

Montagu reforms of 1919

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Manifest Pedagogy

As has been repeated many times in the pedagogy section of history, events which have a centenary have taken centre stage in both prelims and mains. The year 1919 is very prominent in the History of India for the Rowlatt Act, Jallian Wala Bagh massacre, Government of India act 1919, Non-co-operation movement, Khilafat movement.

In news

Hundred years of Montagu reforms

Placing it in the syllabus

History of Modern India

Dimensions

- Montagu deceleration
- Provisions of Government of India act of 1919
- Indian response to GoI act of 1919

Content

Montagu deceleration

In August 1917 Montagu had informed the House of Commons that the **British government's policy towards India** was thereafter one of **"increasing association of Indians in every branch of government** with a view to the **gradual realization of responsible government in India** as an integral part of the empire."

Soon thereafter, Montagu headed a delegation in India that spent the winter of 1917–18, during which he held talks with Chelmsford. The main element of the report was the **recommendation that control over some aspects of provincial government be passed to Indian ministers** responsible to an Indian electorate.

Provisions of Government of India act of 1919

It was an act of the British Parliament that sought to increase the participation of Indians in the administration of their country. The act was based on the recommendations of a report by Edwin Montagu, the then Secretary of State for India, and Lord Chelmsford, India's Viceroy between 1916 and 1921. Hence the constitutional reforms set forth by this act are known as Montagu-Chelmsford reforms or Montford reforms.

Important features of the Act

1. Provincial Government

2. Executive:

- Dyarchy was introduced, i.e., there were two classes of administrators – Executive councillors and ministers.
- The Governor was the executive head of the province. The subjects were divided into two lists – reserved and transferred.
- The governor was in charge of the reserved list along with his executive councillors. The subjects under this list were law and order, irrigation, finance, land revenue, etc.
- The ministers were in charge of subjects under the transferred list. The subjects included were education, local government, health, excise, industry, public works, religious endowments, etc.
- The ministers were responsible to the people who elected them through the legislature.
- These ministers were nominated from among the elected

members of the legislative council.

- The executive councillors were not responsible to the legislature unlike the ministers.
- The Secretary of State and the Governor-General could interfere in matters under the reserved list but this interference was restricted for the transferred list.

2. **Legislature:**

- The size of the provincial legislative assemblies was increased. Now about 70% of the members were elected.
- There were communal and class electorates.
- Some women could also vote.
- The governor's assent was required to pass any bill. He also had veto power and could issue ordinances also.

1. **B) Central Government**

2. **Executive:**

- The chief executive authority was the Governor-General.
 - o There were two lists for administration – central and provincial.
- Provincial list was under the provinces while the centre took care of the central list.
- Out of the 6 members of the Viceroy's executive council, 3 were to be Indian members.
- The governor-general could issue ordinances.
- He could also certify bills that were rejected by the central legislature.

2. **Legislature:**

- A bicameral legislature was set up with two houses – Legislative Assembly (forerunner of the Lok Sabha) and the Council of State (forerunner of the Rajya Sabha).
- Legislative Assembly (Lower House)
- Members of the Legislative Assembly: it included 145 members among them 41 were nominated (26 official and 15 non-official), 104 were elected (General, Muslims,

Europeans, Landlords, representatives of India community, and Sikhs)

- The nominated members were nominated by the governor-general from Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians. o The members had a tenure of 3 years.

3. **Council of State (Upper House)**

- Only male members with a tenure of 5 years.
- Members of the Council of State: It included 60 members (27 nominated which consisted of official, non-official members and 33 elected, it included General, Muslims, Europeans, Sikh).

4. The legislators could ask questions and also vote a part of the budget.

5. Only 25% of the budget was subject to vote.

6. Rest was non-votable.

7. A bill had to be passed in both houses before it became a law.

8. There were three measures to resolve any deadlock between both the houses – joint committees, joint conferences and joint sittings.

9. **Governor-General**

- The governor-general's assent was required for any bill to become a law even if both houses have passed it.
- He could also enact a bill without the legislature's consent.
- He could prevent a bill from becoming law if he deems it as detrimental to the peace of the country.
- He could disallow any question, adjournment motion or debate in the house.

10. **Eligibility for voting**

- Franchise was restricted and there was no universal adult suffrage.
- Voters should have paid land revenue of Rs.3000 or have

property with rental value or have taxable income.

- They should possess previous experience in the legislative council.
- They should be members of a university senate.
- They should hold certain offices in the local bodies.
- They should hold some specific titles.
- All this narrowed the number of people who could vote to an abysmal number.

11. **Indian Council**

- There were to be at least 8 and a maximum of 12 members in the council.
- Half of the members should have ten years of experience in public service in India.
- Their tenure was to be 5 years.
- Their salaries were increased from £1000 to £1200.
- There were to be 3 Indian members in the Council.

12. This act provided for the first time, the establishment of a public service commission in India.

13. The act also provided that after 10 years, a statutory commission would be set up to study the working of the government. This resulted in the Simon Commission of 1927.

14. It also created an office of the High Commissioner for India in London.

Indian response to GoI act of 1919

- The Congress met in a special session in August 1918 at Bombay under Hasan Imam's Presidency and Declared the reforms to be "disappointing and "unsatisfactory" and demanded effective self-government instead.
- Tilak termed the Montford reforms as "Unworthy and disappointing- a sunless dawn". Even Annie Besant found them "unworthy of England to offer and India to accept"
- Subash Chandra Bose viewed that the government India Act 1919 forged fresh fetters for the people.

- Mahatma Gandhi termed that these reforms were only a method of further draining India of her wealth and of prolonging her servitude.