

8TH MARCH, 1900.

PRESENT:—

His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR (Sir Henry Blake, G.C.M.G.).

His EXCELLENCY Major-General GASCOIGNE, C.M.G. (Commanding the Troops).

The Hon. F. H. MAY, C.M.G. (Acting Colonial Secretary).

Hon. W. MEIGH GOODMAN (Attorney-General).

Hon. A. M. THOMSON (Colonial Treasurer).

Hon. R. D. ORMSBY (Director of Public Works.)

Hon. C. P. CHATER, C.M.G.

Hon. Dr. HO KAL.

Hon. T. H. WHITEHEAD.

Hon. E. R. BELLIOS, C.M.G.

Hon. WEI A YUK.

Hon. A. W. BREWIN.

Mr. R. F. JOHNSTON (Acting Clerk of Councils).

PAPERS.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY laid on the table the report of the headmaster of Queen's College and of the examiners appointed by the Governing Body for 1899 and the report of the Captain Superintendent of Police for 1899.

FINANCIAL.

The ACTING ATTORNEY laid on the table Financial Minute No. 9 and moved that it be referred to the Finance Committee.

The COLONIAL TREASURER seconded and the motion was carried.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY laid on the table the report of the Finance Committee (No. 2) and moved its adoption.

The COLONIAL TREASURER seconded and the motion was carried.

NATURALISATION.

A Bill entitled an Ordinance for the Naturalisation of Capitolino João Xavier and a Bill entitled an Ordinance for the Naturalisation of Foo Sik, alias Foo Yik Pang, were read a third time and passed.

THIRD READINGS.

The following Bills were read a third time and passed:—

The Bill entitled An Ordinance to further amend the Post Office Ordinance, 1887.

The Bill entitled An Ordinance to further amend The Public Health Ordinance, 1887.

The Bill entitled An Ordinance to authorize the imposition of fees for the issue by the Government of Hongkong of certain certificates to certain Chinese.

The Hon. T. H. WHITEHEAD—With reference to these three Bills, I would suggest that in future the course which was previously adopted be followed, and that is

that, when important alterations are made in a Bill at a previous meeting of the Council, copies of the Bill as amended should be sent to members of the Council a day or two before the next meeting of the Council at which the Bill is to be finally passed, and at which it comes up for the third reading so that members may have the opportunity of considering the Bill in its altered form. This used to be done and it is a very good custom.

His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR—I asked the Attorney-General about this, because the usual course is that when amended the Bill is referred to the Attorney-General who goes over it to see that the amendments are made. The custom referred to by the honourable member shall be observed in future.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL—The only Bill in connection with which any alterations not then in print before the Council were made was the Public Health Ordinance, and the amendments suggested in Council were incorporated in the Bill as read a third time. Possibly the reason the Bill as amended was not sent out on this occasion was that it is such a very short time since the last meeting of the Council, and it is sometimes very difficult to get them printed in time.

His EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR asked members of the Standing Law Committee to remain after the meeting of the Finance Committee, as the Attorney-General was very anxious to consult with them as to the Land Court Bill.

The Hon. T. H. WHITEHEAD suggested that before the Bill was submitted to the Council the members should have at least three days' time in which to go carefully through it.

His EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR said he understood that the Bill was almost ready and would be sent out at once. So he thought the members would have ample time to go through it.

The Council then adjourned until Thursday next.

MEETING OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE.

THE SALARIES' QUESTION.

A meeting of the Finance Committee was held immediately after the Council meeting, the Acting Colonial Secretary presiding.

The CHAIRMAN said—The Governor recommends the Council to vote a sum of \$26,189 to defray during the current year the increases in salaries of Government Officials sanctioned in the Secretary of State's Despatch, No. 280 of 8th December, 1899.

The Hon. C. P. CHATER—I beg to ask that the consideration of this vote should be postponed for at least a fortnight. The financial minute which has just been read was received by the unofficial members late
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we have not had time to go into the matter as thoroughly as we should like. Personally I have no objection to the vote, but I should like to have a good deal more information before the vote is passed. I should like to know whether any other officers of the Government have asked for increases, and if so who they are and what has become of their application such, and what reasons they have given for asking for increases before this vote is finally passed by the Council. The reasons given in the papers for the increase, I think, are very good, but they are equally applicable to the other civil servants as they are to the officers who are going to be affected by this vote. Therefore I think the unofficial members would like to have the full facts before them before they are prepared to vote on the matter.

The Hon. T. H. WHITEHEAD—I quite support, sir, what has been said. If the reasons given in support of this increase to certain heads and assistant heads of departments are applicable to them, I maintain that they are still more applicable to the clerical staff in the civil service, and that it is not equitable that the heads and assistant heads should receive increases whilst the juniors and clerical staff do not participate in an increase which perhaps they are more entitled to than the heads and assistant heads.

The COLONIAL TREASURER—It seems to me that it might be called a dog-in-the-manager policy to deprive the heads and assistant heads of departments of increases which are admitted to be justifiable, because others have not got them.

The CHAIRMAN—I do not know whether honourable members have carefully read the correspondence which was laid on the table.—I forget the exact date—a fortnight ago or a month ago—with reference to this matter. You will observe from that that, under date 23rd July, 1899, His Excellency the Governor forwarded a memorial from certain members of the Hongkong Civil Service on the subject of the inadequacy of the salaries of public servants. That was a general representation made to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Practically the reply to that is contained in despatch No. 280. I do not think there is any objection, if you wish it, to postpone the consideration of this financial minute, especially as it only reached you at a late hour; but I draw your attention to the correspondence. It is not a question of certain members asking for increases of salaries and of distinctions having been made between the applicants. If you carefully read this correspondence I do not think very much more can be laid before you. You see the Secretary of State for the Colonies has practically decided the question for himself.

The Hon. C. P. CHATER—That may be the case, but we have to give our vote one way or another.

The CHAIRMAN—I merely mentioned it.

The COLONIAL TREASURER—Some of them have not got an increase and they want to delay others. Those officers who have not got an increase would have a better excuse for applying after this vote is passed.

The Hon. C. P. CHATER—I said that the financial minute was received by the unofficial members late yesterday afternoon and we have not had sufficient time to go over it carefully. We should like to consider also whether any other officers in the Government service have made similar applications for increases of salaries and if so who they are and what reasons do they give for the application. I for one have absolutely no objection to the vote before us, but it is best to make one job of the whole matter.

The CHAIRMAN—As I said, there is no objection to a postponement. I would only ask your attention to the printed correspondence in the meantime. The Council meets this day week; do you wish for a longer postponement than a week.

The Hon. C. P. CHATER—I should say a fortnight.

The CHAIRMAN observed that there were officers going on leave to England and they would like the matter settled.

The Hon. C. P. CHATER—The postponement would not affect them, because the Secretary of State for the Colonies has sanctioned the increases from the beginning of this year. Therefore a fortnight sooner or later does not matter.

The CHAIRMAN—I do not see much harm in the matter being postponed for a fortnight.

The Hon. T. H. WHITEHEAD—I wish just to express my regret that we should have been accused of adopting a "dog-in-the-manger" policy on this question. I consider that that remark was entirely uncalled for, especially coming from the Honourable the Colonial Treasurer. My object in supporting the senior unofficial member is to endeavour to see that justice and fair dealing is done to the other civil servants.

The CHAIRMAN—I do not think the honourable the Colonial Treasurer meant anything personal. He made use of the expression as a mere colloquialism. There is no more business before the Committee.

The Hon. T. H. WHITEHEAD—I am sorry, sir, to see that the Honourable the Colonial Treasurer has not seen fit to withdraw the unwarranted accusation.

This was all the business.