

Memo for Cabinet by the Minister of Finance, Customs and PortEngagement of Consultants for Minor Works

The Ministry of Finance is receiving requests from Government Departments for the engagement of private architects on consultancy terms to supervise works of a minor nature.

Some time ago the Director of Agriculture and Fisheries asked for 'Finance' authority for the commissioning of a private engineer, to certify works carried out in the construction of piggeries in connection with the Sorghum Scheme. Similarly another request was put forward, this time from the Postmaster General, for the engagement of a civil engineer for supervising the construction of manholes in connection with the laying of cable equipment. In both cases the requests were made because the Public Works Department had insisted that it could not possibly spare any engineers for such minor tasks due to the fact that the staff of the Department were already overburdened with work.

'Finance' have agreed on more than one occasion to the engagement of consultants in connection with various projects falling under the Second Development Plan, the need for these consultants being accentuated by the urgency of the programme laid down by the Joint Steering Committee. The projects in respect of which consultancies have so far been sanctioned by 'Finance' were all however of a major entity and complexity and it was felt reasonable to assume that the Public Works Department did not have the requisite professional staff to undertake such work. 'Finance' have all along taken the stand that, notwithstanding the difficulties faced by the Public Works Department in recruiting the required number of engineers, they could spare an engineer once in a while to certify or supervise minor works in other departments as for example the construction of piggeries. It would indeed be wasteful to engage a private engineer and pay him handsome fees in accordance with the Tariff (the amount would be £1,515 in the case of the piggeries) when a Public Works Department engineer backed by his subordinates on the technical side in the Department, could be asked to devote a few hours on a job of minor importance. We have recently authorised the employment of a considerable number of student engineers by the Public Works Department and any one of these 'novices' could well be detailed to take on such jobs under the guidance of their seniors.

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The Honourable Minister of Public Buildings and Works, however, could not agree to this and has confirmed the line previously taken by the Public Works Department that they could not possibly be burdened with more work and that both the Postmaster General and the Director of Agriculture should make alternative arrangements.

Efforts have been made to have the work performed by the Departments concerned without the help of the Public Works Department but no proper solution has so far been found. The Postmaster General had proposed assigning the civil engineering work involved in the construction of manholes to one of his telephone engineers who 's also an architect against payment of additional fees but this move was never finalised because the engineer in question has now resigned from the Government service.

Finance still feel that with an effort the unnecessary expense of consultants' fees for minor works could well be avoided. Honourable Ministers are asked to confirm this stand.

5th August, 1969.

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