

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FRIDAY, 7TH NOVEMBER, 1952.

The Council met at 3 p.m., His Excellency the Officer Administering the Government, Mr. John Gutch, C.M.G., O.B.E., President, in the Chair.

PRESENT :

The President, His Excellency the Officer Administering the Government, Mr. John Gutch, C.M.G., O.B.E.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Mr. J. L. Fletcher, O.B.E. (Acting).

The Hon. the Attorney-General, Mr. F. W. Holder, Q.C.

The Hon. the Financial Secretary and Treasurer, Mr. E. F. McDavid, C.M.G., C.B.E.

The Hon. Dr. J. A. Nicholson (Georgetown North).

The Hon. T. Lee (Essequibo River).

The Hon. V. Roth, O.B.E. (Nominated).

The Hon. G. A. C. Farnum, O.B.E. (Nominated).

The Hon. J. Fernandes (Georgetown Central).

The Hon. J. Carter (Georgetown South).

The Hon. W. A. Macnie, C.M.G., O.B.E. (Nominated).

The Clerk read prayer.

The minute of the meeting of the Council held on Thursday, the 6th of November, 1952, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

REPORT AND DOCUMENTS

The Colonial Secretary (Mr. Fletcher, Acting) laid the following reports on the table:—

The Report of the Commissioner of the Interior for the year 1951.

The Report of the Financial Secretary and Treasurer for the year 1951.

UNOFFICIAL NOTICES

KITTY AND LODGE VILLAGES PURE WATER SUPPLY.

Mr. Carter gave notice of the following motion and of his intention to move the suspension of the Standing Rules and Orders at the next meeting of the Council to enable him to proceed with it:—

"Whereas the residents of Kitty Village are suffering great hardships as a result of inadequate water supply, and

"Whereas the only remedy for this water shortage is the construction of overhead tanks at a cost of \$32,000.00 (Thirty two thousand Dollars), and

"Whereas the revenue of the Village is unable to meet this expenditure.

"Be it resolved that this Council recommends that Government advance the required sum as a loan to the Village Council repayable in thirty years."

Mr. Farnum: Before proceeding with the Order of the Day I crave your indulgence, Sir, to bring to your attention and that of this Council a matter which I regard as being of very vital importance to the villagers of Kitty and Lodge and, I venture to say, to the citizen of Georgetown. I refer to the difficulty which the people of the two villages are experiencing now to get water from their artesian wells. It is even more severe in Kitty. The position is, owing to the fact that the population of Kitty has increased very

rapidly during the last six years, most people have to depend on water from the artesian well and a large number of branch lines have been connected to the main line resulting in the pressure on the lines being considerably reduced and the people no longer being able to get water in their homes. It is so bad now that we regard it as a potential danger to one's health, because water is scarcely available to flush the sanitary conveniences. I venture to say that if an epidemic should break out in Kitty or Lodge as the result of that, Georgetown would not escape. Therefore, I feel it is a matter which concerns the Mayor and Town Council of Georgetown as well as the Local Authorities of those districts.

I am therefore appealing to you, Sir, because something has got to be done early, to use your good offices in getting the Mayor and Town Council of Georgetown to do something to help those people to get water immediately. I do know that a Committee has been set up to go into the question, but I am afraid the people cannot wait until it reports because something very serious may happen in the interval. I feel that the Mayor and Town Council of Georgetown are willing to do something to help us get over our difficulty and I do appeal to you, Sir, to see what can be done in the matter.

Mr. Carter: I support all that the last speaker has said. I want to say that I, too, am very much concerned about this problem, and the motion I handed to the Clerk this morning touches on the same matter. I am going to ask that at the next meeting of the Council the Standing Rules and Orders be suspended in order for us to have a full debate on this matter, which concerns not only the residents of Kitty but ultimately concerns the whole of Georgetown as well.

ORDER OF THE DAY.

PROCLAMATION OF FACTORIES ORDINANCE.

Mr. Fernandes, on behalf of **Dr. Jagan**, asked, and the **Chief Secretary** replied to the following questions:

- Q. On the 25th May, 1951, in answer to a question it was stated that:—"It is expected that the Factories Ordinance will be proclaimed later this year." Will Government explain why the Factories Ordinance has not yet been proclaimed? Will Government name the date when the Factories Ordinance will be proclaimed.
- A. Section 46 of the Factories Ordinance, 1947, as repealed and re-enacted by section 11 of the Factories (Amendment) Ordinance, 1949, provides that the Ordinance may come into force in parts by Proclamation published in the Gazette. Up to the present time the Ordinance has been proclaimed with the exception of:—
- Section 17, which provides for a panel of advisers to the Commissioner.
 - Sections 18-20 inclusive, which provide for Safety of buildings; prohibit employment of children in factories and set out conditions for the construction and sale of machinery;
 - Sections 26-29A, which deal with hours and holidays;
 - Section 39, which provides for a display of factory notices;
 - Section 45, which deals with the consequential repeal of other Ordinances.

2. A proclamation is being issued on the 8th November in regard to all these Sections except sections 26-29A. With regard to the latter sections it is desirable to give six months' notice of intention to proclaim these sections in order that occupiers engaged in essential services may seek exemption where necessary from their provisions as provided for in section 29A.

3. The following Regulations have been made under the Factories Ordinance:—

Factories (Fire Escape) Regulations, 1951;	
Factories (First Aid) " 1951;	
Distilleries (Safety) " 1951;	

Distilleries (Health & Welfare) Reg. 1951;
 Distilleries (prescribed Forms) „ 1951;
 Examining Surgeons (Fees) „ 1952.

4. Regulations providing for safety in docks, woodworking and engineering establishments are being prepared. These Regulations will be based on the advice of Committees which were appointed to assist in the preparation of practical Regulations to meet local conditions.

ESTATE DUTY ON C. I. GONSALVES' ESTATE.

Q.—What amount is owing to Government for Estate Duty on Deceased Person's Estates for which Letters of Administration were granted in connection with the estate of Charles Ignatius Gonsalves in 1950? Give gross and net value of real and personal estate and amount of duty payable thereon. To whom were Letters of Administration granted?

A.—This matter has been engaging the attention of the Supreme Court and has not yet been determined. Accordingly, as the matter is *sub judice*, the information cannot be furnished to the Honourable Member.

BILLS—FIRST READING

On a motion by the Attorney-General seconded by Dr. Nicholson the following Bills were read a first time:—

A Bill intituled "An Ordinance further to amend the Summary Jurisdiction (Offences) Ordinance by increasing the maximum penalty that may be inflicted in respect of various acts of indecency."

A Bill intituled "An Ordinance further to amend the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Ordinance, 1940, by increasing the maximum penalty that can be inflicted for using vehicles other than motor vehicles on any road without due care and attention, and matters in connection therewith."

A Bill intituled "An Ordinance to provide for the probation of offenders."

SUBSIDY FOR ST. JOSEPH'S MERCY HOSPITAL

Mr. Roth: I beg to move the following motion—

WHEREAS the St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital and School of Nursing operated by the Sisters of Mercy opened its doors to the British Guiana public on 1st September, 1945, with sixty-four beds;

AND WHEREAS today, with the opening of the New Wing, it provides 134 beds of which 24 are specially reserved for the indigent;

AND WHEREAS the hospital caters for every section of the Community without regard to race or creed, having during the first five years of its existence treated 8,341 in-patients and 25,292 out-patients;

AND WHEREAS the hospital has maintained a steady policy of progress, keeping in line with modern medical and surgical development by installing up-to-date equipment;

AND WHEREAS all this has not been done without great expense and the cost of maintenance, equipment, medicine and food has risen considerably within the past five years and is still rising;

AND WHEREAS the debt on the New Wing still exceeds \$200,000;

BE IT RESOLVED, in view of the above facts and especially in view of the gap in medical care and attention to the community at large which this hospital undoubtedly has filled and is filling, that this Honourable Council recommends strongly to Government the favourable consideration of granting a subsidy to this most valuable institution.

Sir, there is little I can add to what has been stated in the preamble to this motion, except to ask hon. Members to consider what the position would have been had this hospital not been brought into existence. We know that during the past five or six years all has not been too well with the General Hospital which has always been full. Without the Mercy Hospital what would have happened to the 30 odd thousand patients who have been treated there? Certainly they would have had to try and obtain treatment at the Public Hospital. I do submit that this is one case which is indeed worthy of favourable consideration. I have great pleasure in formally moving this motion.

Mr. Carter: It gives me great pleasure to second this motion. I do not think that any Member of this Council can doubt or question the great work which this hospital has been

doing during the past few years. Even before it became St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital, at the very outset, it started with a good record and has kept up that record. It has increased its accommodation tremendously. As the hon. Mover has said, it has filled a great gap in the health services of this Colony. I, more than many of the Members of this Council, should have special regard for this hospital, because it happens that my father was the first patient at its inception, and, possibly, had it not been for the fact that this hospital was open at the moment I might not have been a Member of this Council. That is why it gives me great pleasure to return services rendered to me personally.

Further than that, I want to make my little contribution to show my appreciation of the work which this hospital has been doing during the past few years and which it will continue to do whether or not a subsidy is granted it. But I do hope this Council will approve of this motion in order that this hospital may not only continue to work effectively but, possibly, increase the good work which it is doing. I second the motion.

Mr. Fernandes: I rise to support the motion of the hon. the First Nominated Member, because I, like himself and the hon. Member for Georgetown South (Mr. Carter) who seconded the motion, know of the good work that this institution has done and is doing and I am sure, will continue to do. I happen to have gone there as a patient. It was the first time in my life I entered a hospital as a patient, and I know what was likely to happen to me if there was no room in the Public Hospital and I could not get the attention I needed. Besides attending to a large number of patients, who pay in some cases, an amount smaller than it costs the institution to give the service they get, there is a number of free beds which persons of all denominations and races are permitted to occupy with free medical and surgical

attention. As a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, I worked in the village of Plaisance and I have had to call at this institution on several occasions to take in the poor who could not get admission in the Public Hospital, Georgetown. This is an instance where a voluntary organization has undertaken the task of helping Government to provide extra hospital accommodation for the people of British Guiana.

But, sir, I am sure the hon. the Financial Secretary and Treasurer knows only too well what the cost of the Public Hospital, Georgetown, is to Government, and I am sure you, Sir, know only too well what it would have cost Government to provide this additional hospital accommodation, and I am equally sure you will agree that this additional accommodation, large as it is—I see the hon. Member has said 134 beds—is still not sufficient to meet all the needs of British Guiana. I will not say Georgetown because, as I have pointed out, free patients go there even from outside the City, and I know quite a number of those who pay small sums also come from outside the City. I feel certain that the money which Government may give by way of a subsidy to this organization will be money well spent, as the organization is doing something that Government should do. The part of the motion that worries me most is in the last "whereas" which reads:—

"And whereas the debt on the New Wing still exceeds \$200,000."

I do not know anything about the internal working of the hospital, but everyone of us knows that Bank Interest has risen in the last few months, and I can well imagine that if this institution has to pay even 5½ per cent., which is the special rate the Banks have asked the Rice Marketing Board to pay, it would be easy for us to see that the interest which this institution has to pay on this amount owing on the institution—\$200,000—would amount to \$11,000 a year, which is a large amount to meet for interest alone. Besides interest it should be obvious to anyone

that the Mercy Hospital, efficiently run as it is, will have great difficulty to have its budget balanced and to be economically sound doing the job at the rates at which it is doing it. The rates in the higher division are sufficiently high, but if this hospital were to put up the rates in the lower division, I can assure you, it would cause a very great hardship to a large number of persons who are forced, because of lack of accommodation elsewhere, to seek the services of this very fine institution.

I do not know what the hon. the First Nominated Member (Mr. Roth) had in mind by way of the size of the subsidy, and it is a little bit difficult just to say "subsidize this institution" and leave it at that. But, sir, it is quite possible that besides giving a subsidy it will naturally be a recurring expenditure for Government to share some of this indebtedness by way of granting a loan free of interest or at a rate of interest smaller than that which the institution is paying now and to be repaid over a period of five or ten years. Every voluntary effort that can be made to raise funds to wipe off this debt is being made, and I am sure that you, sir, know and every Member of this Council also knows that no stone is being left unturned in their efforts to wipe off this debt. I am sure that if Government grant an interest free loan over five years with the necessary surety—I do not mean the hospital building as surety but besides that the signatures of various persons who have worth in immovable property in this country—the sum which Government may find it possible to lend will go a far way in tiding this institution over its financial difficulties.

I am not going to move an amendment to this motion to that effect, but I am going to throw that out for the consideration of Government. Government will have nothing to lose, and it will be much cheaper to do that than to see this very fine organization collapse because of this very high interest charge it has to meet. The cost of

reconditioning of our own public hospital is one that runs into several thousand dollars. If this hospital was not there it might easily have run into a million or 1½ million dollars. So I think every Member of this Council would agree that Government should do everything possible to help those who voluntarily are doing everything humanly possible to carry the burden of social services in this country instead of just sitting back and expecting Government to provide everything for everybody. I most heartily support this motion and hope that, if it is carried Government would be as generous as possible taking the financial situation of British Guiana into consideration.

Dr. Nicholson: As a medical man and a member of the Medical Advisory Committee of the Legislature and as I find myself the only member here, it is only fair that I should tell the Council the feeling of the Members of the Medical Advisory Committee. They unanimously agree that they cannot support the motion. Unfortunately I was not present at the meeting when the vote was taken. They felt that Government had its own hospital programme and, if the St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital was taking off the surplus population from the Public Hospital, Georgetown, when Government's programme gets into its full stride that would be unnecessary. That is their opinion in the matter. There are patients who complain that the fees at St. Joseph's are exorbitant. In fact, the fees are rather low, but persons in this country are accustomed to paying small fees because of a subsidized State hospital where Government pays the salaries of the medical officers. But the higher personnel and the lower personnel of St. Joseph's have to fix their fees on a level slightly above those of the State hospital, and even then there are complaints from the public.

I would like it to be known that St. Joseph's have to keep their fees so low that it is very difficult for them to keep their heads above water. One

has only to go to Trinidad to find that the fee for an operation for appendicitis ranges from \$200 to \$400. St. Joseph's started in a similar manner to Stanislaus College where fees were considered high because of the low fees paid at Queen's College and the B.H.S. I think that alone is good reason for supporting the motion. Another point is that St. Joseph's is a private hospital and private medical practitioners complain that it is in competition with them. That is true, because private medical men have found the number of patients attending their clinics reducing very much because of the fact that the hospital is in competition with them. But even then, I would not stand in the way of a subsidy for this hospital. Personally, I would say that the hospital has helped me out of many a difficulty. I feel that we should support the motion and that Government should go to the aid of this hospital because the founders are not making money; they are losing money. When we think of the salaries of the medical men and of the nurses and so on they have to pay, we would realize that it is difficult for the hospital to exist unless it is helped.

I can assure hon. Members that St. Joseph's hospital is one of the show pieces of the Caribbean and that it is an institution of which we should be proud. Sometimes we have medical men coming to the Colony and we know that our Public Hospital, large as it is, is not a beautiful show piece all the time, apart from its beautiful X-Ray department and so on. The picture changes, however, when one goes to St. Joseph's which is nice and clean. I am afraid I have moved away from the decision of my colleagues on the Medical Advisory Committee. I was not present when they made their decision, but it is only fair for me to tell hon. Members what their opinion was. As I have already stated, private medical practitioners, myself included, feel that the hospital is in competition with us but, in spite of that I support the motion.

Mr. Lee: So far as I can see, one section of the Council is of opinion that this hospital is doing a good turn to the community, but I think we have to consider the other side of the question and that is the Ten-year Plan we have drawn up and which has not yet been implemented. We have to consider whether we should implement this plan before anything else. I feel that if Government has laid down a plan which includes the establishment of hospitals in rural areas for the benefit of poor people there, that should be the first care of Members of this Council. It is all well and good to say that St. Joseph's has a number of beds for indigent persons, but when people come to the City for these beds some of them have been unable to get them. I agree that St. Joseph's hospital is doing good work; there is no doubt about that. Similarly, it can be said that the secondary schools are doing a good turn because the number of students at Queen's College is limited. But, are we subsidizing the secondary schools which are helping the Colony in the light of the educational programme we have laid down? I do not think hon. Members can say we are doing that.

We have borrowed money for the purpose of implementing our Ten-year Plan and we have to ask ourselves whether we should take that money and subsidize other institutions like St. Joseph's rather than helping ourselves first. We have to do our duty to the Colony first, and when we have fulfilled that part of the programme we can do other things. We have not yet completed even 25 per cent of the programme under the Ten-year Development Plan, and perhaps it might be better for Government to say "let's buy over this hospital and run it, because we would be catering for the need of some of the people in the Colony." Government cannot afford to do so at the moment, however, and the hon. Mover of the motion might be asked to show us how we can find money. I think he said he could do so.

Mr. Roth: To a point of correction: I never said any such thing — that I can prove to the Council that we have money to spend.

Mr. Lee: There is not sufficient money to do it. How are we going to subsidize a hospital that does not belong to the Government? I am not saying that it is not doing good work, but we have not got the money to do what this motion is asking. Recently, the Finance Committee thought it advisable to make a grant to the Anglican Body so as to assist them to paint the Cathedral, but there is nothing to show that we have the money to do so. I do not see how Government can grant the request contained in this motion when they have to improve the P.H.G. and also the hospital at Vreed-en-Hoop. Although I have great sympathy with the motion I cannot support it.

Mr. Farnum: I rise to support this motion, and in doing so I am guided by what I know has happened to a certain relative of mine who has had occasion to go to St. Joseph's hospital, and also by what the hon. Member for Georgetown North has said. He is a medical man and should know much about this matter. I think it is well known to many of us what happens when one wants to enter the P.H.G. as a patient. He has to wait for several weeks and very often he has to decide to seek accommodation at St. Joseph's. If St. Joseph's was not in existence many persons would have suffered in this respect. When it comes to the treatment of out-door patients, I think the P.H.G. can take a leaf out of St. Joseph's book, particularly when it comes to treatment of the poor. One knows that patients have to wait for half an hour or an hour before they can see a doctor at the Out-door department of the P.H.G., and I can state what happened to a young relative of mine. The little fellow got wounded and was taken there and had to wait three-quarters of an hour before he saw a doctor. That was, obviously, very unsatisfactory, and I know that there

have been many complaints about similar instances. I have very great pleasure in supporting the motion.

The Financial Secretary and Treasurer: I think, first of all, I should, on behalf of the Government, endorse the commendation which has fallen from the lips of the hon. Mover of the motion and the hon. Member for Georgetown North with regard to St. Joseph's hospital. It is indeed a fine institution and something of which the Colony should be proud. It is also true to say that it is staffed by skilful physicians and surgeons and fine nurses. It caters for the indigent as well as the better off, and it does fill an important gap in our Medical Service. I think the difficulty that Government finds in dealing with this motion is the fact that it is, undoubtedly, controversial. We knew that, as the hon. Member for Georgetown North has said, this matter had to go before the Medical Advisory Committee which unanimously decided not to recommend it to Government. They did so for the reasons mentioned by the hon. Member for Essequibo River. They felt that there was a big plan still before Government including a programme for the P.H.G. which was still incomplete, and there is also work to do with the hospital across the river—to make provision for more beds.

We have also undertaken to implement the recommendations of the Venn Commission and, as the hon. Member for Essequibo River has said, we have merely started on this programme. The second difficulty is that the motion does not attempt to indicate the extent of the subsidy which is required. I am, therefore, indebted to the hon. Member for Georgetown Central for having indicated what was in his mind as to the scope and nature of the subsidy which might meet the case. That is certainly a point which should be considered if this matter is pursued. To come back to the reasons which induced the Medical Advisory Committee to reject this proposal—speaking quite im-

partially — those very reasons lend support to the request for a subsidy. If it is true to say that the Government's plan for the improvement of our medical services has not even been started—or let us be a little more careful and say “has not yet gone far enough”—we ought to give honour where honour is due, and pay credit to a local institution which is fulfilling, morally, a duty which Government has failed to fulfill.

I am very sorry indeed that the Council is so depleted this afternoon, because the intention of Government was that this matter should be very fully debated here and that we should have a decision of the Council on this very important matter. I suppose, Sir, that the motion would go through—will be approved—in which case, if a subsidy is arranged in some form, Council would have another opportunity to meet again. I hardly think that the decision of this particular meeting is one which would convey a full opinion of the Council. Nevertheless, I think it would be the decision of a majority of this Council. Therefore I feel, Sir, that Government officials at least should refrain from voting, whatever may be their personal inclination or views on the subject, so as to get a complete view of the Unofficial Members of this Council. As I have indicated the pros and cons, I think Members would decide as to what is the right course to pursue.

Mr. Macnie: If I may say so, I think the Financial Secretary has put his finger on the points which were worrying some of us, and were certainly worrying me. One is, what is the amount of the subsidy the hon. Mover of the motion has in mind? That, I feel, is a matter for important consideration. I, personally, desire to associate myself with the hon. Mover and the other Members who have spoken in commendation of the work done by St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital.

I do not think there is anyone who dares dispute that good work, but would give even higher credit for what has been done. But, in considering this motion, there is the important point of Government's implementation of its long—overdue Plan.

I am extremely glad to hear that Government proposes to attempt the implementation of the recommendations of the Venn Commission with regard to rural Government hospitals. Whether that beginning would be next year or else, I think it would be a long time before the plan is completely implemented.

It would be a tremendous help to this Council if the hon. Mover of the motion can indicate what amount of money he has in mind with respect to this subsidy. I can hardly imagine that it is proposed to leave that question to what I may term “the Administration”—to put forward a certain amount for consideration of the Finance Committee. We know that there is a heavy debt of \$200,000 on the new wing recently added to St. Joseph's hospital, but we would like to know whether an annual subsidy is being proposed and, if so, of what dimension. I am in full support of the motion, but would like to have an idea of how much money is in the mind of the hon. Mover.

Mr. Roth: I am very grateful to those hon. Members—the vast majority of those present—who have supported this motion. I was exceedingly struck by the remark of the Financial Secretary when he said that the reasons which induced the Medical Advisory Committee to reject this motion were actually in favour of the subsidization of this hospital. It seems that hon. Members and the Government are rather anxious to know what amount I have in mind. Since hon. Members, including the hon. Member on my left (Mr. Lee) have not the slightest idea

of what amount I have in mind, I would suggest that until the final implementation of Government's plan for hospitals is brought to fruition, that a subsidy of \$10,000 a year be recommended and that a loan of \$50,000 be granted free of interest for a period of years.

The President: I will now put the question.

Motion put and agreed to.

The President: That disposes of the business before the Council. The adjournment will now be taken until 2 p.m. on Thursday, November 13.