

HOUSE TO RULE ON ANNEXATION, SAYS HEPBURN

**Premier Adopts Opposition
Suggestion Metropolitan
Centre Should Be Formed
Only by Legislation**

REPORT IS AWAITED

Annexation by legislation, when and if such a step is taken, and not by Municipal Board order alone, was assured the metropolitan area municipalities yesterday by Premier Hepburn, when he accepted Opposition argument that "major surgical operations" of that character should be validated by Parliament.

The assurance was given after Hon. Eric Cross, Minister of Municipal Affairs, introduced an amendment to the Municipal Act, which had the effect of widening the annexation order powers of the board. Objections from both Leopold Macaulay, South York, and George S. Henry, East York, that the only "sensible plan was an act of Parliament as in the case of Windsor," brought assent from the Premier and the declaration from Mr. Cross that he would be prepared, in committee stage, to accept an amendment that "any order of the board could not be validated except by act of this legislature."

Apply to Whole Province.

Premier Hepburn went further, and, explaining that the new amendments applied to situations generally in Ontario and not to the Toronto metropolitan area problem alone, said he was prepared to have implemented "any major annexation or any annexation by special act."

Mr. Cross, in introducing the bill, said there had been considerable criticism of too much government, and the legislation was designed to permit councils of municipalities to appear before the Municipal Board and to present their cases in amalgamation proceedings. The legislation, he emphasized, was general in character and was not designed to force annexation in the Toronto area as some feared.

"We are concerned about many townships in the eastern and northern sections which cannot maintain the existing machinery of government," he said. "We feel that if certain of these municipalities could be put together they could afford to pay a secretary or treasurer a reasonable wage and that there would be a general improvement in government."

Problems Involved.

"So far as the Toronto area is concerned, the department appointed a committee to study the particular problem. I have not come to a decision what the future of this area may be until the report is received. I might say the report should enable us to see what the problem is and should it advocate amalgamation or annexation, then we will have the machinery to proceed."

He emphasized that the problems in the area were so involved that even if annexation proceedings were advocated by the committee, it would take at least until Jan. 1, 1941, before definite action along that line could be taken.

He emphasized that under the bill the Municipal Board could appoint a referee or referees upon the adjustment of the assets and lia-

APRIL 7

bilities of the interested municipalities.

"It is the intention of the government to set up machinery to deal in a general way over the province with the problem of over-government," he said.

Opposition Leader Colonel Drew warned that there should be no misunderstanding of the assurance that action would not take place for two years. It was, he said, like telling a man who was sentenced to hang that he need not worry, the hanging would not take place for two years.

"No Hanging."

"There will be no hanging," snapped Mr. Cross.

Mr. Macaulay declared the Walkerville-Windsor annexation plan, by act of Parliament, "was the only sensible plan," and he warned that in the area there were four or five municipalities which were not in default — he mentioned Toronto, Forest Hill, Swansea, North York and Weston — which, by the minister's own statement, could be forced into amalgamation under order of the board.

"Certainly the proper place to perform surgical operations of this kind is in the House and not in the third or fourth floors of this building," he said, referring to the Municipal Board hearing room.

The Premier then added his views that any annexation action in the Toronto area must of necessity be augmented by legislation. "I believe Windsor is infinitely better off because of the action taken by this government," he added.

Change Approved.

Approval of the change proposed yesterday in the Legislature by Hon. Eric Cross in the annexation bill now before the House, was expressed by Reeves of municipalities adjoining Toronto. Most of them stated that the original idea of annexation being ordered by the Ontario Municipal Board was too arbitrary.

"It is a well advised change," said Reeve F. J. MacRae of York Township, "as annexation is certainly a matter for legislation, not a thing to be left to a board which is practically only responsible to itself."

"That is a lot fairer to the different municipalities," stated Reeve Harris of Weston.

Deputy-Reeve Ed Vogelmann of New Toronto was of opinion that the question is not as important to Lake Shore municipalities as it is to some of the others around the city.

"I think the proposed change will make the bill much more democratic," said Reeve Warren of East York.

"That makes it a much better bill," was the statement of Reeve Sam Wright of Long Branch. "I certainly approve of the change."

"While we in North York are strongly opposed to any annexation plan," stated Reeve R. E. Bales, "I think the proposed change is a much fairer one to all concerned."

"There is no doubt but that it is a step in the right direction," opined Reeve B. L. Clutterbuck of Scarborough.

TO ASK LEASIDE ABOUT MEASURE

Objections by members of the Legislature private bills committee to granting special legislation to Leaside led yesterday to the holding over of final action on the bill until the wishes of the town council were obtained.

Members intimated they were prepared to implement the section which would reduce the number of councillors from six to four, but they objected to granting special legislation which would give to Leaside, with but a population of 3,800, authority to divide the town into four wards and to pay their elected representatives not more than \$450 to the reeve, \$400 to the deputy reeve and \$300 to each councillor.

Leaside representatives argued that the proposed fees were under the amounts which the town was authorized to pay in existing general legislation. George S. Henry (Con., East York) argued that the unusual problems of Toronto suburban municipalities had led the Legislature for the past forty-five years to grant them special powers, not covered in general municipal legislation. Hon. Eric Cross, Minister of Welfare, held that since the formation of his department it was the function of the department to so redraft general legislation that it would cover these unusual circumstances and that the department was committed to that policy.