

*From the London End*

## Ministerial Responsibility

WHEN Mr Churchill was entrusted with the task of forming a government after the Conservative electoral victory, he was faced with a problem of Ministerial organisation. The solution he adopted has now raised a first class constitutional problem, viz., whether or not the British principle of Ministerial responsibility will continue to be respected. It is this question that the Commons and Lords took up for consideration recently when Lord Woolton, the "co-ordinating" Minister of the Departments of Agriculture and Food, so defiantly told the House of Lords that his position in the Government was not one involving responsibility to Parliament!

Mr Churchill had to face the problem of forming a Cabinet sufficiently small in size for speedy decisions, and yet capable of giving adequate guidance and supervision to the many departments of State that have now come into existence. It is a problem which is not new. Efforts at Cabinet reorganisation were made at various times, though the details of these efforts were never made public. It is known, however, that there are a number of Cabinet standing committees which are presided over by a senior Minister and to which junior ministers concerned are invited.

The Committee system became a regular feature during the period of war. Mr Churchill showed no unwillingness to experiment and in May, 1940, formed a War Cabinet of five members who (except for the Foreign Secretary) were chairmen of Committees and not departmental Ministers. Gradually, the strength of the Cabinet was increased with the addition of members of specific departments taking their pre-war place on it. By February, 1942, the elaborate committee structure was largely replaced by a single committee under the chairmanship of the Lord President of the Council. This committee was given the function of preparing the legislative programme of the government. Mr Attlee, after 1945, maintained the Lord President's Committee, and formed two further committees designed to deal with economic problems (one for internal and the other for external problems). In 1946, a Minister of Defence was appointed by statute,

to co-ordinate the three Service departments and to preside over the Cabinet Defence Committee (which traces its origin to the Committee of Imperial Defence set up in 1904).

No matter which government was in power, it always kept secret the manner and form in which these committees reached decisions. It was never known to the public whether there were any differences between Ministers. Insofar as the public were concerned, the Minister represented the policy of the government and as such, he was responsible to Parliament for the work of his department, whether or not he or some Cabinet standing committee formulated the policy. This system worked well as long as the composition of such committees and the details of their deliberations were kept secret. With the formation of the new government in 1951, Mr Churchill announced the appointment of two "overlords", Lord Woolton and Lord Leathers, to co-ordinate the departments relating to food and food production, and transport respectively. These "overlords" were to be included in the Cabinet. The fact that these appointments were made public implied that some degree of ministerial responsibility to Parliament would attach to these personages. The actual degree of responsibility, however, remained obscure as non-Cabinet departmental Ministers continued to assume the normal responsibility to the House from which they came. The departmental responsibility thus became blurred and it was on this question that Parliament so closely examined the functions of the co-ordinators.

Lord Woolton had told the House of Lords that in his view, "the work of the co-ordinators is not a responsibility to Parliament; it is a responsibility to the Cabinet."<sup>1</sup> Mr Churchill, replying to a battery of questions in the Commons, was quick to correct his own Minister, thus:

"Ministers as a body are collectively responsible for Government policy as a whole. The work of the co-ordinating Ministers is an aspect of collective responsibility . . . and as Ministers of the Crown they are accountable to Parliament."

There is, Mr Churchill explained,

very little difference between the present arrangements and the older arrangements by which senior non-Departmental ministers had co-ordinating duties as chairmen of Cabinet committees. If there was any difference, it was only "that the specific area of co-ordination assigned to each was publicly announced." This, however, was precisely the objection that was raised against the "overlords". So long as the names of the Chairmen of Cabinet committees are not announced, the departmental Ministers remain clearly responsible to Parliament for their department. Now that they have been announced, it is only to be expected that this responsibility will remain blurred.

By appointing the co-ordinators, Mr Churchill addressed himself to one of the main problems of government which successive Prime Ministers in the past 35 years have attempted to solve. Is it possible to have a small and workable cabinet and yet maintain an effective eye on the multitude of complex functions which belong to the State machine? In spite of the exclusion of a number of Ministers, the Cabinet remains larger than at the end of the last century. Apart from the War Cabinets of Lloyd George and Mr Churchill, and the Cabinet of Mr Ramsay MacDonald in the exceptional circumstances of 1931, the size of Cabinet in this century has never been below 16. More often, it has been as large as 19 or 20. Mr Churchill today has as many as 17 members.

The reason for the relatively larger size of the Cabinet appears to lie in that oft-forgotten dynamic of modern government, i.e., in Party political organisation. The Cabinet is not merely an instrument of administration—it is in a very clear and practical sense the policy-making committee of the party in power and as long as political parties remain a permanent feature of British life, it will be unlikely that leading lights in the party will be excluded from the Cabinet.

### Britain's Crisis in Africa

THE speed with which Britain is attempting to finalise the discussion on the formation of a Central African Federation, is being subjected to various interpretations. The importance of this matter is heightened by the permanent banishment of Seretse Khama, heir to the Chieftainship of the Bamangwato tribe in Bechuanaland,

since this affair is by no means unconnected with the schemes now afoot in Central Africa.

It will be remembered that in 1949 representatives of the white community of Kenya met the South African premier, Dr Malan, in Pretoria with a view to fostering closer relations between the Union of South Africa and the more northern dependent and semi-dependent States. One of the proposals that were put to Dr Malan was the request that the South African Government should not impede the migration and settlement of Afrikaners in Kenya. At the back of the minds of these representatives was no doubt the hope that South African assistance alone would be able to mitigate if not stop the "penetration" of Indians and Africans into those economic domains which were hitherto the privilege of the "whites" alone. This act, then seemingly insignificant, set up a trend of events which today is manifested by the efforts for the establishment of a Central European Federation under the auspices of the United Kingdom.

A draft of a federal constitution embracing Nyasaland, Northern and Southern Rhodesia, was worked out last summer by officials of the Commonwealth Relations and Colonial Offices in London. In the autumn, this draft was presented to a con-

ference of representatives of 'white' and African opinion at Victoria Falls. Among the articles in the draft, was the provision for a Federal Minister of Native Affairs who was to be appointed by the British Government. This innovation found little support from the 'white' settlers. The draft was accordingly revised and is now being again to representatives of the three territories for their study. A 'yes' or 'no' decision is to be made at a further conference which is to be convened in July. The position of the Africans themselves has been one of opposition throughout these discussions. In federation they see their chances of advancement being put back and believe that the worst features of Southern Rhodesia's native policy (which is more or less akin to that of the Union of South Africa) will be expanded to engulf the other two territories.

The fears of the African people are aggravated by the fact that Britain has never once exercised the veto power which she possesses over the Southern Rhodesia legislature in matters relating to African interests. In a long letter to the *Times*, representatives of African opinion, who are in London, have expressed their complete lack of faith in the professed safeguards that are now being worked into the draft constitution. "The constitutions of the

Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia," they maintain, "have proved that they are valueless". In 1931 a joint Parliamentary select committee issued a report on this subject and in it was pointed out, "the interests of the overwhelming majority of the indigenous population should not be subordinated to those of a minority belonging to another race, however important in itself". The Africans believe that the situation in this regard has not substantially altered since 1931 to justify a reversal of this view.

Why, then, is the British Government so anxious to hurry through the constitution of a Federation, risking a complete alienation of the sympathy and support of the African people? The interpretations of the motives of the Government are many. Those on the Left attribute the Government's anxiety to that of placating and appeasing the local white settlers in the territories in question. To others, it is the desire to harness the immense economic wealth of these areas in a world of raw material shortages. The more likely reason, however, is to be found in the very condition of Africa. Hitherto a very fine and delicate balance had been achieved by the different colonial powers regarding the extent of their stakes

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## For the attention of Far-sighted Industrialists

### TO MECHANISE?

There comes a time in the experience of all of you when you wonder whether you should mechanise, be it in the office, plantation or at the points where material is frequently handled, either in the stores or the plant. With the recent rapid upward trend of labour costs this question is becoming more and more prevalent and also more pertinent.

Before taking the plunge, involving usually considerable capital expense as well as the problem of disposal

of the labour thereby rendered surplus, it is advisable first to examine carefully whether you are employing the best manual methods. If no further economies are possible in this direction, it is then necessary to decide on the mechanical devices best suited to your needs.

The issue clearly requires a thorough and unbiased study of the prevailing conditions and future trends, together with an analysis of comparative costs, including effective maintenance.



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