

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Friday, 13th April, 1945.

The Council met at 2 p.m. His Excellency the Governor, Sir Gordon James Lethem, K.C.M.G., President, in the Chair.

PRESENT

The President, His Excellency the Governor, Sir Gordon James Lethem, K.C.M.G.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Mr. W. L. Heape, C.M.G.

The Hon. the Attorney-General, Mr. E. O. Pretheroe, M.C., K.C.

The Hon. the Colonial Treasurer, Mr. E. F. McDavid, C.B.E.

The Hon. E. G. Woolford, O.B.E., K.C. (New Amsterdam).

The Hon. J. A. Luckhoo, K.C. (Nominated).

The Hon. J. I. de Aguiar (Central Demerara).

The Hon. H. N. Critchlow (Nominated).

The Hon. M. B. G. Austin, O.B.E. (Nominated).

The Hon. J. Gonsalves, O.B.E. (Georgetown South).

The Hon. J. B. Singh, O.B.E. (Demerara-Essequibo).

The Hon. Peer Bacchus (Western Berbice).

The Hon. H. C. Humphrys, K.C. (Eastern Demerara).

The Hon. C. R. Jacob (North Western District).

The Hon. T. Lee (Essequibo River).

The Hon. A. M. Edun (Nominated).

The Hon. V. Roth (Nominated).

The Clerk read prayers.

ANNOUNCEMENT

DEATH OF PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

The PRESIDENT: Hon. Members of Council, we are met but for a single purpose today, perhaps, at very short notice of this meeting. I have had the names of several Members—Messrs. Seaford, Percy C. Wight, Dias, C. V. Wight, Jackson—who are unable to attend and have sent apologies. Messrs. Seaford, Percy C. Wight and C. Vibart Wight are out of town and Messrs. Dias and Jackson are ill.

I had very little thought when adjourning this Council yesterday afternoon that I should request Members to meet again this afternoon, but I am quite sure that all of us are of one mind that an opportunity formally to record the very deep regret which we feel in this Colony on the death which occurred yesterday of President Roosevelt, who was also Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of that great Ally of the British Commonwealth, the United States of America, should be taken as early as possible by this representative body of the citizens of British Guiana.

It is a very tragic fate that almost in the hour of victory one of the makers of that victory should be removed from his active part by death. How great that part has been is not for us but

will be for history to assess. Not only in these three and a quarter years during which his own country has been at war but over the longer period of five and a half years during which our Commonwealth has at times been strained to the utmost limit of its endurance, and beyond that a longer period ever since the war clouds began to roll over the world twelve years ago, has the late President been a great pillar of support not only to his own country but to ours and those other countries of the world that have stood for freedom in the way of life. I say how great that part has been will not be for us but for history to assess. That great task he had undertaken was not yet finished, perhaps its most difficult phase was yet to come. We shall all most anxiously pray that those, who have to carry on that task not only in his own country but in ours and in those many other countries, will inherit as the best tribute to his memory some of that big-hearted spirit which would have borne him out and met with such response from the United Nations.

Though these are sentiments that we must share with all parts of the globe, yet we can remember also at this time that the Caribbean and Guiana have had a special interest in the late President not only as part of the Americas but arising from a long knowledge of his own of these countries. It was my fortune to meet the President three times—once to receive him at Antigua in the Leeward Islands, once again to visit him at the White House in Washington when on my way to the Conference at London concerning the Air Bases, and a third time only five months ago when I saw him at the White House on the day of his return to Washington after the elections of November. At the first of these interviews he spoke much of his early travels in the Caribbean many years ago, and at the last he spoke of the Guianas. We know well too that he had a special interest in the future of our interior.

It was our very great pleasure and pride also to receive a visit from Mrs. Roosevelt only just over a year ago, and though I had hoped and had in fact arranged for that visit to include some hours in Georgetown and that fell through, nevertheless we are proud that that distinguished lady has visited this Colony. Those of us, who met that very distinguished lady and at the Base heard her as the bearer of a personal message from the President to the men of the United States Forces deliver it in such a manner, were filled with admiration.

I have taken the liberty therefore of telegraphing to the White House in the following terms:

“It was with the most profound regret that the sad news of the death of President Roosevelt was received in this Colony and I wish to express to you on behalf of the people of British Guiana, which you so recently visited, and of myself our deepest and most sincere sympathy.”

We have met this afternoon for the single duty of placing before the Council a motion standing in the name of the hon. the Colonial Secretary, which on adoption by this Council we will then transmit to the Consul of the United States, whom we have with us here today, for transmission in the proper manner as the earnest of the people of this Colony of their feelings and sympathy with the Government and people of the United States. The resolution, as hon. Members know, reads:

“Resolved that, this Council having learned with the deepest regret of the death of Mr. F. D. Roosevelt, lately President of the United States of America, an expression of its profound admiration for the devoted services rendered by the late President to the Allied cause be recorded and that its heartfelt condolences be sent to the family of the late President.”

I call upon the hon. the Colonial Secretary to move the resolution.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Mr. Heape): Sir, may I ask that the Standing Rules and Orders be suspended to allow this motion which stands in my name to be taken.

Standing Rules and Orders suspended.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: You, Sir, have just conveyed most poignantly that which we all feel on this grievous day and, I think, there is only left for me to say that this Council on behalf of the people of British Guiana together with all the right thinking people in this world mourn the death of the greatest of men, whose heart was wholly and absolutely in the right place and who died in the service of his country, the Allied Cause and the freedom-loving world. We now can only convey our most sincere and deepest sympathy to Mrs. Roosevelt and her family in their immeasurable loss. I ask hon. Members now formally to pass the motion.

The PRESIDENT: I call upon the Deputy President to second the resolution.

Mr. WOOLFORD: Sir, I think it is both fitting and appropriate that this Council should have been summoned by you to place permanently on our records our appreciation of the great and valuable public services rendered by a man, who was as experienced and eminent a Parliamentarian and Statesman as the world has ever known. The late President attained his eminence, not merely as a matter of good fortune but, notwithstanding his physical handicaps, he laboured in his early life very hard and very constantly to attain the position—which was not won without difficulty—of the Governorship of the State of New York. During the period of his administration, no more noticeable feature seemed to have been his aim than the promotion of social justice.

Garnered with that experience, rich and manifold as it was during his first term of office as President of the

United States, it seemed to be his constant aim to further those ideals. His association with Mr. Churchill and Premier Stalin in the Councils of State recently has been a very large contributing factor in determining what shall be the future of this world. His loss is not merely a National one, but an International tragedy, coming as it does at this time. And, to us, though far removed from the scene, no less anxious as loyal subjects of the British Empire, no less interested, it is a matter for deep regret that his removal from those Councils should have occurred at so untimely a period. I happen to know, and I should like to think that I am right, that in the pursuance of a policy which was almost unique, the President, during one Session of his Presidentship, was able to persuade Congress to sit for a period of 103 days—a quite unprecedented event, I believe, in the history of the United States. It was that conscientious stubbornness and the respect in which he was held that enabled him alone, of all Presidents, to be able to do that.

I hope, Sir, that I have conveyed something of the impressions which the people of this Colony feel at the loss and disappearance of so great a public figure. I am grateful for the opportunity and privilege, on behalf of the people of this Colony and the Members of this Council, to submit this imperfect tribute to the memory of a fine and noble character.

Mr. ROTH: A great man has gone. When a little more than twelve years ago Franklin Delano Roosevelt first took his seat in the Presidential Chair of the United States of America, most of us, British people, rejoiced at the fact. At that time the rejoicing was due mainly to his relationship with his famous namesake, Theodore Roosevelt, whose policy of friendship with Britain we hoped he would renew and strengthen by the end of his first term. That hope was more than justified, and when the time came for the end of his

second term we respected, admired and loved him not for his name but for himself, for we cannot forget that it was he who during our darkest hour kept his faith in the steadfastness of Britain, and today we mourn his unexpected and sudden passing. It has been a tragic blow not only to the United States of America but to us, the United Nations, and to the whole world that loves peace. Yes, a great man has gone, and I most sincerely wish to associate myself with this resolution.

Mr. EDUN: Mr. President, as I rise to pay tribute to the honoured memory of this singularly great man, I am reminded of that Bard of Avon who wrote this years ago:

"The evil that men do lives after them,
But the good is often interred with their
bones.
So let it be with Caesar."

Greater than all the Caesars of the world today and the past, this democratic head of a democratic country will live and shall live in the hearts and souls of those men and women who worshipped at the shrine of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. He shall live ever and ever in the hearts of men. Standing as I do here, Sir, as a coloured representative of the coloured community in British Guiana in this Honourable Council, in the Public Buildings, in the Stabroek Ward, in the City of Georgetown, British Guiana, and the only English-speaking country in the whole of South America, I would like to speak as I feel of the attributes of this great man who has passed so suddenly from our midst.

There is no doubt about it, Sir, that at times like these opportunity is taken by men of my type to examine the conduct of greater men. But, as I see it, the good that will accrue from the goodness of this great man will help to outweigh all other human frailties. When I remember the Atlantic Charter, when I remember the four freedoms—those principles that had

captivated the imagination of the whole world and for which men of every race have given up their lives to maintain, I, as a coloured man, have been imbued with the same animation to worship this man in whom the coloured peoples of this world had found some hope. But, Sir, it is indeed very sad to think that on the brim of victory this great Moses, this modern Moses, has not been able to see the fruits of victory and has not entered the promised land. That is where I feel sad. Sir, it reminded me further of another great man—and it appears to me the American Continent is conducive to producing these great men—Abraham Lincoln who gave the world and the coloured community the hope of redemption, who inspired in the minds of men that dynamic principle of government of the people by the people for the people. Therefore, Sir, I feel that the American people ought to follow the lead of this honoured son of theirs and not to do what happened during the time of President Woodrow Wilson. I go further and remember those fourteen principles advocated by this great man, Woodrow Wilson also.

Will mankind forget the Atlantic Charter? Will they forget the Four Freedoms when they get around the peace table? No; I do not think so. If I feel that the same thing will happen as that which happened with Woodrow Wilson then I shall have lost all hope for humanity. Sir, were I an American, I would cry because I feel how frustrated I would be to see that my President would not see the fruits of his labour—the sure and certain victory by the United Nations. Were I an Englishman, I would do the same. I should cry in my soul as an Indian—as a Guianese—because I feel that the principles advocated in the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms were a hope to me, to my people, to the peoples of India, to the coloured peoples of Africa and the West Indies and Malaya. But, Sir, even if I were a German, I would feel sorry in my heart

because I feel that the peace that had been mapped out by this great man with the other great one across the Atlantic — Prime Minister Churchill — would have led to something that is equivalent to this little verse which, Sir, with your permission I shall read:

“Let us then uniting bury
All our idle feuds in dust,
And to future conflicts carry
Mutual faith and common trust.
Always he who most forgiveth
In his brother is most just.”

That is the peace I feel that was mapped out even for the Germans by this great man. Unfortunately he did not live to see that, and that is where I sorrow in my soul for him. With those few words, Sir, I support this motion with my soul.

The PRESIDENT: I have just received a telegram from one of our Members, the Hon. Mr. Jackson, regretting his inability to attend this meeting of Council and expressing his thorough agreement with the resolution of

sympathy with the American people and the United Nations on the irreparable loss through death of President Roosevelt.

I shall therefore proceed to put formally this resolution which, as I said, is to be transmitted to the Consul of the United States of America as an earnest from the people of this Colony of their deep profound regret and sympathy with the Government and people of the United States of America. Gentlemen, I think, I may ask that this resolution be accepted unanimously by this Council.

The resolution was again read and passed, the Members standing.

The PRESIDENT: Gentlemen, I thank you for your attendance today, and I declare the Council adjourned to next Thursday.

The Council adjourned accordingly to Thursday, 20th April, 1945, at 2 p.m.