

## CHAPTER IV.—SECRETARIAT PROCEDURE.

37. *Secretariat procedure.*—The Committee of 1919 devoted much time to the examination of Secretariat procedure and made various detailed recommendations in connection therewith. In Appendix XIV we note the more important of these and indicate the action taken in respect of each, while adding further suggestions of our own. Beyond this, we do not think it is necessary to retrace the ground then covered. We have had the advantage of consulting many experienced secretariat officers of different standing, serving both with the Government of India and the provinces (and in essence all Secretariats proceed on similar lines), and it was their unanimous opinion that the system, as such, is suitable. The conditions governing it, *i.e.*, a transitory cadre of a few superior officers controlling a permanent but less qualified office, were noticed by our predecessors (paragraphs 64 and 108) and remain unchanged. But while it is natural that officers brought up under a system should be reluctant to recognise an alternative, we have not discovered, nor did our predecessors, any other method likely to be equally suited to the transaction of Government business, given the circumstances governing its disposal. No secretariat system will guarantee that the orders ultimately passed are necessarily sound; all that can be sought is that an efficient examination of cases should precede their reasonably prompt disposal. The cardinal fault to which all Secretariats are prone is delay, and the particular vices of the Indian secretariat system are usually recognised to be—

- (a) the dilatory referencing and submission of cases (partly due to defective indexing—paragraph 114 of the report of 1919);
- (b) needless references either to other branches within the same department or to other departments in connection with no specific point but, vaguely, that the case may there first be seen;
- (c) excessive and irrelevant noting (paragraph 119 ditto);
- (d) careless editing of files prior to printing (paragraphs 123, 124 ditto).

All officers are cognizant of these faults and in fact admit them. There are existing rules condemning them and seeking to correct them, but the remedy does not lie in the multiplication of rules but in insistence on their observance. Officers see the work of their subordinates daily, and when defects reveal themselves they should be pointed out and their avoidance in future insisted upon. Otherwise there is no hope of improvement, and the multiplication of instructions which are disregarded leads nowhere.

38. *Office supervision.*—The fact that all superior officers are overworked was noted by our predecessors (paragraph 73) and was equally emphasised before us. There was no attempt to conceal the fact that Secretaries and Under Secretaries have no time to inspect their offices, while Assistant Secretaries, when engaged in case work (*cf.* paragraph 34 *supra*), are in very similar plight. We admit the difficulty, but are not satisfied that more might not be done than at present seems to be the case. The supervision of the office is left to the superintendents, and we doubt whether this is sufficient. Our predecessors (paragraph 108)

postulated as essential conditions of permanent and substantial improvement:—

- (i) the improvement of office supervision through the strengthening of the staff of responsible officers, especially Assistant Secretaries;
- (ii) the appointment of an Inspector of Office Procedure (paragraph 139).

We have already said that we do not consider this to be the proper function of an Assistant Secretary and the qualifications required for effective office control are not necessarily the same as those needed for an efficient Assistant Secretary. We have considered, therefore, the general revival of the post of Registrar, but so long as this remained as a reward of lengthy ministerial service it was always apt to be regarded as a dignified shelf. However much it might be argued that this need not necessarily be so, given proper selection, it seemed to be the natural course of events. At the same time, there appears to us to be the definite need of a responsible officer sitting in an office to be in constant touch with the work in it, ensuring that files are not lying neglected upon assistants' tables but are being dealt with promptly and intelligently. We think this could best be secured without the atrophying results which seem to attend appointment as a Registrar by selecting a capable, tactful and energetic superintendent (as in the Finance Department), explicitly entrusting him with this duty, but allowing him still to keep in touch with the more live work of a superintendent, though reducing the latter to an extent which would leave him time for general superintendence. In some departments it may be possible to arrange this among the existing staff; in others it might entail the addition of one superintendent. But even if it did, the matter is of sufficient importance to justify this course. Since such a Chief Superintendent would still have opportunities of further promotion, it would be to his interest to display a more active interest in his work than was the case under the old system of Registrars.

The suggestion for the creation of a post of Inspector of Office Procedure was accepted, and such an appointment was actually made in 1920 on a salary of Rs. 2,000—50—2,500 per mensem. The main duty entrusted to the Inspector was to facilitate the introduction of the revised office system recommended by the Committee and to ensure its progressive improvement and adaptation to changing conditions. It appears, however, that while he did useful work in many matters connected with the re-arrangement of office accommodation in the secretariat buildings, New Delhi, to which the Committee drew attention (paragraph 66), he was able to achieve very little in regard to the improvement of the internal management of the office. The post was abolished in 1923 as a measure of economy on the recommendation of the Inchcape Committee. The evidence tendered to us shows that the failure of the experiment was due partly to the personal equation, partly to the Inspector's employment largely on other duties, and partly to opposition on behalf of the offices inspected by him. These defects should be remediable, but, on the whole, agreeing with the majority of witnesses, we doubt the advisability of a whole time special appointment. We would rather see the periodical deputation of, say, an experienced officer with special aptitude for this class of work, to overhaul an office, particularly one which was demanding an increased staff. It was represented to us that, at present, the

Finance Department often finds difficulty in gauging the merits of such applications, and in two recent cases this procedure was actually followed with advantage. In 1931-32 all departments were so inspected in connection with retrenchment. Such deputations should be recognised as a normal procedure. A wise Secretary should welcome them, and any attempt at ministerial obstruction should be suppressed. In this connection, it is noticeable that in the United Provinces, which is the only province to employ a Chief Inspector of Offices and staff (from whose labours excellent results are claimed), his regular inspections do not extend to the Secretariat, though they might be undertaken by request.

We think, too, it might be advantageous if the Home Department convened periodical conferences of Chief Superintendents at which defects might be brought to notice and improvements suggested.

39. *Training of subordinates.*—At present, except in the Department of Industries and Labour, there is no systematic training of subordinates when they join the Secretariat, and we gathered the impression that they are turned out to find their own feet. Our predecessors (paragraph 50, discussed the possibility of training classes and recognised the difficulties in starting them; but we think that it should be definitely recognised that a new recruit ought to be put through the different stages of office procedure definitely for training under the supervision of the Chief Superintendent before being entrusted with individual work. This, of course, does not detract from the need of supervision and advice from his superior officers throughout his career.