

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.—No. 226.

The following Report by the Food Supply Commission and correspondence relating thereto, are published for general information.

By Command,

T. SERCOMBE SMITH,
Acting Colonial Secretary.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 13th April, 1901.

FOOD SUPPLY COMMISSION.

HONGKONG, 18th December, 1900.

SIR,

We have the honour to enclose herewith our Report as Members of the Food Commission together with a copy of a letter we have addressed to its Chairman Mr. J. J. FRANCIS, Q.C.

We have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servants,

EDWARD OSBORNE.
A. M. MARSHALL.
F. MAITLAND.
FUNG WA CHÜN.
WILLIAM HARTIGAN.

To the Honourable

J. H. STEWART LOCKHART, C.M.G.,
Colonial Secretary,
HONGKONG.

HONGKONG, 18th December, 1900.

DEAR SIR,

Understanding that you will not be able to prepare the Food Commission Report for some time yet, we have forwarded our Report to Government (as per enclosed copy) as we do not wish to be parties to any further delay in the matter and desire that, as far as we are concerned, the Commission should be considered at an end.

Yours truly,

EDWARD OSBORNE.
A. M. MARSHALL.
F. MAITLAND.
FUNG WA CHÜN.
WILLIAM HARTIGAN.

J. J. FRANCIS, Esq., Q.C.,
Chairman, Food Commission.

REPORT BY THE UNDERSIGNED, MEMBERS OF THE FOOD
COMMISSION APPOINTED 19TH MAY, 1900.

- (1.) A number of meetings were held, witnesses examined, and a mass of information obtained from Steamship Lines, Hotels, The Gaol, The Government Civil Hospital, Military Authorities, and other sources.
- (2.) An advertisement asking information from householders was inserted in the local Papers, to which 8 persons (ladies) replied.
- (3.) The following table shows the percentage of rise in the wholesale and retail prices in 5 years :—

<i>Articles.</i>	<i>Wholesale.</i>	<i>Retail.</i>
Bread,	—	20 per cent.
Fish,	13 per cent.	50 „
Beef,	33 „	33 „
Mutton,	25 „	45 „
Eggs,	50 „	80 „
Fowls,	45 „	40 „
Ducks,	50 „	50 „
Potatoes,	25 „	—
Firewood,	90 „	95 „
Ground Nut Oil,	110 „	100 „
Rice	33 „	33 „

- (4.) Beyond natural fluctuations of supply and demand, the main causes of this increase have been :—
- (a.) Depreciation of Silver.
 - (b.) Increased Cost of Rice.
 - (c.) West River Piracy.
 - (d.) Increased Rents.
 - (e.) Enforcement of Sanitary Laws.
- (5.) The augmentation of the Military and Naval forces in Hongkong and Manila has contributed towards a rise in certain commodities, as the sources of supply are limited and take time to accommodate themselves to the increased demands.
- (6.) Whilst it is difficult by means of direct evidence to prove that a combination exists with the object of keeping up the price of meat, the fact that practically the whole supply is in the hands of two men, who acknowledge being supported by a syndicate, and from whom other market butchers buy, must tend to crush other individual effort and enterprise, give them a monopoly, and enable them to regulate prices as they please. The fact also that the two individuals put forward as owners of this large business in a trade which has a world-wide reputation for being most lucrative, swore they have been losing money in it during three consecutive years, and that during the whole course of their examination they were manifestly prevaricating and concealing the truth, makes all evidence on this point most unreliable.
- (7.) We consider that Market rents are not excessive (except in particularly choice situations) and have not contributed to the increase.

At the same time we regard rents as a tax on food, and think they should be kept as low as possible.

- (8.) Our enquiries have failed to suggest any practical remedies of real value, and, bearing in mind the many objections there are to legislative interference in trade affairs, we can only make the following recommendations :—
- (a.) That increased Market accommodation be provided and meanwhile, in order to relieve pressure on existing Markets, that fruit and vegetables be sold outside in licensed shops.
 - (b.) That Markets be used for the sale of perishable food only, Biscuits, Hams, Tinned Meat, Jams and such like stores should not be sold in Markets, as the letting of stalls for such purposes tends to crowd out the legitimate vendors of fresh produce.
 - (c.) That further endeavours be made to stamp out piracy.
 - (d.) The cheapening of rents by opening new building areas with means of conveyance by tramways and ferries.
 - (e.) The reduction of Market rents to such level as will provide just sufficient funds to cover interest on capital and working expenses. Markets should not be a source of profit.
 - (f.) The encouragement of foreign ladies to make their own purchases by having the Markets kept clean and by clearing the passages of loafers.
- (9.) We recommend that an attempt be made to encourage the villagers of the New Territory to breed cattle by providing them with funds for the purchase of stock (to be repaid when the animal is brought to market) or with heifers from a Government stockyard.
- (10.) We also recommend that an attempt be made to induce them to grow vegetables and rear poultry, and suggest that attached to each Police Station should be a European gardener whose business, assisted by Chinese, it would be to cultivate vegetables as an object lesson to surrounding natives and to provide them with seed imported by Government.
- (11.) We specially recommend that trials be made in the New Territory (Shatin Valley for instance) in growing Potatoes.
- The best Potatoes sold in Hongkong are those grown at Macao, and it does not appear unreasonable to suppose that what will grow near Macao will grow equally well in the New Territory.
- (12.) We desire to state in conclusion that the delay in the publication of the Food Commission Report has been due to the Chairman of the Commission being unable to afford the time for the prosecution of the enquiry and the preparation of the Report.

EDWARD OSBORNE.

A. M. MARSHALL.

F. MAITLAND.

FUNG WA CHÜN.

WILLIAM HARTIGAN.

Hongkong, 18th December, 1900.

HONGKONG, 20th December, 1900.

SIR,

I have, within the last hour, received from Messrs. Osborne, Marshall, Maitland, Fung Wah Chün and Hartigan, Members of the Food Supply Commission of which I have the honour to be Chairman, a copy of a report signed by them and sent in to you with a covering letter dated the 18th instant, of which they also sent me a copy. I received from them at the same time a joint letter addressed to myself, of which it appears they have also sent you a copy.

I have no objection to make to the report they have sent in to you on the subject-matter of the inquiry. It embodies in brief the conclusions at which we unanimously arrived. I should have had very much pleasure in signing it if they had asked me to do so.

I only wish to correct one trifling mistake in the last paragraph which runs as follows :—

“(12) We desire to state, in conclusion, that the delay in the publication of
“the Food Commission Report has been due to the Chairman of the
“Commission being unable to afford time for the prosecution of the
“enquiry and the preparation of the Report.”

There was no delay in the prosecution of the inquiry. The members were unable to sit for more than two days in the week for a couple of hours each day and the taking of evidence was proceeded with with all due diligence and was completed in July last. The delay has been in the preparation of the draft report, and I regret to say, that my time was so fully occupied with my own business that I could not get it completed in time to satisfy the impatience of my colleagues. I am unable myself to see that there was any very great urgency. I was preparing a very full and detailed report, two-thirds of which had been completed and approved by Mr. Marshall, to whom I sent it a short time ago, with a request that he would, as I was so full of work, finish it for me, he being fully acquainted with my views and concurring in them.

Instead of doing so, a meeting of the other members of the Commission was held to which I was not summoned and the report prepared which has been sent you.

I probably ought not to have accepted the appointment as a Member or Chairman of the Commission knowing how fully occupied I am in my profession at all times. If I have put the Government to any inconvenience by so doing I apologize to the Government and to the public.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

JNO. J. FRANCIS.

The Honourable

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY,

§c., §c., §c.

No. 2319.

COLONIAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE,
HONGKONG, 27th December, 1900.

SIR,

In reply to your letter of the 20th instant, I am directed by His Excellency the Governor to send you the enclosed report of the Members of the Food Commission and to request that, in accordance with the terms of the Commission issued to you, all the evidence taken before the Commission may be forwarded to me by you as its Chairman.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

J. H. STEWART LOCKHART,
Colonial Secretary.

J. J. FRANCIS, Esq., Q.C.

HONGKONG, 2nd January, 1901.

SIR,

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of your letter No. 2319 of the 27th December last, forwarding me copy report of Members of the Food Commission and requesting me to forward all the evidence taken by the Commission.

I beg to hand you herewith all the papers and correspondence connected with the proceedings of the Food Supply Commission.

1. The Commission.
2. Correspondence.
3. Notes of Evidence.
4. Minutes of Meetings.
5. Draft Report as prepared by me, but not completed.

I have also to hand you Mr. Jabez Potts' memo. of fees due him for his services as short-hand writer to the Commission. Will you be so good as to let him have a cheque for the amount \$206.80.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient humble Servant,

JNO. J. FRANCIS.

The Honourable

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY,

&c., &c., &c."DAILY PRESS" OFFICE,
HONGKONG, 27th December, 1900.HONGKONG FOOD COMMISSION *Dr. to* JABEZ POTTS.

Tung Wing's evidence, July 3rd :—

Taking note	\$ 10.00
Transcribing same, 82 folios at 40 cents per folio (72 words)	32.80

Lee Sing's evidence, July 9th :—

Taking note	10.00
Transcript, 45 folios	18.00

Mr. Ladds' evidence, July 10th :—

Taking note	10.00
Transcript, 121 folios	48.40

Forward,.....\$129.20

	<i>Brought forward</i> ,.....	\$129.20
Mr. Dyer Ball's evidence, July 17th :—		
Taking note		10.00
Transcript, 88 folios.....		35.20
Mr. Brewin's evidence, July 23rd :—		
Taking note		10.00
Transcript, 56 folios		22.40
	Total.....	<u>\$206.80</u>

No. 50.

COLONIAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE,
HONGKONG, 9th January, 1901.

SIR,

With reference to your letter of the 2nd instant, forwarding papers and correspondence connected with the proceedings of the Food Supply Commission, I am directed to inform you that what His Excellency requires is a verbatim record of question and answer given in evidence, in accordance with the mandate of the Commission, without which the Report would be useless.

2. This was directed in the Commission and is what His Excellency asked for. I am to return the draft Report, which is incomplete, as several blanks are left for figures. I presume these figures are given in the evidence upon which the report is assumed to be made.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

J. H. STEWART LOCKHART,
Colonial Secretary.

J. J. FRANCIS, Esq., Q.C.

HONGKONG, 17th January, 1901.

SIR,

I have the honour to state, for the information of His Excellency the Governor, in reply to your letter No. 50 of the 9th January, that it is impossible for me to supply a verbatim record of question and answer given in evidence before the Food Supply Commission as that method of taking evidence was not adopted by the Commission.

The evidence taken was recorded in the usual fashion in which it is taken by all Judges and Magistrates, and in legal proceedings generally, and no special instructions were given me, or are contained in the Commission requiring the evidence to be taken down by question and answer.

All the evidence taken has been forwarded to you.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

J. J. FRANCIS.

The Honourable
THE COLONIAL SECRETARY,
HONGKONG.