

30th December, 1931.

FINANCE COMMITTEE.

A meeting of the Finance Committee was held in the Council Chamber, the Colonial Secretary (the Hon. Mr. W. T. Southorn, C.M.G.), presiding.

Votes totalling \$1,303,380 contained in message No. 15 from H.E. the Governor, were considered.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I must first apologise for the lateness of the agenda which reached you only this morning. You will appreciate it is an effort to bring in to this meeting as far as possible all the expenditure up to the 31st December, and we were not able to get the details out as quickly as we should have liked.

Item 145: Public Works Recurrent:—Hong Kong Water Account (Meters). Provision and fixing of meters, \$60,000.00.

HON. MR. BRAGA.—Is there any means by which this Committee can be informed as to the number of new meters installed in Hong Kong and Kowloon respectively? Of course it is almost unfair for me to put the question without notice, but as you mentioned a while ago the papers were circulated rather late. It would be interesting to see what progress in the development of Kowloon is being made in comparison to Hong Kong.

THE CHAIRMAN.—Can the Director of Public Works give us the details now?

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS.—I cannot give all the details off-hand.

HON. MR. BRAGA.—I did not think you would be able to give them off-hand but I would like to know what is the ratio of development between Hong Kong and Kowloon.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I will get the information for you.

HON. MR. BRAGA.—Will that be available for the whole of the Council?

HON. SIR HENRY POLLOCK.—Perhaps a statement can be made by the Chairman at the next meeting?

HON. MR. BRAGA.—Well a short statement would do, but the whole Council ought to have the benefit of it.

THE CHAIRMAN.—It can be laid on the table at the next meeting.

Item 152: Miscellaneous Services.—Transport of Government Servants, \$150,000.00.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Is that due as regards the increased cost of petrol and oil? It seems a heavy sum for underestimation.

THE COLONIAL TREASURER.—No, it is for passages.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Transport of Government servants means passages and not petrol for motor cars?

THE COLONIAL TREASURER.—Yes, passages only.

HON. MR. BRAGA.—With your permission, Sir, I would like to take this item together with item No. 166. They bring me back to the question which I have so often raised in Council, and in this Committee, which deals with sterling salaries compared to dollar-paid officers of the Government service. I should very much like to know to what extent, if at all, dollar-paid men are granted any passage allowance. If not, then I think the sooner the Committee or members of Council are placed in possession of the Retrenchment Committee's report the better will they be able to form a correct idea as to the expensive policy of the employment, or continued engagement, of sterling-paid men for the subordinate departments of the Government service, as against the dollar-paid man. I express the opinion very forcibly now that the Retrenchment Committee's report is very much overdue.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I think that is out of place here, Mr. Braga, to discuss a question of Government policy.

HON. MR. BRAGA.—It is not a question of policy, with all respect to your opinion. I want to put it before you that here we are called upon to vote sums of money to the extent of hundreds of thousands of dollars, and the Retrenchment Committee was appointed with a view to effecting economy. We do not know what the recommendations might have been. They might have been very good. All we know is that these recommendations might affect these items before the Committee, and from that point of view, with all respect to your opinion, I cannot agree it is a matter of policy.

We have members of the Council who have, by virtue of their position, come to a knowledge of the recommendations of the Committee, and as regards all other members of the Council they are perfectly in the dark. Here we have got before us votes

totalling over a million dollars, and we are still very much in the dark as to what the Retrenchment Committee has recommended should be the policy of the Government with regard to the salaries of public officers.

THE CHAIRMAN.—The publication of the report awaits the approval of the Secretary of State; the report will be published as soon as permission is received.

HON. MR. BRAGA.—We have heard that so very often that months have gone by. Here we find a complete financial year is closing and still we are left where we were several months ago.

HON. SIR HENRY POLLOCK.—How long ago did the Retrenchment Committee make its report?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Somewhere about the middle of the year.

HON. SIR HENRY POLLOCK.—Rather a long time.

HON. MR. MACKIE.—Most of these items are due to the fall of exchange. I do not think they have much to do with the Retrenchment Committee.

THE CHAIRMAN.—Do you accept the items, Mr. Braga?

HON. MR. BRAGA.—I cannot do otherwise, Sir.

Item 166: Miscellaneous Services:—Rent Allowances Senior Officers, \$32,000.00.

HON. MR. MACKIE.—It seems to me there is a big difference there, if it was underestimated \$32,000 on a total vote of \$90,000.

THE COLONIAL TREASURER.—It was originally estimated higher but was cut down by the Estimates' Committee last year to \$90,000. The estimate for 1932 has been put in at \$110,000.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—Is that the method of getting estimates through?—(Laughter).

THE COLONIAL TREASURER.—It was hoped that there might be some retrenchment.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Is there a shortage of Government houses?

THE COLONIAL TREASURER.—There is a great shortage of Government houses. The more Government houses there are the less money will be required in this respect.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Not that the rents have been increased?

THE COLONIAL TREASURER.—No.

All the votes were approved.

THE CHAIRMAN.—Nothing remains but to wish you all a very happy New Year.
