

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.—No. 677.

The following Protest with reference to the Estimates for Public Works Extraordinary, during the year 1900, which was laid before the Legislative Council on the 30th November, 1899, is published.

By Command,

J. H. STEWART LOCKHART,  
*Colonial Secretary.*

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 1st December, 1899.

PROTEST BY THE UNDERSIGNED UNOFFICIAL MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF HONGKONG WITH REFERENCE TO THE ESTIMATES FOR PUBLIC WORKS EXTRAORDINARY, DURING THE YEAR 1900, AND AGAINST THE REFUSAL OF THE GOVERNMENT TO RECONSIDER AND REMODEL THEM.

1. A careful consideration of the Estimates for the coming year and of the statement to the Council with which His Excellency the Governor introduced the Estimates, suggest one or two points in connection with the financial position of the Colony generally and especially in connection with the Public Works Extraordinary proposed to be executed or commenced in 1900, which appear to require attention and reconsideration.

2. In the first place the Colony is to be congratulated upon the fact that, in spite of the very large and totally unforeseen expenditure incurred in taking over the New Territory, the corrected Estimates for the current year show a probable credit balance on the 31st December next of \$400,000, including therein a balance from 1898 of \$90,000. The revenue in nearly all its items has shown a surprising elasticity and the amount realised by the sales of land has been exceptionally large. In fact, the greater portion of the estimated surplus is derived from that source. There can be no more convincing proof of the growth and prosperity of the Colony (although other proofs are not wanting) than this increase in the quantity of land sold and the amount of premia realised on such sales.

3. His Excellency the Governor in his opening statement put the credit balance from last year at \$90,000 or thereabouts, and the balance at the end of the current year as shown by the corrected Estimates at about \$315,000, so making up the estimated total of \$400,000. His figures for 1898 are taken apparently from the Treasurer's Financial Returns laid on the table with the draft Estimates, (Paper No. 40 of 1899). This paper in its amended form includes two statements of the Assets and Liabilities of the Colony at the end of 1898 differing very considerably from one another and both of which cannot be correct. His Excellency seems to have adopted that dated the 13th March, 1899, and it undoubtedly seems to be the more correct as it contains a statement of the arrears of taxes and Crown rent still outstanding and to be collected on 31st December, 1898; but the paper even as amended appears to be faulty and needs explanation before it can be accepted or even understood. Among the liabilities the Treasurer includes \$407,080.76 under the head of "Deposits not available." This amount probably represents monies deposited with the Government in connection with the Praya Reclamation, by suitors in the Supreme Court, and otherwise. The principal items should be stated. It would appear as if these monies have been applied in aid of the general revenue although described as "not available" and as monies to be kept separate.

The statement dated 13th March shows the balance of Assets over Liabilities on 31st December, 1898, to be \$213,358.39, whereas the one dated 29th September gives the balance of Assets as \$251,056.94, or an increase of \$37,698.55. How does this arise?

From the former sum of \$213,358.39 there is deducted in the statement \$123,334.14, "Balance of 1893 Loan," which, without explanation, is unintelligible.

The Loan Accounts are supposed to be kept separate from the general revenue of the Colony. The return does contain a Sinking Fund Account, but no general account showing the present position of the Loan Fund. Has it all been expended? If so, has it all been expended on loan works, *i.e.*, on the works for which it was specifically borrowed, or has any portion of it been taken and applied in aid of the general revenue of the Colony? If so, then the money borrowed from the Loan Monies for general purposes should appear somewhere as an item of revenue, and the amount due from General Revenue to the Loan Fund should have appeared as a liability. The Returns by the Treasurer of the Assets and Liabilities of the Colony at the end of 1898 are not comprehensible as they stand, and are in need of very considerable explanations and additions.

The final settlement of the Estimates for 1900 should be postponed until these accounts are cleared up and re-stated.

4. According to His Excellency the Governor's statement and the Treasurer's Return before referred to, there will be a surplus on 31st December next, over and above the current expenses, in round numbers, of \$400,000, and the Estimates for next year provide for an Expenditure on Public Works Extraordinary during 1900 of \$331,100 only. The actual amount available for Public Works Extraordinary in 1900 is the said \$400,000, plus the estimated surplus Revenue over the ordinary estimated Expenditure during next year, say, \$436,720, or an aggregate of \$836,720.

How is it that, with the large number of important public works now pressing for attention, many of them most urgently required, so small an amount out of the admittedly available surplus revenue is to be applied in 1900 in the execution of such works?

5. There is only one apparent justification for this very small estimate for Public Works Extraordinary in 1900, and that is the inability (if it exists) of the Public Works Department to proceed with works during the year to a greater extent than the amount estimated for \$331,100; but that is, in fact, no justification or excuse as the remedy is a simple and easy one, to adequately increase the strength of the Department either temporarily or permanently, or to get the necessary work done under the supervision of competent local architects.

Instead of increasing the strength of the Public Works Department to meet urgent public necessities the Estimates for the coming year show a reduction in its strength, especially in Engineers, from what it was a few years ago.

This is a matter which urgently needs reconsideration before the final approval of the Estimates and the passing of the Appropriation Ordinance for 1900.

6. There is apparently abundant available funds for the more urgently needed public works. The sound basis on which to proceed in the expenditure of that money is to arrange the list of works to be done in the order of their importance and urgency, to take the most urgent in hand without delay and to devote a portion of the funds in hand to providing, as an extraordinary expenditure, the necessary staff for the purpose of superintending the work. There is no reason why an estimate for Extraordinary Public Works should not include the provision of an extra-ordinary supply of officers to superintend their execution.

7. What are the Extraordinary Public Works now in contemplation, and which of these are in their order the most urgent and the most important?

8. His Excellency the Governor pointed out in his address to the Council the "overwhelming importance of eradicating" the scourge of plague, and that, if any information could be obtained throwing light upon the causes of it, "no expenditure within the reach of the Colony would be too great to secure the blessing of freedom from such a scourge." On this point there can be no

difference of opinion. It appears strange that, among the Public Works Extraordinary estimated for, no provision is made for any work of any importance directly bearing on the Sanitation of the Colony or aiming at the improvement of the dwellings of the poorer classes of the Chinese population, it being common knowledge that the defective construction of numerous Chinese dwellings, the want of light and air, the overcrowding, and the absence of all sanitary appliances for the use of the vast Chinese population, are among the contributory if not the main causes of the plague.

9. More Public Latrines are most urgently required. There is nothing from a sanitary point of view more urgently necessary. For want of them, as Mr. DRURY, Sanitary Surveyor, points out in his admirable report, dated 5th August last, the whole fruits of our expenditure on the drainage of the Colony during the last ten years is so much money thrown away. The storm-drains are still sewers as foul as the sewers themselves. The subsoil is still being steadily saturated with filth. Innumerable houses are still the water-closets and urinals of a large number of the native population. The necessity for public urinals and for many more of them, and for the taking over of the existing private Latrines in the Colony, has been the subject of the most pressing representations to the Government since the first arrival of the late Colonial Surgeon in the early seventies. Every Sanitary Authority has reported in favour of it [See Evidence and Appendix annexed to the Report of the Insanitary Properties Commission dated 9th March, 1898]; but there is no provision at all in the Estimates for the purchase of private latrines and provision for the erection of only one public latrine during 1900. This is a work which ought to be taken in hand instantly and carried out promptly in its entirety.

Another urgent public work from a sanitary point of view is the overhauling and cleansing of the storm-water drains—old and new—which are still practically sewers and a grave danger to the Colony. Mr. DRURY clearly attributes the steady increase of typhoid in the Colony to these drain-sewers.

10. There are hundreds of houses in the Colony condemned by every Sanitary Authority who has ever inspected them as uninhabitable either in whole or in part. There is nothing in the Estimates to indicate that this evil is to be attacked in any way. It cannot be done without expense. Either these houses should be bought up and reconstructed by the Government, or the owners should be forced to reconstruct and improve, with compensation, or Government should build model premises for the poorer classes of Chinese at Taipingshan or elsewhere; but there is evidently no settled plan for dealing with these houses and no money provided by the Estimates for even a single experiment in this line.

Why is not something done or attempted to be done, after all the years of enquiry and report?

The Estimates for 1900 provide for an expenditure (Items 24 and 25 Details Extraordinary Public Works) of about \$15,000 for sewerage of Victoria and miscellaneous drainage works, but these are of the ordinary character and do not attack the sanitary problem in any way.

In the Estimates there is a list of 32 items of Public Works Extraordinary to be commenced or gone on with next year and the one or two really urgent and necessary public works (non-sanitary) that in the opinion of every man in the Colony ought to figure in that list are not there. The Shelter for chair coolies at the Peak, a mere flea-bite so far as expense is concerned, is omitted, although it might well, it is so small, be brought into the ordinary current expenditure. It is a work which every consideration of humanity should impel to the speedy construction. It is a question of the health of the working men, who for our convenience are exposed to all the inclemencies of the weather. It should be put in hand and completed before money is expended on a Peak Residence for the Governor. His

Excellency is provided for but the coolies without a Shelter will suffer. Only \$4,000 to \$5,000 is required for the Shelter, yet it cannot be done. Why not ?

No plans or details of the building have yet been laid before the Public Works Committee in connection with the Governor's Peak Residence for their approval, and no money has been voted for it, yet money is being spent on the site.

11. The most important and most pressing public building is undoubtedly the Post Office. Fifteen years ago it was reported in the plainest language that the present Post Office was much too small for the work which had to be done in it. In 1896 a strong Committee reported—

“The accommodation in the Post Office, in spite of the recent arrangement by which the offices of the Attorney General and Crown Solicitor have been placed at the disposal of the Department, is so cramped that there is not sufficient room to sort two heavy mails at a time, while the space devoted to the business of the Parcels Post is insufficient to *secure* the safe custody of parcels.”

There has been a vast increase in the business of the Post Office since that report was written. There are many more mails coming in. There will soon be a fortnightly German mail in addition. Captain HASTING's reports emphasize more emphatically the need of space and the impossibility of working the Post Office with ordinary success without more space. The easy and successful working of the Post Office is of the first importance not merely for the business of Hongkong but of all China and Japan. The Post Office is a most successful revenue-making Department, yet the construction of a new Post Office is put off until the Law Courts are finished, in other words, *ad Kalendas Graecas*, for no one knows when the new Law Courts will be commenced. Government land previously appropriated for the purpose is lying idle. Interest is being lost on the money sunk in its reclamation ; it is abundantly ample in size for a first class Post Office and most conveniently situated ; it is a site deliberately selected by a strong Committee in 1896 for the purposes of a Post Office, whose report was approved by the Governor and Council and not objected to by the Secretary of State. Messrs. COOPER, THOMSON, CHATER, McCONACHIE, and Sir THOMAS JACKSON were the members of the Committee. Their opinions and recommendations were set aside in 1898 in Public Works Committee by the vote of the Chairman only, the Director of Public Works, newly arrived in the Colony.

However strong may be the arguments from convenience in favour of the site of the present Post Office and Supreme Court for the construction of the new Post Office, they become valueless, and worse than valueless, when it is discovered that the site can not be made use of for an unknown period, not less, at the very least, than five or six years.

It may be that the present site is the more convenient and the more central for the new Post Office and Treasury than the Reclamation site (although there is much to be said on both sides and the older and more experienced men in the Colony favour the latter and think that in a very short time it will be the true centre of the Colony), but these arguments, if they were very much more cogent than they are, must surely give way to the contention that on the Reclamation site a new and perfect Post Office could be completed in two years from date ; (there are local architects who could most certainly do the work if the Government are unable to do it), while if the present site is to be the site of the new Post Office we must drag along in our present discreditable state for five years more, going from bad to worse each year as business grows.

As to the financial aspects of the case, a letter from the undersigned to the Chamber of Commerce of the 17th ultimo (copy attached) shews clearly that the Treasury would profit largely by the removal of the Post Office and Supreme Court from their present position and by the sale of the land.

If the Public Works Department were properly manned or if private enterprise were availed of, there is no reason why both the new Law Courts and the Post Office should not go on together.

12. Next in order to the Sanitary Works already indicated, and to the Shelter at Victoria Gap and to the Post Office, would appear to come in importance the speedy extension of our means of obtaining, storing, and distributing Water. The waterworks are estimated to bring in a revenue to the Colony in 1900 of \$132,000. The actual cost of maintenance is estimated at \$19,700, leaving a balance to credit of Water Account of, say, \$112,300. It is proposed to spend on Water Account a sum of \$73,000: \$15,000 in carrying out the Taitam Extension, \$27,000 on waterworks in Victoria and the Hill District, \$11,000 on meters, &c., and \$20,000 on water supply in Kowloon.

In respect of this latter item no plans appear to have been prepared or submitted, and therefore in obedience to the Secretary of State's instructions of 18th April, 1890, no money can properly be asked for or voted for this work.

The Unofficial Members of Council formally protested in a memorandum dated 20th December, 1890, laid on the Council table on 22nd idem, against being asked to vote monies for works in respect of which no plans, statements or details of any kind had been prepared and submitted and of which they had not approved.

It is deeply to be regretted that with the experience of past years before us and with the rapid and rapidly increasing growth of the population in the island of Hongkong, no greater expenditure than \$15,000 is proposed for 1900 in adding to our means of Water Supply in the City of Victoria. An abundant supply is indispensable to the health of the Colony; a continuous supply throughout the year and especially towards the end of the dry season is absolutely essential for the effective operation of our separate system of sewage disposal. The separate system depends wholly on a perennial supply of water at all hours of the day and night for its successful working. It was sanctioned on the assurance that abundance of water would be found and every floor in every Chinese house was provided with water works on that assurance. Every year for months the supply has been intermittent only. No effort should be spared to provide for a continuous water supply not merely for our present but for the growing population. A vote of \$15,000 for additional water supply in the island is wholly inadequate.

If the Staff is not strong enough to carry on the works necessary for an enlarged supply, it would be economy—true economy—to get a separate staff of Engineers equal to the work, as was done when the Taitam Reservoir was taken in hand, and establish a separate department. The Colonial Revenue is three millions and a quarter. The ordinary expenses of government and of the maintenance of existing works is two millions and three quarters. There is roughly half a million a year available for Extraordinary Public Works together with the surpluses from past years.

13. In conclusion, the first place in point of urgency should be given, in the appropriation of the Colonial Funds for Extra Works, to the sanitary wants of the Colony and among the sanitary wants of the Colony there stands in the forefront the pressing necessity of getting rid of the causes, or of any possible causes, of the visitations of plague. In that connection the necessity for an adequate number of Latrines comes first, and no estimate for 1900 which does not provide for this can be satisfactory. Perhaps the next most important public work from the point of view of health is the water supply. The increase of the water supply is hardly a work to be completed, like the latrines, in a few months. It should be continuous over a number of years, but the amount allotted for it each year should bear a large proportion to the total amount of money available.

In respect of public buildings the Coolie Shelter at the Peak comes first in importance although least in amount. After that the Post Office and after that, but a long way after, new Law Courts—the present Courts although inconvenient being adequate for the transaction of business.

Next in the order of importance come the new roads. Those in the New Territory first. They are required for the preservation of peace, order, and good government there as well as for the purpose of opening up the Territory for profitable use.

The present Estimates should be amended and re-cast. The Treasurer's Financial Returns and two Statements of Assets and Liabilities on 31st December, 1898, cannot both be correct. The estimates for Public Works Extraordinary need re-consideration from beginning to end; the works enumerated in them might well be arranged in the order of their importance and urgency instead of in their present apparently purposeless succession.

Then the available money should be appropriated to the several works in the order in which they stand on the Estimates, and if there is not enough to go round, the last on the list should be left over till some other year.

It is useless to plead the insufficiency of the staff of the Public Works Department as a reason for not proceeding with any urgent work or works. Extra-ordinary works should be provided for by the provision of additional strength for the Department or by special staffs. At present with much pressing work on hand the staff is being apparently reduced. It is certainly much less strong than it was ten years ago when the population was much less and the area of the Colony twenty-nine square miles instead of four hundred and twenty-nine.

T. H. WHITEHEAD.

HONGKONG, 23rd November, 1899.

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.—No. 678.

The following Particulars and Conditions of Sale of Crown Land by Public Auction, to be held at the Offices of the Public Works Department, on Monday, the 18th day of December, 1899, at 3 p.m., are published for general information.

By Command,

J. H. STEWART LOCKHART,  
*Colonial Secretary.*

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 2nd December, 1899.

Particulars and Conditions of the letting by Public Auction Sale, to be held on Monday, the 18th day of December, 1899, at 3 p.m., at the Offices of the Public Works Department, by Order of His Excellency the Governor, of One Lot of Crown Land, in the Colony of Hongkong, for a term of 75 Years, with the option of renewal at a Crown Rent to be fixed by the Surveyor of Her Majesty the QUEEN, for one further term of 75 years.

• PARTICULARS OF THE LOT.

No. of Sale.	Registry No.	LOCALITY.	Boundary Measurements.				Contents in Square ft.	Annual Rent.	Upset Price.
			N.	S.	E.	W.			
			feet.	feet.	feet.	feet.	\$	\$	
1	Inland Lot No. 1,566.	Queen's Road East (near Tai Wong Temple),.....	16	16	60	60	960	14	1,440

CONDITIONS OF SALE.

1. The highest bidder above the upset price shall be the Purchaser, and if any dispute arise between two or more bidders, the Lot shall be put up again at a former bidding.
2. No person shall at any bidding advance less than \$20.