

REPORT OF SELECT COMMITTEE

Appointed to enquire into the correctness of the statement contained in a reply of the Honourable Mr. Smithe, on the 26th February, 1883, "That the late Government left no information in the Departments as to the relative cost of the work on Dry Dock by day labour as against contract prices."

The Committee selected to enquire into the correctness of the statement contained in a reply of the Honourable Mr. Smithe, on the 26th February, 1883, "That the late Government left no information in the Departments as to the relative cost of the work on Dry Dock by day labour as against contract prices," beg to report to this Honourable House as follows:—

That they enquired into this matter on the 10th day of March, 1883, and they find that, although no statement as to the relative cost of the work on the Dry Dock by day labour as against contract prices had been made by the late Government, still there were papers in the office of the Resident Engineer at Esquimalt from which such statement could have been made in a reasonable time up to the 5th day of December last. The Engineer states that it will take him another week, having already been employed since the end of the last month, to make a statement of the relative cost to the 1st day of March instant. The Resident Engineer states in his evidence that from the books in his office a statement of relative cost can be made up in a reasonable time with extra assistance. We have the honour to submit the evidence as taken before us.

ROBT. McLEESE.

Chairman.

MEETING OF COMMITTEE.

10TH MARCH, 1883.

Present,—Mr. McLeese, in chair; Messrs. Duck, Semlin, and Pooley.

Hon. Mr. Smithe present.

MR. BENNETT, called,—

Q. Can you tell me now how much the work done on the Dry Dock by day labour costs as against the contract prices? A. I have not yet completed the accounts.

Q. Do you remember my asking you shortly after I took office if you could give me any idea of the relative cost of day labour and contract work on the Dock? A. I think I do, and I think I told you at the time that the information could not be obtained until the work had been measured up and the accounts brought up to date.

Q. Do you remember my subsequently asking you to measure up the work with a view of determining the relative cost of day labour and contract work? A. I do.

Q. Are the accounts kept in such a way as to make the information obtainable? A. They are.

Q. Had the late Government instructed you to measure up the work so as to enable them to form an estimate of the relative cost of day labour and contract prices? A. I can't say I was instructed to do it with that view, but I did measure up the work; I was instructed to do so.

Q. When I asked you the question had you the measurements mentioned? A. Yes, up to the 5th December.

Q. If you had those measurements, how was it that you told me you could not give me any idea of the relative cost of day labour against contract prices? A. Because the accounts had not been made up in that way.

Q. Had you ever measured up the work with a view of getting at the relative cost of day labour and contract prices? A. No.

Q. Were the Government in a position, on the 5th December, to tell the relative cost of day labour and contract prices? A. No.

Q. Up to the 5th of December was there any data by which the Government could have obtained the relative cost of day labour and contract prices? A. Up to the 5th of December there were some papers in my office at Esquimalt from which the relative cost could have been obtained; there never has been a statement of relative cost made, but the papers are in my office from which such a statement can be made.

Q. How is it then that, with the information you have in your office, you have kept me waiting a month for the information asked for as to the relative cost of day labour as against contract work? A. Because I understood you wished for information up to the date at which you spoke to me.

Q. How long would it take you now to prepare a statement showing the relative cost of work done by day labour as compared with the cost of such work under contract? A. With the assistance of one extra clerk I think I could get the information out in a week.

Q. Are the accounts kept so that this statement as to relative cost could be readily obtained within a week provided you had proper assistance? A. Certainly, if I had proper assistance.

Q. How long have you been engaged under Hon. Mr. Smithe's instructions in getting at this statement of relative cost? A. About the middle of February Mr. Smithe asked me to measure up the work. I told him I would see Mr. Gamble at once. Mr. Gamble had to leave for Nanaimo next morning and did not return till the end of the week. At the commencement of the next week I was taken unwell and was unable to begin the measurement till the last day of the month.

Q. If, with the aid of Mr. Gamble, you have taken from the end of last month to date, and inform the Committee you will still require a week, with extra assistance, to give the relative cost of the work, how can you say the relative cost can at any time be made out in a week? A. If the office work were kept up to date I could manage to get my work finished in a week.

Q. Has the office work been so kept up to date? No, because I have never had proper assistance.

Q. Is it not a fact then that the information could not have been obtained in a week? A. The information could not have been obtained in a week without the necessary assistance had been there to put the books into correct shape.

Q. What should that extra assistance be in your opinion? A. A competent clerk.

Q. Could the Chief Commissioner, when he asked you to get out the relative cost of work of day labour as against contract prices, have obtained that information within a week had he given you an extra clerk? A. No, I do not think he could.

Q. Why not; and how long would it take? A. I don't think a clerk could have posted up the books and made the detailed statement in that time. Not more than another week, perhaps not as long.

Q. Can you tell now the relative cost of day labour and contract prices? A. No.

Q. Could you or any one, so far as you know, in the Departments have informed the Chief Commissioner a month ago when he asked the question, "Whether the work done by day at the Dock was costing more or less than contract prices?" A. Without making up the accounts it would be impossible to tell amount.

Q. Were the accounts made up so that you could tell? A. No.

Q. Had the late Government ever made up an account of the relative cost of day labour and contract prices? A. No.

Q. On the 5th December, from the material you had in the office, could you have made up a statement of relative cost within a week? A. No, not within that time.

Q. Did you, on the 5th December, know the amount of stone cut; and is it recorded in the books of the office at that date? A. I believe I have a memorandum to that effect, but I am not sure. It is not entered in the books of the office.

Q. Did you, on the 5th December, know the amount of cement used on the work done by day labour? A. Yes, that could be obtainable to any day.

Q. Did you, on the 5th December, know the amount of stone quarried; and was it entered in your books at that date? A. I cannot tell how much stone was quarried, I only know what was received at the works to that date.

W. BENNETT.

CHAS. E. POOLEY,
Secretary.