

Report of T. Hollis Walker, K. C.

(Continued from page 7.)

clined to pay. After his resignation the amount was paid to Mr. Duff by cheque of the Deputy Minister dated 9th April, 1923; and there I am content to leave the matter.

The summer operations in the way of making and improving the roads appear to have turned out well. All the work was done under contracts, the terms of which were carefully considered and while no undue amount of profit reached the contractors the public obtained tangible and useful results. It was in the winter and as the General Election approached that the measure of public money developed, and to keep or to secure their political support aiders were paid for work at the rock sheds which they never performed.

PUBLIC CHARITIES

The fifth and last matter mentioned in the Commission was stated in the following terms:—"Similar allegations have been made respecting the expenditure upon able bodied poor relief by the Department of Public Charities during the years 1922 and 1923."

The Department of Public Charities was also engaged in meeting the special wave of destitution referred to in previous sections of this report, and its activities followed a course very similar to that which was taken by the Department of Agriculture and Mines and of Public Works respectively. From small and defined beginnings it rapidly passed into a period of varied and informal growth developing beyond expenditure, beyond intention and ultimately beyond control and reaching at last a maximum of lavishness in the months of March and April, 1923.

This Department was a sub-department under the Colonial Secretary and was controlled by a Commissioner and a special staff. Its principal function was to bring relief to the permanent and casual poor and it distributed funds at the rate of a dollar per head of the population to relieving officers appointed for the various districts. For many years it has also dispensed a certain amount of help among able bodied persons, though until recently the sums thus expended were comparatively small. In 1917-18 they amounted to \$8692, and in 1918-19 to \$4933. In 1921-22 they reached \$170,756, and in 1922-23 \$286,608. The remarkable increase in 1923 is shown by the following table:

1922, January 55834; 1923, January 24,894.
1922, February 55231; 1923, February 135,384.
1922, March 118,118; 1923, March 333,199.
1922, April 21,460; 1923, April 54,248.

The payments are, however, frequently almost generally made in the month following that in which the relief (in the form of groceries, etc.) has been supplied and it is necessary to add to the table.

May, \$38,677; May, \$74,416.

In the year 1921 the Commissioner was Mr. O'Dwyer, and the chief clerk was Mr. Dunphy. Towards the close of the year Mr. O'Dwyer became seriously ill and the Department was thereupon carried on by Mr. Dunphy, who in important matters took counsel with Mr. Mews, the Deputy Colonial Secretary. To Mr. Mews at the end of 1921 or the beginning of 1922 came Dr. Campbell, the Minister of Agriculture and Mines, complaining that he was in difficulties over his timber contracts and asking that men who could not be relieved by that means should be assisted by the Department of Public Charities. Many members of the House of Assembly made similar requests and Mr. Mews arranged with them for the employment of the people in public works such as cutting wharf sticks, telegraph poles or bridge timber in return for provisions given them. On 11th January, 1922, an Order in Council was made which stated:—"The Commissioner of Public Charities having reported that cases of destitution have arisen in various localities that cannot be relieved through the contracts for cutting wood or by

employment on public works; and as the various Relieving Officers under his department will have to afford relief in such cases; and as there are at present no funds in the Department of Charities to meet such expenditure; and the necessity is urgent; on recommendation of the Commissioner of Public Charities it was ordered that authority be granted him to issue able-bodied relief through his Relieving Officers in such cases when it has been ascertained after careful enquiry that there is actual need which cannot be met in any other way. The expenditure under this authority to be limited at present to the sum of \$20,000. . . . A copy of this was sent to the Commissioner with a covering letter from Mr. Mews, dated 17th January, impressing upon him the necessity of keeping a very close touch upon the different disbursements in this connection," of supervising the expenditure and reducing this relief to a minimum. Circulars were then sent to the Relieving Officers by the Commissioner, which bade them make due and searching enquiry into every case, and emphasized the absolute necessity of taking precautions to detect fraud and to keep such extra relief down to the smallest possible amount. From time to time further sums were allocated by Order in Council to the Department, "for expenditure in connection with the relief of extraordinary destitution"; on 21st September, 1922, it was provided that \$170,755, the amount spent during the financial year 1921-22, should be transferred to loan account 1922, and that out of the balance of that loan \$60,000 should be appropriated to meet able-bodied expenditure for 1923; a further \$25,000 was allocated in December 1922, \$60,000 in April 1923, \$100,000 in July 1923, and so on. In the circulars to the Relieving Officers they were particularly enjoined to keep a separate account of this extra relief and a list of the recipients of the same and to forward the same to the Commissioner weekly. From the first this was entirely neglected and no attempt was ever made to enforce it; distribution was not long restricted to Relieving Officers; accounts were sent in to the Department certified by Chairmen of Road Boards, members

of the House of Assembly, and later candidates for the House of Assembly; money was poured out faster and faster, and as the year 1923 advanced the work in the Department got completely out of hand. In Mr. Dunphy's view the greatest distress was in January, February and March, but the demands were greatest in respect of April, the month before the election; after that event the pressure was relaxed, and in another month or two the work was within bounds again. I have no doubt that a great deal of this money did not go into necessary relief; it was not reserved for proper causes after due and searching enquiry; it was lavishly scattered broadcast with both hands for political purposes.

Mr. Dunphy declined to make himself responsible beyond the limits of the original scheme. He dealt only with accounts certified by Relieving Officers, he knew of no authority under which he could recognize anyone else and he referred all others to the Colonial Secretary and paid them only on his instructions.

A large number of accounts were brought before me. They exhibited every kind of imperfection and irregularity, but all were paid in full. Sometimes there were no details at all, no names of recipients and nothing to show how or in what quantities the goods were, if at all, distributed; sometimes there were mere lists of names, or mere lists of groceries; one account included a considerable quantity of tobacco, several contained items of biscuits, and one was made up largely of peaches, pineapple, greenages and lime juice.

I did not find any instance in which there was actual misappropriation by anyone in the Department, but the whole conduct of the Department was slovenly and unbusinesslike and made possible abuses all over the Island, of which I cannot think that the staff was ignorant.

Three departments of the Public Service were called in to help in meeting the emergency of unusual destitution. There was destitution, unusual destitution, and though I think its extent and dangers have been exaggerated, there was more than enough to call upon the Government to institute special measures of relief. That relief was provided at prodigious cost, far in excess of what was necessary and would have been found sufficient if only proper care and supervision had been exercised and the people had shown a little patriotism. But the prevailing spirit was far otherwise, there were too many who sought only to make out of the position what they could for themselves. Politicians exploited the situation and improperly scattered public money to further their political aims, the recipient rejoiced over the fallacious semblance of getting something for nothing, and general demoralization has been the result. The Departments themselves cannot escape a share of the condemnation. Their restrictions and formalities required by law are the taxpayers' safeguard and to relax them at the behest of a member or even of a Minister is fraught with grave peril. It

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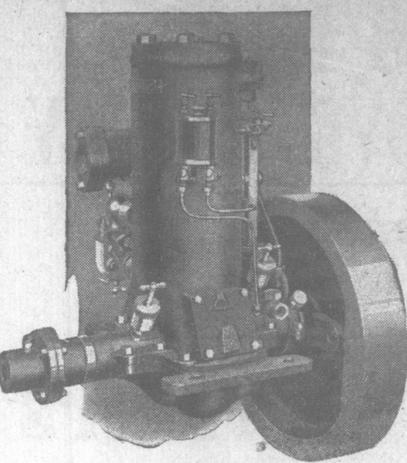
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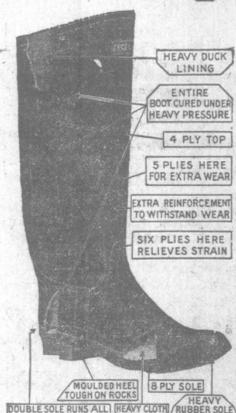
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