

The Indian Council Act 1909 (Morley Minto Reforms)
(06 December, 2021)

The Indian Council Act 1909 or Morley- Minto Reforms

It was the most short-lived Act of all the EIC Acts.

ASPIRE IAS

Background

1. There was a **phase of turmoil and militant activities** that followed the Indian Council Act of 1892. Curzon's policy of Centralization, his contempt for the aspirations of educated Indians and INC, and above all Partition of Bengal led to discontent of the people. Leaders began to reconsider the ultimate goal of their organization and more particularly the method of pressurizing the British.
2. **Rise of Extremism point of view:** Extremists started Swadeshi. Some moderates supported it.
3. **Moderates point of view**
 1. There was a growing impatience with the goals and methods of

UPSC GS Study Notes

Congress itself.

2. G.K. Gokhale went to England to meet John Morley (SoS) to put Congress demands of a self-governing system similar to that in the other British colonies.
3. He also said: 'The goal of the Congress is that India should be governed in the interests of the Indians themselves.'
4. Moderates wanted Govt to make some liberal gestures. Their **hopes** found their way **when at the end of 1905, Liberals** came to power in Britain and **John Morley became the Secretary of State (SoS)**. He was known for his liberal views.
5. **1 demand** of Indian leaders was **done even before the Act was passed**.
 1. Appointment of 2 Indians to the SoS's Indian Council and of the GG and Provincial Governors.
 2. This step was taken to **create a stake for qualified Indians** in the existing structure, not with the aim of increasing administrative efficiency.
 3. Under this, **comparatively unimportant portfolios of Education and Law were given to Indians**. Yet this step was important because it amounted to an implicit acceptance of 2 facts:
 1. Indians were **fit to be appointed to the highest position**.
 2. Indians were **better interpreters of the wishes of their countrymen than British officials**.

4. The British point of view

1. They had **2 aims** to introduce these reforms
 1. To strengthen the Raj by **rallying the moderates to the empire**
 2. To **encourage divisions** amongst Hindus and Muslims and Moderates and Extremists.
2. **Minto** (Conservative - **Conception of Constitutional Autocracy**) had succeeded Curzon as Viceroy was very different from Morley in their backgrounds, reputations, and practical experiences. **But with respect to (wrt) their policy in India, they had similar views**. Both recognized that The Partition of Bengal was a grave blunder and had hardened anti-govt feelings (even in Muslims).
3. **Carrots for Moderates**
 1. The **basic demand** of Moderates that India should be ruled interest of Indians could **not be accommodated within the imperialistic framework**.
 2. **Thus, reforms in** the composition and functions of **legislative bodies** were made which more or less satisfied them.
4. But British **also raised other pillars of support** for them in India as a counterpoise to INC
 1. They gave representation to Landholders in the Imperial LC.
 2. **Shimla Deputation = Aga Khan met Viceroy in Oct 1906**. Hence, separate electorates were given. British encourage

UPSC GS Study Notes

communalism. The same group **quickly took over ML**, initially floated by Nawab Salimullah of Dacca along with Nawabs Mohsin-ul-Mulk and Waqar-ul-Mulk in December 1906.

5. Sticks for INM (1907-1908)

1. Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act **banned meetings in specific areas.**
 2. The Newspapers (Incitement and Offences) Act **enabled the seizure of presses.**
 3. The Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act imposed a **ban on the samitis in Bengal.**
5. During 1885 – 1906, the no. of students passing 10th increased 7 fold. Even the number of newspapers and journals and their circulations increased. It means people were likely to be conscious of their rights.

Features of Morley Minto Reforms, 1909

1. This was also an amending act to the size and functions of GG and Governors.
2. Viceroy and GG's Executive Council Composition
 1. **1st time Indians were added. Satyendra P Sinha was the 1st Indian.**
3. The Imperial /Central Council Composition:
 1. *The Indian Council Act 1909* increased the strength of the Central as well as Provincial Councils. It **increased Additional members from 16 to 60.**
 2. **Official Majority** was retained though elected non-official members were introduced.
 3. The Indian Council Act of 1909 **became a landmark because** of the manner in which **non-official seats** were distributed and filled.
 1. Of these 32 non-official seats 5 were filled by nomination by the Government.
 2. There was given a representation to local govts, chambers of Commerce, Universities, and Zamindars.
 4. **Some members** = M M Malviya, G K Gokhale, D E Wacha, S N Banerjee, Tez Bahadur Sapru, Jinnah.
4. The Imperial /Central Council Powers: Members were given **The right to discuss the Budget, ask supplementary questions, and could move resolutions except for armed forces, foreign affairs, and native states.**
5. Provincial Council Composition:
 1. The Indian Council Act 1909 increased the strength of the Central as well as Provincial Councils. It increased members from 30-50.
 2. **The non-official majority was maintained** by the Election of some non-official members. This was **done because**
 1. An understanding that - they represent diverse interests and classes + it would be difficult for them to take a joint stand.
 2. Plus, if they were to pass an undesirable bill, it could be vetoed.
6. **Elections were introduced but under various constraints.**

UPSC GS Study Notes

1. Details of seat allocation and electoral qualifications were left to be decided by the local governments which left enough space for bureaucratic manipulation. Special provision was made for the additional representation of conservative classes and Muslims.
2. Moreover, the electorate was to be based on high property qualifications.
3. And finally, the Govt was given the power to disallow any candidate from contesting on any grounds.
4. **Separate Electorate for Muslims (Minto = Father of the Communal Electorate).**

Evaluation of Morley Minto Reforms, 1909

1. It gave no answer to the Indian Political problem.
2. Morley made it clear that colonial self-government (as demanded by Congress) was not suitable for India, and he was against the introduction of parliamentary or responsible government in India.
3. It was in essence aimed at 2 things
 1. Dividing the nationalist ranks by confusing the Moderates and
 2. Checking the growth of unity among Indians through obnoxious separate Electorates.
4. Govt **aimed at rallying Moderates and Muslims against the rising tide of Nationalism.**
5. The officials and ML leaders often talked about the entire community when they talked of separate electorates but **in reality**, it meant the **appeasement of a small section of the Muslim elite.**
6. Plus, the system of **elections was too indirect** and it gave the **impression of "infiltration of legislators through a no. of sieves"**.
7. Parliamentary forms were introduced **but no responsibility was conceded**, which led to thoughtless and irresponsible criticism of the Govt.
8. **Only some mem like G K Gokhale put to the constructive use of the opportunity to debate in the councils by**
 1. By demanding universal primary education
 2. Attacking repressive policies and
 3. Drawing attention to the plight of indentured labor and Indian workers in South Africa.
9. What the **reforms of 1909 gave** to the people of the country was a **shadow rather than substance.**
10. The **people had demanded self-government but** what they were given was **'benevolent despotism'.**

Reactions - The reforms satisfied none.

1. It was **rejected by Congress.** It had no element of Swaraj, legislatures were weak and non-official elected consisted of only a minority. The GG and Governors enjoyed veto power.

UPSC GS Study Notes

2. Elections were indirect and universal adult suffrage was not there. Principal of separate electorates.
3. **Morley's statement** in 1909 that the reforms were not intended to give self-government to India.

Impact of Morley Minto Reforms, 1909

1. **Communalism**: In the long run, the introduction of separate electorates for Muslims proved to be the masterstroke of imperialist strategy. Subsequently, these electorates were extended to Sikhs (1919), Dalits (1932), Laborers (1935).
2. The **debates in the legislature served an important purpose.**
 1. The arguments put the official members in an embarrassing situation.
 2. The arguments reverberated in the press throughout the length and breadth of the country.
 3. The debates thus helped in eroding the moral foundations of the Raj.