

(8) Almost every decision of a Minister, even of the most trivial importance, is thus—at least in theory—brought before his colleagues for the purpose of obtaining their collective approval, which is necessary for its validity.

(9) Provisions to this effect can be traced in almost every Act of Parliament which has been passed since Confederation; and it seems clear that the statesmen of that time thought it necessary to ensure that the collective responsibility of the Cabinet for the action of individual Ministers should be protected by safeguards of this kind.

(10) But I need scarcely point out that a great deal has happened since 1867, and that methods of administration which may have been well adapted to the circumstances of those days have become quite unsuitable after the lapse of nearly half a century.

(11) With the increase of population, the extension of trade, and the development of the various activities of the State, the business of Government necessarily grows both in amount and in complexity.

(12) The only means by which this growth can be met is by division of labour and devolution of power. In the absence of some continuous process of this kind the machinery of government must gradually become less efficient and must ultimately break down under the stress imposed upon it.

(13) Many topics which, in the early stages of national life, may properly form the subject of collective discussion and decision, will in the course of time diminish in relative importance, and must be dealt with in some more summary fashion.

(14) The first suggestion which I have to offer is that many of the powers now vested in the Governor in Council should, by some process of devolution, be transferred to individual Ministers. At times mistakes will no doubt be made. These mistakes will occasionally be inconvenient to the Administration; and it may be conceded that some of them are such as might have been avoided by fuller discussion or consideration. But these are risks which must be run, and which are inherent in the working of any highly developed organisation. Under present conditions it is practically impossible that all Ministers should take part in all decisions.

(15) Legislation would, of course, be required in order to effect such a change, since the duties to which I have referred are imposed on the Governor in Council by statute; but the legislation, though complicated in detail, would not be likely to raise many questions of a controversial character. It would, I think, be generally conceded that a Minister should be able to give leave of absence to the officers of his department; to grant statutory increases of salary; to sanction the acceptance of tenders, except where very large amounts or questions of principle are involved; to make appointments to vacancies; and to promote the clerks in his department from one class to another.

I only mention these as illustrations of the general character of the changes proposed. There are many others which will readily occur to any one who will examine the details of the existing system.

(16) I suggest therefore that a Committee of Ministers should be appointed to review the whole of the duties now discharged by Council, and select those which can safely be left to the discretion of the individual Ministers. All that would then be necessary would be to schedule these particulars, and provide by statute that the powers hitherto exercised by the Governor in Council should be transferred to the several Heads of the departments concerned.

(17) If, in view of the importance which is attached in this country to even minor appointments and promotions, such a reform is considered too drastic to be fully adopted at once, a board of two or, at most, three Ministers, with an equal number of permanent officials, might be constituted, and charged with the duty of considering all appointments and promotions recommended in any department. If approved by the Board, the decision of the Minister would take effect at once, or with such modifications as the Board thought advisable.