

EFFICIENCY AND CONDITION OF THE SERVICE.

The efficiency of the Public Service should be of the highest standard, and, while this is the goal looked for by the Commissioners, a certain disappointment must be expressed at the comparatively slow rate of improvement in some Departments. It is useless to refer further to the matter at the present moment, except to remark that more than one point of inefficiency has been disclosed which has been the result of methods dating back for many years. Steps are being taken which, it is hoped, will result in an improvement. It is, however, difficult, when the existing inefficiency is the result of thirty or forty years' entanglement in the meshes of unbusinesslike methods, to produce greater efficiency without vexatious delays, but it is satisfactory to record that while some Departments passively or actively resist improvements which are likely to lead to increased efficiency, others show a sustained endeavour to bring their Departments into the best condition.

Even at the risk of reiteration the Commissioners again stress the necessity for business methods, which are nothing more than methods which give a maximum result at a minimum of cost. Unfortunately, much of the work of the Public Service cannot be expressed in terms of profit and loss; and even when it can, the failure to produce balance-sheets according to recognized commercial methods is not conducive to economy. This matter was fully referred to in the Second Report, but it is not known that any action has been taken by the Departments in the direction recommended.

Owing to the number of officers who volunteered for military service immediately on the outbreak of war, and the number specially required for clerical work in the Defence Department, it was a matter of difficulty for a time to satisfactorily ensure the carrying-on of the current work of Departments. The assistance of Permanent Heads who, almost without exception, waived objections to the temporary transfer of their officers to Departments where work was more pressing, enabled the work of most Departments to return to fairly normal conditions. The choice of applicants for temporary clerical work became restricted as commercial business recovered itself soon after the outbreak of war, but the Commissioners were successful in obtaining a number of clerks for such work as they might be considered suitable, and the results of the Public Service Examinations enabled cadets to be appointed in February and March. At the present time, with the exception of a few cases in which it is stated by Departments that only trained officers can be employed, the condition of the work of Departments is practically normal. It has not been necessary to consider the restriction of any service to the public by any Department.

A hearty response to the call for volunteers from the Service for military duty was expected, but the result exceeded anticipations, and the Commissioners are gratified to observe that the loyalty of the Public Service has been displayed in such a practical way. Every facility has been placed in the way of public servants to volunteer, and on the 1st April last 635 officers had been given leave to join the Expeditionary Forces. This number has been considerably added to since then.

The Commissioners have, wherever practicable, maintained the principle of filling vacancies in the higher positions from within the Service, and only in a few isolated cases has it been considered necessary to invite applications from outside the Service. This principle the Commissioners hope to continue. At the same time they feel that it is due to the officers themselves to state in plain language that difficulties are being experienced in finding capable officers to fill positions of responsibility, particularly officers with initiative, and possessing a knowledge of higher accounts-work, together with capacity to supervise and control.

The movement of staff and expansion of the Service is referred to on page 25.

CO-OPERATION AND CO-ORDINATION OF DEPARTMENTS.

The pressure placed upon Departments owing to the rapid changes in staff, as the result of officers volunteering for the Expeditionary Force, has prevented progress in the direction of the amalgamation of Departments. In any case, legislation would be necessary in some cases before the scheme outlined in the last report could be carried into effect; and the Commissioners are not at the moment pressing any changes which, although ultimately beneficial, might result in momentarily increasing the volume of work during the transition stage. The