

*16th June, 1938.*

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A meeting of the Finance Committee was held in the Council Chamber, the Colonial Secretary (Hon. Mr. N. L. Smith, C.M.G.) presiding.

**ALSO PRESENT:—**

THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY (HON. MR. S. CAINE).

HON. MR. R. M. HENDERSON, (Director of Public Works).

HON. SIR HENRY POLLOCK, Kt., K.C., LL.D.

HON. MR. CHAU TSUN-NIN, C.B.E.

HON. MR. S. H. DODWELL.

HON. MR. LEO D'ALMADA E CASTRO, JNR.

HON. DR. LI SHU-FAN.

MR. T. MEGARRY (Clerk of Councils).

**ABSENT:—**

HON. MR. J. J. PATERSON.

HON. MR. LO MAN-KAM.

HON. MR. A. L. SHIELDS.

Votes totalling \$167,612 under Estimates 1938, contained in Message No. 5 from His Excellency the Governor, were considered.

Item 67.—22, Medical Department:—X-Ray apparatus. Running Expenses and Maintenance, \$2,700.

HON. DR. LI.—I gather from the increase asked for under this item that there has been approximately a one-third increase in the number of patients and the number of films taken during the first four months of the year. It appears that the figures have reached serious proportions and it seems to me that some investigation is indicated. I understand that in the out-patients departments of certain Government hospitals, X-ray photographs are taken free of charge as also is the case of a number of third-class in-patients. During the first four months of the current year the increase has been so much that I think some action should be taken immediately.

To my mind, in the event of anyone applying for free X-ray photography the application should be submitted for proper investigation. As you know such investigation is carried out in America where it is known as social service work. In England it is under the almoner who alone can decide whether a case is worthy of public funds. In order to keep a check on public funds I should like to see something on this line of action brought to your notice.

THE CHAIRMAN.—The question of engaging almoners was raised quite recently and I think you will find that some provision will be made in the 1939 Estimates.

THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY.—It is under very active consideration. But I should also like to point out that it does not necessarily follow, that because a charge for the expenditure appears here, no fee is charged to the patients concerned. I don't know to what extent that expenditure is covered by fees received by the Medical Department.

HON. DR. LI.—We want to keep a check on misplaced charity.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I will make enquiries to get the full figures.

Item 75.—26, Kowloon-Canton Railway:—Special Expenditure. 41, Railbus for running a shuttle service between Fanling and Taiipo Market, \$121.

HON. MR. LEO D'ALMADA.—Is this shuttle-service expected to be a paying proposition?

THE CHAIRMAN.—It is intended to be. The service is by virtue of an agreement between the railway and the bus company concerned.

THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY.—The bus service has been or is being withdrawn.

Item 80.—29, Charitable Services:—Maintenance of Lepers in Hong Kong, \$9,000.

HON. DR. LI.—I understand the cost of maintenance of a leper at the Infectious Diseases Hospital of the Tung Wah Hospital is approximately \$9 per month per head, but at the Roman Catholic Mission at Sheklung it is only \$5. As this is a difference of almost 50 per cent. in upkeep I think an understanding between this Government and the Mission should be reached with a view to entering into some satisfactory arrangement.

THE CHAIRMAN.—This matter was under very close consideration only this week.

THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY.—I expect we shall be able to submit proposals for that quite shortly. Probably, we shall have to provide Sheklung with more accommodation. They cannot take more lepers without being provided with more buildings.

HON. DR. LI.—Furthermore, that will give effective means of completely segregating and isolating the leper. At the present time at Kennedy Town they have unrestricted freedom of movement.

Item 84.—33, Public Works Recurrent:—Kowloon. 13, Water Works. Item 2, Water Meters; Upkeep and repairs, \$20,000.

HON. MR. LEO D'ALMADA.—Is this not a matter that could have been easily foreseen when the original estimates were made up?

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS.—This is a higher standard of repairs than we are carrying out now. The Financial Secretary will agree that we have put forward this matter before because it is to the advantage of Government to repair these meters as often as possible, because they quickly deteriorate and you lose revenue. Until recently there has not been money available and we have had to keep these meters at a sort of minimum efficiency. We have let them go for over three years whereas in Singapore they go over them every six months. If we had not had the money now we would not have asked for the vote, but since we have it we submit it is a paying proposition. It is then a better service rather than something that was not foreseen.

THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY.—The total sum asked by the Public Works Department was considerably cut last year. Although we hope the repairs will bring in extra revenue it is also in the general public interest because in some cases it might result in fairer water charges; in some cases the consumer might be suffering.

Item 88.—34, Public Works Extraordinary:—73, Recreation Grounds \$2,300.

HON. MR. LEO D'ALMADA.—Is there any real necessity for a fence around the recreation ground? Are they afraid of burglars? All the sports grounds in King's Park are either bordered with privet hedges which seem effective enough, or have no fences at all.

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS.—I think it is because the ground is at Yaumati and they are afraid of what is happening at the old Polo Ground at Causeway Bay. There you will always find children playing on the ground and, although it is a good thing for the children, it completely destroys the turf.

THE CHAIRMAN.—What sort of fence is it?

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS.—The same as that erected at Kai Tak with concrete posts and barbed and joined wire. The Police are paying half the cost.

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Item 90.—34, Public Works Extraordinary:—Hong Kong. Miscellaneous. Passport Office at Chung Tin Building, \$4,400.

HON. MR. LEO D'ALMADA.—Are these rooms taken on a lease? Could you not have prevailed upon the owners to provide the necessary structural alterations instead of doing them yourselves?

THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY.—That would mean a higher rent.

HON. MR. LEO D'ALMADA.—A case of sting the Government if you can!

THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY.—Possibly, but it is not easy to get accommodation these days. A Passport Office requires different accommodation from an ordinary business firm's office.

All the votes were approved.

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