

December 9, 1937

REFORM OF THE ARMY COUNCIL

A Trick Of Window-Dressing?

By Major-General J. F. C. FULLER, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.

ANY radical reform of our Defence Services is of vital interest to the people of this country, not only because they pay for them, but because their lives and liberties may one day depend upon their competence. Such a reform was announced on Thursday, December 2, and put briefly it may be defined as "Youth versus age at the helm."

In order to understand this change, and how far it will make for increased efficiency, first of all it is necessary to grasp clearly what our system of army control entails. Secondly, what defects it has developed; for then only is it possible to ascertain how far youth at the helm is going to improve upon existing conditions. Here, then, is the background:—

In 1899 we went to war with the Boers in South Africa, and the whole organisation of Army control broke down. Muddle followed muddle, and the result was that, even before the war ended, it became apparent to the Government that radical reforms were essential. At that time the Army came directly under a Commander-in-Chief—Lord Roberts, a soldier who had rightly earned a high reputation in India, in which country he had served for

inert, soulless agglomeration of items without brain or intelligence . . . a foul Augean stable that defied cleansing," the object of this Committee was not to clean it out, but instead to deprive the Army of all power of decision. Had the Government been able to decide (which it could not do) that henceforth every Secretary of State for War would be a grand-strategical genius, the Board organisation might have become workable. But as Bentham once said: "Boards are

Members has, ever since 1904, been one of age. Hitherto they have been drawn from the Field-M Marshals, Generals and Lieut.-Generals lists; that is to say, from a cadre of men usually in the last lap of their service; such who have made their reputations, and therefore are naturally inclined to safeguard them. These men are little disposed to originate anything new, and as every soldier who has served in the War Office knows, to originate or even to push forward an accepted novelty

Members, control of expenditure remains the crucial and fundamental problem in reform.

The truth which is so seldom realised is this: It is not the Secretary of State or even the Army Council who controls the Army, but the bureaucracy of the Permanent Under-Secretary; for by obstruction it can see all Members and their subordinates through their tours of duty. It knows nothing of the human and military sides of the Army. It does not even know when it is obstructing, and consequently becomes "automatic" grit in the war machine. Whatever the problem may be, the War Office financiers have ever ready at hand a monkey-wrench to throw into it, and so reduce it to the "scrap - iron" of unending branch memoranda.

THE REMEDY

WHAT then is the remedy? It is to bring finance under the General Staff as a servant, so that it will cease to be its master. The present system is so extravagant and inefficient that nothing but the lassitude of the public in military affairs has maintained it in force. It is not that the causes of this disease are unknown, they have often been examined

Army Council Changes

Chief of Imperial General Staff.

Major-General the Viscount Gort, V.C., C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.V.O., M.C. (aged 51), succeeds Field-Marshal Sir Cyril Deverell, G.C.B., K.B.E. (aged 63).

Adjutant-General to the Forces.

Major-General C. G. Liddell, C.B., C.M.G., C.B.E., D.S.O. (aged 54), succeeds General Sir Harry Knox, K.C.B., D.S.O. (aged 64).

Master-General of the Ordnance.

Engineer Vice-Admiral Sir H. A. Brown, K.C.B., Grand

Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Colonel Sir Ronald Adam, Bt., D.S.O., O.B.E. (aged 52). This post has been in abeyance for some years.

General Officer Commanding in Chief (Southern Command).

Major-General A. P. Wavell, C.B., C.M.G., M.C. (aged 54), succeeds General Sir J. Burnett-Stuart, G.C.B., K.B.E., C.M.G., D.S.O. (aged 62).

General Officer Commanding the British Forces in Palestine and

116736