the second reading of the bill the Minister said that it was introduced in accordance with the expressed policy of the Government to alter the present system of administering the Federal Capital Territory and to provide for more direct Ministerial and Departmental control.

He said that since the decision to establish the Capital City in Canberra was first made, there had been many and varied forms of control. This was in part due to changes in the administering departments, and in part to the unique character of the project upon which the Commonwealth had embarked. For the first time in history, a capital city was to be created, not by the normal process of economic development, but by the order of the Government and Parliament. It was to be expected that in the process unforeseen difficulties would be encountered and rapid re-adjustments entailed(?). As a result, the administration of the Territory presents a picture of many administrations each of which served its particular purpose and then gave way to something better calculated to advance the progress of the city to a further stage.

Reviewing past forms of administration the Minister said that the greatest setback to the establishment of Canberra had been the war which caused a drain upon the resources of the Commonwealth and brought the Capital City for many years to a standstill.

In 1921 it was decided that construction should be speeded up and Parliament and the Departments transferred as soon as possible. A criticism of the existing system was that officers in charge of construction in Canberra were responsible to Ministers in Melbourne. The Government of the day thereupon introduced a bill providing for the appointment of a Commission with very wide powers, and with instructions to proceed with construction as quickly as possible. The appointment of the Commission was opposed as being unnecessary and expensive and an abrogation of Ministerial and Parliamentary responsibilities.

'With the transfer of Parliament,' the Minister said, 'the purely constructional stage of Canberra gave way in importance to the occupation stage. From then on the capacity of the Commission to control the city affairs of Canberra was put to the critical test. It was then that the fears originally expressed by the Labour Party began to take shape. The Commission originally selected because of engineering, constructional and town planning qualifications found itself faced with the task of administering in a civic capacity the affairs of a modern city. Their task was rendered even more difficult by the fact that the land was to be rented under the leasehold system and the outside financial (?) and business agencies were, therefore, not disposed to co-operate in any considerable way. There was, too, a very human factor associated with the transfer of thousands of citizens to a place far from their old associations and under conditions to which they had not then become accustomed. It was inevitable that there would be a certain amount of discontent and it is not to be wondered at that the Commission was soon involved in bitter disputes and hostile criticism inside and outside the Parliament.

'I have nothing to say about the capacity of the men who then comprised the Commission,' said Mr Blakeley. 'In their particular and specialised spheres, they did some excellent work and it may be that the sociological problems which so suddenly confronted them, were beyond them. I do say, however, that the Commission form of control under the powers conferred, irrespective of the individuals who might comprise it, was doomed to failure. It was blamed sometimes unjustly not doubt, for all the disabilities under which the citizens laboured, and despite its every effort lost the confidence of the residents.

Realizing the position, the Government of the day amended the Act in order to provide for local representation by means of election. This step, however, proved to be merely another patch upon a city of many vicissitudes. Two such representatives have been appointed: one of them resigned before his term expired [Dr LW Nott]; whilst the other tendered his resignation but withdrew it pending the disclosure of the Government's intentions with regard to a new form of control.

The relationship between the citizens and the Commission can, perhaps be best illustrated by a survey of the Commission's meetings since public representation was introduced. [Election of third commissioner 1929] Broadly speaking it has been a succession of acrimonious disputes between the representatives of the Commission and representatives of the Commission and the people's representative, followed usually by a protest from the latter as to his ineptitude in the circumstances.

It may be taken as certain that if the present form of control were continued, discontent would undoubtedly grown and the whole system collapse.

This was recognised by the previous Government. Before the close of the last Parliament the failure of the Commission form of control. This coupled with the drastic curtailment of the constructional programme, and the almost complete cessation of building activities in Canberra, compelled the Government to refuse to sanction the continuation of the Commission for a period longer than twelve months.

**'I say unhesitatingly that the Commission form of government has failed on many counts,' said the Minister. 'it was wrongly conceived, and because of its extraordinary powers, it tended to usurp the functions of the Parliament and Government. It failed to understand the temperaments and aspirations of the citizens, who disfranchised by circumstances felt themselves unsympathetically treated and powerless to protest.'**

Mr Blakeley refuted the suggestion that the Commission form of control had succeeded at Washington.

He quoted a report by Sir John Sulman who pointed out that the difficulties of Washington would have become acute ere now but for the fear of the negro vote and its manipulation by unscrupulous wire-pullers.

Mr Blakeley said that the Government expects to save at least 80,000 pounds of the present year's vote for Canberra.

**On administration alone, savings at the rate of 30.000 pounds per annum have been affected and these will be of a permanent character.**

Mr Blakeley said that the Government would welcome a time when Canberra in its municipal services was self supporting and would in that case hand over complete control to a body elected by the citizens. That day is not yet.

‘We have gone as close to direct control as the circumstances permit,’ he said. ‘The Council will be the only body dealing generally with all the activities of Canberra, and there will be no higher tribunal sitting on top of the Council rendering all its deliberations and recommendations abortive. Every important subject at present dealt with by the Commission will come before the Council..

The elected representatives will sit alongside the heads of the various Departments controlling whatever subject is before the Council. First-hand information will be always available and the necessity for frequent deputations appealing against the abuse(?) of what was regarded as an autocratic body should disappear.

The heads of the Department will, of course, be in direct contact with their Ministers and also the representatives of the people. A better understanding of the problems to be resolved and a greater sympathy in regard to them must ensue.

In the Parliament, the responsibility of the Commission as it now exists, while it will still be mainly the responsibility of the Minister for Home Affairs, will be shared jointly by no less than three Ministers.

The past has been full of disappointments and bitter recriminations,’ said the Minister, in conclusion, ‘We have had various forms of control and many controlling authorities. Mistakes, have naturally been made, and experiments initiated with great hopes have sometimes ignominiously failed. We should take to heart the lessons we have learned during the many vicissitudes of this promising city, and then relegate the troubles of the past to the limbo of forgotten things.’