

Departments were closed, and the stocks handed over for issue by the Government Stationery Office. A report has been received to the effect that while the Departments have been relieved of all work previously undertaken in connection with the receipt, custody, and issue of such stationery, there has been no appreciable extra labour in the Stationery Office in issuing supplies, which speaks well for the new system.

STORES.

The importance of providing regulations, &c., for placing the whole of the transactions relating to the purchase, custody, and inspection of stores on a proper footing has been referred to in previous reports.

Stores Regulations.—It is satisfactory to note that whilst the regulations set up by the Commissioners under the Public Service Act have been in operation for the past two years, the Departments concerned have in most instances advised that little or no alteration is required. It is a matter for concern, however, that in one of the principal stores-purchasing Departments—namely, the Public Works Department—practically no action has been taken to give effect to the regulations.

In addition to the Stores Regulations, the Commissioners considered that simple rules should be provided in Departments having Stores Branches to amplify the regulations and aid officers in carrying out their respective duties. In the Post and Telegraph, Justice, and Mental Hospitals Departments these special rules have been approved and issued. Rules have still to be issued for the Education, Public Health, and Public Works Departments.

Arrangements were made by the Commissioners for an officer to specially report on the practices followed in respect to stores, &c., at the various hostels of the Tourist and Health Resorts Department; and the methods to be finally adopted are at present receiving consideration.

Amendments to Regulations.—It was found desirable to extend in some respects the provisions of the original regulations. The principal amendments were as follows :—

(a.) Officers have been authorized in special cases to purchase stores by direct purchase without competition to a value of £20 instead of £10 in any one requisition.

(b.) The method of requiring separate deposits and bonds with each tender has been simplified. Tenderers may now make a fixed deposit with a bank to cover all deposits required in connection with any tenders submitted, and one general bond is accepted as sufficient security for the fulfilment of all conditions by the same tenderer.

Departmental Property.—Reference has been made in previous reports to the unsatisfactory state in which the records of departmental equipment had been maintained. Regulations have now been gazetted, and forms prescribed, for ensuring that a simple and accurate record shall be maintained of all equipment. Provision has been made for the records to be properly checked and all property examined at regular intervals. The Commissioners have not yet been advised to what extent Departments have applied the scheme. This will be a matter for inspection.

Audit of Stores.—Notwithstanding that authority was contained in the Public Revenues Acts from 1887 to 1910 for the issue of regulations governing the purchase, accounting, and inspection of stores, it is a matter for regret that no action was taken by the Treasury. Attention was drawn to this, and the Government is taking steps to make regulations requiring the Audit Department to make the necessary audit.

It has to be borne in mind that stores represent money or money's worth, and if any waste or misappropriation takes place those responsible are as culpable as an officer who misappropriates actual cash. Elaborate checks are made in cases where actual cash is concerned, and if any shortage is found no stone is left unturned to secure the return of the money and to punish the delinquent. The same principle should apply in the case of stores.

Public Works Department.—Attention was particularly directed in the First Report to the fact that the stores system of the Public Works Department was