

1880.
NEW ZEALAND.

GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE.

(REPORT OF COMMITTEE AS TO ITS ORGANIZATION, WORK, ETC., AND SUGGESTED
MODIFICATIONS THEREIN.)

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

SIR,—

Wellington, 30th July, 1880.

We have the honor to report that we have, at your request, made a careful inquiry into the system followed at Wellington in regard to Government printing, with the object more particularly of ascertaining in what directions a closer economy, compatible with efficiency, could be enforced.

Our investigations appeared to us to be more likely to be of use to Ministers, if we closely scrutinized the technical branches carried out by the department under the supervision of the Government Printer, and ascertained what checks were at present adopted to prevent unnecessary work being thrown, from any source, upon the Printing Department.

It is with great pleasure that we bear witness to the signs of good management to be found throughout the Printing Office under Mr. Didsbury, and the excellent description of work turned out by every branch. This struck us as being all the more creditable when we considered the difficulties under which the work has to be carried on—difficulties which arise as much from the unsuitable character of the buildings into which the department appears to have grown, as from the spasmodic and careless manner in which copy for the printer is often brought into the office from the various departments of Government. A more systematic and economical mode of management could, no doubt, be inaugurated if suitable buildings were provided.

It was satisfactory to find, although a deputation from the men requested to be allowed to wait upon us, that they had no complaint to make except as to the over-crowded state of the piece-room. They at the same time expressed a hope that, under the special circumstances of their position, the rate of wages at present paid would not be reduced.

There can be no doubt that the piece-room complained of is utterly unfit for the purpose it is now put to. We visited the room during the day and in the evening, accompanied on the last occasion by the Colonial Architect, who, at our request, has furnished us with a report upon the subject, which is appended hereto. Having considered the fact that the Government will not be in a position to build a printing office for some years to come, and that it is therefore probable that the existing buildings will be utilized for the remainder of the lease, we would respectfully recommend that an efficient scheme of ventilation should be at once adopted, even although it may entail a rather serious expense, as we wish emphatically to state that, in our opinion, the piece-room is not fit for the men to work in; while the time-room, though not so hot, is probably equally as injurious to the health of the men employed in it.

We were much struck with the very large amount of type kept standing in chase, galley, and otherwise in the office. No private office could allow so great a proportion of its plant to remain idle for an indefinite period. Mr. Didsbury complains that this waste of plant is enforced upon him, in a great many instances needlessly, on account of the orders sent in from time to time by the various departments not being followed up by definite instructions after the first, second, or even third proof has been returned.

It appears that at present every department sends its work to the Printer when and how it chooses, with, of necessity, an entire absence of any feeling of responsibility as to the cost of what is ordered. So loose a system must produce carelessness; and we were not surprised to learn that copy is sent to the printer in a very unprepared state, the authors, in too many instances, appearing to formulate ideas for the first time under the inspiration of the printer's type. The needless waste of money arising from this want of system is much to be regretted.

The value of the work turned out by the office is very considerable, although in some cases work done, of good value in itself, is rendered useless by sudden changes in policy, or, as alluded to above, from work being sent to the Printer in an unprepared state. The Land-Tax and Property-Tax forms, struck off in great quantities during the past year, have been a source of great loss, and afford a convenient instance of loss through changes of policy. As an example illustrating in some measure what we mean by loss incurred from want of system in the transmission of work to the Printer, we may instance a case mentioned to us, where an official in the Government service condemned many thousand copies of a printed form, for the sole reason that the paper was blue instead of white. In this case the work had to be done again and the paper first used had to be thrown aside.

The Printer has furnished us with a return, which we append to this report, showing the value of work done during the past four years for the several departments. We also append a return similarly furnished, showing the value of the binding done for a like period. An approximate estimate of the value of printing plant in use is also appended. Mr. G. S. Cooper has furnished us with an estimate of expenditure for the past four years, which will be found attached hereto. For the year 1879, for some reason, the expenditure for stationery is thrown into the printing vote, and thus swells the apparent expenditure by a sum of £15,000. It is gratifying to note that the value of work performed is steadily increasing in a greater proportion than the expenditure for a corresponding period.

The revenue received by the Stationery Office should be credited to the Printing Department, as also the revenue received by the Post Office for the Postal Guide, about £200, and by the Land Transfer Department for advertisements. The value of paper is not included in the return showing value of work done. We have not thought it necessary to obtain a return of the value of paper used during the last few years, considering it sufficient to show such value for the year ending 30th June, 1880. While the cost price of the paper used does not affect the calculation as to the profitableness or otherwise of the Printing Office, yet it should not be entirely overlooked that the stationery is bought at the lowest prices in the London market, and that private offices would charge a profit upon their purchasing price of all paper used in work performed by them.

In some cases, work of a clearly unprofitable nature, not rendered necessary by the circumstances of Government, is cast upon the office, which should, we think, be avoided as much as possible. We might instance a work upon Polynesian Mythology, just completed by order of the late Government, from which no adequate return is to be expected. We recommend that in this case the copies of the work struck off should be offered to the trade, so that the best return possible under the circumstances may be obtained.

We have submitted the Printer's estimate of values for work done to a searching analysis, bearing in mind what, in our opinion, similar work could be done for in private offices. We are not able to say, taking all the circumstances into consideration, that these values are excessive. In some cases where such values appear high, it must be borne in mind that in the case of all work done in the Government Printing Office a stricter economy as to space in making-up and paper used is followed than would be the case were the work done at contract prices. In the Government Office, also, a much closer attention to careful revision has to be paid in order to insure accuracy than is the custom in private offices.

In the estimate of value for the annual Appropriations and the Postal Guide, we have suggested to the Printer that some reduction in price ought to be made in consideration of the fact that the type is kept standing throughout the year. It will be seen in the suggestions which we have the honor to make, that we attach considerable importance to the returns of value for work done for the various departments being rendered as accurate as possible.

We have the honor to submit the following suggestions for your consideration :—

1. The present system of allowing any department to send work to the Printer should at once be discontinued. All work, other than parliamentary papers, should be sent into the office through the Colonial Secretary's Department. It would save very considerable waste were one of the officers in the Colonial Secretary's Department made the sole channel of communication between the Government Buildings and the Printer. Such officer should possess some technical knowledge of the trade, and be competent to advise his chief as to the reasonableness and form of the work proposed to be sent out. It would be the duty of such an officer to obtain from the Printer an estimate of the cost of all work projected, for the information of the Colonial Secretary, in order that work which promised to cost more than it appeared likely to prove worth might be withdrawn from the Printer's hands. We need not do more than point out the good effects which would be likely to result from such a system of check as we suggest, in inducing the various departments to consider before sending everything indiscriminately to the printing office.

2. To prevent the great waste now experienced in consequence of work sent from the Government Buildings being allowed to remain in the Printer's hands without definite instructions, in some cases for twelve or eighteen months, we are of opinion it would be well that it should be understood that, as a rule, the Printer will break up all matter in hand for three months, for which no final orders have been received. It would very seldom happen that any inconvenience would result from the adoption of such a system, while heads of departments would very quickly ascertain that it was their duty to see that final instructions to proceed or to delay were sent through the proper channel, in the case of all work from time to time sent out.

3. We think that the Printing Office should not be made a general convenience for the printing of documents of which a few copies only are required for temporary purposes.

4. In regard to the parliamentary work done during the session, we have no suggestions to offer further than to point out that a considerable saving might be effected by curtailing the circulation of the Order Papers as a bound volume. Probably a supply of bound numbers for the Library and for Ministers' rooms would be sufficient, in which case at least 200 volumes in each year could be discontinued.

5. In regard to parliamentary papers, *Gazettes*, and statutes, circulated to mechanics' institutes and libraries, we are of opinion that a large saving could also be effected without public inconvenience. It is only too clear that in a great number of cases these papers are not valued. In one instance brought under our notice, the Government Printer was appealed to by the secretary of an institution, who desired that he would be pleased to purchase a series of such papers for waste-paper. The Printer, we need not say, had to decline the bargain. We would suggest that the circulation of the *Gazettes*, statutes, and parliamentary papers should be stopped in the case of any library or mechanics' institute whose secretary had not transmitted to the Government Printer, in the months of March, April, or May in each year, a certificate from the Chairman of the county or Mayor of the borough in which such institute is situate, to the effect that papers previously forwarded were properly filed in an accessible place for public reference.

6. The *Gazette* might be made more remunerative. We see no reason why a moderate charge of £1 a year should not be made to Justices of the Peace, who might be desirous of receiving the publication.

7. We learn from the Government Printer that the commercial demand for parliamentary papers is steadily on the increase, and we agree with him that every facility should be afforded, by the offer of moderate commissions to agents, to encourage this demand.

8. In the case of the Postal Guide, which is issued quarterly, we feel strongly inclined to recommend that 1s. per number should be charged instead of 6d. as at present, in order to give a better return for the large outlay incurred. It might, however, be considered more advisable to decrease its bulk, by

eliminating the railway tables, which it is hardly necessary should now be published in the Guide. Of late years, the constant alterations in the train time-tables have thrown upon the Guide an extra cost of over £100 per annum.

9. It appears that a saving of time and expense might be made if the permanent issue of *Hansard* were to be bound in cloth instead of half-calf as at present. The volumes would reach members of Parliament fully six weeks earlier than is possible if the present style is continued. We presume that a sufficient number of volumes in the present style would be issued for Government House, the Assembly Library, and Ministers' rooms. While referring to *Hansard*, we think it desirable that the attention of the Chief Reporter should be drawn to the importance of insisting that all copy sent in should be fairly decipherable. It came under our notice that copy forwarded by two members of the present reporting staff was not, after making every allowance for the difficulties under which the staff work, fair copy to go to the Printer. A very large expense, and no little delay in the publication of *Hansard*, are caused by the unreasonable extent to which honorable members of both Houses exercise their privilege of correcting proofs of speeches made. These corrections, in many instances, are made throughout the whole speech, and amount to an elaborate revision of the speech as uttered. To so great an extent is this carried by some members, that more than one speech on unimportant subjects which came under our notice would have been more cheaply re-set than corrected, and we were assured that the examples which were accidentally in hand at the time of our visit were fair average cases of the system pursued.

10. We have suggested to Mr. Didsbury that it would be wise to take a few additional apprentices into the composing-room to be bound for the legal period. The Government offices afford excellent advantages for turning-out highly-skilled workmen, and a fair proportion of apprentices being constantly employed in the offices would, in the course of time, steadily raise the standard of the average tradesman.

11. The pay of the men permanently employed, and the duration of working hours, have received our attention. We do not consider that the men are overpaid. It has to be borne in mind that printers must live near to the office, working by night and day, and that they are therefore shut out from availing themselves of the cheaper house-rents at the outskirts of the town, that might, under other circumstances, be taken advantage of. At the same time, there is no reason why the men should not be called upon to share in the sacrifice so generally demanded from all employés in the Government service at the present time. We have, therefore, to recommend that the hours of labour should be increased from forty to forty-five hours per week, and that the rates paid for overtime should be proportionately decreased, except in a few cases. The scale of payments for overtime recommended is attached to this report.

12. Mr. Didsbury hopes to be able to effect some reductions in the number of men engaged after the session. Whether this will be possible will depend upon the amount of printing ordered by the General Assembly. It is fair to add that the large amount of work caused by the various Royal Commissions has been a severe additional strain upon this department during the past year.

13. As the Printing Department has now grown to very considerable dimensions, we are of opinion that it would be very desirable that a report should be prepared showing the operations of the office for each year ending the 31st December. Such a report would be the best means of checking any undue increase in the expenditure.

14. Although not strictly perhaps within the scope of our inquiries, we thought it useful to make some cursory investigation into the printing ordered for the Government through private printing offices in various parts of the colony. We are of opinion that all work which has to be so printed in the larger towns should be offered by public tender, and that heads of departments should be so directed.

We have, &c.,

C. A. DE LAUTOUR.

J. WALKER BAIN.

W. S. WILSON.

The Hon. the Premier.