

REPORT

THE TELEGRAPH COMMITTEE,

1906-07.



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**RESOLUTION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA IN THE DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, No. 7550-7575—88 (TELEGRAPH ESTABLISH-
MENT), DATED SIMLA, THE 25TH SEPTEMBER 1906.**

For some time past the organisation and work of the Telegraph Department in all its branches have been occupying the close attention of the Government of India. From the time when construction first began in 1850-51 the history of the Department covers a period of a little more than half a century, during which Telegraph Officers have rendered admirable services to the State, and have shown themselves second to none in public spirit and *esprit de corps*. In the Mutiny of 1857 their work was of incalculable value, and in more recent times they have again and again proved their devotion to duty and their power of overcoming the gravest physical difficulties during the Afghan War, in Burma, in frontier expeditions and in Tibet. In the less trying circumstances of the every day work of the Department their achievements have not been less excellent. In fifty-five years the number of miles of open line has risen from nothing to 64,730, the number of miles of wire from nothing to 243,840, and the number of paid messages now exceeds ten millions in the year. Successive reductions of the charges for all classes of telegrams have placed telegraph facilities within the reach of all, and the Government of India believe that the efficiency of the service is thoroughly appreciated by the public. It is a record of which the Department may well be proud, and it may be confidently anticipated that the future will not be unworthy of the past.

2. But, if this is to be accomplished, it is essential that the Department should not be handicapped by obsolete methods or faulty organisation. The continuous growth of the Department yearly increases the strain on every branch of the service, magnifies the scale of operations, and tests the adequacy of the established methods of work and administration. The expansion of the work, which has always been rapid, has in recent years become enormous. Traffic has gone up by leaps and bounds, and with commercial and industrial development and the spread of education the rate of progress must be expected to increase in the future. The organisation which was suitable in the infancy of the Department, and has proved itself equal to the care of its vigorous youth, cannot be expected without modification to meet fully the requirements of its maturity. Mere multiplication of establishment without an effort to understand what the conditions are, and to provide for them appropriately is no remedy, and must in the end be absolutely fatal both to economy and efficiency. New conditions call for new methods, fresh problems demand appropriate solutions, and traffic on an unprecedented scale must be disposed of by other methods than have hitherto sufficed. It is for this reason that the Government of India deem it necessary to review the work of the Telegraph Department in all its branches and to examine the manner of recruitment, the mode of work, and the distribution of responsibility amongst the various authorities. From the need of a periodical examination of its organisation and duties no service is exempt, and in the case of the Telegraph Department the increase of work renders it imperative that the task should be no longer postponed, if it is to do justice to the reasonable expectation of the public and to its own past history.

3. One particular respect may be mentioned in which the need for reform is specially urgent. So long as the Department was comparatively small, it could be administered conveniently and efficiently from one centre under the immediate personal control of a single head ; but the time when this could be done is already past. In the year 1904 when an increase of establishment in the Director's Office was applied for, the Government of India were impressed by the immense volume of the work with which the Direction was burdened, and the number and variety of the questions (some of them of the most trivial character) with which the Director-General was expected to deal. An experienced officer of the Accounts Department, Lieutenant-Colonel Waller, was deputed to inspect the head office and to formulate proposals for the relief of the head of the Department from all questions of a routine character, and all matters of minor importance, the disposal of which might safely be entrusted to subordinate authority. Lieutenant-Colonel Waller in his report entirely confirmed the impression which the Government of India had already formed that the Direction was over-burdened and in urgent need of relief, and he also drew attention to the defective organisation of the Department, by which no less than twenty-eight separate offices were immediately subordinate to the Director-General. He therefore advocated the grouping of the Telegraph Divisions in several great Circles of control, and the creation of a grade of officers intermediate between the Director-General and the Divisional Superintendents, to whom much larger powers could be delegated than could safely be entrusted to Superintendents. These recommendations were approved by the Government of India, and a small Departmental Committee was constituted to prepare a detailed scheme of decentralisation. The proposals of the Committee were considered to be generally suitable, but, before final orders could be passed, it became necessary to postpone a decision, until the prior question of the amalgamation of the Post Office and Telegraph Departments had been settled.

4. The decision arrived at with regard to amalgamation was made public by the Hon'ble Mr. Hewett in his speech in the Budget Debate on the 28th March 1906, and to the conclusions then expressed the Government of India adhere. Amalgamation could only be justified if it could be shown that it would result in a financial saving without loss of efficiency ; or that it would secure increased efficiency with a similar standard of expenditure. The organisation of the two Departments at the present time is entirely different, and without a radical change in the Telegraph Department amalgamation could not possibly be attempted. Reorganisation must therefore in any case precede amalgamation, and may in view of the special conditions prevailing in India render it unnecessary, provided that the work of the two Departments be properly co-ordinated. In the work of co-ordination progress has already been made, and will be continued under the control of the Department of the Government of India to which both services are subordinate ; and the principle that post and telegraph offices should be combined, wherever possible, should be steadily enforced. Not fusion, therefore, but co-ordination is the policy which the Government of India have adopted as suitable for the present time and as conducive under existing conditions to efficiency and economy.

5. The scheme of decentralisation submitted by the Departmental Committee provided for the constitution of six Circles each in charge of a single officer, for the delegation to these officers of large powers and for the reorganisation of

the staff of the Direction and its office establishment. Some system of this kind the Government of India regard as indispensably necessary, not only in order to leave the Director-General free to devote more time to the more serious problems of administration, though the importance of this can hardly be overrated, but also to afford an opportunity to the officers of the Department to acquire a sound training in administrative work, which under the present system they have small chance of obtaining. The scheme which has been prepared has been drawn up on thoroughly sound lines, and will, the Government of India think, be found to be generally suitable, but it is not possible to proceed at once to its introduction. In certain minor respects it requires further examination in the light of what has occurred since the Committee sat. It is thought, for example, that if possible, Telegraph and Postal Circles should be coterminous, not merely because amalgamation must remain a possibility of the future, but also because, if the system of combined offices is to be extended, it is essential to harmonious working that the jurisdictions of the various Divisions of the two Departments should not overlap.

6. But there is another and more cogent reason for postponing the introduction of the scheme. Facts which have recently come before the Government of India, and especially those elicited in the inquiries made regarding the question of amalgamation, point to the conclusion that decentralisation by itself will not suffice to place the Department on a sound basis, and that more comprehensive measures are called for. There is reason to believe that, on the one hand, highly paid officers, who have received an elaborate technical training, are sometimes employed in work of a routine character, which could equally well be performed by officers without special training, and on lower pay, while, on the other hand, the system is not fitted to turn out men with the requisite experience and training in matters where special knowledge is essential. The work done by a Telegraph Officer during the earlier stages of his career (*e.g.*, when he is in charge of a Sub-Division) is exactly the same as that performed by Sub-Assistant Superintendents whose qualifications are far inferior. It would appear therefore that for sub-divisional work proper the special technical training which officers of the Superior Staff receive is not required. On the other hand although Assistant Superintendents have every chance of making themselves experts in construction work, they seldom have an opportunity to acquire by practical experience a full knowledge of the vitally important matter of traffic working, nor have they been always encouraged to devote themselves to the scientific study required to qualify them for dealing with modern developments of telegraphy. It ought therefore to be considered whether the present distribution of duties amongst the higher officers of the Department might not be improved with advantageous result both to economy and efficiency. It should be decided how many officers are required for strictly scientific work, how many for construction and maintenance, and how many for traffic. To the total number thus arrived at must be added the proper proportion of junior officers, who may be considered as still under instruction, and it has to be determined how they can be most usefully employed both in the interests of the Department and with a view to their own training. The decentralisation scheme necessarily involves some readjustment of the higher appointments and the time is opportune for a complete settlement of the whole question.

7. The organisation and duties of the Upper Subordinate Establishment are inseparably connected with those of the Superior Staff, and any radical

change in the one involves some corresponding modification in the other. Sub-Assistant Superintendents are at present recruited by promotion from the ranks of the Signalling Staff; and they are employed partly in traffic work in the larger offices, partly as Sub-Divisional officers, and partly on construction, while a few are attached to the offices of Divisional Superintendents and Sub-Divisional officers. Their duties are thus somewhat various and call for qualifications of diverse kinds, but it is not clear that they receive any systematic training to fit them for their work. The Government of India believe that considerable improvements might be effected in their recruitment and training, and that the question should be fully considered. Any scheme of reform must necessarily include a consideration of the duties which this class of officer may properly be called on to perform.

8. In an earlier paragraph reference has been made to the important bearing which a proper control over traffic working has upon the efficient and economical administration of the Department. The object for which the whole system ultimately exists is the prompt transmission of messages at as low a cost as possible, but the problems of traffic working are essentially of an administrative character, and, as already pointed out, Telegraph Officers have not at present sufficient facilities for becoming experts in this particular. Experience in other countries has shown that, when the increase of messages reaches a certain stage, it is absolutely necessary in the interests of economy to employ special officers, working directly under the head-quarters office, to make detailed examinations and to devise improvements in this branch of work. The Government of India are disposed to consider favourably the employment of special officers of this kind in India, and in order that full advantage may be taken of the experience gained elsewhere, it has been suggested that, as a beginning, an expert Traffic Officer should be obtained from England for a limited period to inspect the system in this country and to advise Government as to its improvement. The Government of India are inclined to believe that the introduction of new ideas by this means would prove advantageous to the Department but it will suffice at present merely to note the suggestion as one which should be further considered.

9. Intimately connected with Traffic Administration is the question of the organisation of the Signalling Establishment. This question was considered by the Departmental Committee which sat in 1904, and definite proposals were submitted to Government; but the difficulties connected with the subject are very great, and no final decision has yet been arrived at. Meanwhile the rapid growth of work has made further postponement a direct invitation to serious failure. In 1902-03, the increase in the total operations over the previous year was 5 per cent., in 1903-04, 7·6 per cent., in 1904-05, 24·17 per cent. (this enormous rise being no doubt due to the reduction in the rates) and in 1905-06, 14·97 per cent. Nor is there any reason to think that the movement has spent its force. Large additions have from time to time been made to the Signalling Establishment, but it is obvious that, unless the Department is to be worked at a loss, the process cannot be continued indefinitely. The growth of work must be partly met by a rise in efficiency, and an improvement in the outturn of the individual signaller. That the present average outturn, in spite of some improvement which has taken place recently, is far below what it might be, and is absurdly low when compared with the results obtained in other countries does not admit of doubt. The Government of India understand that in Belgium telegraphists serving on a line constantly worked can produce on

the Morse apparatus thirty or thirty-five telegrams an hour, and that smart operators may do even forty-five and fifty. In England the standard average of twenty-four telegrams per operator per hour is insisted on, and if that is not reached explanations are called for. On some circuits of course the rate goes below twenty-four but on a constantly fed main wire a standard of forty or fifty messages an hour is frequently attained. In India the average outturn in combined and departmental offices together does not amount to six messages per hour, while from figures submitted by the Director-General, it appears that in fourteen of the principal Departmental offices the average outturn per diem amounted in 1905 to fifty-six messages per man or seven per hour. It is possible that widely different conditions may make the English standard impossible of attainment in India, but that an improvement can and ought to be made is clear.

10. In order to improve the outturn of work a system has been tentatively introduced in some of the larger offices, by which all signallers, who exceed a certain minimum number of messages in a day, receive additional remuneration in proportion to the excess number of messages disposed of. From this system of "pie money" or from some similar system, the Government of India look for important results. When a signaller's earnings are directly dependent on the amount of work he does, it is reasonable to expect that he will exert himself and endeavour to do his best. On the other hand when the idle and industrious are paid alike, no man has any motive to do more than his neighbour, and an inevitable tendency exists for all to sink to the same dead level of production. The "pie money" system has already produced a decided improvement where it has been brought into force, but there are a number of details which cannot be settled without further examination, *e.g.*, the standard number of messages which a signaller may fairly be expected to attain before extra emolument is earned, and the precise form of the system which will be best suited to the needs of the Department. It will be necessary to consider how far signallers should be remunerated by fixed salaries and how far by earnings proportionate to the amount of work done. A scheme by which all signallers would receive a fixed subsistence allowance, an additional remuneration for each message despatched, would have distinct advantages, for the earnings of every man beyond the fixed minimum would be automatically regulated by the amount of work done, and signallers would have every incentive to exert themselves to the utmost. An additional advantage would be that the present cumbrous and inconvenient classification of signallers as Superior, Good, Average and Indifferent would be got rid of and the necessity for periodical testing examinations removed. The Government of India are unable to say at present how far it would be safe to go in this direction, but the matter merits full investigation.

11. There are other questions connected with the organisation of the Signalling Establishment besides that of the mode of remuneration. It has been found increasingly difficult to obtain recruits in sufficient numbers, or of the standard of physique and education which is desirable, and it appears clear that an effort must be made to widen the field of recruitment. Two measures have been suggested with this object, of which one aims at the reduction of the number of General Service men in the Department (*i.e.*, those liable to service in any part of India), and the establishment at the Presidency towns

and possibly at some other large centres, of purely local non-pensionable services, while the other contemplates the employment of female telegraphists. Both these suggestions are worthy of serious consideration, and it may, the Government of India think, be possible to give effect to them.

Finally the rate of expansion which has prevailed recently in the Department has forced on the notice of Government the necessity of devising some scheme for the automatic increase of establishment in proportion to the actual increase of traffic, provision being made for the increase of controlling establishment in defined proportion to the increase in lower grades. Government are not always in a good position to decide whether an increase is required or not, and so far as possible the system should be made self-regulating, if this can be done with due regard to the interests of economy.

12. In connection with the relations of the Telegraph Department to the Post Office allusion has already been made to the question of combined offices. This is a matter which the Government of India regard as of the greatest importance to economical administration. They consider that the principle of combining Post and Telegraph offices wherever possible should be steadily enforced; new departmental offices should be opened only when the necessity cannot be avoided, while in the case of existing offices, it should be considered to what extent combination can be effected. It will be necessary however to examine the matter carefully, and to lay down the principles which should regulate the policy of Government in dealing with individual cases.

In another respect the relations of the two Departments might be closer, *viz.*, the Accounts system. In most European countries, though the extent to which the Departments are amalgamated varies, it has been found possible and desirable to effect a complete combination of the Accounts administration. It is not possible to say at present whether this would be practicable in India and whether the advantages to be derived from the amalgamation, if feasible, are sufficient to make the change advisable. But the Government of India consider that the matter should be fully investigated.

13. The questions which have been raised in the foregoing paragraphs are of very considerable importance, and demand full examination. The Government of India have therefore decided to appoint a Committee to consider them and certain other minor matters which have not been specifically referred to, and to advise Government as to the course which should be followed. The Committee will consist of the following gentlemen:—

President :

SIR LEWIS TUPPER, K.C.I.E., C.S.I., I.C.S.

Members :

MR. L. A. S. PORTER, C.S.I., I.C.S.

MR. E. A. LBAOH, Indian Telegraph Department,
Deputy Director-General of Telegraphs.

MR. W. MAXWELL, I.C.S., Postmaster-General, Punjab.

MR. R. O. LEEB, Indian Telegraph Department.

MR. P. T. B. KELLNER, Public Works Department, Accounts.

Secretary :

MR. G. RAINY, I.C.S.

14. The points which the Committee will investigate are the following :—

- (1) Whether the scheme of decentralisation drawn up by the Departmental Committee of 1904 may be adopted, as it stands, or whether any, and if so what, modifications are necessary.
- (2) What alterations should be made in the staff and office establishment of the Direction, if the decentralisation scheme is adopted.
- (3) Whether the existing organisation of the Superior Staff of the Department and the distribution of the work is satisfactory, and if not what alterations should be made : in particular whether a clearer distinction should be made between (a) administration, traffic and inspection on the one hand, and (b) construction and engineering on the other.
- (4) Whether the existing system of recruitment, training and duties of the Upper Subordinate establishment is satisfactory and if not what changes should be made.
- (5) Whether an expert Traffic Officer should be brought out from England to examine the traffic working of the Department and to make suggestions for its improvement.

NOTE.—If the Committee find they are in a position to recommend the immediate appointment of an expert they should submit detailed proposals to Government at as early a date as possible in anticipation of their report.

- (6) What measures should be taken to promote closer and more intimate relations between the Post Office and the Telegraph Department in the matter of combined offices, and what principles should govern (a) the opening of new departmental offices, and (b) the combining of offices already separate.
- (7) Whether the accounts and audit system of the Telegraph Department should be amalgamated with that of the Post Office.
- (8) Whether any and if so what changes are required in the existing organisation of the Check Office in view of the expansion of message traffic, and in particular—
 - (a) whether any part of the work can be transferred to any Accounts Department; and
 - (b) whether any part of the work can be decentralised and transferred to the Circle Officers whom it is proposed to create.
- (9) What changes should be made to improve the existing organisation of the signalling establishment and in particular—
 - (a) whether strictly local and non-pensionable services should be formed in the Presidency towns and other large centres ;
 - (b) whether female signallers should be employed in the Department and if so to what extent and under what restrictions ; and
 - (c) what alterations should be made in the present mode of classification and remuneration of signallers, and to what extent their earnings should be regulated by their actual outturn of work by the general introduction of 'pie-money' or some similar system.
- (10) Whether a scheme can be devised for the automatic increase of the signalling establishment in proportion to the actual increase in

traffic, the strength of the controlling establishment being increased in fixed proportion to the increase in the lower grades.

- (11) Whether any and if so what changes are called for in the existing Stores system of the Telegraph Department.
- (12) Whether it is advisable to decentralise the work of the Department to a larger extent in great cities.

The Committee are not limited by the terms of the reference to the specific questions indicated, but are free to take up any matter connected with the main object of their appointment, which is to submit proposals for the improved organisation of the Indian Telegraph Department in all its branches. Any defects in working or suggestions for improvements which may come to their notice should be carefully considered, and so far as necessary, appropriate proposals should be made.

15. The Committee, or as many of their number as are able to take up their duties by that date, will assemble at Simla on the 28th September. From the 1st of November onwards the head-quarters of the Committee will be at Calcutta but from two to three months will be spent on tour. The members will visit important mercantile cities and other places at their discretion, where their inquiries and inspections are likely to be useful. The Government of India trust that Local Governments will afford them all the assistance which they may require, and comply with any requests for information and advice which may be addressed to them by the Committee through their Secretary. In addition to Telegraph officials the Committee will be at liberty to take the evidence of members of mercantile firms by which the telegraph is largely used, who may be willing to give evidence, as also of officers in Government offices who have any considerable experience of the despatch and receipt of telegrams. The Committee should submit its Report in six months or earlier if practicable.

ORDERED that a copy of this Resolution be forwarded to all Local Governments and Administrations, to the Home, Finance and Public Works Departments, to the Director-General of the Post Office in India, to the Director-General of Telegraphs and to the President and Members of the Committee.

ORDERED also, that it be published in the Supplement to the *Gazette of India*, for general information.