

Overhauling the Machinery of Empire

AN American Secretary of State was once asked by an American Ambassador to Great Britain precisely whom or what he had in mind when he addressed an official communication to His Majesty's Government. The Secretary confessed that, as a rule, he had in mind no particular person, but rather the aggregation of functionaries, no one of whom he was so fortunate as to know personally, who made up the Foreign Office, or, perhaps, the Cabinet. "But when I present your note," replied the Ambassador, "I read it to a very real man, and the impression which it makes upon him is sometimes different from what was intended when you addressed it to His Majesty's Government in general." The moral is twofold: first, that a Government (the famous preamble of the Massachusetts Constitution to the contrary notwithstanding) consists in the last resort of men; and, secondly, that discussion of governmental matters is likely to be facilitated when the officials of various countries know one another.

The practical workings of the British Constitution, interesting at all times to an American, are peculiarly interesting when examined under the shadow of the great war. I say under the shadow, rather than in the light, of the war because the war, whatever the success with which it is being prosecuted or the confidence which is felt among all classes in its outcome, has nevertheless produced, in every department of British administration, a mixture of confusion and nervous tension which makes a study of any part of the complicated mechanism exceptionally difficult. Without exception, the officials whom I have approached have shown the same courteous willingness to answer questions and further investigation that I found everywhere in France; but it was also evident, often, that they were not always quite sure of the extent of their own powers, that there was a good deal of overlapping and of arbitrary division of functions, that the machinery did not always work smoothly and surely, and that forward steps were sometimes taken a good deal in the dark. On the other hand, if unstinted personal devotion, long hours of strenuous labor, a cheerful relinquishment of the Englishman's much-valued holidays, and a serious determination to do the best with every problem that arises count for anything, the creaking wheels of empire will not fail to grind out victory and peace. I have often wondered if any honest German, were he to study the operations of government in England to-day, could still believe that they were grinding out anything else.

The transformation of the historic Cabinet which followed the overthrow of the Asquith Government, and which placed political control nominally in the hands of five Ministers, but actually in the hands of three, must be passed over here, partly because the change, in form at least, was a good deal commented upon at the time, and partly because a consideration of its full constitutional significance merits separate treatment. For the future of the British Empire as a whole, a greater significance attaches to the so-called Imperial War Cabinet. For six weeks from March 21 the Prime Ministers or other representatives of the self-governing Dominions sat in council several times each week with Mr. Lloyd George and his associates, for the consideration not only of colonial and imperial matters, but as well

of questions of war and peace and of general British policy. The arrangement was as characteristic of British constitutional methods as it was novel in form. No one of the colonial representatives was present under any constitutional warrant or mandate; each came at the personal request of Mr. Lloyd George. None was constitutionally empowered to speak for the colony which he represented, or to bind the colony, legally or morally, to the support either of his own votes or of the conclusions of the War Cabinet as a whole. None, certainly, had any constitutional right to sit in judgment upon any question of purely English policy. Yet they were for the time being integral members of the British Cabinet and integral parts of the domestic as well as of the imperial machinery of English government, and were accepted as such, apparently, not only by Parliament, but by the nation as well.

Side by side with the Imperial War Cabinet were held the sessions of the Imperial War Conference, attended by the Dominion and Indian members of the War Cabinet. A report of the proceedings of the Conference, shorn, however, of some of the most important debates, has just been published. It is not easy to draw the line between the two bodies with precision, save in form, not only because of the partial duplication of personnel, but also because various propositions which came before each of the bodies had already been discussed by the other. The most important resolution agreed to, for example, that in favor of imperial trade preference after the war, was fully debated by the War Cabinet before it was presented in the Conference, and was adopted by the latter body practically without discussion. India, on the other hand, while formally represented in the War Cabinet, was only informally represented in the Conference; and one of the resolutions of the Conference urged such modification of a resolution of the Imperial Conference of 1907 as would permit of the full representation of India in all future conferences. It should be noted that the assent of the colonies is necessary to give effect to this recommendation.

It is the effect upon the future constitutional relations of the British Empire that forms, for the moment, the most important aspect of the work of the Imperial War Cabinet and the Imperial War Conference. The Conference was of the opinion that "the readjustment of the constitutional relations of the component parts of the Empire is too important and intricate a subject to be dealt with during the war, and that it should form the subject of a special Imperial Conference to be summoned as soon as possible after the cessation of hostilities." The Conference placed on record, however, its view that "any such readjustment, while thoroughly preserving all existing powers of self-government and complete control of domestic affairs, should be based upon a full recognition of the Dominions as autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth, and of India as an important portion of the same, should recognize the right of the Dominions and India to an adequate voice in foreign policy and in foreign relations, and should provide effective arrangements for continuous consultation in all important matters of common Imperial concern, and for such necessary concerted action, founded

on consultation, as the several Governments may determine."

In discussing the resolution, the final form of which was moved by Sir Robert Borden, General Smuts, whose public addresses in England have attracted wide attention, pointed out that the adoption of the resolution would negative, happily as he believed, the idea of "a future Imperial Parliament and a future Imperial Executive," and would leave the Empire free to develop "on the lines upon which it has developed hitherto"; that there will be "more freedom and more equality in all its constituent parts," and that they "will continue to legislate for themselves and continue to govern themselves." "Here we are," he declared, "a group of nations spread over the whole world, speaking different languages, belonging to different races, with entirely different economic circumstances; and to attempt to run even the common concerns of that group of nations by means of a central Parliament and a central Executive is, to my mind, absolutely to court disaster."

Here, then, we have, although for the moment in outline only, the programme around which, when peace shall come, the discussion of British imperial reorganization will turn. So far as the older programme of imperial federation involved the creation of an Imperial Parliament with an enhanced measure of control over the colonies, it has been repudiated. Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand are to-day too large, too strong, and too independent to be dealt with in that way; Newfoundland, although perhaps not destined to continue long under a separate government, feels no less self-reliance than its larger sister colonies; and the voice of India must now be listened to. On the other hand, India and the Colonies have proved, in unexampled measure, their loyalty to the Crown; and their aid, grievously as it has been needed, has been accepted, not with grudging acquiescence or empty compliment, but with hearty cordiality and sincere gratitude. What the new imperial programme demands is a "more perfect union" based, on the one hand, upon frank recognition of local differences and needs, and, on the other, upon an equally frank recognition of the solidarity of British peoples throughout the world. Instead of the historic conception of the Dominions as subject provinces, as they still are in theory and to some extent in practice, there will now have to enter, in General Smuts's phrase, the idea of the Dominions as "equal nations of the Empire." The new machinery which shall give effect to the new imperial conception will be, one may suspect, little more perfect theoretically than that which exists to-day, for the reason that theoretical consistency, in either government or administration, is one of the last things over which an Englishman allows himself to be disturbed; but it will pretty certainly be such as will, in practice, bind together more effectively the world-wide Empire in common interest for the attainment of common ends.

For the moment, the most significant ends appear to be economic rather than political. The publication of the resolutions of the Imperial War Conference followed hard upon the issuance of the final report of the Dominions Royal Commission, which has been conducting, since its creation in 1912, an inquiry into the natural resources, trade, and legislation of the self-governing colonies. The conclusion of the Commission is that "joint inter-Imperial organization has so far made little effective progress," and that existing organizations are "inadequate to deal, prompt-

ly and efficiently," with such matters as telegraph, cable and shipping communication, the inter-Imperial postal service, the development of harbors and commercial waterways, migration, trade legislation, the use of capital in the development of Imperial resources, the dissemination of news bearing upon Imperial questions and interest, the preparation and publication of statistics, and the handling of commodities. The Commission accordingly recommends the creation of an Imperial Development Board, with headquarters in London, for the systematic study of trade conditions within the Empire and of "the methods of production and distribution of rival trading countries which have similar problems to face"; together with an enlargement of the functions of the present Department of Commercial Intelligence of the Board of Trade.

Coincidentally with the publication of this report, probably the most important, so far as a comprehensive survey of British economic resources is concerned, that has ever been issued, announcement is made that the Foreign Trade Department of the Foreign Office, which of late has been mainly occupied with the preparation of "black-lists" of enemy firms, has elaborated a scheme for the furtherance of British export trade through the systematic assembling of statistical and other information, and the distribution of the same to merchants through chambers of commerce. The Royal Colonial Institute, with a membership of over 11,000, maintains courses of lectures at every English and Scotch university situated in a large centre of population on the history, government, law, commerce, economics, botany, and geography of the Empire; furnishes illustrated lectures on colonial topics in all parts of the country and at military camps and hospitals; maintains a bureau which is much used by persons seeking information about colonial trade; and has stirred up the Government to begin an inquiry into the natural resources and trade conditions of the Crown colonies and colonies not yet possessing responsible government. Finally, the British Empire Producers' Association has presented to the Imperial War Cabinet a memorial, signed by representatives of eighty-one associations of producers and manufacturers with an estimated joint capital of £1,000,000,000, praying for the fuller development of Imperial resources, approving the resolutions of the Paris Economic Conference, and calling for a thorough revision of the existing system of general and technical education.

It needs no great measure of foresight to perceive that the adoption of such plans and recommendations as have just been cited, not to speak of other similar ones which are certain to be brought forward, will inevitably work far-reaching changes in English policy and administrative methods, in the relations between England and the colonies, and in the position of England as a world power. The suggestion of imperial preference, for example, comes at a moment when the demand for protection is being vigorously urged and widely discussed, and when staunch supporters of free trade frankly admit that the protective policy may prevail. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Bonar Law, in announcing to the House of Commons the resolution of the War Cabinet regarding imperial preference, stated that there would be no change during the war, and that the resolution "does not involve the taxation of food." On the same day Mr. Lloyd George said the same thing at the Guildhall. Unless, however, Great Britain is somehow to cease importing food in large quantities, not

only from the colonies, but from foreign countries, imperial preference without the taxation of food is likely to prove a chimera. The fight for protection is on, however, and it is significant that not a few who decline to discuss the question as one of economics, perhaps from a desire to avoid raising an old and troublesome controversy, are supporting it as a wise measure of national defence.

It is difficult to see how there can be much enlargement of imperial administrative functions without a considerable improvement in existing methods. I am not prepared to say that, as government service goes, the English departmental service to-day is inefficient, but it is certainly cumbersome, ill coördinated, and often exasperatingly slow. There are exceptions and extenuating circumstances, of course; indeed, when one realizes the tremendous pressure of the war upon every branch of the service, not excepting local government, one wonders that so much is done so well rather than that some things are done bunglingly. Wherever the Commissioners of the Civil Service have been able to manage questions of personnel, one finds as a rule relative competency and efficiency and a healthy system of discipline. On the other hand, the call for men for the army and navy has drained every department and bureau heavily of its trained staff, and brought in a veritable flood of new men and many women whose initial fitness was relatively inferior. Such drains bear with peculiar weight upon the Colonial Office and India Office, where the losses cannot well be made good by the employment of substitutes, and where, in consequence, the service must go on short-handed as best it may. A portentous array of new departments and bureaus, chief among them the Ministries of Munitions and Food, has been created, and has had to handle, on the whole successfully, vast and complicated operations with huge numbers of employees drawn hastily from almost every walk of life; the regular Government offices, already congested before the war, have proved wholly inadequate and have overflowed into hotels, clubs, office buildings, and private residences all over London; while the lack, in many cases, of even the most usual office equipment would drive an American efficiency expert to despair. But the work is being done, by hook if not by crook; day and night the huge, if unwieldy, machinery grinds its grist of preparation and defence. The strength of English administration, after all, is in the quality of the men who operate it; and the men who to-day, in every department of the widely ramified administrative service, are bending all their energies to the solution of the problems created by the war, are not likely to be found wanting when the no less serious imperial problems of peace come to be faced.

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A Statesman Retired from Business

LOOKING around the House of Lords one is struck by the appearance of Lord Lansdowne seated on a bench below the Gangway. Long time a prominent figure on one or other of the front benches where Ministers and ex-Ministers sit, he mutely intimates his retirement from business. On the death of Lord Salisbury there was no question of his right of succession to the leadership of the

Unionist party in the House of Lords. A ready speaker, independent of notes when suddenly called upon, his manner was courteous, his suavity inflexible, his voice cooing like a sucking dove. He was at least equally popular with his opponents as with his own party. Acrimony, political or personal, was foreign to his nature. But through varying circumstances there was never conceded to him the same measure of unquestioned obedience tendered to, to be precise exacted by, his predecessor. Of the bluest blood, fifth Marquis of his line, twenty-sixth inheritor of an Irish barony created in the twelfth century, he had the disadvantage, serious in an assembly predominantly Tory, of having commenced his political career under the patronage of Gladstone. A man may grow out of his early political creed. Mr. Chamberlain, for example, did so with unqualified success. To others of less intellectual mobility there is always danger of the earlier tendency reasserting itself. One who between his twenty-fourth and twenty-ninth year was successively Lord of the Treasury and Under-Secretary for War in a Government that partially freed Ireland from the yoke of the landlord and disestablished an alien church, might have relapses, albeit he had crossed the floor of the House accepting office under Lord Salisbury.

Suspicion on this score by an influential clique made Lord Lansdowne's position as leader of the party one of difficulty. A prominent occasion arose in connection with one of Mr. Lloyd George's budgets. A Home Rule bill being concurrently to the fore, the Unionist peers resolved to make a flank attack upon it by throwing out the budget. The step, if not absolutely unconstitutional, was contrary to all precedent. It was privately opposed by the leader of the House, who perceived its suicidal tendency. His efforts were unavailing. For the moment the House was led by a majority of usually obscure peers of the political sagacity of Lord Willoughby de Broke, their authority in statecraft measured by the freedom from party prejudice habitually displayed by Lord Halsbury. Under this combined influence they, in spite of the warning from Lord Lansdowne and other cooler heads, ran down a steep place into the sea. They destroyed the budget, with the result of the introduction of a measure which permanently clipped their wings, and made it possible within a period of three years to add the hated Home Rule bill to the Statute Book.

The introduction of what became the Parliament act placed Lord Lansdowne in a position of fresh difficulty. Lord Willoughby de Broke, "out for blood," as he picturesquely described himself at a meeting of suburban Unionists, would have treated the measure as he and his friends had dealt with the budget. Lord Halsbury, undismayed by the action for which he was largely responsible, was eager for another fight. Lord Lansdowne, his earlier counsel remembered, was in a stronger position in face of the new danger. By his skilful direction the Parliament bill was grudgingly permitted to go through successive stages, the hostile majority surrendering by the expedient of abstention from the division lobby.

The shunting of Lord Lansdowne began with the formation of the Coalition Government in the spring of 1915. Presumably a statesman who had for many years occupied one of the two highest positions in the Unionist party would be invited to assume a corresponding place in the combined Government. What happened was that, while his principal colleagues were suitably provided with office and salaries, Lord Lansdowne assumed the anomalous post