

CONDITION AND EFFICIENCY OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Section 15 of the Public Service Act, 1912, requires the Commissioner to report at least once annually on the condition and efficiency of the Public Service. Although it could never be claimed that the standard of efficiency of the Service has been maintained at the pre-war standard during the war period, it has been gratifying to find the extent to which public servants have been able to meet the innumerable difficulties which have arisen. The ability of the permanent staff, almost without exception, to accept increasing responsibility has been especially noticeable and pleasing and indicative of the loyalty and esprit de corps of the Service generally. Certain instances have occurred where duties have not been performed as well or as expeditiously as one could wish, but this shortcoming has been realized by the staff and constant endeavours made to meet the situation. Shortage of staff both in quantity and quality still precludes the situation being completely remedied.

However, with the gradual return of former employees from the Forces and the increased training of temporary employees who have been taken on during the war period, some substantial improvements have been made. The general services of the Government have been continued throughout the war period without at any stage a substantial breakdown, despite expanding activities and decreasing trained staff.

No substantial reorganization of Departments or the Service as a whole has been possible. The need for constant inspections and survey of the activities of Departments under changing conditions is not overlooked, and the earliest possible opportunity will be taken to revert to pre-war activities of this nature.

PERSONAL REPORTS ON OFFICERS

Reports were obtained on officers in 1943. The value of personal reports in the administration of the Service has become increasingly apparent. Although any system of marking and assessing the relative merits of officers has obvious shortcomings, no better system has yet been devised to meet the problem of mass personnel management. Fairly substantial changes were made in the form of report which was used in 1943, and although many helpful suggestions have been received for alterations to the report, it has been decided to use the same form again, and a request has now been issued for further reports as at 31st March, 1945. This is felt to be desirable in order to obtain some continuing comparability.

With the improvement in war conditions the opportunity should occur before long to fill vacancies in the Service that have been long vacant or filled in an acting capacity owing to the number of officers serving in the Forces. This will involve the very difficult task of assessing the relative efficiency and suitability of applicants for such positions, and it is only with the help of the honest and unbiased opinions of an officer's immediate superiors in marking a report that adequate justice can be done to all officers of the Service. The task imposed on Departments in completing personal report forms is fully appreciated, but their value is such that the Commissioner considers the extra work fully justified.

HOUSING DIFFICULTIES THROUGHOUT NEW ZEALAND

One of the major social problems in New Zealand as a result of war conditions is that of housing. This has had a serious effect on public servants, especially as they are more liable to transfer from one part of the Dominion to another than possibly most other groups of workers. In almost all major centres where public servants are stationed, housing difficulties have existed. The unfortunate effect of these conditions is that officers are loath to apply for positions outside the town of their present residence unless they are assured of suitable housing accommodation or of promotion so substantial as to compensate for additional outgoings.

Apart from promotions, the situation has also prevented Departments making necessary staff adjustments to meet changing conditions by the transfer of officers from one centre to another. The major staffing problem in the Dominion has been in Wellington, where the Head Offices of Departments are located. Had it not been for accommodation difficulties, more officers from outside centres could have been transferred to Wellington and so assisted in meeting the problems that arose. However, this would have caused considerable difficulties and often actual distress to married officers had they been forced to face such a situation. It has even been necessary to transfer officers to Wellington and permit them to leave their families behind at their former residence and for them to board in Wellington. They have been assisted in meeting their additional outgoings by payment of board and, where necessary, fares to enable them to visit their families at intervals.

OFFENCES BY PERMANENT OFFICERS

Offences by officers of the Service are dealt with as laid down in sections 11 and 12 of the Public Service Amendment Act, 1927.

A summary of cases dealt with is as follows :—

Misappropriations : 3 (forfeited office, 2 ; services terminated, 1).

Unsatisfactory work : 13 (services terminated, 2 ; reprimanded, 5 ; fined, 1 ; disrated, 3 ; resignations accepted, 2).

Unsatisfactory conduct : 32 (services terminated, 4 ; transferred, 2 ; reprimanded, 10 ; fined, 13 ; disrated, 1 ; increment withheld, 1 ; resignations accepted, 1).

CONCLUSION

We have continued to receive strong support and co-operation from Permanent Heads, without which the many difficulties of the past year would have been insurmountable. Thanks are extended to all of these officers and also to the staff of this Office for their loyal assistance ungrudgingly given.

All of which is respectfully submitted for Your Excellency's gracious consideration.

J. H. BOYES, Commissioner.

G. T. BOLT, Assistant Commissioner.

Office of Public Service Commissioner, 20th June, 1945.