

NEED OF A CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICE.

A coherent and co-ordinated statistical system—a national keeping of social and economic accounts—is the very best means for promoting the most efficient and intelligent management of the national business. This was recognized in Canada even before the war, when the Statistical Commission of 1912 reported that “there is apparent in the body of Canadian statistics, considered as a whole, a lack of coherence and common purpose,” as a result of which the scope of Canadian statistics had been restricted, while inevitable duplication took place and the statistics were unequal in quality and value, as well as belated in the time of their appearance. This lack of unity and co-ordination has prevented true comparisons between Canada and other countries. The remedy for this condition of affairs the Commission found in centralization—the creation of a Central Statistical Office to organize, in co-operation with the several departments concerned, the strictly statistical work undertaken by the Dominion Government. This office should, in conformity with the recommendations of Mr. A. L. Bowley for a Central Statistical Office in the United Kingdom, “have cognizance of all the statistics of more than departmental importance which are published officially. . . . Misleading statistics must be suppressed, overlapping must be stopped, careful plans must be devised for filling in the gaps at present left and preparations made for investigation of matters likely to become of public importance. All Bills involving or affecting the collection of statistics should be considered by it. . . . Publications for the use of the public should in some cases be edited by it, with careful definitions, and with short analyses and criticism stating accurately and intelligibly the purport and meaning of their contents; in other cases, where a department already exists for such publication, there should be co-operation with a view to carrying out the purposes already indicated.”

ESTABLISHMENT OF DOMINION BUREAU OF STATISTICS.

The first step in carrying out the report of the Commission was taken on June 19, 1915, by the creation of the office of Dominion Statistician, this officer being entrusted with the direction of the various statistical activities comprehended in the proposed scheme of enlargement and centralization. As a result of this work, the Act creating the Dominion Bureau of Statistics (8-9 Geo. V., c. 43), was passed in 1918.

The Statistics Act is, structurally, a consolidation of the previous statistical legislation of the Dominion Government, including the Census Act, the General Statistics Act, the Railways Statistics Act and the Criminal Statistics Act, with additions to render the scheme comprehensive. Specific sections deal with the decennial and quinquennial censuses of population and agriculture, an annual census of industry (to include mines, fisheries, forestry and manufactures), the statistics of trade and commerce (foreign and internal), transportation statistics, criminal statistics and general statistics. The most significant section of the Act, however, is that which creates the Dominion Bureau of Statistics and broadly defines its functions.