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CONFIDENTIAL.

COMMITTEE OF HOME AFFAIRS.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH BILL.

Memorandum by the Home Secretary.

Apart from the questions raised by the President of the Local Government Board, upon which I am in agreement with him, the following points appear to me to deserve consideration.

1. The Bill only proposes to amalgamate the Local Government Board and the Insurance Commissioners under the title of a Minister of Health, and to transfer to the Minister some unimportant powers of the Board of Education and the Privy Council. This change of machinery will not save life, and will disappoint the public who have been led to expect great things. The Minister of Health, if one is set up, should from the beginning be entrusted with larger powers for enforcing the sanitary laws and for other purposes connected with the public health.

2. Is it clear that the Insurance Commissioners should be merged in the Ministry of Health, and not retained as a statutory body under the control of the Ministry?

3. Clause 2, subsections (2) and (3) provide for the transfer of other unspecified powers to and from the Minister of Health by Orders in Council. This mode of legislation is open to criticism, and leaves other departments in uncertainty. The powers capable of being transferred should be specified in a schedule, even though the actual transfer may be postponed to a future date.

4. Schedule 1, paragraph 1, provides only that, if an Act is hereinafter passed for revising the poor law, then the poor law powers of the Ministry of Health may be transferred by Order in Council. Such a provision should not be made in advance, but should be contained in the Act revising the poor law. I think a decision as to the future of the poor law should be taken now and embodied in this Bill.

5. Schedule 1, Paragraphs 2 and 3, provide for still more Orders in Council. Surely these questions could be dealt with now by substantive legislation.

6. The Secretary for Scotland raises important points as to the application of the Bill to Scotland, and advocates a new departure in the administration of Scottish affairs. I doubt whether this Bill should be used for all the purposes mentioned in his memorandum; but certainly the position of Scotland and Ireland under the Bill should be considered and determined before the Bill is introduced.

Upon the whole it appears to me that it would be a mistake to introduce the Bill in its present form. It should be revised during the Recess, and if agreed should be introduced in the autumn. Whether a Bill of this importance can be passed in the present Session may be doubtful; but at least it can be put forward for public criticism with a view to its being passed next year.

G. C.

12th July, 1918.