

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.—No. 150.

The following despatch to the Secretary of State and Minute by His Excellency the Governor on the Report of the Committee appointed to enquire into and report on the question of Chair and Jinricksha Coolies, were laid on the table of the Legislative Council on the 11th instant, and are published.

By Command,

J. H. STEWART LOCKHART,
Colonial Secretary.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 12th March, 1902.

No. 526.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE,
HONGKONG, 31st December, 1901.

SIR,

I have the honour to report that, in consequence of a number of complaints which reached the Government in connection with the difficulties of procuring and retaining reliable coolies for private chairs and jinrickshas, I appointed a Commission, in August last, for the purpose of enquiring into the cause of these complaints and suggesting a remedy.

2. The Commission held fourteen meetings during the months of September, October and November, and examined a large number of witnesses.

The Report in which the evidence of these witnesses was reproduced, and in which the Commissioners formulated their suggestions for the removal of the alleged grounds of discontent, was submitted to me last month. I gave it my very careful consideration and perused all the evidence upon which the recommendations of the Commissioners were based.

3. I did not find myself in agreement with the deductions drawn from the evidence by the Commissioners, and was unable, therefore, to concur in their recommendations. I invited the Members of my Executive Council, however, to give me the benefit of their views on the subject, and caused them to be informed of the opinions held by myself.

4. On the 20th instant, the question was fully considered in Executive Council, especially as to the question whether there should or should not be compulsory registration of private coolies, and it was advised by a majority of the Members of Council that no steps should be taken to carry out the recommendations of the Committee. This advice was given on the ground that the recommendations, if carried out, were not calculated to bring about the desired result, nor, in the long-run, to satisfy the employers of private coolies, inasmuch as the real causes of discontent appeared to be traceable to the state of the labour market of Hongkong and China and other natural economic conditions.

5. I have now the honour to transmit for your information six copies of the Report together with a statement of my own views, which I drew up after reading the Report but before I consulted the Executive Council.

6. I also enclose an extract from the *China Mail* of the 20th instant from which it appears that the difficulties dealt with by the Commissioners who drew up the Report may be mitigated by other methods than those suggested by them—methods which would be less subversive of sound economic principles.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Yours most obedient Servant,

HENRY A. BLAKE,
Governor.

The Right Honourable

J. CHAMBERLAIN, M.P.,

His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies,

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(Enclosure.)

Extract from "China Mail" of the 20th December, 1901.

The difficulty in procuring ricksha coolies seems to have been almost met by the recent action of the authorities in placing 500 extra public rickshas on the streets. There are now twelve hundred of these conveyances plying in Hongkong, and the coolies, finding that their earnings are not so profitable as before, are throwing aside the public ricksha and going into private employ. The public ricksha owners grumble that many of their machines are lying idle for want of coolies. The grumble, of course, is justifiable when one takes into consideration the fact that the licensee has to pay \$72 a year to the Treasury for the licence for each ricksha.

Minute by His Excellency the Governor on the Report of the Committee appointed to enquire into and report on the Question of Chair and Jinricksha Coolies.

HONOURABLE COLONIAL SECRETARY,

I have very carefully read and considered this report and the evidence upon which it is based. The causes of the difficulties complained of are fairly set forth in the answer of the first witness to question 7 of page 1A—(a.) the demand for coolies is greater and the coolies are more or less limited in number; (b.) they are under no control and they can do as they like; (c.) the cost of living has increased and wages are still going up. The latter reason given is borne out by 17 of the 32 responses in Appendix E. and is emphasised by Inspector HANSON in his answers to questions 9 and 10, page 11. On the other hand, as suggested in questions 3 and 4, page 14, as private chair coolies are usually housed, the increased cost of lodging outside ought to tend to increase the supply of private chair coolies.

Another reason of the alleged discontent of private chair coolies is that they object to performing the light work outside the mere carrying of chairs that has hitherto been within the scope of their duty.

The proposals put forward by the Members of the Commission to meet this state of discomfort are compulsory registration of all coolies employed as private ricksha or chair coolies, and the reduction of the fares of public ricksha and chair coolies so that their possible earnings would cease to be a temptation to private chair coolies to leave private employment and become licensed public chair coolies. The establishment of a coolie farm was also suggested, question 10, page 15, but Mr. HANSON'S answer "There is no doubt that if these people are put into the hands of one person, the community will have to pay largely for that man's monopoly" confirmed by Mr. DYER BALL'S answer, question 6, page 23, is borne out by the demand of NGAN WING CHI who had evidently been approached on the subject of a monopoly, and was prepared to undertake the supply of 2,700 private chair and ricksha coolies in three classes at eleven, ten, and nine dollars respectively.

On the subject of registration, the views of the witnesses are very divergent. Registration has been tried before and proved a failure, because the masters would not be troubled by any restriction of the kind so long as they could get their work done. Mr. MAY'S answer to question 2, page 6, shows how far this disinclination went to accept any trouble even in a case where it was notified to the master by the police that one of his boys was a thief. The answer was: "Well, so long as he does not trouble me, I don't mind." The evidence of Mr. DENNY, late Crown Solicitor, showed that he was strongly opposed to any interference by compulsory registration of private coolies as an interference with freedom of contract, questions 6 to 9, page 29; and at question 6, page 31, he gives the reasons for

the present difficulty, that is, that a street or cargo coolie can earn more money than a private chair coolie. The evidence of Mr. SAUNDERS, pages 92 to 99, is also very strongly against registration, on the grounds of interference with freedom of contract (question 3, page 94) and also of the danger of intensifying the present discomforts (question 4, page 94) "There is a limited supply of these people and, if you weed them out, there will be an insufficient supply." Mr. SAUNDERS' evidence appears to have been rather a resistance to persistent arguments of the Commission in favour of registration making employment of unregistered coolies an offence, than the volunteering of his views on the questions under discussion.

Mr. BREWIN, the Registrar General, declared himself in favour of compulsory registration, question 6, page 57, but the answers to the questions from 4, page 58, to question 7, page 59, show some of the practical difficulties of identification. The examination of the witnesses shows that the Commission entered upon the inquiry with strong views upon the advisability of compulsory registration and of the necessity for reducing the fares of the public ricksha coolies and chair coolies so that their earnings would cease to induce private chair and ricksha coolies to elect to serve public licensed coolies rather than to engage as private coolies. Inspector HANSON said, question 25, page 15, that two men can make from sixty to eighty dollars a month with a public ricksha, but at question 8, page 16, he places the probable duration of a coolie's ricksha life at three years, while NGAN WAI CHU, in answer to question 11, page 90, shows that over ten of his ricksha men have died, because they had a long run over the new road from Kowloon to Shatin.

Mr. BREWIN, in answer to question 6, page 60, said that cargo coolies are the best paid. The question at the bottom of the page assumes that in such case the reduction of the ricksha and chair fares would not have much effect in driving the men into private employ. Mr. FUNG WA CHUN, question 10, page 65, placed the earnings of a street coolie with a pole at 40 cents a day while other coolies make \$15 a month. And that the increase in wages is not confined to Hongkong is shown by Mr. LAU CHU PAK (questions 3 to 12, page 71) by which it appears that in South China wages have risen 30 % in the villages. The first three witnesses agree that compulsory registration will probably produce a strike.

I have analysed the evidence thus carefully as I consider it highly undesirable to interfere with sound economic principles except very strong local reasons are shown—that I cannot find in the evidence given before the Commission. Freedom of the port and freedom of contract are two principles under which Hongkong has grown and prospered. The original Registration Ordinance was repealed because the European population showed that they did not care to avail themselves of its provisions, and the passing of such an Ordinance as is now recommended might have far reaching consequences, extremely inconvenient to Europeans dependent upon the services of chair coolies. It has been shown in the evidence that Registration Offices have been tried on more than one occasion and have failed from want of support, and it is evident that any master who desires to be satisfied as to the character of his chair coolies, can refuse to engage any coolie who does not produce some evidence of his character. All that is required is a common agreement between a number of employers. Or, if a number of people find it difficult to obtain coolies, it is evident from the statements of Chinese witnesses that there are men in the Colony who would undertake to supply them if arrangements were made with them. Mr. HANSON points out, on page 14, the objection the Chinese coolies have to many restrictions, and it seems to me that compulsory registration would reduce the labour supply and further raise the wages.

But the question as to fares and as to the issue of tickets as recommended in para. 21 might be considered in Executive Council. In para. 20 Inspector HANSON'S statement is quoted. These amounts may possibly have been earned in one of the busy months before the large increase of 1,200 rickshas, but, granting the

statement that, for the year the average nett earning was \$10, this cannot be reckoned exorbitant remembering the short life of a ricksha coolie, and is not more than can be earned by a cargo coolie.

If a system of tickets could be adopted it would, in my opinion, save many disputes especially with people who do not carry very small change, and who generally receive Chinese coins in exchange. I have spoken to Mr. HEWITT on the Shanghai system which, he tells me, works well, and if such tickets were issued by Government, probably books of them would be bought freely and used by sailors, &c., &c. As to the amount, a sum equal to one penny farthing does not appear to be very startling even for the shortest journey, and is decidedly moderate for fifteen minutes, but this could be considered in Executive Council. Increased competition must bring down the earnings and with lower fares we might find such a curtailment in the number of rickshas as would reproduce the inconvenience felt last year.

Circulate for Executive Council.

P. A. B.

10.12.01.

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.—No. 151.

The following bye-laws made by the Sanitary Board on the 6th March, 1902, and approved by the Legislative Council on the 11th instant, are published.

By Command,

J. H. STEWART LOCKHART,
Colonial Secretary.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 12th March, 1902.

BYE-LAWS

Made under section 13 sub-section 16 of "The Public Health Ordinance, 1901."

DEPÔTS FOR CATTLE, PIGS, SHEEP AND GOATS.

The following Bye-laws are hereby substituted by the Sanitary Board for those previously made by such Board on April 18th, 1901, and published in the *Gazette* as Government Notification No. 387 of 1901:—

A.—Within the Limits of the City of Victoria.

1. The fee payable for each head of cattle housed for export in a Government Depôt within the limits of the City of Victoria shall be fifty cents, and the fee payable for each pig, sheep or goat similarly housed for export shall be twenty-five cents.

B.—Outside the Limits of the City of Victoria.

2. The fee payable for each head of cattle housed for slaughter in a Government Depôt outside the limits of the City of Victoria shall be two cents for the day of entry and a further sum of two cents for every additional day that each head of cattle remains in such depôt.

3. The fee payable for each head of cattle housed for export in a Government depôt outside the limits of the City of Victoria shall be fifty cents, and the fee payable for each pig, sheep or goat similarly housed for export shall be twenty-five cents.

C.—General.

4. The Sanitary Board provides water only for the use of the cattle, pigs, sheep and goats housed in the Government Depôts. The owners of such animals must provide proper and sufficient food, and must send men in sufficient numbers, to look after, feed, and water such animals.

Accommodation for such men is provided on the premises.

5. Neither the Government nor the Sanitary Board will be responsible for the safe custody of any cattle, pigs, sheep or goats housed in the Government Depôts.

Made by the Sanitary Board this 6th day of March, 1902.

G. A. WOODCOCK,
Secretary.

Approved by the Legislative Council this 11th day of March, 1902.

R. F. JOHNSTON,
Acting Clerk of Councils.