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TAMIL NADU ARCHIVES

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU

Revenue DEPARTMENT

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GOVERNMENT OF MADRAS.

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT.

11th September 1877, No. 409 R.

Railway.

Read the following papers:—

No. 42. Endorsement of the Consulting Engineer for Railways, dated Madras, 17th August 1877, No. 417.

From Major K. A. JOPP, R.E., Engineer in charge of Bellary-Hubli State Railway, to Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. M. SHAW-STEWART, R.E., Consulting Engineer for Railways, dated Bellary, 6th August 1877, No. 610.

As requested in your No. 1,293, dated 2nd instant, I have the honor to report upon the points, in order, to which my attention has been drawn.

The Article which appeared in the *Madras Times* of 1st instant is full of inaccuracies so patent to every one at all connected with the railway that it is not my intention to notice more of them than actually stand in my way whilst framing this report.

(1) *Contract System*.—I have before stated that, as no contracts are entered into with persons selected to employ labor, I have not called the system a contract system; but as not doing so appears to give offence to some individual unconnected with the work, I am quite willing to concede the point and to acknowledge for the contentment of any one who prefers to call it so that the system is one of petty contract.

Admitting the term into this report, there are thirty-three contractors at work on this railway in the Madras Presidency. In the Bellary taluq, to which the writer of the Article appears to confine his remarks, eighteen contractors are engaged (which, I may parenthetically remark, at "6 miles" per contractor would show that work is being simultaneously carried on over a length of 108 miles of line in the Bellary taluq alone).

Since the end of May coolies have ceased to be sent in gangs to my works. Able-bodied persons "who crowd to the Government relief camps for assistance" are excluded as far as possible from these camps, and informed that they can find employment on the railway; the force of necessity alone drives them to me. Those who come, obtain work under any contractor they like to patronize; they are told or easily learn the amount of wage they can claim for work performed.

It being directly to the interest of each contractor to obtain as many coolies as possible, and each cooly (who is no longer a member of a gang, tyrannized over by a Kolkar, but a free agent to come or go) having power to have one contractor and try another, it could only be by a well organized system of combination that the contractors could "grind down the poor wretches under them," and under no system could they be "made to work from early morn till far into the night, only to receive in return for their labor less for a whole day than Government allow the coolies on other relief work for a single meal," or compel them to perform double the work per half the price allowed to the contractor.

There is nothing in the contract system as carried out with famine labor differing from the same system in ordinary times, save that the laborer need not accept the contractors own terms, but can demand the rates laid down by me.

Work is supervised by myself, three Assistant Engineers, one Sub-Engineer, and six Overseers or Surveyors, all Europeans; of which proportionate numbers are employed in the Bellary taluq. The Native Overseers are all Queen's Own Sappers and Miners. I have set my face against employing men of the Maistries and Kolkar type, and fully expect to be attacked in the papers by one of their fraternity also.

The District Famine Officer (Captain Hackett), the other European besides myself mentioned by the writer of the Article, is under the orders of the Collector of Bellary, and in no way connected, otherwise than working hand in hand, with me. Another Famine Officer, Mr. Coombes, has been placed at my disposal by the Collector of Bellary.

Mat huts are provided for all coolies who do not return to villages to sleep.

(2.) *Low rate of Pay received by Coolies.*—The rates of pay the cooly can demand have been reported to Government; they vary according to the nature of the soil, length of lead, and depth of pit. The lowest rate is 2 Annas per yard, and I am extremely liberal in raising this rate on the slightest excuse.

If there was no weak point in it, my system would be perfection. It is not perhaps possible to ensure the payment by a contractor of the exact amount laid down by me; but as the knowledge of the rates is widely disseminated, and any complaint made is investigated and a cooly can leave a hard contractor and go to another, I do not believe that very much of the grinding process so graphically described in the Article can be at work and without my knowledge; I should be very much surprised to find that the weakest cooly on my works did not earn over 2 Annas a day.

(3.) *High death-rate among Coolies.*—In the Bellary taluq the coolies employed on the railway receive, in common with those in villages and on other relief work, medical aid from the Civil agency. The return of deaths is submitted by Captain Hackett, the District Famine Officer, to the Divisional Officer, who informs me that "the deaths along the line of railway in this taluq were 74 in May and 46 in June; but these numbers include a certain number of deaths not connected with the railway, as wherever there is a camp or hospital outsiders are sure to come for relief. Probably three-fourths of the numbers given relate to Railway coolies or their children." The average daily number of coolies in this taluq was in May 3,100 and June 3,858.

In the Hospett taluq the sick are cared for by Apothecaries under my orders.

The return for the last month shows 119 admitted to, and 72 discharged from, hospital, and 12 deaths, of which 4 were from cholera, 7 from diarrhoea and dysentery, and 1 from dropsy.

The average daily number of coolies in Hospett taluq was 5,184.

(4.) *Insufficient Medical attendance.*—I experienced some difficulty at first in obtaining medical assistance, but I have now two European Apothecaries, and in the absence of any severe epidemic these are sufficient.

I am well supplied with medicines and other necessities.

No. 42-A. From Major K. A. JOPP, R.E., Engineer in charge of Bellary-Hubbli State Railway, Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. M. SHAW-STEWART, R.E., Consulting Engineer for Railways, dated Bellary, 13th August 1877, No. 638.

In compliance with your No. 1,338, dated 9th instant, I have the honor to communicate the following additional information concerning the system obtaining on this Railway:—

"*The nature of the contracts.*"—In theory, each contractor is bound to conform to the general rules laid down in the Circular No. 163, a copy of which accompanied my No. 245, dated 28th May, to your address, and to the terms of the following memorandum, a copy of which is given to him:—

Memorandum				
Contract rates—				
Easy soil	...	...	...	per cubic yard.
Hard soil and gravel	...	...	...	do.
For each yard in depth over three feet, an additional	...	...	...	do.
Rates to be given to coolies by contractor—				
Easy soil	...	...	...	do.
Hard soil and gravel	...	...	...	do.
Below 3 feet—				
Easy soil	...	...	...	do.
Hard do.	...	...	...	do.

The contractor will also have to supply the coolies with water and have the embankment levelled and slopes dressed.

In practice, the contractor generally converts these rates into other terms, requiring from 8 to 5 yards for 1 rupee; this being practically an easier computation. Contractors however frequently make their own terms with their men, giving out a certain portion of the work, generally one pit, to a gang who provide their own women and children for leading the earth from the pit; this gang will generally ask for an advance from the contractor, of say three or four days' pay all round, and will set

to work and only demand payment again on the completion of their pit. If this gang makes a good business of it, well and good; if not, the members are very sure to complain to myself or officers either that the lead was longer than they had agreed to, or the soil was harder, and the contractor is for his own sake willing to abide by our decision.

Perhaps the terms so made between gangs and contractors are not as advantageous to the coolies as those I have laid down; but when the coolies accept these terms and are content, I consider that any interference on my part would be most impolitic. At some future time, when famine is past and labor is required on Public Works of utility, the local Public Works Officers would find it hard to undo the mischief I had done in the labor market, were I now to force the coolies to accept and demand higher wages than they themselves are willing to work for. I summed up the nature of my system in my No. 610 of the 6th instant, when I said, "there is nothing in the contract system as carried out with famine labor differing from the same system in ordinary times save that the laborer need not accept the contractor's own terms, but can demand the rates laid down by me." I consider it my business on this relief work to see that coolies of all classes can earn and do receive at least as much as the Government subsistence allowance, but not to ruin the market by preventing labor finding its own level.

"*The extent of each?*"—Almost universally I place a distance of 40 chains or half a mile between the commencement of one contractor's work and the commencement of another's; he is not allowed to straggle his men over this half mile so as to ensure obtaining the whole length, but is required to concentrate the labor he employs on a few chains at a time. If he gives satisfaction, he generally obtains the entire earth-work of the half mile. I have no hard and fast rule, but I may say roughly that one furlong is the extent of each man's contract at one time.

"*How often work is measured up and paid for to the contractor?*"—The contractor can by his terms demand "that his work shall be measured up and that he shall be paid once a week, and not oftener, unless the officer in charge desires or consents to make more frequent payments."

Practically the contractors prefer less frequent payments, and will leave their pits, and banks unfinished to prevent final measurements being taken; this is notoriously the case in the Hospett Division.

Payments are made to contractors on the actual completion of any length of bank or any pit; the object being to prevent complication, or possibility of paying twice over for the same work. I find by my accounts that the intervals between payments made to any one contractor range from 4 to 32 days.

"*What sum the coolies actually earn?*"—It is impossible to answer this question definitely or approximately, and neither the cooly nor contractor can tell me. I have ascertained that some earn 6 Annas a day; whereas in the Bellary tank, where good earth for the bank has to be obtained from many different places and depths, making rating complicated, and where the contractors are ordered by me to take on every Bellary person willing to work, some coolies are accepting the old rates of Annas 2 per man and Annas 1-6 per woman or child, and are working very cheerfully on those rates; others make their own terms.

"*How often are they paid?*"—Those as above who take daily rates are paid daily; some contractors always pay daily, others on the completion of the self-accepted task, or partly in advance and partly on completion.

"*And whether they are paid extra rates for extra lead and lift?*"—From the explanations I have above given, it will be seen that coolies are paid indirectly for extra lead and lift, that is to say, that whether they are paid at the rates of 7, 6, or 5 yards for a rupee is as much dependant on the extra lead and lift as it is on the nature of the soil.

It can, I hope, be quite understood that theoretical intentions cannot always be rigidly adhered to in practice, but the best criterion that my system is working well is that the coolies who are engaged on my works are all perfectly content, are in good condition, and the last medical report I have received states that there is no sickness on the works, cholera having entirely disappeared.

SUBMITTED for the consideration of Government.

(Signed) J. H. M. SHAW-STEWART, Lt.-Col., R.E.,
Consulting Engineer for Railways.

No. 43. ORDER THEREON, 11th September 1877, No. 409 R.

RECORDED.

2. As the earthwork draws to a close, should it become necessary to reduce the numbers employed upon it, Major Jopp will be instructed to discharge the Wudders in the first instance, retaining the work-people sent in need of support to the last.

(True Extract.)

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Lt.-Col., R.E.,
Joint Secy. to Govt., P.W.D.,
Railway Branch.

45657

To the Consulting Engineer for Railways.
„ Famine Department.

21 Sept 77

Exd. A. Grubert.

Spare Copies

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Rev 1877 Dept
Fr No 8069
RAILWAY.

Govt. of 1877 Madras.
PUBLIC WORKS.

✓
THE CONSULTING ENGINEER
FOR RAILWAYS.
&c., &c., &c.

Dated September 11th.

Issued

Recd. September 18th /77

Encl.

G. O., 11th September 1877. No. 409 R.

SEPTEMBER.

Nos. 42-43.

Mis QO 21 September 1877 N 5651.

Bellary-Hubbli Railway. — Papers regard-
ing the —, recorded with instructions.

To the Board of Revenue.
Collector of Bellary.