

responsibilities for property assessment, and for the administration of education, welfare, health and justice. It advocated a complete reorganization of municipal government; counties would disappear, their functions being transferred to other jurisdictions. New councils would be established, and only age would be required for voting eligibility, the property and poll tax qualifications being abolished.

Municipal finance would be completely remodelled to eliminate many repressive and inequitable local taxes, including poll taxes, personal property taxes, non-resident taxes and local automobile taxes. Municipal revenues would continue to come from the property tax, but would be heavily supplemented (from 40% to 70%) by unconditional provincial grants, in turn financed by an increased sales tax. The heavy burden of education costs would be borne entirely by the province and financed in part by a provincial property tax levied on a uniform province-wide assessment of real and business property. The balance would come from general revenues. Schools would be provincially owned, but administered by local boards.

The Report was released in early 1964, and caught most of the province's 600,000 citizens and probably even the Government unaware, for it took some two years to get the proposed legislation before the House. But following the release of a Government White Paper in early 1965, which accepted the principles of the Report, the Government agreed to adopt virtually all of the major recommendations, with some minor modifications and three major exceptions.

The first exception was the proposal that the province take over ownership of all hospitals, in line with the Commission's view that all health services should become a provincial responsibility. But this was particularly contentious in a province where nearly 40% of the population are French-Roman Catholic, and where many of their hospitals are run by religious orders.

The second exception was the proposal for new independent administrative commissions at the provincial level to run the programs of education, health, welfare and justice, in order to eliminate the possibility of patronage and political interference. The government rejected this view, on the ground that the creation of such commissions would seriously interfere with the principle of ministerial and Cabinet responsibility for publicly administered services.

The third exception was the proposal to abolish all existing municipal tax concessions to industry. Though no new tax concessions are to be granted, existing ones will be honoured, much to the relief of many industrialists, especially K. C. Irving, the

province's industrial giant.

What has been the impact of the concerted effort by the Premier and his colleagues to implement the 'Program for Equal Opportunity'? As might well be expected there have been more petitions, submissions, briefs, letters, commentaries, and public debate in New Brunswick in the last two years than in the last twenty. The traditional political apathy of the general public and pressure groups in the province has been heavily shaken, and the many decades of 'patronage government', which fed upon an inert and irresponsible public, may be over.

The two most important parts of the legislative program are education and reorganization of municipal government and finance. There are now 33 school districts instead of over 400. New regional high schools and elementary schools are under construction. There are new uniform and higher teacher salary scales. There is being implemented a new and more imaginative curriculum, and a new transportation system for pupils. All these changes are designed to give New Brunswick youth a better chance in a rapidly changing modern world.

County government has disappeared, while cities, towns and villages are functioning under entirely new legislation. New unconditional grants are being paid to all municipalities, to relieve the burden of taxation at the local level, and to equalize the fiscal capacity of municipalities so that consistent levels of service can be given to all citizens, regardless of where they live in the province.

Naturally much of the success of the program will depend upon the effectiveness of the provincial civil service which has not exactly been accustomed to this sort of dynamic change. Yet it is still quite possible that the civil service will become the program's most significant beneficiary, if the government takes the opportunity it now has to find the staff and develop the kind of modern management methods needed for the job. But if it doesn't it is hard to see anything but serious trouble ahead.

The heated debate, and the widespread implications of the reform measures, has made the next election a key one for the Liberal Government.

Property taxes have gone down, but the sales tax has gone up; there is a new and better structure for education, but it is difficult at this early stage to see the benefits; above all a great change has taken place and it has cost the province something to get the benefits. How much it will cost the Liberal party that brought the changes about will be measured in votes on October 23rd.