

(Prepared by - Dr. Annila Banerjee)

## The Cabinet

The Cabinet system originated in England and is the product of history rather than invention. The basic point of a Parliamentary Government is the formal or nominal nature of the head of State. In a Parliamentary or Cabinet System all executive powers and authority are exercised by a Cabinet or the Council of Ministers. A King usually remains as the head of the government. He however is a nominal or titular head and not the real ruler. He is the symbol of the nation but does not rule the nation. He is the head of State but not the head of the Government. His post has honour and dignity but not authority and hence has no responsibility either. The Cabinet governs in his name. The real executive the Cabinet is legally responsible to the legislature for its political acts and ultimately to the electorate. The Cabinet rules according to the laws that Parliament enacts. Members of the Cabinet are the members of either House of the legislature. The Cabinet guides and leads the legislature. This system is therefore called Parliamentary or Cabinet System of government. In a Parliamentary system the Cabinet is formed by the Party which has a majority in the lower House of the legislature.

# The Cabinet

'The Cabinet is the core of the British constitutional system. It is the supreme directing authority. It integrates what would otherwise be a heterogeneous collection of authorities exercising a vast variety of functions. It provides unity to the British system of government.'

SIR IVOR JENNINGS: *Cabinet Government*

## I. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

### THE PRIVY COUNCIL AND ITS WEAKNESSES

In chapter 4 it was shown how medieval kings consulted periodically with the Great Council, the Magnum Concilium, on important matters of State, especially those affecting taxation. As the business of the realm increased, the King had to appoint a smaller Council which was in permanent session. This contained the leading officials, such as the Justiciar, the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Treasurer, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal and the leading judges. It was known originally as the Curia Regis and developed later into the Privy Council.

By the 13th century the Privy Council was a definite body, having paid members who took an oath to give the King good advice, though he was not usually present at their deliberations. Its composition was decided solely by the King. It was not a large body, consisting in 1404, for instance, of nineteen persons. Though the King could consult with this Privy Council concerning the exercise of the royal power, it did not preclude him from meeting with the Great Council as a whole or contacting unofficial persons, such as nobles, bishops and court favourites. In practice, therefore, the scope of the Privy Council's activities varied with the strength and character of the King. Thus during the period when Henry III, Richard II and Henry VI reigned as minors, the Council virtually

governed the country, but under Henry VII it was merely used to register the King's decisions.

The Proclamations of the Council became the means of communicating the royal will to the nation, the Council also taking the necessary administrative measures. But, in addition to executive functions, the Council soon acquired judicial powers in both civil and criminal cases. Original civil jurisdiction arose from people petitioning the King in Council as an alternative to the King in Parliament. By the early 15th century, cases going to the Council were automatically referred to the Chancellor, the King's chief legal adviser, and he developed a system of law alongside the common law, known as 'equity' (see page 358). Although it was admitted that the Council had authority for certain offences, such as neglect of duties by J.P.s, riots, and bribery of jurors, its criminal jurisdiction was, from the beginning of the 14th century, continually being opposed by the statutes of Parliament.

The Privy Council reached the zenith of its power under the Tudors, who turned it into an efficient engine of government with legislative, executive and judicial functions. It issued ordinances, controlled the administration of those ordinances and, with extended jurisdiction, punished those who did not obey them. Its Court of Star Chamber became particularly notorious for its investigation of political offences and its use of torture as a means of extracting confessions. But, as Parliament became bolder in its opposition to the King, so the power of the Privy Council declined. The Court of Star Chamber was abolished in 1641, while during the Civil War and the Commonwealth period, the Privy Council ceased to exist. When it was restored in 1660, its powers were considerably reduced.

The Privy Council today consists of some 300 members and contains all Cabinet ministers past and present, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Lords of Appeal, the Lord Chief Justice, retired High Court judges, high-ranking ambassadors, and other persons prominent in public life, both at home and in the Commonwealth. But it meets as a body only when the Sovereign dies or announces his intention to marry. Usually the business which remains to it is conducted by four to six members (a quorum is three) summoned by the Clerk of the Council. These members are usually Cabinet ministers who meet in the Queen's presence, and the Clerk gives authority to the

proceedings by signing the minutes. Its functions are:

- (1) Carrying out the formal business of receiving oaths of office, appointing and removing holders of certain Crown appointments, receiving homage from bishops.
- (2) Giving effect, without deliberation, to Cabinet decisions, by Proclamation or by Orders in Council (see page 402).
- (3) Providing members for standing committees, which represent the survival of the Council's old advisory function and today deal with matters relating to Jersey and Guernsey, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and the chartered municipal corporations.

The most important surviving committee is the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. The Act abolishing the Council's judicial powers in 1641 applied only to England and it retained its authority to consider appeals from the King's subjects overseas. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council was formally constituted in 1833. It has appellate jurisdiction from the Courts of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, from the overseas dependencies and on certain legal issues arising in those independent members of the Commonwealth who have retained the right of appeal. (The present tendency, however, is for members to keep appeals within their own judicial system.) It also hears appeals from the Prize Courts, the Ecclesiastical Courts and the Disciplinary Committees of the General Medical Council. The Judicial Committee is composed of the Lord Chancellor, the Lord President of the Council, the Lords of Appeal in Ordinary and other Privy Councillors who have held high judicial office in Britain or the Commonwealth. In practice, it is the Lords of Appeal in Ordinary who man the committee. About 30 appeals are heard each year.

- (4) Establishing special committees, containing three to five members, to consider particular problems. Thus in 1957 a committee of Privy Councillors enquired into telephone tapping, and studied the problem of reducing the burden on ministers. While the alternative, a Select Committee of the House of Commons, would also have an intimate knowledge of government, the Privy Council committee has the advantage of being more compact, not having to represent a cross-section of the House.

## THE 17TH-CENTURY CABINET

Under the Stuarts, the Privy Council was too large to be an efficient advisory or executive body, having increased to over fifty members. Moreover, containing critics and even traitors, it was unacceptable as a policy-forming body. Hence, both James I and Charles I sought advice either from a small body or, more frequently, from a single person, such as Strafford or Laud. The Council itself formed committees to deal with such matters as foreign affairs, the army and navy, complaints and grievances, and trade and plantations, but so clumsy was the procedure for referring matters to the appropriate committee and acting on its advice that the committee system proved unworkable.

The most important attempt to overcome the weakness of the large size of the Council was promoted by Charles II, who consulted with only a small group of members rather than with the whole body. This group was known as the Cabinet or Cabal, the former because it met in the King's closet, the latter from the initials of the men composing it — Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley and Lauderdale. It was not a true committee of the Privy Council, for it was selected entirely by the King; nor did it resemble our present Cabinet. Its members were linked to the King rather than to each other and shared his confidence unequally. They distrusted and disliked one another and were therefore ineffective as a combination. Nor were they departmental heads assembling to discuss policy as a whole, but were called together by the King merely to consider such problems as he chose to submit to them. Moreover, by being present at their deliberations, he could hear conflicting opinions — quite different from the modern practice, where the Cabinet's advice carries weight, politically and psychologically, by being tendered as a whole. Above all, the Cabal did not represent a permanent body which would be consulted by the King on all problems and at all times, for he could, and did, confer with other persons.

The Cabal was justly unpopular. Not only did it tend to increase the personal influence of the monarch, since policy was formulated in secret outside the main body of the Council, but the uncertainty as to who actually tendered advice made it impossible for Parliament to fix responsibility for mis-government. Attempts were made, therefore, to restore the Privy Council to its former eminence, but these came to nothing.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN CABINET

(The Cabinet first began to acquire an authority of its own when George I ceased to attend its meetings, for then decisions were conveyed to the King by one of the ministers present. The practice was continued by George II and accepted by George III, and, as a result, the personal influence of the monarch diminished and a dominant minister emerged.)

But there seems to have been no continuous link between the Cabal and the modern Cabinet. At the beginning of the 18th century, the King chose the nominal or formal Cabinet from the great officers of State, many of whom had no departmental duties. But such a large body lacked solidarity and secrecy. Hence a small inner Cabinet, the 'efficient Cabinet', developed, consisting of the political officers of the Household, those who actually carried on government. Walpole, for instance, would usually prepare the ground for policy decisions by discussing the matter over dinner with the minister responsible. The efficient Cabinet would then be called and a united policy decided upon. The next step of summoning the nominal Cabinet was merely to obtain formal consent to the decisions already agreed upon.

(It was then the task of the leading minister to persuade the King to accept this advice. Persuasion and subtlety would first be used but often the King's views had to be over-ruled. The extent to which this happened was largely determined by the respective personalities of the monarch and his leading minister. Walpole resigned in 1717 when Townshend was dismissed, and was such a nuisance in opposition that he had to be recalled with Townshend in office. Similarly, when Pelham resigned in 1745 because George II would not have the elder Pitt in his ministry, the King had to give way, while Newcastle would only form a Government in 1757 on condition that Pitt served him as Secretary of State. Finally, the failure in 1807 of George III to extort a promise from the Grenville ministry that no further concessions would be made to the Roman Catholics gave rise to the doctrine that the Crown must not fetter its advisers by exacting pledges as to their future action.)

(Only gradually did the Cabinet develop its essential role as the link between the Crown and Parliament. The prevailing doctrine of the 18th century was the separation of powers, which held that the executive should be independent of the legislature. In terms of

everyday government, this meant that the Crown was responsible for policy and administration, which Parliament could control directly by legislation or indirectly by refusing to grant Supply. Neither method, however, provided a really effective means of forcing the Government to follow a policy acceptable to Parliament. That came about only as the party system developed and the King admitted that, in choosing his ministers, he should accept the leaders of the majority party in the House of Commons and follow the policy which they advised.

Thus the 18th-century Sovereigns had to learn by experience. There was no party system in the modern sense of the term. Support for a Government in Parliament rested on family political groupings, patronage and the goodwill of the 'independents'. Such a situation could not produce with any consistency the characteristics of our modern Cabinet — submission to the authority of a Prime Minister, the ultimate supremacy of the Cabinet's view over the Sovereign's, political unanimity and collective responsibility. Most Prime Ministers were originally chosen because of their acceptability to the King, though their survival depended on skilful management of the House of Commons. The Sovereign changed his advisers as the need arose. Only in 1714 did the whole of the ministry go at the same time, and this did not happen again until 1782. Moreover, since ministries usually contained men of both parties, there was no need for them to resign collectively if defeated in Parliament. In 1719 Stanhope's Peerage Bill was defeated through the opposition of Walpole, but it did not lead to the resignation of Stanhope, the leader of the Government. Again, in 1733 Walpole had to withdraw his Excise Bill, a Government financial measure, and in 1739 he had to declare war on Spain against his wishes, but he did not resign on either occasion.

Towards the end of the century, however, the Commons began to exercise more authority in controlling the Government. Thus in 1780 we have Dunning's motion, 'that the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished,' while the Economical Reforms of 1782 removed many opportunities for patronage. When, a few years later, George III withdrew from active politics, Pitt was left supreme and the Cabinet system developed apace.

But it was the Reform Act, 1832, which dealt the final blow to the King's power, and set in motion those forces which made the

Cabinet the instrument by which the people could retain control over policy. The development of parties meant that from now on the choice of Prime Minister and Government rested with the electorate, not the Sovereign (see page 58). To determine the relationship between the Cabinet and these parties and between the Cabinet and Parliament, conventions evolved. Such conventions developed at different times and have been modified as conditions have changed. A consideration of them will reveal the main features of the present-day Cabinet system.

## II. MAIN CONVENTIONS GOVERNING THE CABINET SYSTEM

The functioning of the Cabinet system is determined almost entirely by convention. Indeed, until 1937, when the Ministers of the Crown Act provided for the payment of salaries to the ministers who were members of the Cabinet, it was entirely unknown to the law. Even in Parliament, Cabinet ministers are legally only on an equal footing with other members, a fact underlined in 1857 when the Commons would not approve priority for them when passing over to the Lords. In practice, however, ministers do enjoy some privileges by custom. Thus the Iron bench to the right of the Speaker is reserved for them, and in debate they find it much easier to catch the Speaker's eye.

The rules regulating the Cabinet system and its relationship to the Sovereign, the Prime Minister, Parliament, parties and the electorate, are the most fundamental conventions in the British constitution, for it is through them that the political sovereignty of the electorate is implemented. Here we merely describe how they normally operate; why they are followed and their advantages over written law are discussed in Chapter 29.

(1) *The composition of the Cabinet is decided by the Prime Minister.*

Subject to minor qualifications, the Prime Minister has completely free hand in selecting his Cabinet (see pages 240-2). Some ministers without portfolios are included and, if he chooses, the Prime Minister can create new departments. In 1970 Mr. Heath did this in order to reduce the Cabinet to seventeen (compared with Mr. Wilson's twenty-three).

- (2) *The Cabinet is chosen from the majority party in the House of Commons*

The Leader of the party having a majority of seats in the House of Commons must be sent for by the Sovereign to form the Government. Two possible exceptions to this rule occur where: (a) the existence of an important third party results in no one party having an absolute majority; (b) abnormal circumstances make it desirable to form a coalition Government. But such conditions rarely apply. A third party may emerge as a result of a party split or in response to new political needs, but it finds difficulty in growing to a size sufficient to upset the two-party system. On the other hand, coalitions are disliked, since they fail to produce strong and decisive government.

It is this convention which solves the problem of how to secure co-operation between the legislature and the executive, a problem which led to the breakdown of government under the Stuarts. Later monarchs recognised the necessity of having a ministry not faced with a hostile House of Commons, and either selected ministers who were likely to receive support there or, as with George III, chose those who would follow his policy and then packed the House with sufficient members to uphold that policy. But the Reform Act, 1832, by transferring sovereignty to the electorate, made the adoption of this convention essential. The choice of the ministry could no longer rest with the monarch. Had he pressed the issue, the King might easily have become involved in party politics, with a loss of influence and dignity when he eventually had to climb down. As early as 1834 the situation was brought home to William IV. The King had seized on a hint by Lord Melbourne to secure his resignation and had replaced him with his own choice, Sir Robert Peel, the Tory Leader. At the election which followed, however, the Tories were defeated and Peel, since he could not obtain the necessary support for his Government, was forced to resign in favour of Lord Melbourne.

- (3) *A Government defeated on a major issue in the House of Commons must either resign or ask for a dissolution of Parliament*

In 1841 it was proved that no Government can continue in office when faced by a hostile House of Commons. Two years previously Lord Melbourne had tendered his resignation when he lost the support of the Radicals and the Irish. Peel, however, declined

office because the Queen would not change her Ladies of the Bedchamber, who were Whig in sympathy. Lord Melbourne therefore continued in office, although subject to frequent adverse votes in the House of Commons. The climax came in 1841, when a resolution was moved by Peel 'that Her Majesty's ministers do not sufficiently possess the confidence of the House of Commons to enable them to carry through the House measures which they deem of essential importance to the public welfare, and their continuance in office, under such circumstances, is at variance with the spirit of the constitution'. As a result, the Whigs asked for a dissolution, and at the general election which followed they were defeated, but it was not until a no-confidence amendment to the Address was carried against them that they resigned.

Today, strict party discipline makes a Government defeat in the House of Commons unlikely. Failure of party members to support Cabinet decisions in the division lobby will lead either to the resignation of the Government or to a dissolution. Thus they cannot afford to forget Bagehot's warning that the Cabinet is a committee which can dissolve the assembly which appointed it; it is a committee with a power to appeal. 'Though appointed by parliament, it can appeal if it chooses to the next' (*The English Constitution*). Members, as already pointed out, will not risk losing their seats other than on the most exceptional grounds. Hence, once formed, it is the Cabinet which now controls the Commons, rather than the House controlling the Government, and Cabinet policy is almost automatically ratified by Parliament.

(4) *A Government defeated at the polls resigns immediately*

At one time a Government, although defeated at a general election, went through the procedure of meeting Parliament and waiting for a formal vote of 'no confidence'. Disraeli, however, established the practice in 1868 of resigning immediately an election had been conceded.

The situation is somewhat different when no party is returned with an absolute majority, for it may not be known which way the minority parties will vote. In this case, the Government meets Parliament and awaits the result of an amendment to the Address.

(5) *All ministers are collectively responsible for Cabinet decisions*

Except when a minister explains the reasons for his resignation,

Parliament hears nothing of the Cabinet's current deliberations. These remain secret, and only decisions as a whole are reported to the House when policy is announced. Any leakage of divergent views held by ministers would, as during Queen Victoria's reign, seriously weaken the Government. In its decisions, 'the Cabinet is a unity to the House'. While a minister can speak against any proposal in a Cabinet meeting, he must either support the policy decided upon or resign. Recent resignations of this nature are Frank Cousins (Prices and Incomes Bill, 1966) and Lord Longford (education cuts, 1968). But such resignations are infrequent. Ministers come from the same party and, at least initially, are fairly homogeneous in their political views. In any case, a former minister is unlikely to cross the floor of the House and join the Opposition. His disagreement with the Government is usually over only one issue, and his basic political outlook remains unchanged.

(Thus the Cabinet stands or falls together. Where the policy of a particular minister is under attack, it is the government as a whole which is being attacked. Thus the defeat of a minister on any major issue represents a defeat for the Government. However, today, unlike the 19th century, such defeats do not occur. The use of rigid party discipline ensures that the Government can always obtain a majority vote. Nevertheless, criticism may be so severe and widespread that the Government may modify its policy. If the minister identified with it feels that his prestige with the party has been badly damaged, he may resign, e.g. Sir Samuel Hoare (1935) over the proposals to partition Abyssinia.

In practice, therefore, all that collective responsibility means today is that every member of the Government must be prepared to support all Cabinet decisions both inside and outside the House. That this aspect of collective responsibility is still real today was seen in the case of Mr. Frank Cousins while Minister of Technology. He was constantly under attack from the Opposition for his known hostility to the Government's wages policy. Mr. Rex Mogg (*The Sunday Times*, October 3, 1965) summed up the situation as follows: 'He must, if he is to remain in the Cabinet, give public support to the Cabinet's wages policy. He cannot remain in the Cabinet but not of it; that is an affront to the British constitution, and the British constitution will win in the end.' It did!

It should be noted, however, that resignation may not come immediately. The minister may remain for a time in the Cabinet

hoping to convert its views, as with Mr. Cousins. Or disagreement over policy may not be pursued. Thus while in 1974 both Mr. Michael Foot (Secretary of State for Employment) and Mr. Eric Heffer (Minister of State for Industry) openly disagreed with the Government's decision to continue to supply arms to the anti-Communist regime in Chile, neither resigned. Nevertheless, when a year later Mr. Heffer spoke against the E.E.C. contrary to the agreed guideline, he was dismissed. The open split in the Cabinet on whether to remain in the E.E.C. must be regarded as a unique occasion.

Collective responsibility does not apply to a minister's responsibility for his permanent officials or for his personal mistakes. Thus only Sir Thomas Dugdale resigned over Crichton Down (1954), Dr. Hugh Dalton through inadvertent budget disclosure (1947), Mr. John Profumo over lying to the House of Commons (1963), and Lord Lambton and Lord Jellicoe (1973) over their involvement with prostitutes.

### III. IMPORTANCE OF THE CABINET IN THE CONSTITUTION

While the Cabinet has important policy-forming and co-ordinating functions, it is not merely an executive organ of government. It is the device which gives coherence to the whole of the British constitution and represents an alternative to the separation of powers as a basis of organising democratic government. Through the Cabinet, the executive power is directly related to the legislature and so to the electorate.

Until the development of the Cabinet system, there was always difficulty in ensuring that ministers acted in harmony with the wishes of Parliament. The Sovereign was responsible for deciding policy and, so long as he could manage without seeking funds from the Commons, he was subject to little restraint. The only sanctions available to the Commons were the ability to withhold Supply and, to a lesser extent, the impeachment of responsible ministers.

Both methods, however, were negative, leading to deadlock and sterile government. Tudor monarchs realised it was better to forestall criticism. Leading statesmen were therefore encouraged to seek election to the House of Commons so that they could explain policy and report back to the Sovereign the views expressed there.

The Stuarts were less skilful, and collisions between the executive and legislature brought about the breakdown of government.

After 1688, the liaison between the Government and Parliament became closer. By the arrangements made for the Civil List in 1697, the House of Commons ensured that, for a large part of his revenue, the King would in future have to make periodic application to Parliament. Policy thus became subject to continual examination, and henceforth Sovereigns recognised the desirability of choosing ministers acceptable to the Commons. This was achieved by linking the ministry with the party system which was developing in Parliament. Herein lies the essence of the Cabinet — it is an executive body deriving its authority from the legislature by being appointed from among those persons whose views there are in the majority. Bagehot explains it as follows: 'A Cabinet is a combining committee — a *hyphen* which joins, a *buckle* which fastens the legislative part of the state to the executive part of the state. In its origin it belongs to the one, in its function it belongs to the other' (*The English Constitution*).

When, in 1832, political sovereignty passed to the electorate, the Cabinet system was taken one stage further, for now the executive was linked, not only with the legislature but, through the extension of parties outside Parliament, to the electorate. Because of the two-party system, a general election today is virtually a plebiscite to decide which set of persons shall manage the country's affairs. Such an arrangement goes a long way towards achieving democratic and effective government. It is democratic for two reasons: (a) the electorate can vote for a definite Government following a policy announced in broad outline at the election; (b) the people retain the right to criticise that Government through their representatives in Parliament, chiefly on the Opposition side. It is effective because the Government is drawn from the party having a majority of seats in the House of Commons.

Some commentators fear that the executive is becoming too powerful. The Cabinet, through the party machine, tends nowadays to control the House of Commons rather than itself being subject to the sovereignty of Parliament. It disciplines the House by the threat of dissolution. It has virtual control over legislation. It makes all financial proposals and, by its demands on parliamentary time, prevents the Commons from discussing them adequately. It has secured increasing opportunities for delegated

legislation. It has so added to the number of ministerial offices in today the Government alone (including the Parliamentary Secretaries and certain offices of the Royal Household which are political appointments) represents over a hundred seats in the Commons. It can interfere directly in 20% of national production through its supervision over the State industries.

Such developments, it can be argued, are essential to the modern Welfare State. The traditional theory of the sovereignty of Parliament has no special virtue in itself but was significant only in conflict with absolute monarchy. Today the Cabinet should not be viewed in isolation as an organ opposed to Parliament, but rather the two must be regarded as complementary in the functioning of the constitution.

#### IV. FUNCTIONS OF THE CABINET

We now turn to an examination of the work for which the Cabinet is responsible. Although its functions tend to overlap, it is convenient to sub-divide them under the following headings:

(1) *It decides on the major policy to be followed in both home and foreign affairs*

The policies advanced by the parties at an election represent a reflection of their prevailing philosophies rather than programmes to be implemented in detail. A party can expect to see a certain line followed if it is returned to power, but it should not fetter the Government. The Cabinet has a duty, not only to the party, but to the whole nation, and so it must be given considerable freedom to act for what it considers is the national well-being. If people think that party interests have been allowed to dominate, the floating vote may turn against the Government at the next election. (The failure of the Labour Government to stand up to the trade unions probably contributed considerably to its loss of support in the election of 1970).

In any case, it is the Cabinet which decides the moment when each issue shall be submitted to Parliament and draws up the legislative programme which the Government aims to complete during its present term of office. Where a measure may temporarily cost it some popularity, e.g. the removal of subsidies on school meals and welfare milk in 1970, the Cabinet is likely to act early so that the general benefits of the policy can be appreciated before

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it has to seek re election. The same applies to measures which cannot come into full operation before extensive administrative machinery has been established. In fact, during the last years of a Parliament, only those bills which excite little controversy are usually introduced.

(2) *It fills in the details of policy*

Apart from the working reports of the various committees of the Labour Party, the parties do not examine proposals in great administrative detail. This is left to the Government when the party gains office. For a number of reasons, there may be a considerable difference between what the election programme seemed to signify and the detailed scheme actually introduced. In the first place, the Government may have to modify its plans in the light of prevailing conditions. Thus, additional finance may impose limits. Secondly, the Government must ensure co-ordination between all the departments concerned with a project, directly or indirectly, and this may again prevent it going too far in one direction. Above all, in implementing proposals, the Government consults with the interests concerned, something not allowed for in the party programme.

(3) *It co-ordinates the policies of different departments*

If the administration is to work smoothly and policy is to be implemented successfully, there must be careful co-ordination between the departments affected. A proposal to raise the school-leaving age, for example, would affect not only the Department of Education and Science, but also the Department of Employment, the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Health and Social Security, and the Home office, to mention merely a few.

While a large measure of co-ordination may be achieved at lower levels by the departments concerned, the broad aspects have to be decided at Cabinet level (see page 267). This will apply both in planning policy and later when the scheme is in operation. If it is to be successful, therefore, the Cabinet must contain a number of heads of departments (see page 269).

(4) *It takes decisions on unforeseen major problems*

New problems are continually arising, both at home and abroad, which call for Government decisions. Apart from parliamentary business, which is a standing item on the agenda, and changes in the economy, which have to be discussed regularly, matters often

reach Cabinet level by attracting the attention of the Press or being the subject of embarrassing questions in Parliament. Above all, in foreign affairs, urgent decisions frequently have to be taken. A revolution in the Middle East or an outbreak of violence in an African country would have to come before the Cabinet. Thus foreign matters form another standing item of business.

(5) *It formulates plans for the future*

Since the State has a continuous existence, plans have to be laid now for anything up to fifty years ahead. Thus measures have to be taken to provide for future changes in the population before the end of the century, to develop atomic energy in co-ordination with other industries providing power, to plan new methods of defence and to apply scientific advance to production. It must be admitted that, to some extent, long-term planning is made more difficult by the Cabinet's being composed of frequently-changing party politicians.

Thus the Cabinet is the real policy-forming body in the British constitution. It provides the dynamic impulses vital to progressive government or, as Professor H. Laski puts it, 'the Cabinet pushes a stream of tendency through affairs.' Without it, policy would be stagnant; the only alternative would be to introduce committees to run departments, on the pattern adopted in the U.S.A. and in our own local government.