

General. As the country developed and international relations increased in number and complexity this system became inadequate and a separate department of External Affairs was set up in 1909. The practice of using a formal instrument like the Minute of Council for almost all the business of the executive was the subject of occasional comment from successive Governors General. Lord Stanley of Preston complained to the President of the Privy Council of the difficulties and delays of this practice and in 1910 Earl Grey wrote Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the Prime Minister, at some length, wondering at the continuation of a system which compelled Council to give a large portion of its time to considering a mass of business on small details of administration and at the quantity of Minutes, all signed by the President, which came to him daily for approval. He thought it should have been possible for routine matters of this nature to have been approved by the Minister responsible or, if the authority of the Governor General was legally required, then could not all such Minutes be bound under one covering Minute for signature.

The defects of a system which placed a heavy burden of detailed departmental work not only on Council but on Ministers individually and precluded them from giving full attention to the more important questions of national policy seems to have been recognized at Confederation. However the union of the Provinces posed other and more urgent problems so that generally the organization and methods used in the old Province of Canada were merely continued into the wider field of the Dominion. The continued expansion of this system with the growth of the country disclosed and aggravated its faults.*

In 1912, Sir George Murray was made a Commissioner to inquire into the organization of the Public Service of Canada. In his report he stated that nothing had impressed him so much as the almost intolerable burden the then system of transacting public business imposed on the Ministers themselves. He pointed out that almost all executive acts required the sanction of the Governor in Council, that there were large numbers of Orders (and Minutes) of Council with subject matters ranging from questions of the highest importance to matters of petty routine, that statutes continued to contain those requirements for collective responsibility for ministerial acts by approval of the Governor in Council which had been thought necessary safeguards in 1867 but by now were not required. He suggested as remedies that many powers then vested in the Governor in Council should be devolved on individual Ministers and, for this purpose, that a committee of Ministers review the duties discharged by Council and select those which could be safely left to the discretion of individual Ministers; moreover, that a distinction should be drawn between a meeting of the Cabinet and a meeting of Council so that matters of small intrinsic importance but which required formal sanction by the Governor in Council could be dealt with by a minimum quorum of Council, and Cabinet would be assisted thereby in performing its proper function of deciding questions of high policy. This report led to instructions to the Treasury Board by a Minute of Council in September 1913 to review the duties discharged by the Governor in Council and to report on those that might be left to the discretion of Ministers or a Committee of Ministers.

For several reasons no report materialized and the outbreak of World War I put aside further consideration of the whole question. However the War began to influence the organization of the executive in 1916, when three subcommittees of Council were established to deal with problems of censorship, labour and recruiting, and scientific and industrial research. When the Union Government was formed late in 1917, it was decided, in order to co-ordinate the war effort for maximum effect and also to distribute more evenly the burden on Ministers, to divide the Cabinet into two committees, the War Committee and the Reconstruction and Development Committee, the only members in common being the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance. These committees had wide terms of reference and there was provision for the appointment of secretaries. Although

*See memorandum, Aug. 30, 1913, Adam Shortt to Sir Robert Borden, P.A.C. Borden Papers.