

- \* working files are referred to four to six times per day, compared to approximately once per week for the Registry;
- \* in reaction to specific events/subjects requiring information the desk officer usually turns to his working files as a first and possibly final source;
- \* quality of working files varies considerably, depending on the working style of the officer concerned;
- \* on a regular basis only a relatively small amount of time is devoted to maintenance of the working files, but every few months an afternoon or evening is devoted to weeding and re-organizing as required.

It can be seen from this that working files have now become a way of life in the Department. A case can be made for a certain degree of use of working files but very heavy dependence is a form of sub-optimisation which, because of lack of any quality control and difficulty in maintaining continuity across rotational changes, can seriously undermine the efficiency of the Department. Furthermore, there is a duplication of effort in paralleling Registry functions and mis-application of time and energy by desk officers who have other functions to perform. They also not infrequently commit the sin of placing original documents in their own files, which are then thrown out by their successors. Finally, this do-it-yourself process increases the gap between the user and the Registry, thus diminishing any effective support which could be offered.

41. During discussions with desk officers no attitude either for or against was adopted by team members, but it was frequently apparent that a degree of embarrassment existed regarding the extent of dependence on working files, a practice well understood to be against standard Registry practice. This, added to the fact that the maintenance of working files is a burden, suggests that the desk officer is not irreversibly wedded to this mode of operation. Presented with a better alternative fulfilling his needs he would rapidly reduce this dependence. A general aim of this project is to provide better records management service rather than to wage ideological warfare on the working files, but in achieving the main objectives the secondary enemy stronghold would also be reduced.

#### Needs in the Posts

42. In the eight posts visited it was quickly obvious that a system developed for Ottawa would not directly benefit the posts very much and might in fact demand more from them, with little or no apparent benefits. The demands could take the form of possible improvements or changes in the format of telegrams to facilitate indexing and rapid comprehension by addressees. This was generally felt to be acceptable, if not necessary, although misgivings were expressed about backsliding from improvements to former ways. Since all officers at posts have served in both Ottawa and abroad, both sides of the problem could be seen and appreciated.

43. On the other hand, by direct observation, and from information provided by the Records Management Division, registry operations in some posts were found to be below par. Efficiency and effectiveness of these registries rests almost entirely on the capability and initiative of the registry supervisor. Much more guidance and control should be exercised from the Ottawa end