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RICHARD, C. H.

1920
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POWELL WOOD PROCESS FOR RAILWAY SLEEPERS

at previous Paper.

Memo. of case for adoption of in connection with railway construction in Kenya.

44986

Minutes within.

at subsequent Paper.

49994

MEMORANDUM FOR CONSIDERATION BY

The Rt. Hon. Viscount Milner

106

in regard to

THE POWELL WOOD PROCESS &c.

1. It is now 19 months since I first brought the above Process to the notice of the Colonial Office (through Major Thornton) with a view to its adoption in British East Africa, now Kenya Colony.
2. A year ago I was officially informed that Viscount Milner hoped to make a decision respecting the Powell Wood Process in a few weeks.
3. An Engineer of the Crown Agents for the Colonies, Mr Spiller, came, early in 1919, to the offices of the Syndicate owning the Powell Process, and made full investigations of its claims.
4. Inquiries were subsequently made regarding experience of the Powell Process in Australia and I understand that the reports from that Country were entirely favourable. Inquiries were probably made in other directions.
5. About the end of April of this year I learned that a new railway, 136 miles long, was to be constructed in British East Africa. That railway is known as the Maitani Railway. I had several interviews with Mr. Hutton, a First Class Clerk (I think) at the Colonial Office, and drew up statements to show that sleepers made of timber grown in Kenya Colony could be produced at about 11/2 a piece (of which 2/3 was to go to a sinking fund) where as steel sleepers, exported from this Country, would cost 28/- each f.o.b. London.

6. I saw Sir Edward Northey, the Governor of the Colony at Mr. Bottomley's office, on the 4th of May and went through my proposals with him.

His Excellency was undoubtedly favourably impressed by those proposals and

(a) asked Mr. Bottomley if it would be possible to borrow from the Railway Loan for the purpose of erecting the Powellising Plant I had suggested. Mr. Bottomley's reply was in the affirmative.

(b) He said quite openly that the Contractor must be consulted.

It appeared to me that, although the Crown Agents had long known of the Process and were, presumably, satisfied as to its merits in relation to Railway Sleepers, a contract had been subsequently entered into for the construction of the Plateau Railway, and that, in this contract, it had been arranged to use "steel sleepers", although, as I have stated, the latter were much more expensive. They are certainly three times as expensive as our timber sleepers, treated by Powell Process.

7. Shortly afterwards, having heard that the final decision as to whether steel sleepers or Powellized wooden sleepers should be used rested with the Consulting Railway Engineers to the Crown Agents for the Colonies, I obtained an interview with Sir Robert Gale, a partner in this Firm of Consulting Railway Engineers. (But see C. O. 30262/1920 of 26th June) My conversation with him showed clearly that the decision would be in favour of "steel" sleepers.

Setting aside my view that the refusal to use the Powell Process involved a very great waste of money to the Colony, there is the fact that I have not yet been informed what the Colonial Office declines to have anything to do

with

Agents would only say what they had said a year before, plus what their Consulting Railway Engineers had to say on the subject.

That, naturally, finished off everything.

It is not pleasant for me to remember that I had acquiesced in all that the Crown Agents Engineers had said and suggested a year before, even going to far as to guarantee to pay for the Experimental Plant which had been proposed to me in 1919, should my claims in regard to the Powell Process prove untenable. I had also offered to go out for six months in charge of that Experimental Plant but nothing more had been said on that point. I saw a short Minute advising that Viscount Milner might be well advised to carefully weigh this proposal of an Experimental Plant, although I had guaranteed to bear any loss

9. I may be told that it is not my affair, but I think I am entitled, having been on Railway Construction in South Africa, to point out that no Contractor should be required for the construction of 136 miles of Railway. The Engineers of a Colony who can't do that much for themselves are not worth their salaries. I can only conclude that they were never asked to say whether they could do it, or not.

Sir Edward Northey is reported (in the "Times") to have publicly stated that the Plateau Railway would cost £2,000,000. I know that 136 miles of the existing line are to be taken up and laid in the new construction, that section of the existing line to be relaid with new material. Disregarding the cost of that operation, which should not be very high, the Plateau Railway, if the £2,000,000 were spent on construction alone, would cost £14,700 per mile! Allowing for stations and sidings and telegraph wires, gangers' cottages etc., the cost is appalling for a metre gauge Railway.

I confine myself to the one item of sleepers, steel sleepers, costing 28/- apiece. F.O.B. London, must cost at least 40/- by the time they are laid in the track in Kenya Colony. There will be quite 275,000 of them in 126 miles of construction, including sidings. The outlay, therefore, at £2 each, amounts to £550,000. Had my suggestion been adopted, that outlay would not have exceeded £160,000, of which £32,000 would have been set aside to pay for the requisite Powellizing Plant - which would continue working for many years - and £89,375 would have been paid to local timber concessionaires for imposing green sleepers at 6/6 each, at which price Major E. S. Grosvenor, D.S.O., had assured my Solicitors and myself that he would be willing to supply such sleepers for this particular railway contract. Other concessionaires would no doubt have been equally prepared to meet all sleeper requirements.

Assuming that my figures are not accurate and that steel sleepers would only cost £500,000 (instead of £550,000) and that cut sleepers would cost £200,000 (instead of £160,000) a saving of £300,000 would have been affected. If interest on the Kenya Colony Railway Loan is at 6%, the difference between the capital cost of the two kinds of sleepers being £300,000, the saving in interest, every year, would amount to £18,000. Even if our sleepers only lasted 7 years, that saving (disregarding compound interest) would amount to £126,000. If Professor Boulger and Mr. Pearson are right and the Powellized sleepers last 12 years, then the saving of £18,000 per annum would amount, on the same basis to £216,000 - more than enough to relay entirely the whole line.

Viscount Milner is anxious to develop our Colonies. May I venture to point out how Kenya Colony is being

handicapped if my knowledge of this Plateau Railway Contract is correct.

(a) I understand that the contractor is to lay down all material supplied to him free of charge, receiving a percentage of the cost of his remuneration.

(b) If that remuneration is 10% on a Sleeper costing 4/- delivered to him, the contractor receives 4/-.

(c) If there are 275,000 Sleepers, the commission in respect of this item alone, will amount to £55,000 entailing an annual payment in interest (6%) of £3,300.

(d) Whether the contractor pays the necessary labourers or not, this expenditure is wastefully high.

I am, of course, very much in the dark, but Viscount Milner can naturally procure the precise terms of this Railway Contract. I do not think he will approve of them.

To turn to my own affairs, I beg that you will submit this statement to his Lordship for his favourable consideration. Legally, of course, I have no redress, but I am confident that Viscount Milner will feel that I have been very badly treated and will agree that I should not have been submitted to the worry and anxiety through which I have gone, and that it was quite unnecessary to keep me hanging on spending money and time on waiting for the definite decision which has never yet been sent to me. If his Lordship regards my point of view as justified, I would submit one proposal which would benefit Kenya Colony and myself, and atone for the past without any cost to the Colonial Office or the Colony.

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd) C.H. Fritchard.

23rd September, 1920.

4/20/20 Kemp

4 October 1920

Dear Sir,
With reference to
the above I have to advise
communications which
passed in 1917 in June
last on the question of

DRAFT.

A.

MINUTE.

- Mr. Bowdler, 2/19/20
- Mr. [unclear]
- Mr. [unclear]
- Mr. Grindle
- Sir El. Lambert
- Sir H. Bond
- Sir G. Fiddes
- Col. Anson
- Lord Milner

1/2

ad. [unclear] to Powell Brook
Process in [unclear] [unclear]
I have to say that
it is the opinion that
a conference should be
held at which the matter
can be discussed.
The conference has
been proposed for Thursday
Oct. 28, at 3.30 pm

~~Mr. Bottomley~~

Mr. Britchard came to see me personally yesterday and left with me the attached memorandum. He ~~seems~~ to be very sore at the ill-considered treatment which he had received at the hands of the Crown Agents and this Office. The main grievance appears to be the delay in giving him a ~~written~~ answer as to whether his process ~~will~~ be adopted for sleepers on the Railway or not.

*Government Engineer into
his complaints.*

Hest

24.3.33

~~Sir H. ...~~

attach a copy of ...
on this subject. I ~~do not~~ want to see any
keep any undue delay in a matter of such great
importance to ~~the~~ a principal interest, as you
will notice, as ~~the~~ required by the reference to
Western Australia or final submission of the
proposals to the Government and the enquiries
which Sir E. Kennedy has ~~been~~ or making since his return
to the Colony. I have still waiting for his final
views by telegram.

Apart from delay there has certainly been

no objection in the East African Department. For as
 yet I have gone as far as pressing the apparent merits
 of the ~~new~~ process as I could, without exposing myself
 to enquiry as to the size of the cheque.

As regards the Crown Agents, I only know what
 Mr. Pritchard had already told me of the interview
 referred to in paragraph 6 of this memorandum. I still
 think the Consulting Engineers attitude is unduly
 conservative and that the figures given in their reports
 attached to K2226/20 are based upon prejudiced opinion
 as to the relative life of steel creosoted and Powellised
 sleepers. This question of life is the crux of the
 whole matter. No amount of guarantee as to replacement
 during the term of years will satisfactorily settle the
 question whether the Government will or will not lose
 in the long run by the adoption of the process.

As to details; Paragraph 6 (b), Sir E. Northey
 of course meant that in the event of the process being
 considered satisfactory it would be necessary to consult
 the contractor before the contract was provided for, and
 not that the Contractor should be consulted before the
 process was turned down. The following paragraph is
 purely a repetition on Mr. Pritchard's part. The
 contract for the construction of the railway has not yet
 even been entered into.

Paragraph 7: As I have pointed out, we are
 not yet in a position to inform Mr. Pritchard whether
 the Colonial Government wish to have an experimental
 plant or not. His reference to information received
 on the 6th July must be to one of his numerous calls
 here. I had already informed him on the 18th June that
 I thought there was no chance of his process being taken
 up

up beyond a small experimental plant. I have put
 this in communication with Mr. Burtchowsky, the Chief
 Conservator of Forests.

Paragraph 8: The last paragraph is not
 specially relative to the main issue, since the
 discussion which has taken place has not been on the
 question of the terms for an experimental plant, but
 on the adoption of the process generally. It will
 be time to take up the terms on which we should start
 an experimental plant when we hear from the Government
 that he wants one. I do not understand the last
 sentence of this paragraph; of course Mr. Pritchard
 has seen no minutes here.

Paragraph 9: It is certainly not within
 Mr. Pritchard's province to discuss whether railway
 construction in Kenya should be done departmentally
 or by a contractor. As a matter of fact it was ~~the~~
~~Government~~ ^{the} recommended construction by a contractor.

Plans for the railway programme are still
 under consideration and the mileage is under reconsid-
 eration. This must vitiate Mr. Pritchard's calculation
 and the points mentioned on the last page of the
 memorandum are based on inaccurate information; in
 particular the contractors' remuneration will not be
 10%, but 5%.

In regard to the last complete paragraph on
 page 5, I do not think that either Professor Boulger
 or Mr. Pearson are able to say definitely that
 Powellised sleepers of East African wood will, under
 East African conditions, last 12 years. Mr. Bettie
 in 36336 stated that he had discussed the matter with

Mr.

Mr. Pearson and Pritchard and he suggested that the two others should be consulted. It will perhaps be better if we consult Mr. Pearson, and I suggest that we should still ask Mr. Battiscombe (who is on leave) what Mr. Pearson told him.

In regard to the last paragraph of the memorandum, all we can say is that we are not yet in a position to give him a final answer as we are still waiting for the reply by telegram from the Governor. Say, however, that his telegram will probably deal only with the question of Powellized plant for experimental purposes, as it seems likely, as he was informed orally on the 10th June, that the Governor will not be prepared to recommend that Powellized sleepers should be adopted in the future railway construction without previous experiment.

Add that Lord Milner regrets that the consideration of the process has taken so long, but he cannot admit there has been any undue delay in considering the scheme, the success or ^{failure} of which would be a serious matter for the Colonial Government.

There remains the last sentence in which Mr. Pritchard says that he still has a proposal to make. I am not anxious to engage in any interview with Mr. Pritchard alone and it will be best for him to be asked to make this proposal in writing. If he does not wish to do this a meeting might be arranged at which Colonel Carmichael should be invited to be present, and I hope that you will be willing to preside.

W.C.S. 27 9.20
A.S. 27/10/20

Mr. Bottonley

I spoke to you today. I have now spoken to Lord Milner. He thinks a conference should be held at which Sir R. Read, yourself, Mr. Pritchard and Colonel Carmichael should be present, together with any others you think fit, and that this conference should be presided over by Colonel Amery. I have also spoken to Colonel Amery, who agrees. If you will arrange a date with Colonel Amery, I will communicate with Mr. Pritchard.

1.10.20

Net

Reference to 400
John on Secretary

Mr. Bottonley

Thursday 17th Oct at 3.30

Meeting with Mr. Pritchard

at 10.15

- 836/19 4.2.19. Pritchard asks for consideration of his process.
- 14.2.19. Letter referred to Crown Agents.
- 23497/19 15.4.19. - Crown Agents report that Pritchard cannot yet submit proposals owing to illness of a Director.
- 3172/19 26.6.19. Crown Agents report on discussion and make various suggestions. Recommend reference to Western Australia as to success of process.
- 33.6.19. Agent General, Western Australia, asked for report.
- 5125/19 27.10. Agent General, Western Australia, has cabled to the Government.
- 63020/19 22.7.19. Pritchard welcomes enquiry, but fears hostile response from opponents in Australia. Shows every chance of rebutting.
- 5182/19 7.10.19. Agent General, Western Australia, sends report.
- 59186/19 14.10.19. Pritchard submits proposals for a timber concession on the Tana River. Asks that matter may be discussed with Governor on his arrival.
- 4.11.19. Pritchard informed that this would be done.
- 5.11.19. Correspondence sent out to East Africa Protectorate for consideration, including consideration of the Powell process.
- 9.12.19. Discussed with Sir E. Northey, who says that matter must be left to Acting Governor.
- 15.12.19. Pritchard is informed.
- 7324/19 30.12.19. Pritchard is further asked to the advantage of good intelligence.
- 5.1.20. Copy sent to East Africa Protectorate.
- 12731/20 31.1.20. Despatch from Acting Governor received.
- 20.3.20. Matter referred to Sir E. Northey where attention is drawn to great sawing in railway

cost if process suitable.

Sir E. Northey considers that more information from Australia would be required as to the process. ~~Wishes~~ ^{Wishes} generally as to concession and considers that Pritchard should go out to

18.4.20. Pritchard complains of delay.

20.4.20. Oral discussion with Pritchard who was placed in communication with Kaiser ^{Group} as to timber being available.

23.4.20. Sir E. Northey's views and extracts from reports of Chief Conservator of Forests and General Manager of the Uganda Railway sent to Pritchard. Secretary of State shares local view that the Government should limit itself to commercial dealings with any Company Pritchard may form and all possible assistance ^{from} ~~should~~ be given to such a Company.

Despatch received on question of wood distilla- 20219/20
to

sent to Pritchard.

Pritchard furnishes estimate of cost and 22226/20

probability of Powellized sleepers.

Views of Sir E. Northey and Pritchard.

Difficulty in finance by Government.

Crown Agents.

10.5.20. Pritchard's testimony from Professor Boulger. 23596/20

11.6.20. Views of Crown Agents & Consulting Engineers ^{revised} 22226/20

12.6.20. Conclusions of Consulting Engineers disputed
in detail by East Africa Department.

18.6.20. Telegram sent to Governor summarizing figures as to expenditure proposed on wood, steel, and Powellized ^{wood} sleepers. What does he recommend. If credits suggest small Powellizing plant for experiment.

262/20. 18.6.20. Pritchard called. Informed probably on course beyond small experimental plant and on question of commercial development recommended to get into touch with Mr. Battiscombe,

Chief Conservator of Forests now on leave.

19.6.20. Pritchard complains of attitude of Consulting Engineers, and delay. Requests reference to Pearson and Boulger and asks for discussion with Battiscombe.

26.6.20. Pritchard may discuss with Battiscombe, but decision as to Powellizing depends on report from Government.

16221/20. 27.7.20. Telegram from Governor. General Manager opposed usage of local wood - insufficient until railways built. Experimental Powellizing ^{not} required, but advisable to wait for reply from Australia to telegram which had been sent.

21.7.20. Telegram to Governor stating that re-railing must be postponed so that no question of Australian hardwood arises ^{for that purpose} as regards

material. What mileage of steel sleepers required or does he want Australian hardwood plus experimental Powellizing plant?

26336/20. 22.7.20. Battiscombe able to support Government exploitation of Powellizing process, but

Public Works Department might have a small experimental plant. Has discussed with

Pearson, Lane Poole, and Perree. Suggests that Lane Poole and Perree be consulted.

29.7.20. Crown Agents told to consult Lane Poole and Perree.

- 9.8.20. Crown Agents report Lane Poole has returned to Australia, but they will see Perree. 3534/20
- 25.8.20. Governor reassured by telegram. 41158/20
- 26.8.20. Crown Agents report Perree unfavourable. This is confidential. 41158/20
- 7.9.20. Governor telegraphs that information from Australia unsatisfactory, but has cabled for further details. Hopes to reply to telegram of 21st July soon. 44986/20

Confidential

Reference No. 30252/1920.

119

MEMORANDUM FOR CONSIDERATION BY
The Rt. Hon. W. Jozeff Milner
in regard to
THE POWELL WOOD PROCESS &c.

1. It is now 12 months since I first brought the above Process to the notice of the Colonial Office (through Major Thurstan) with a view to its adoption in British East Africa, now Kenya Colony.
2. A year ago, I was officially informed that Viscount Milner hoped to make a decision respecting the Powell Wood Process in a few weeks.
3. An Engineer of the Crown Agents for the Colonies, Mr. Spiller, came, early in 1919, to the offices of the Syndicate concerning the Powell Process, and made full investigations of its claims.
4. Inquiries were subsequently made regarding experience of the Powell Process in Australia and I understand that the reports from that country were entirely favourable. Inquiries were probably made in other directions.
5. About the end of April of this year I learned that a new railway, 136 miles long, was to be constructed in British East Africa. That railway is known as the Plateau Railway. I had several interviews with Mr. Battonley, a First Class Clerk (I think) at the Colonial Office, and drew up statements to show that sleepers made of timber grown in Kenya Colony could be produced at about 11/3 apiece (of which 2/3 was to go for a sinking fund) whereas steel sleepers, exported from this country, would cost 25/4 each f.o.b. London.

6. I saw Sir Edward Northey, the Governor of the Colony, at Mr. Bottomley's office, on the 4th of May and went through my proposals with him.

His Excellency was undoubtedly favourably impressed by these proposals and

(a) asked Mr. Bottomley if it would be possible to borrow from the Railway Loan for the purpose of erecting the Powellizing Plant I had suggested. Mr. Bottomley's reply was in the affirmative.

(b) He said quite openly that the Contractor must be consulted.

It appeared to me that, although the Crown Agents had long known of the process and were, presumably, satisfied as to its merits in relation to Railway Sleepers, a contract had been subsequently entered into for the construction of the Piteau Railway, and that, in this contract, it had been arranged to use "steel sleepers", although, as I have stated, the latter were much more expensive. They are certainly three times as expensive as our timber sleepers, ~~made by the~~ Powell Process.

7. Shortly afterwards, having heard that the final decision as to whether steel sleepers or Powellized wooden sleepers should be used rested with the Consulting Railway Engineers to the Crown Agents for the Colonies, I absented an interview with Sir Robert Gale, a partner in this Firm of Consulting Railway Engineers. (See C.O. 30262/1920 of 26th June.) My conversation with him shewed clearly that the decision would be in favour of "steel" sleepers.

Setting aside the objection that the refusal to use the Powell-Process involves a very great waste of money to the Colony, there is the fact that I have not yet been informed that the Colonial Office declines to have anything to do

with that Process in relation to Kenya Colony. My last information, on the 6th of July now over two months ago was that the Colonial Office was awaiting a reply from Sir Ronald Portley to a cable that had been sent to him (already referred to above).

After seeing Sir Robert Gale, and thinking that his decision might be overridden if the Colonial Office was satisfied that the Powell Process offered the saving in capital cost that I had shown, I went again to see Mr. Spiller at his office at the Crown Agents. I gathered that if the Authorities concerned were satisfied that our sleepers would give an assured life of seven years, the Powell Process would be adopted. The Secretary to the Crown Agents was with Mr. Spiller when I called. I urged that Professor Boulton, an authority on timber at the Imperial Institute had given his opinion in writing that sleepers of local yellow wood, treated by the Powell Process, would last for fifty years. Hence that, Mr. Ralph S. Pearson, C.I.E., the Indian Forest Surveyist, who has had quite 13 years' experience in India of the Powell Process in connection with sleepers (made of all sorts of timber), has stated that, in his opinion Powellized Yellow Wood Sleepers would last 12 or 16 years in Kenya Colony. There should thus have been no difficulty in satisfying the Colonial Office that a life of 7 years was undoubtedly assured. In my opinion, the Secretary to the Crown Agents and Mr. Spiller were prepared to give that assurance to the Colonial Office; unfortunately, however, Colonel Carmichael came into Mr. Spiller's room and asked how it was getting on with my Process. As soon as he learned what we were arranging, Colonel Carmichael became violent in voice and manner and told the Secretary that he could do what he pleased about it, but the Engineers of the Crown

Agents would only say what they had said a year before, plus what their Consulting Railway Engineers had to say on the subject.

That, naturally, finished off everything.

It is not pleasant for me to remember that I had acquiesced in all that the Crown Agents Engineers had said and suggested a year before, even going so far as to guarantee to pay for the Experimental Plant which had been proposed to me in 1898, should my claims in regard to the Howell Process prove untenable. I had also offered to go out for six months in charge of that Experimental Plant but nothing more had been said on that point. I saw a short Minute advising that Viscount Milner might be well advised to carefully weigh this proposal of an Experimental Plant, although I had guaranteed to bear any loss!

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I am, of course, very much in the dark, but Viscount Milner can naturally procure the precise terms of this Railway Contract. I do not think he will approve of them.

As to my own affairs, I trust that you will submit this statement to His Lordship for his favourable consideration. Legally of course, I have no redress, but I am confident that Viscount Milner will feel that I have been very badly treated and will regret that I should not have been submitted to the W.P.V. and Enslin through which I have gone, and that it was quite unnecessary to keep on paying of enormous money and time on waiting for the definite decision which has never yet been sent to me.

If His Lordship regards my point of view as justified, I would submit one proposal which would benefit the Colony and myself, and at the same time be profitable to the Colonial Office or the Colony.

Yours faithfully,

W. P. V. Enslin

3rd September 1920.

October 1930
Westbury
Dorchester
S.A. Devonshire

125

Under Secretary of State
Colonial Office
S.W.

I am in receipt of notification of the invitation
which has been made to attend
conference, under the presidency of
the President, at 3.30 p.m. on Thursday next,

I gladly accept the invitation of Lord Milner's

Yours -

Sir -

Your obedient servant

A. Pitt-Rivers