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THE MACHINERY OF
GOVERNMENT

BY

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THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

DURING the course of the World War the British Government grew anxious as to what would happen when it came to an end. The whole machinery of government, not less than the organization of industry, commerce, and finance, had been converted into a war machine. Every energy of the State and people, so far as government could control it, was concentrated on the sole object of defeating the enemy. The result was an extensive dislocation of the political and economic structure, from which we have not yet recovered.

Some such consequence as this was foreseen, and to guard against it—very insufficiently, as it has turned out—a Ministry of Reconstruction was brought into existence which, in its turn, appointed a number of expert committees to study and report on different phases of the problem. One of these committees, presided over by the late Lord Haldane, was directed to inquire into the responsibilities of the various departments of the Central Executive Government, and to advise in what manner the exercise and distribution by the Government of its functions should be improved. The reference was wide and perhaps intentionally vague. It produced an interesting report, of which some of the recommendations have been adopted, notably, the perpetuation of the war-time innovation of a Cabinet Secretary 'charged with the duty of collecting and putting into shape its agenda, of providing the information and material necessary for its deliberations, and of drawing up records of results for communication to the Departments concerned'. It certainly seems almost incredible that until December 1916 the chief executive organ of the Empire should have been without such an official; so that in many cases, some of which have been recorded, it was a matter of doubt and subsequent discussion what precisely had been the subject of debate in the Cabinet, and whether it had reached any

—and if so, what—conclusion! So jealously was the intimate character of Cabinet proceedings guarded that it was considered a questionable proceeding for any member of the Cabinet to keep any record of its discussions except that contained in the periodical letter to the Sovereign by the Prime Minister, which was never shown to any of his colleagues. That this amazing system did not produce greater confusion in our administration than it did, is a striking example of how the British can make almost any organization work. It also shows how much less in past times was the tension and rapidity of movement of affairs, so that if a mistake was made, it could nearly always be put right before it was too late.

It is not my purpose to discuss in detail the other recommendations of the Haldane Report. But there is one phrase near its commencement to which I desire to draw your attention. Paragraph 12 runs as follows:

‘Turning next to the formulation of policy, we have come to the conclusion, after surveying what came before us, that in the sphere of civil government the duty of investigation and thought, as preliminary to action, might with great advantage be more definitely recognized. It appears to us that adequate provision has not been made in the past for the organized acquisition of facts and information, and for the systematic application of thought, as preliminary to the settlement of policy and its subsequent administration.’

On the basis of this finding, the Committee devoted a good deal of its attention to considering the organization of inquiry and research for Government purposes. Some provisions for this purpose had already been made. Several departments had their own intelligence branches. Other research was carried out by bodies supervised by administrative departments, or in some cases by agencies external to and independent of any particular department, whose results were available for general use. It was this last kind of machinery for research which appealed

specially to the Committee, and they recommended its development so that ultimately it could be ‘maintained by a Minister specifically appointed on the ground of his suitability to preside over a Department of Intelligence and Research which would . . . take its place among the most important Departments of Government’.

The picture is alluring. One visualizes a governmental realization of the hope held out by those enterprising publications—‘Enquire within about everything’—a kind of living encyclopaedia. To those who believe that want of knowledge is the main obstacle to that ‘thought, as preliminary to action, in the formulation of policy’ which the Committee rightly advocated, the proposal for such an organization must seem full of hope. That it would have value in certain cases no one can doubt. Take, for instance, the burning controversy between Free Trade and Protection. There is indeed a mass of official documents upon the subject. There have been innumerable economic disquisitions full of subtle and well-informed reasoning; there have been many technical inquiries into the condition of particular trades and industries and the effects on them of home and foreign import duties. But as far as I know there has never been any general inquiry into the actual consequences of a policy of free trade or protection in the various countries. No doubt the inquiry would be difficult. The factors of the problem would be very complicated. Merely to show that in a particular country a change of fiscal policy had been followed by an increase or diminution of prosperity would take one a very little way. All the surrounding economic circumstances would have to be considered. Even so, a single instance would prove very little. But if it could be shown that the adoption of a fiscal policy of one kind or the other had always been followed by certain general economic results, that would seem to be an enormously valuable fact. If, on the other hand, no such consequences could be shown to have followed, that also would be important. In either case, the economic side of the controversy might be definitely

settled. Protection or free trade might be shown conclusively to be the avenue to prosperity—or it might be demonstrated that they had comparatively little to do with it. To some of us, at least, it would be an incalculable advantage to get out of the region of theoretical discussion on the one hand, and narrow business arguments drawn from the circumstances of particular trades on the other.

Here does seem to be a question which a research department might possibly solve. But, speaking generally, I have some doubts whether a greater accumulation of facts would really help to a better formulation of national policy. The chief difficulty seems to me not that ministers have insufficient information to arrive at a right decision, but that they have not adequate time or leisure to consider that information and form conclusions upon it. From this point of view, a research department, by adding to the labours of ministers, might even make things worse than they are at present. For the truth is that the increasing complexities of modern administration are becoming too great for human strength to cope with, at any rate as organized in our present government machine. Compare the demands made upon a Cabinet minister now with what he had to face a hundred years ago. The Reformed Parliament had then just come into existence, and every member had thenceforward to deal with a constituency. But, except at actual election times, it did not trouble him much. There was, it may be, an occasional public dinner to attend, or sometimes a deputation to receive. Beyond that, public meetings were rare. He must have had very few letters, for the facilities for correspondence were not great and the number of voters was a mere fraction of the present electorate. Usually there were a few influential individuals whose continued favour was important, and as long as that was secured the bulk of the electors did not much matter. What was true of the ordinary member was even more true of the minister. Now, the minister, apart from his official duties, has, if he is in the House of Commons, to be perpetually visiting his constituency,

unless he is lucky enough to have one of the very few 'safe' seats still left. Then Parliament sits much longer than it used to, and though in the old days there were a certain number of late nights, yet on the average the number of parliamentary hours per week was much less. True, in those days and for long afterwards ministers were expected to be in their places on the Treasury bench throughout the sitting. Even as late as 1870 Mr. Gladstone insisted on this. That has been completely changed, and except during question time or on some specially important occasion, the Treasury bench is only occupied by the minister in charge of the business before the House and a stray and transient colleague or Whip who may look in for a few minutes. Most of the other ministers are usually in their rooms, coping with official papers or other departmental work. For departmental work has enormously increased in almost every direction. The machinery of government is far more complicated. A century ago public education was only just beginning. There was no Education Minister. Local government was in its infancy. There were no County Councils, or District Councils, or Parish Councils. Waterworks and drainage were for the most part quite elementary. Gas lighting was a recent discovery. No one had heard of electric light, or telegraphs, or telephones, or broadcasting. There was no regular police, and very little factory or housing or hygienic legislation. All the vast apparatus necessary for dealing with these and other similar matters has been created since then, and forms part of the burden resting on individual ministers and on the Cabinet as a whole.

Parallel developments have taken place in the organization of our defence, due partly to the increasing complexities of the Empire, and still more to the facilities of communication. Everywhere there has been increased centralization. In the old days the Army in India, for instance, was necessarily run almost independently of the War Office. Now Whitehall can be and is consulted through the India Office on all kinds of questions. So

with the Navy. From the Admiralty there is wireless communication with every British warship in the world. Gone are the days when fleets or cruisers once they had departed from British shores were left to their own devices except for some general orders or instructions. And to the Army and Navy we have added all the novel problems of the Air Force, which have for the most part also to be solved in London. In every part of the fighting departments, the burden of work and responsibility for the home Government has grown enormously.

The same is true of the Colonial and India Offices. No doubt the remoteness of Downing Street from the places in the Empire where administrative action had to be taken was a very serious danger and produced many unfortunate results. The immense development of means of communication has in this respect been of great advantage. But it has inevitably increased the strain on Whitehall. Many questions even of first-rate importance, which were in old times decided by the man on the spot, are now normally referred home. The same thing is equally true of diplomacy. In the days before the Crimean War, our ambassador at Constantinople took a very large part in deciding the national policy. His position was one of commanding authority with the Turkish Government. Now, the ambassador at a foreign Court, however able he may be, is little more than a messenger. He receives instructions in the morning, carries them out in the afternoon, and reports the result in the evening. He still has the duty to advise his Government—particularly if he is asked to do so—and if he is a man of talent and personality, his advice may have important consequences on the policy of his Government. But in no case of moment is he expected to act on his own responsibility. That rests entirely with the Foreign Office. The ambassador gives the Foreign Office such material for deciding rightly as he can, but the decision rests with his chief, unless he refers it to the Prime Minister or the Cabinet.

Nor is this the only aspect in which the Foreign

Minister's duties have become more onerous. When, at the conclusion of the War, the League of Nations was established, a great effort was made to lessen the danger of war. I believe the step was fully justified and, provided the States members of the League, and particularly the western nations, are prepared courageously and with determination to carry out their duties to the League, it may prove an incalculable blessing to mankind. But do not let us forget that it involves a considerable increase in the work of the Foreign Office, and indeed of many other Government departments, at any rate for the present. The Council of the League meets regularly three times a year, and at other times if required. Under existing arrangements, the Foreign Secretary attends all those meetings, at any rate for part of the time. Then there is the Assembly as well, which meets at least once a year and sometimes more often. The mere attendance on all these occasions is in itself a large addition to the duties of the Secretary of State. Besides that, he has to familiarize himself with the various questions that are coming before the League, and sometimes to attend committees of the Council or Assembly formed to deal with such questions. It is true that some of this work would on the old system have been dealt with by the more leisurely methods of diplomatic communications. That was no doubt an even more laborious mode of procedure. But then it was spread over a much larger period of time, so that the burden imposed at any moment was even in those questions less than it is now. And a large number of the matters discussed and decided at Geneva used not to come within the sphere of national policy at all. Ill-treatment of a minority might in extreme cases be the subject of very carefully worded diplomatic representations. But there was nothing like the continued and varied discussion of minority grievances that now takes place. Tariff questions were definitely ruled out of ordinary international negotiation. Disarmament was sometimes discussed in a perfunctory and wholly ineffective way. But no serious

attempt was made to deal with that most thorny and vital question. Many other instances might be given of the way in which the League has enlarged the area of international action, and each enlargement means an addition to the labours of government. So that it may truly be said that the League itself has added to and not diminished the task of diplomacy. Nor must it be forgotten that it has brought in its train a tendency more and more to settle international difficulties by direct conferences of Governments rather than through what used to be called the usual channel of diplomatic negotiation.

All this has largely augmented the work of ministers and particularly of the leading members of the Cabinet. On them, too, commonly falls the duty of party leadership. Here we must chronicle an enormous growth in the labour involved. All parties now are democratically organized, which means that in every constituency there are the local associations which appoint delegates to divisional and national councils and conferences. These have to be addressed and guided by the leaders of the parties, that is—in the case of the party in power—the ministers of the Crown. It must be no small addition to the burden of a Prime Minister that he usually has to attend these party conferences and deliver 'key-note' speeches. Moreover, the appetite for—or at least the custom of—holding large party gatherings in different parts of the country has greatly increased. Mr. Gladstone's Midlothian campaign in the seventies was thought to be a portent. Such activities have since become commonplace. Whether the administration of the country has benefited thereby may be doubtful. But, beneficial or not, there seems to be no sign of their diminution. On the contrary, it is in the youngest of the three parties, the Labour party, that such practices flourish most. The unhappy Labour member does not even get his Sunday rest. He appears to be always travelling or speaking. Constituencies are more tolerant of neglect by a member of Parliament of his parliamentary duties than of attendance at flower shows

and concerts, and conversaciones and meetings in the town or county which he represents. Even Labour ministers are not spared, and they have in addition frequent party meetings at which their policy is assailed and their leadership impugned. Truly, a Labour minister's lot is not a happy one!

It may be said that all this only shows that certain ministers, such as the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and some of the other departmental ministers, are overburdened, but that that does not apply to the other members of the Cabinet. Even if this were true, it would be serious enough, for it is the duty of precisely these ministers to think out and propose to the Cabinet the general lines of its home and foreign policy. But in fact the exhaustion of some of its leading members reacts on the Cabinet as a whole. For the Cabinet is the chief executive authority of the country. To it come for ultimate decision all great questions of policy and any other matters which any of its members think it desirable to bring before it. The growth of departmental business naturally produces greater work for the Cabinet. Frequent and lengthy meetings of the Cabinet with long agendas follow. More and more often it happens that questions take too long for the whole body to deal with them, and they are referred to a Cabinet committee to thrash out first. Such committees consist of the men whom the Prime Minister regards as most competent to deal with the particular questions referred to them, that is, very often, the leading members of the Cabinet. Frequently, in important matters, he will himself preside; and in any case they add to the labours of all the ministers in different degrees.

What are the consequences of this state of affairs? In the first place, I believe the strain on the individuals is affecting their health. Take the last ten or eleven Prime Ministers: there is scarcely one of them who has not had periods of break-down, except perhaps Mr. Gladstone, and he flourished before the worst of the pressure began

to be felt. Several of them died comparatively young. Others suffered from insomnia or some other disease of exhaustion. Even where their actual health was not affected, too many of them appeared to lose the faculty of decision. That seems to be one of our faculties which wears out soonest. I believe general managers of great undertakings often find it impossible to go on for many years with work which calls for frequent and important rulings. What wonder, then, that men charged with the vast responsibilities of directing the policy of the Empire should suffer under the exertions required? I have no doubt that all the ministers suffer in varying degrees, according to the importance of the offices which they fill.

Certainly, there is a widespread impression that Governments do not decide, or do not decide in time. The charge is constantly being made against each administration in succession. That is partly, no doubt, the effect of government by a committee which cannot or will not move till assured of popular support. But even that tendency—the policy of the jumping cat—is immensely exaggerated by overwork. To decide makes a considerable strain on nervous force, and the strain increases with the apprehended unpopularity of the decision. There ensues the search for some means to avoid the effort. Postponement, in its different forms, is welcomed. Some so-called compromise is adopted which in fact leaves all the difficulties unsolved. Or a Royal Commission is appointed. Or the state of business in the House of Commons is declared to make action impossible. Or the matter is simply adjourned. If it is a foreign question, the attitude of foreign Powers is awaited, or the blame for inaction is thrown upon some conference. We are all familiar with these devices and the reiterated verdict that when something at last is done it is too late.

I have been speaking mainly of the larger questions which come before the Cabinet as a whole. But in departmental matters, like causes produce like results. Recently, a book has been published about Post Office Reform. The

writer, with ample official knowledge, claims that want of initiative in that department has meant the loss of millions of pounds, the stagnation of progress and improvement, and embittered life and happiness for 230,000 employees. As far as one can judge, the case is fully made out. Indeed, an official committee, presided over by Lord Bridgeman, has in the main endorsed it. Nor is there any reason to suppose that in other departments things are much better. In such cases the root of the trouble is want of driving force in the official chief. Civil servants are admirable people. But their training is not to enable them to take the initiative. Their function is in some cases to criticize, and in all to carry out the policy laid down by the parliamentary chiefs. Without such guidance they usually seek the well-worn path of departmental administration. No doubt there are exceptions. Every now and then a great constructive genius like Rowland Hill is found who leads the way in great reforms. It is noticeable that in that instance the reformer was not a regular civil servant, but an expert brought in from outside. Still, no doubt civil servants are found who inspire advanced policies. But they do so in defiance of their training and with the great disadvantage of not easily understanding the political requirements of the situation. Even if they are advising on strictly technical matters, the advice, to be of real value, must be checked and moulded by a political mind. When the history of our times comes to be written, I believe it will be found that the success of Governments has varied directly with the degree to which parliamentary ministers have been masters of their offices. In other words, an overworked and consequently lifeless Cabinet makes for bad administration in spite of our very admirable Civil Service.

It is obvious that overwork is not the only thing that makes an inefficient minister. Ability and industry are not less important than energy. But without energy, no other quality is sufficient. I submit, therefore, that both on the grounds that the present system endangers the

health and even the life of ministers, and because over-driven ministers cannot do their best in the public interest, we ought to consider whether in some way the terrific pressure of the democratic machine cannot be lessened.

There are, as it seems to me, two objects at which we should aim. We ought, if possible, to diminish the pressure on the leading members of the Cabinet, and we ought to have some improved machinery for the formulation of policy. These propositions involve very grave issues which cannot be adequately discussed in a single lecture, even if the present lecturer were properly equipped for the task. I cannot hope to do more than make suggestions which may stimulate inquiry by others.

Let us, then, first consider the structure of the Cabinet. It consists of some twenty heads of departments and other chief ministers of the Crown. It has, or had in my time, two standing committees. I believe that there is now a third body called the Economic Advisory Council, which, I gather from the newspapers, performs some or all of the functions of a standing committee of the Cabinet. I know too little of its working to be able to discuss it. Anyhow, in my time there were only two such committees. One was the Committee of Imperial Defence, to which went all questions whether of policy or organization which the Prime Minister deemed to affect the defence of the realm. Strictly speaking, the only member of the Committee was its chairman, usually the Prime Minister. He summoned whatever ministers he thought right, including in important cases the chiefs of the three fighting departments, the Foreign, Indian, Colonial, and Dominion Secretaries, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. On questions of policy, as distinct from questions of detail, the conclusions of this body come up to the Cabinet, and, if they are unanimous, are approved without much discussion. Those who know best the work of this Committee are unanimous in its praises. I do not differ. My only criticism is that I have some doubts whether it is the most

suitable body for the discussion of big questions of foreign policy which, when they have a bearing on questions of imperial defence, or vice versa, are sometimes referred to it. It is attended by the technical advisers of the various ministers represented, including the chiefs of the staffs of the three fighting Services. I believe that these gentlemen, admirable as they are for all technical purposes, should as a general rule be heard on questions of policy through their parliamentary chiefs. I should, therefore, be inclined to refer all questions of foreign policy which the Foreign Minister did not think he ought to decide on his own responsibility, to a new standing committee which might be called the Committee on External Affairs. It would consist of the ministers already mentioned and would deal with imperial as well as foreign questions, leaving all matters directly involving defence to the Committee of Imperial Defence, as at present.

The other standing committee then existing was and is the Committee on Home Affairs. This is a real standing committee, with a Chairman assisted by the ministers of such departments as the Home, Scottish, and Health Offices, and the Board of Trade. In my time, the Chairman was the Lord Chancellor, I don't quite know why, except that the occupant of the office, Lord Cave, was a man of singular tact and judgement. Normally, I should have thought that ministers without departmental work, like the President of the Council and the Privy Seal, might preside over the Committees on Home and External Affairs. So constituted, they might do much of the work that at present is done more laboriously and not so well by special committees of the Cabinet. I do not say that it would be possible to get rid of special committees altogether. But they are not in all respects satisfactory, particularly for questions of minor importance. There are apt to be difficulties about the times of meeting of such committees which result in considerable delays. The members of the committee are not always familiar with each other's minds. Some special committees have

doubtless done admirable work. But often they tend to be dilatory and unbusiness-like.

Partly for this reason, but more in order to improve the machinery for thinking out problems of first-rate importance, I suggest one more permanent committee, which might be called the General Purposes Committee. Its regular members would be the Prime Minister and the Chairmen of the other standing committees. To its meetings would almost always be summoned the Foreign Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, together with such other ministers as might be necessary to deal with any particular subject. Its business would be to consider all questions of policy of the highest importance selected by the Prime Minister. In many respects it would be like the War Cabinet, particularly in the smallness of its numbers and its great authority. But in two respects it would differ from that body. It was the custom in the War Cabinet to summon large numbers of officials and experts to its meetings. A good many of them came into the room, with the result that the atmosphere was physically and morally overcrowded. The conditions of intimate and informal discussion were injured, if not destroyed, and the advantages of a small membership of the committee were lost. Moreover, the presence of the officials often was more of a hindrance than a help. They were naturally asked to give their opinions. If it was on a mere technicality, all went well. But if, in his reply, an official touched on policy, he was asked to justify his opinion before men whose whole training had been to acquire facility in putting their thoughts into words. The result was that, with some exceptions, the official did not do his opinions justice. At the best, some members of the Cabinet who agreed with what he was trying to say, came to his assistance and expounded the matter to their colleagues. At the worst, the opinion, which might be of great importance, was ignored because it was never properly understood. The old constitutional plan, which is the result of trial and error, carried on through many

years, works far better. By that plan it is the duty of the parliamentary chief to make himself master of the departmental point of view and, so far as he agrees with it, to put it before his colleagues. If he is a competent man he will do it more quickly and far more effectively than could his technical advisers, and if he is not a competent man he ought not to be there.

The other difference between the General Purposes Committee and the War Cabinet would be that the Cabinet as a whole would not be superseded. It would meet once a week or oftener, as at present, and would consist of all the heads of important departments. There have sprung up in recent years one or two smaller departments, like the Ministry of Transport, which are independent but not of sufficient importance to be in the Cabinet. It seems to me a matter for serious consideration whether these should not be reconverted into Under-Secretaryships.

The business of the Cabinet would be normally to consider Reports made by the General Purposes and other standing committees. If there had been a serious division of opinion in the committees, it would be necessary to have the matter fully discussed in the Cabinet. But if the Reports were unanimous, the Cabinet would probably be content to read them and pass them without serious debate.

By some such organization I believe a very considerable saving of time and energy might be effected. The committees would have their regular times of meeting, which their members would keep free. Many questions—particularly those involving what Lord Balfour called 'tiresome interdepartmental wrangles'—would be settled in the appropriate committee by half a dozen instead of twenty ministers. One would hope that most of the special Cabinet committees would not be required; and above all in the General Purposes Committee there would be an organism small enough to give close consideration to great questions and sufficiently authoritative to afford decisive guidance to the Cabinet.

Reform of this character would bring into existence improved machinery, and would give some relief to ministers. Even so, their work would be overwhelming, especially in the case of such ministers as the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Let me repeat, the most important duty of these officials is rightly to direct the general policy of the country, both in home and external affairs. In particular, the Prime Minister must keep in touch with all the main issues affecting the social and industrial interests of the people—the Army, Navy, and Air Force—the self-governing Dominions, including Ireland, India, and the Crown Colonies—Foreign Affairs, including the League of Nations and all it stands for—and, perhaps most of all, the economic and financial problems of the world. Further, if he is a party leader, he is expected to take the chief burden of guiding and inspiring his party, soothing personal quarrels, rewarding party services, and all the sordid and harassing questions connected with honours and appointments. He has usually been the titular leader of the House of Commons, in itself a whole-time job, and he is expected from time to time to visit his constituency. Finally, there are all his Court and social engagements which, pleasant or unpleasant, consume much irreplaceable time. Even this formidable list of duties omits all the odds and ends of letters and interviews which some Premiers have found among the most exhausting of their duties.

The Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have not quite so much of the duties of the Chief Executive as the Prime Minister. But they ought to and do discharge functions of the same kind, and they have besides very exacting departments to preside over and direct.

It is surely obvious that no human being can properly carry out the duties which these gentlemen are supposed to perform. After a very few months, exhausted nature will take its revenge either by a break-down of health or

by a resort to those devices of postponement and evasion to which I have already referred. A few years ago a friend of mine used to refer to what he called 'the Prime Ministers' disease', by which he meant an instinctive refusal to decide anything if decision could by any means be avoided.

Now I am afraid that, whatever is done, the chief officers of State will always be very hard-worked men. That is inevitable. But can nothing be arranged to make it easier for them to devote their chief energies to their most important tasks? In the catalogue I have just given I cannot think that all the items are of equal moment. There is the House of Commons, for instance. No doubt modern Prime Ministers do not attend its sittings with the same exaggerated constancy as Mr. Gladstone. But could not their attendance be even further reduced? Why should a Prime Minister be there except during the last half of questions and to make a relatively small number of speeches on really first-rate occasions? At other times the leadership and direction of business should be left to one of his less hard-worked colleagues. I leave out of consideration any measures which might be taken to render the membership of the House less onerous for all, because it is too large a subject to be dealt with here. I will only say that to me it seems fantastic that hundreds of members should be kept night after night hanging about the precincts of the House, most of whom never even go into the Chamber after question time except to divide. Surely, by a more resolute and complete use of standing committees, the greater part of this utterly useless waste could be avoided. However that may be, it is at least certain that a Prime Minister can be better employed than in taking part in this melancholy farce.

Then with regard to other lesser duties, could they not also be cut down? Is it really necessary for a Prime Minister—let me insist that I am not referring to the present occupant of that office, who is in a very special

position—to make the number of party speeches which have been usual? Even if it be thought essential that he should attend the annual meeting of his party, would not that, together with one or two more, be enough extra-parliamentary utterances? And surely he might leave to other less busy individuals those discourses on science, art, and literature which, however delightful in themselves, are really consuming the energy which might otherwise be used for solving the vital problems of the Empire. Similarly, I would ruthlessly cut down all those social and semi-public dinners and other engagements which are a needless expenditure of strength. There are also some activities of very great importance which yet take up a lot of time—I refer chiefly to attendance at international conferences. I should think it impossible for a Prime Minister to avoid these altogether. It may sometimes be that the problems to be considered can only be settled by the intervention of the Prime Minister. But certainly he ought not to attend them unless it is quite certain that there is no substitute available. It should be one of the first duties of a Prime Minister to spare himself to the utmost of his power.

Some of these observations will apply to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Foreign Secretary. Of the departmental work of the Chancellor I know little. He used to be considered not one of the most overburdened ministers except actually during the preparation and passing of the Budget. However that may be, leisure to think and plan is only less desirable for him than for the Prime Minister, and a determined effort should be made to secure it for him. Nor is this less true of the Foreign Minister. Indeed, in some respects his need is greater. Forty years ago it was commonly thought that a Foreign Minister's departmental duties were too exacting for a member of the House of Commons. Certainly, for that or other reasons the majority of Victorian Foreign Ministers were peers. It must be remembered that whereas most ministers can shift more or less of their work on to the

shoulders of subordinates, it is difficult for a Foreign Minister to do so. He must see the representatives of the more important foreign Powers and discuss with them any pressing matter which is at issue. To do that effectively, he must keep himself in touch with all the current papers. It is not enough for him with the help of able subordinates to 'cram' at the last minute for a crucial conversation. If he does, he runs grave risk of being caught tripping. The best of our Foreign Ministers have had at their fingers' ends not only the main facts of the urgent controversies of the day, but also a general background of knowledge of the personalities concerned and the previous history of them and their country. It is only by preparation of that kind that the negotiator can fully appreciate what is in the mind of the other party and be enabled to devise means for meeting his difficulties without sacrificing the interests of his own country.

All this means reading a large mass of papers and seeing a considerable number of persons from whom information and advice can be obtained. And recent developments have increased the strain upon the occupant of the Foreign Office. By an excellent rule, begun by Sir Austen Chamberlain, the Foreign Minister attends, as I have already pointed out, all important meetings of the League of Nations, not to speak of other international conferences. That involves a great addition to duties which already come near to being overwhelming. I do not myself see how any normally strong individual can do all this and yet retain time and energy to think out sound policies on all questions of international importance. I have long been convinced that an Assistant Foreign Minister is necessary. He should have allotted to him all League questions except those of such first-rate importance that the Foreign Secretary decides to retain them in his own hands. Probably the Assistant might have other duties assigned to him as well. He would have to be of Cabinet rank, so that when required he could take the place of the

Foreign Minister either at Geneva or London as the case may be. I believe a change of this kind is essential, not only to give relief to the Foreign Minister, but for the proper transaction of foreign policy. For foreign affairs do not stand still either at meetings of the League or in Downing Street while the Foreign Minister is away. Questions have to be determined, action has to be taken, diplomats have to be seen. Unless there is on the spot some person of sufficient authority and responsibility to give a decision or procure one from the Cabinet, an irrevocable opportunity may be missed, or at least a hurtful delay may occur.

Here, then, are some suggestions which I believe are worthy of consideration. They do not cover the whole or nearly the whole of the field. They deal mainly with the Cabinet itself, and the offices of some of the principal ministers. Doubtless those familiar with the working of other departments could indicate many improvements in the organization of the remaining chief executive organs of the State. What I venture to insist upon is that the matter is one of very great importance and no little urgency. There are, as I have indicated, many signs that the present machinery of government is not working satisfactorily. Not only do individual ministers break down with increasing frequency, but the whole machine works with serious loss of efficiency and rapidity. Democracy is intrinsically a very laborious form of government. The relations between the sovereign power and its agents must be much more complicated than in the case of an autocracy or even an oligarchy. To bring home to the electorate the essential features of an administrative or legislative problem requires great and elaborate exertions not only by direct addresses but by so framing policy that its main purpose will be easily intelligible. Nor is it less difficult for the electorate, through its representatives, to intimate its wishes. Moreover, the structure of civilization is growing in complexity, both nationally and internationally, while the speed of communications has immeasurably increased. It is therefore natural that from

time to time the mechanism of government should need overhauling. And I feel strongly that such a time has now arrived. There is a real danger that unless changes can be made, the ever-pressing problems of national and international life will smash the mechanism that is unable to deal with them.