

GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS.

MARINE DEPARTMENT.

READ—the following paper:—

From J. C. SHAW, Esq., Chairman, Chamber of Commerce, Madras, to the Chief Secretary to Government, dated Madras, 20th June 1884.

The Acting Master Attendant having been prevented, by conscientious scruples, from complying with the Chamber's request to seek from the Government authority to reduce the harbour dues demanded on coal, it has become necessary for the Chamber to address the Government direct on the subject instead of through the channel of the Marine department. The Chamber made no demand that need have shocked the Acting Master Attendant's sense of official propriety. It may be taken for granted that the Government, while anxious to secure a revenue from the harbour, is indisposed to sanction the continuance of burdens that are found, by experience, to be detrimental to the interests of trade and the general well-being of the community. Coal is an article of import that is already so weighted by freight that peculiar care is needed in apportioning the burden upon it on account of harbour dues. But the harbour demand is Rs. 1-5-6 per ton of 20 cwt., which represents a tax or import duty on a foreign product of 6 to 7 per cent. The Chamber need not dwell upon the expediency of encouraging local industries, such as spinning and weaving mills, or on the inexpediency of imposing a tax on the fuel, which is more or less essential to the successful working of those mills.

2. The Acting Master Attendant sees force in the argument that "large sums of money, amounting in all to nearly Rs. 15,000, have already been paid without any demur by importers of coal." The Chamber cannot but presume that the importers referred to include the railway companies, which, under existing conditions, have not the pressing need to study comparatively small economies that is experienced by private importers of coal. But the magnitude of the sum raised to date seems to the Chamber to strengthen, rather than weaken, the case for the reduction of so onerous, however for the moment lucrative, a demand as is now made. The Acting Master Attendant demurs to the proposition for a reduction of that demand on the ground that the harbour dues were adjusted by a committee on which were several members of the mercantile community, and that ample time was allowed to the Chamber and the mercantile community generally to find and express objections to those dues. The Chamber is not prepared to say that the schedule received as minute attention as it deserved from those whose interest it was destined to affect. There has been, it may be frankly admitted, some lack of symmetry in the views regarding harbour taxation that have been expressed by the Chamber from time to time since the harbour was prospected. But the gift of infallibility is not bestowed upon Chambers of Commerce any more than upon Governments, and it is easy to make too much of slight inconsistencies between present and former executives of public bodies. The Chamber wishes now, as always, to see the port provided with a complete harbour, but it also desires to see the trade protected from oppressive taxation. Harbour advantages will be obtained at too high a price if that price tends to prohibit trade. A schedule that admits of so important a commodity as coal being taxed 6 to 7 per cent. on value must be in need of immediate revision.

3. I am, therefore, desired to represent to the Government the necessity for that revision, and to say that the Chamber will be glad to co-operate (with the aid of the experience acquired since the schedule came into force) in the scrutiny which is demanded, in view to the equitable re-adjustment of the incidence of harbour taxation.

ORDER—dated 26th June 1884, No. 275, Marine.

The expediency of re-adjusting the harbour dues had, previous to the receipt of their Chairman's letter, been under the consideration of Government, and the Committee constituted to advise on matters connected with the harbour administration have been requested to assemble in view to a revision of the schedule of rates. The letter from the Chamber will be forwarded to the committee.

(True Extract.)

E. F. WEBSTER,
Chief Secretary.

To the Chairman, Chamber of Commerce.
 " the Collector of Madras.
 " the Hon. A. Mackenzie.
 " the Superintending Engineer, Presidency Circle.
 " the Commissioner of Police.
 " the Master Attendant, Madras.
 " the Harbour Works Engineer.
 " J. A. Boyson, Esq.
 " R. Turnbull, Esq.
 " J. C. Shaw, Esq.
 " F. W. Emery, Esq.
 " H. R. Dawson, Esq.
 " the Government Solicitor.
 Copy to the Public Works department.

Ed. C. Howarth.

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" the Government Solicitor.

Copy to the Public Works department.

Gabt. of (1884) Madras.

MARINE.

Issued

Recd.

Encl.

G.O., 26th June 1884, No. 275.

JUNE.

Harbour Dues.

Forwarding, with remarks, to the committee constituted to advise on matters connected with the harbour administration letter from the Chamber of Commerce regarding the revision of — on coal.

Govt. of (1884) Madras.

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B/A 171025 7/10/84

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Copy to the Public Works department.

Exd. C. Howarth.

B No. 171017 d/10/7/84

Recorded in
continuation of
G.O. No. 166717 d/
3rd July/84

(CB)

Gobt. of (1884) Madras.
MARINE.

Issued

Recd.

Encl.

G.O., 26th June 1884, No. 275.

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With or

21st JUNE 1884, No. 1381, FINANCIAL.