

22nd December, 1930.

FINANCE COMMITTEE.

A meeting of the Finance Committee was held in the Council Chamber, the Colonial Secretary (Hon. Mr. E. R. Hallifax) presiding.

Votes, totalling \$564,759, contained in Message No. 17 from H.E. the Governor, were considered.

Item 158: Public Works Department.—Radio Telegraph Branch, repairs stores and current, \$2,000.

HON. MR. KOTEWALL.—I do not suppose, Sir, you can give us off hand the actual expenditure and revenue of this branch for 1930?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Not yet.

HON. MR. KOTEWALL.—Since you cannot, can you furnish us with a statement giving these particulars at the next meeting of the Finance Committee?

THE CHAIRMAN.—I do not think we can give the full particulars, but we can give them as far as they are made up. Revenue is increasing rapidly.

HON. MR. KOTEWALL.—I think the public will be interested to know how the income compares with the expenditure.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I think I can give you some figures later.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—I believe it to be a very favourable comparison as a matter of fact.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I think so.

Item No. 161.—Prisons' Department.—Fuel \$3,500.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—I have a number of questions to ask on this item. Are you aware that there are no less than five items in to-day's votes which are to be found out of the Subsistence of Prisoners? They are 161, 162, 165, 184 and 185. I should like to ask what is meant by "Subsistence of Prisoners?"

THE CHAIRMAN.—The exact details, so far as subsistence of prisoners vote goes, I cannot answer without the Superintendent being here, but it means what it says.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Is it the food?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Yes, food.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Is it a fact that the estimates for this year's subsistence have been reduced?

THE CHAIRMAN.—For 1930 I think not, but can soon find out.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Arising out of that, may I ask if the tender for last year was less than in the previous years?

THE CHAIRMAN.—I think you ought to give notice of these detailed questions.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—I only received my copy of the votes on Saturday.

THE CHAIRMAN.—The vote for subsistence is exactly the same as in 1929, \$100,000.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—But the tender was considerably less? Perhaps you will take a note of that. Can you give me any idea of the supervision of food at the gaol? I mean the general scheme of supervision of the food until it gets to the cells?

THE CHAIRMAN.—It is very accurate. It is all examined when it comes from the contractor. It is weighed. The quality is examined, I think, by a doctor. It is under special warders, who have to attend to the cleansing and cooking and it is weighed again before it is despatched to the prisoners.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Have any complaints been received in this respect from the gaol during the past year?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Yes.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—May I ask what are the alleged causes of it?

THE CHAIRMAN.—There have been continuous complaints, especially in the latter part of the year, in the matter of diets.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Have any steps been taken to investigate these complaints?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Yes, a committee was set up to go into the matter.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Have any steps been taken to deal with it?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Yes, the committee made certain recommendations but the Government, in examining them, had some doubt as to whether they were in excess of the amounts and quantities necessary and proper for prison diet. In fact, that they were on too generous a scale altogether. These particular recommendations required a good deal of further consideration, and the Government has made certain improvements pending further consideration of these wider recommendations.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Have you taken any further steps?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Yes, this food question is being examined as closely and strictly as possible, but no action has been taken beyond keeping a close watch on events in the gaol.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Is the Government satisfied with the present administration of the gaol?

THE CHAIRMAN.—As far as I am aware, yes. It is extremely difficult to administer.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—The Government is not contemplating any alterations in the administration of the gaol?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Not so far as I am aware. There is a vacancy for the Second Superintendent which is in the process of being filled from Home.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Are any steps being taken to provide a new gaol or gaols?

THE CHAIRMAN.—The matter is, at present, in the last stages of preparation for work which we hope will begin early in the New Year, as soon as the site has been settled. Plans have been made and it only remains now to fix definitely on the site and that, I think, has been practically done.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Have any steps been taken to obtain advice on the new gaol?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Oh yes. Quite a number of committees have sat on this very question, both site and plans.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Would it be possible for a report to be laid before this Chamber?

THE CHAIRMAN.—I am not sure whether a report of this nature can come before the Finance Committee, but it could be laid before the Legislative Council.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—I am thinking of the report of the Committee made in June.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I think there is likely to be no objection to the report being brought before a proper body. Of course, the female prison is in course of construction now, and beginnings have been made at Laichikok.

Item 163: Miscellaneous Services.—Language Study Allowances \$1,950.

HON. MR. BRAGA.—Will you be so kind as to state what are the grades of officers receiving language allowances?

THE CHAIRMAN.—European Police Officers, Sanitary Inspectors, Fire Brigade Officers, Supreme Court Bailiffs, Land Bailiffs, Inspectors of Juvenile Labour, Revenue Officers, Boarding Officers, Chief Junk Inspector and Subordinate European Officers.

HON. MR. BRAGA.—So that practically every grade of officers receives an allowance for the Chinese language. The point I would like to make is that a great deal of economy might be effected in the interests of the Colony, were a greater number of men obtained locally for doing the class of work that is being done by officers who have to be employed and given these allowances to study the Chinese language. In reply to a question I raised in connexion with the Budget, I think His Excellency made a statement that this question of employing more local hands was being gone into. I think it would be an advantage to this Committee if some assurance could be obtained from you, Sir, that a very strong endeavour is being made to substitute officers who can as easily and economically be engaged locally.

THE CHAIRMAN.—This matter is one of the distinct terms of reference for the Retrenchment Committee, and we have to await their report.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—It is one which the Retrenchment Committee is examining and we are considering whether something of the sort in certain directions can be done.

HON. MR. BRAGA.—I am happy to know that something is being done in this direction, because a good deal of economy can be effected both in expenses of language and also by means of travelling allowance privileges by employing local candidates.

THE CHAIRMAN.—The matter is being carefully examined from your point of view.

Item 165: Prisons Department.—Linotype Machine \$6,900.

HON. MR. BRAGA.—I feel I must formally vote against this item to be perfectly consistent with the attitude I took up when the question of building a new printing department within the present gaol was raised. I make a formal vote against the item.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—As a member of the Retrenchment Committee, we have not really taken up the question of the gaol except roughly, when we went round the gaol the other day, but I do think that the work on a very permanent structure in the middle of a gaol which is shortly to be abolished is wrong. I do not know whether it could be regarded as a temporary structure as it is made of reinforced concrete of an extremely solid type at a cost of \$100,000.

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS.—A temporary structure could not have answered the purpose, as the machines to be put there are very heavy, and vibration was what the old building was suffering from.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—That I realise, but I think the argument was that it would take from seven to ten years to construct a new gaol, whereas the present estimate is that it will take five, and that puts a rather different complexion on it. While I am prepared to admit that it is always necessary to have prisoners near the Police Courts, there will always be prisoners on remand and not able to do printing work, which means that we are creating another gaol.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—I was a member of the Committee when we inspected the printing works. It was pointed out to us that the new gaol would not be completed for a number of years, but our feeling was that it was quite impossible to carry on the printing work under the conditions then being conducted, certainly not for a period of five years.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—Do you think it is economic to act in the way you are doing at the moment?

THE CHAIRMAN.—That is one of the considerations that has to be borne in mind when dealing with this question. The Government has had in mind all the considerations you speak of now and have given a great deal of consideration to the recommendations of the Committee, and after examination decided it was politic to continue with this work, and the money was voted. This is carrying out the approval that was then obtained from the Finance Committee for the re-building of the present establishment in the gaol. The Retrenchment Committee will, no doubt, give close attention to it.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—They will.

HON. MR. OWEN-HUGHES.—Is the linotype machine working now?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Not just now.

HON. MR. OWEN-HUGHES.—I would remind you, Sir, that the Committee which Mr. Shenton referred to just now visited the prison last January. The vote was turned down at the
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or at a subsequent meeting. When we examined the old printing shop we agreed, with one dissentient, I think, that the printing shop was totally unfit for work both as regards the health of prisoners and Superintendents. What I cannot understand is that it has taken nearly a full year and practically nothing has been done. The machine has been here for some time and additional printing has had to be done outside at extra cost from time to time, whereas my view is that the building of a printing shop should be pressed forward as quickly as possible.

THE CHAIRMAN.—That is the Government view but it has taken a considerable time to obtain the approval of the Council and the Finance Committee. It was held over last January and we had to bring the matter up again at the end of the year.

HON. MR. OWEN-HUGHES.—I think it was approved in January last.

THE CHAIRMAN.—No, it was held over pending further approval and it was submitted again later and members of the Finance Committee again examined the gaol. It was adopted in July.

HON. MR. OWEN-HUGHES.—I thought it was last year.

HON. MR. KOTEWALL.—I think it was April last.

THE CHAIRMAN.—The delay, I think, was due to the time it took to get approval for the expenditure.

Item 174: All Services and Departments.—Personal Emoluments \$262,903.

HON. MR. KOTEWALL.—During the debate on the Budget, His Excellency said that he had under consideration a proposal to pay sterling salaries, half at 1/6d. and half at the current rate. Has that been put into effect yet?

THE CHAIRMAN.—His Excellency said he was going to communicate with the Secretary of State and was prepared to approve, subject to the approval of the Secretary of State, such a scheme. That has been referred to him, but no definite answer has been received yet. In any case it was as from January 1, next year.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Then for this year it is at the rate for the day?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Yes.

Item 175: Public Works Extraordinary.—Road Connecting Garden Road and Bowen Road with May Road, \$30,000.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—I believe that when an estimate for a road is brought forward to this Committee, it always excludes surfacing and tarmacadam, or whatever surfacing is to be made. Is that correct?

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS.—Yes.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—Would it not be very much better that when an estimate for a road is brought forward the whole of the estimate should be brought up?

THE CHAIRMAN.—I am in agreement with you.

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS.—In this particular case we hoped to surface the road next year and we were going on with the other section of the road connecting Conduit Road. That has not been approved and therefore it is necessary to get this section tarmacadamed and so keep it from wear and tear during the wet season, otherwise surfacing might have been done next year as the extensions were carried out.

THE CHAIRMAN.—Is it not possible, in giving an estimate for a road, to give us the entire estimate, including tarmacadam?

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS.—Yes, but this work is done by another department.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—I realise that, and I have views on it, but they cannot be properly expressed here.

THE CHAIRMAN.—The Director of Public Works will keep the point in view.

Item 181: Public Works Recurrent.—Gas Lighting, \$10,000.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—How does gas lighting compare with electricity?

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS.—It is slightly cheaper.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—I should, perhaps, not have asked that question because I am interested, but I did not think of it before I asked it.

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS.—The question of cost was taken into very careful consideration and these rates were agreed on as giving the advantage in this case to gas lighting. We have now a satisfactory sliding scale with the Gas Company.

Item 183: Pensions.—\$139,000.

HON. MR. KOTEWALL.—May I ask when an answer is expected from the Secretary of State to the Governor's despatch on the report of the Currency Committee?

THE CHAIRMAN.—We are in communication now but when we shall get a final answer it is impossible to say.

HON. MR. KOTEWALL.—That has gone Home some months ago?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Yes.

Item 185: Prisons' Department.—Materials for Repair and Renewals, \$600.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Who decides, Sir, when a vote is to be taken out of another vote? Is it the Colonial Treasurer? Here we have cost of materials and repairs taken out of subsistence allowance. Who decides that it is to be taken out of that?

THE CHAIRMAN.—The head of the department will represent that he has a balance, under another sub-head that will meet the bill and the Treasurer has to say if this is correct.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—Then has this vote been done on the recommendation of the Governor of the gaol?

THE CHAIRMAN.—No department asks for a new vote without pointing out savings that can be taken to balance it.

HON. MR. SHENTON.—So this recommendation is really a recommendation of the Governor of the gaol?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Yes, according to that rule.

HON. MR. OWEN-HUGHES.—I take it that subsistence is the only head likely to show a surplus at the end of this year?

THE CHAIRMAN.—Yes, but it does not follow at all that there is any undue economy on subsistence of prisoners. There is a surplus.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—These prisoners are difficult to cater for. It may be that His Majesty has not so many guests on some occasions as on others. So far as the quality of the food goes, it struck me as extraordinarily good, but I can say nothing about quantity.

THE CHAIRMAN.—Both quantity and quality are carefully fixed by regulation.

HON. MR. PATERSON.—It is a mistake to overfeed prisoners, as you are likely to get anyone.

THE CHAIRMAN.—That is a question we are considering.

All the votes were approved.