

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

WEDNESDAY, 25TH FEBRUARY, 1948.

The Council met at 8 p.m., His Excellency the Governor, Sir Charles Woolley, K.C.M.G., O.B.E., M.C., President in the Chair.

PRESENT.

The President, His Excellency the Governor, Sir Charles Campbell Woolley, K.C.M.G., O.B.E., M.C.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Mr. D. J. Parkinson (acting).

The Hon. the Attorney-General, Mr. E. M. Duke (acting).

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

The Hon. C. V. Wight, O.B.E., (Western Essequibo).

The Hon. F. J. Seaford, C.B.E., (Nominated).

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

The Hon. V. Roth (Nominated).

The Hon. T. T. Thompson (Nominated).

The Hon. W. A. Raatgever (Nominated).

The Hon. G. A. C. Färnum (Nominated).

The Hon. J. Fernandes (Georgetown Central).

The Hon. Dr. C. Jagan (Central Demerara).

The Hon. W. O. R. Kendall (New Amsterdam).

The Hon. C. A. McDoom (Nominated).

The Hon. A. T. Peters (Western Berbice).

The Hon. G. H. Smellie (Nominated).

The Clerk read prayers.

The minutes of the meeting of the 20th of February, 1948, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

PAPERS LAID.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I beg to lay on the table the following document:—

“Report on Reorganisation and Rehabilitation of the Telecommunications Services in British Guiana, 1947.”

As soon as possible this Council will be informed of the action Government proposes to take on this report and Council's approval sought.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I beg to lay on the table the following:—

“Statement of Loans from voted expenditure written off during the year ended 31st December, 1947.”

ORDER OF THE DAY.

1948 DRAFT ESTIMATES.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that the Council resolve itself into Committee and resume consideration of the Report of the Finance Committee on the Estimates for 1948.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

Council in Committee.

POLICE.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: At our last meeting we had completed Head XXVIII “Pensions and Gratuities” and I now move that Head XXIX “Police” be carried out at the figure stated in the

Report of the Finance Committee — \$1,102,777.

Mr. FERNANDES: There are just two small matters under this Head I would like to ask Government to consider. One is the question of the change in the system of Pensions paid to the Police. In January, 1929, a new system of pensions with a lump sum bonus came into force and the members of the Police Force were given the opportunity of choosing between that and the old system. At that time the period of service to qualify under the new Ordinance was 20 years. In 1936 this period was changed from 20 years to 10 years. That change being so fast, I think, it is only fair that Government should again give these people the opportunity of deciding which of the two systems they would like to have.

The other matter is the question of the men of the rank and file. Last year, I think I am correct, a new scale or pay was put into force and, according to the present set-up, it is possible for the older members of the Force to arrive at their maximum term of service and retire without reaching the top of that scale. I would just ask Government to consider what means it can put forward to enable those men at least to reach the maximum of their scale before their normal retiring age. I had mentioned it in Finance Committee and so the Commissioner of Police understands quite clearly the points I have made tonight.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I think it would help if I refer to the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting of the 29th January, 1948, when this Head was discussed in detail, because it seems that the points made by the hon. Member who has just spoken were so important that a note had been introduced in those minutes which reads as follows:

“Under this sub-head Mr. Fernandes, the Member for Georgetown Central took the opportunity to raise the following points which the Chairman undertook to have investigated —

(a) That in his opinion some special consideration should be given to Police Constables who had

served in the Force for nearly 20 years when the salary scales were revised in 1937 corresponding to the grant of double increments to certain officers in the Clerical Service when their salary scales were revised.

(b) That certain Police Constables had not been given the option of accepting the new Superannuation benefits provided for the Police Force as is normally the case whenever a change in pension laws is introduced.”

As I told Members of the Committee, these special items recorded in the minutes are being extracted to the appropriate Secretariat files and each item will come up in due course for investigation and consideration. So there is no chance that these points will escape due consideration and, perhaps, in order to save time I might mention what is further recorded in the minutes of that day's meeting. There is also this note: “The Committee recommended that the additional post of Assistant Superintendent of Police should be filled by a local candidate if suitably qualified”. That note will also be brought to the attention of the proper authorities. I merely mention that to forestall any speeches on the subject.

Mr. FERNANDES: Thank you!

Total of Head approved.

POOR.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that the total of Head XXX “Poor” to be carried out at \$586,280 as recommended in the report of the Finance Committee.

Total of Head approved.

POST OFFICE.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that the total Head XXXI “Post Office” be carried out at \$534,274 as recommended by the Finance Committee in their report.

Mr. SMELLIE: I understand from the Postmaster-General that he is very much concerned at the increasing expend-

iture under the sub-head "Postal Agencies". He has informed his advisory committee that the present vote will not be adequate in view of the opening-up of various districts in the Interior of the Colony. He instanced the North-West District, the Cuyuni, the Demerara River and, coming nearer home, Lodge Village. The Advisory Committee understand that he will represent the matter to Government, and we trust that when it is brought before this Council it may receive the favourable consideration of hon. Members. The sum involved is \$500

Dr. JAGAN: I would like to find out from the hon. the Colonial Treasurer if any action has been taken in respect of item 12 "Sorters and Travelling Sorters". I think this item was discussed in Finance Committee and the question of either increasing the maximum salary by \$120 per annum or having the pensions made applicable to that \$120 per annum as personal allowance after five years' service at the maximum of the scale. It was pointed out that these Sorters have given very long years of service and they usually have to work very long hours, and since they cannot receive any higher scale in the Fixed Establishment I feel that their case is very strong for an increase of the maximum salary from \$720 to \$840. I again would like to find out if any action has been taken in the matter.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: From the minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee of the 6th February, 1948, there is this record:

"In reply to a question the Postmaster-General explained that the personal allowances of \$120 per annum to be paid to the employees now holding these posts on their attaining the maximum salary of the grade was a recommendation of the Post and Telegraphs Committee based on the fact that their opportunity for promotion out of the present grade was unlikely. Dr. Jagan, supported by other Members, asked that consideration be given to the question of making these personal allowances when granted pensionable."

As I have indicated before, this is one of the items in the minutes which

will be extracted and given proper consideration. Members ask on this and previous occasions whether action is taken on this or that recommendation of the Finance Committee. I hope it will be realized that there has been no time for any such action. If the approval of these Estimates is expedited I would be more able to take action on these various recommendations in the Finance Committee's report.

The CHAIRMAN: What about the Postal Agencies?

The COLONIAL TREASURER: The Postmaster-General spoke to me about that and I told him the proper procedure is to make his recommendation and I have no doubt whatever I would be authorised to approach the Finance Committee for an increase of the vote and also that the Finance Committee would approve of it. It is quite true to say that the activities in the districts in which Postal Agencies are necessary are increasing, and I feel sure that the necessary action will be taken as soon as proper representation has been made by the Postmaster-General.

Mr. SEAFORD: I would like to ask when the Postmaster-General appreciated that he would have to extend the Postal Agencies and that there are not enough. I understand the Departments put in their estimates up to a certain date, and it seems very extraordinary that he should come back and ask for an increase after his estimates were submitted. I think it is very wrong that after estimates have been submitted that the Head of a Department should come back and ask for an increase without very good reason for doing so. It should be something he was not able to foresee or contemplate at the time the estimates were put in.

The CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member is quite right; in a matter of principle once the draft estimates have been submitted they should not ask for any increase of the amount in the Estimates except in exceptional cases. But there is really need for increasing these Postal Agencies.

Total of Head approved.

POST OFFICE — TELECOMMUNICATIONS
& ELECTRICAL INSPECTORS BRANCH.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that Head XXXII "Post Office Telecommunications and Electrical Inspectors Branch" be carried out at \$239,048 as recommended in the report of the Finance Committee.

Mr. FARNUM: In Finance Committee it was disclosed that very valuable transmitters in connection with radio-telephones are stored under a sports club. We think that is rather unsafe and, perhaps, something may be done to put them in some other place. One Member suggested they should be placed at Eve Leary where they were stored during the War. I do think, Sir, that storing such a valuable thing as a transmitter at a sports club is rather unsafe, especially when one remembers that if it is interfered with it might put radio communication with the Interior and Georgetown out of commission.

The CHAIRMAN: A transmitter has no atomic properties!

Mr. SEAFORD: I think, when this matter came up in Finance Committee the Head of this Department undertook to try and find a more suitable place and report back at some future date. As the hon. Member said it is likely to be interfered with under a sports club, and apparently that is not a very convenient place to store it.

The CHAIRMAN: I take it that the matter will be locked into. The whole question of telecommunication will be the subject of debate in the light of development.

Total of Head approved.

POST OFFICE — SAVINGS BANK.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that Head XXXIII "Post Office—Savings Bank" be carried out at \$36,506 as recommended in the report of the Finance Committee.

Mr. ROTH: In Finance Committee the hon. Member for Essequibo River

and the hon. Member for North-Western District, both of whom are absent this evening, brought to the attention of the Committee the difficulty under which the depositors in the country districts suffer under the new system of machine-recording by which whenever a deposit is made the book is taken away and sent to Georgetown and also when money is being withdrawn. In respect of depositors in Georgetown and places near to Georgetown they do not suffer much difficulty, but those at places like Arakaka do not get back their books for a month during which they cannot do any business. He can neither deposit nor withdraw money until he gets back the book, and a whole month elapses before he does get it. If he is a short distance from Georgetown he can come to town. It was suggested to the Postmaster-General to permit people in places like those to have two accounts, and the gentleman was horrified at such a contravention of red tapism. I do not see why a person should not have two accounts in the Savings Bank. It is done in commercial banks. I do not see why Government should have any objection to such a course. It is certainly convenient to those people in the Interior and those dealing with far-flung branches of the Savings Bank. I ask Government to give the matter some consideration.

Mr. FARNUM: Also in Finance Committee the question was brought up as to whether some system could not be evolved in place of the present one whereby the Bank is closed from the 1st to the 15th of January each year, because it imposes a lot of hardship on some people. There are cases known to many where people appear before the Magistrate and are fined and, though they had money in the Post Office Savings Bank, could not withdraw it so as to pay the fine because of the close period. Many such hardships have occurred during that period, and in Finance Committee we asked whether Government could consider some other system by which more relief would be given in a shorter period of closing the Bank, because it certainly imposes a great hardship on a large number of depositors.

The CHAIRMAN: The Bank is closed for accounting purposes!

he would know what the correct facts are. There is a plan for carrying out some repairs to that road but not for reconstructing it, while there is a plan for reconstructing the East Bank road because there is no railway running through that district as in the case of the East Coast. As regards the question of stone there has been some difficulty in getting supplies and the hon. Member is quite correct. Government have had certain machinery on order for the last two years but have not yet got it. There is difficulty not only as regards shortage but also as regards transportation and it is hoped that something would be done in this respect because the cost of transportation at present makes the price prohibitive. The machinery is due to arrive here about the middle of this year and I think by that time we would have all the stone available.

Head passed.

PUBLIC WORKS — DRAINAGE,
IRRIGATION AND SEA DEFENCES —
ANNUALLY RECURRENT.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that this head be carried out at \$222,936 as recommended by the Finance Committee.

Agreed to.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that this head be carried out at \$14,965 as recommended by the Finance Committee.

SUPREME COURT.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that this head be carried out at \$101,822 as recommended by the Finance Committee.

Agreed to.

TRANSPORT AND HARBOURS.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that Head XL "Transport and Harbours" be carried out at \$609,462 in respect

of the Net Deficiency as shown in the printed Estimates. I would just take the opportunity to place on record that the Finance Committee have approved of the purchase of the equipment of the Bermuda Railway. That will come up at a later stage as a special item. As Members know, it is part of the allocation under our development plan. It is to be financed either out of surplus funds or loan. I think it will be a charge against surplus funds. I merely mention it as it is a question of a large sum of money being spent on the Transport and Harbours Department.

Mr. WIGHT: I would like to place on record the protest of the residents of Western Essequibo to the curtailment of the services which is proposed by the Department with the advice of the Advisory Committee. I have already been in communication with the Head of the Department, and I have received a reply. I intend to pursue the matter with Government in another direction. It does seem that the Essequibo Coast will be cut off entirely in the form of transportation by curtailing the services. It may be it is costly and it may be that they will be recompensed with the development programme which is to be inaugurated as shortly as possible by telephonic communication. It has been said to me that they propose to have a faster service, but at the same time I do say the protest of the residents of that area has to a certain extent a certain measure of support from me personally inasmuch as the inconvenience I suffer in getting down there and in getting communication with there. It takes in some cases a week, and as a matter of fact it is cheaper for a person to travel by steamer — the tri-weekly service — than to telephone to someone in the Pomeroon to come to Georgetown in respect of a death. A physical motion is perhaps better than the spiritual motion or motion by wire. But I do think that reconsideration may be given to it, or on the other hand opportunity be given to test this faster service which it is proposed to inaugurate. There was a majority and a minority decision with regard to the Advisory Committee's opinion on transport. I ask that the matter be recorded and pursued within those lines

Dr. NICHOLSON: In Finance Committee we had a very disturbing statement made by some Members about the Transport and Harbours Department. They told us that the Head of the Department informed the members of his Advisory Committee that the Estimates as printed were only printed as such, but he had no intention whatever of following those estimates; there was going to be considerable retrenchment and the members of the Committee were only in an advisory capacity. I do not know if this Council can accept that.

Mr. RAATGEVER: I would like to know whether the record of the opinion Members expressed in Finance Committee so far opposing the deficiency grant to this Department has been brought to the notice of Your Excellency.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: We had a long discussion in Finance Committee over the constitution of the Department's Board, the powers of the General Manager, the powers of the Executive Council over the Department, and the powers of the Legislative Council in providing the money, and also the Governor's powers in regard to it. I do not want to go into it again. The Finance Committee approved of the Net Deficiency as printed but requested that their opinion should be recorded in the minutes and brought to your notice in the following terms — I think I should read it:

"After discussion the Committee approved of the provision for the net deficiency of the Department being passed as printed on the understanding that there should be no variation in the detailed Estimates of the Department as set out in Appendix A, except with the concurrence of the Advisory Council of the Department and the approval of the Governor in Council. The Committee requested the Chairman to bring to the notice of His Excellency the Governor the condition on which this item has been approved by the Committee and to invite confirmation by him."

Here again is one of the records in these minutes which will come to Your Excellency in due course. That is the condition on which the Finance Committee approved of this deficiency.

Dr. JAGAN: In Finance Committee I asked for information with respect to the saw mill which is the property of the Transport and Harbours Department. I wonder if I can get that information at the present time.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: That too is a matter which is recorded in the minutes. It is recorded:

"Mr. Smellie, Chairman of the Department's Advisory Council undertook to make enquiries into the matter."

I do not think he has had an opportunity to do so as yet. The hon. Member referred to a saw mill which is one of the assets of the Department and, which I think, has been sold.

Mr. SMELLIE: Sir, in replying to the question raised by the hon. Member for Central Demerara, I desire to say that I have enquired into the matter and my information is this: There was no sale at all of any saw mill whatever; all that was sold was a certain amount of equipment — a saw and various other things which were part of the saw mill. There was no sale of any property which the hon. Member might infer was belonging to the Government. My information is, that the General Manager is under the impression that the sale of any articles or equipment is perfectly within his compass to make, and there was no sale of any property whatever.

In connection with the discussion on the Vote as a whole, I think I would like to make a few remarks with your permission, Sir. In the report of the General Manager for the year 1946, he states that the final cost of the Transport Services to the Colony was \$613,694.47 as against \$997,899.72 in 1945. The comparative figure for the year 1947 is \$665,128.61. This would appear to show a reduction of only \$8,000 on the 1946 figure, but there is a good deal more to add than that. In the first place the total for 1947 includes \$67,000 additional for Cost of Living allowance and in the second place the expenditure on renewals and replacements is more than double what it was in 1946. This is due to renewals and replacements in respect of the West Coast Railway's running stock which were

ordered in 1938 and not received until 1947 and debited in that year. The deficit on working without the addition of interest and capital charges or expenditure on renewals and replacements is as follows:—

“1945 — \$640,984.99
1946 — \$405,456.85
1947 — \$328,442.48

As I have already mentioned this last figure includes the amount of \$67,000 additional for Cost of Living Allowance. It will be seen that even with this included there is a reduction in the deficit on the working of \$77,000, and without it there is a reduction of not less than \$144,000 for 1947. I think that those figures speak for themselves, and I would ask Members to pass this vote without any further discussion.

Total of Head approved.

TREASURY.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that Head XLI “Treasury” be carried out at \$58,593 as recommended by the Finance Committee.

Question put, and agreed to.

Total of Head approved.

TREASURY — INCOME TAX OFFICE.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that Head XLII “Treasury — Income Tax Office” be carried out at \$40,673 as recommended by the Finance Committee.

Question put, and agreed to.

Total of Head approved.

TREASURY — COMMISSIONERS OF CURRENCY.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that Head XLIII “Treasury — Commissioners of Currency” be carried out at 8,294 as recommended by the Finance Committee.

Question put, and agreed to.

Total of Head approved.

LOANS FROM PUBLIC FUNDS.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that Head XLIV “Loans from Public Funds” be carried out at \$82,200 as recommended by the Finance Committee.

Question put, and agreed to.

Total of Head approved.

POST OFFICE — EXTRAORDINARY.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that Head XLV “Post Office Extraordinary” be carried out at \$24,400 as recommended by the Finance Committee.

Question put, and agreed to.

Total of Head approved.

PUBLIC WORKS — EXTRAORDINARY.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that Head XLVI “Public Works Extraordinary” be carried out at \$600,000 as recommended by the Finance Committee.

Mr. SEAFORD: In Finance Committee and also in the Advisory Committee there was a request that the details be put before this Council before it is actually allocated.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I explained to the Finance Committee that this lump sum provision has to be allocated and asked their indulgence in the matter, because the allocation of this vote is giving a great deal of difficulty and the Colonial Secretary and the Director of Public Works and I will have to put in some work on it in order to adjudge priorities. It is going to be a very difficult matter as there are so many items calling for immediate attention. Therefore I undertook that the Schedule of Allocation as soon as it is ready will be submitted to Finance Committee for formal approval.

Mr. WIGHT: This Head was inaugurated about a year or two ago, but I understood from the Government that while it was so there were so many

complex decisions that the Advisory Committee would take no particular decision unless Your Excellency or the Colonial Secretary had considered also the decision. There were certain requests made from the Colonial Secretary and that had to be decided in conjunction with the Department. I think that was the policy and apparently, I would suggest, it would still be the best policy when several Departments make requisitions. There were certain requisitions made which Government thought might be more pressing than those of the Public Works Advisory Committee, and those matters were referred first of all to the Colonial Secretary, then to Your Excellency, and then the Public Works Advisory Committee would be forwarded them with any comments made thereon.

The CHAIRMAN: It is a very difficult task, allocating this sum of money, but Government will do its best in the matter.

Question put, and agreed to.

Total of Head approved.

PUBLIC WORKS, DRAINAGE, IRRIGATION AND SEA DEFENCES EXTRAORDINARY.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that Head XLVIA "Public Works, Drainage, Irrigation and Sea Defences — Extraordinary" be carried out at \$470,855.

Question put, and agreed to.

Total of Head approved.

COLONIAL EMERGENCY MEASURES.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I move that Head XLVII "Colonial Emergency Measures" be carried out at \$1,935,000. Hon. Members would know that the item "Cost of Living Allowance" which had been printed at \$1,494,605 has now been deleted and included under each departmental head to which it refers.

Mr. SMELLIE: On that particular point I would like to make a few remarks. In Finance Committee I raised the question twice and, although I did not say

I was going to bring it up in full Council, I understand I am not debarred from doing so. As a new-comer to the Council I feel rather diffident to question the method of presentation of these Estimates, but I cannot help feeling that it gives Members a totally false impression by lumping this Cost of Living amount and not having it allocated under the various Heads or Departments. Hon. Members are debarred then from seeing really what the increase in expenditure under each Head is going to be, and it means constant turning up from one Head to this main Head to see how this main Head is split up under the various Departments which, I think, is very unnecessary. Also I would like to make another point about the presentation of the Estimates and that is: In the year 1947 for example, the Supplementary Estimates which were passed subsequent to the original Estimates are not shown, and there again Members are liable to be misled because they do not see what the total amount voted for 1947 was in comparison with what is estimated for 1948. I would like to make these two points for consideration by Government in respect of future years.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I think the hon. Member is quite right. It is confusing and to some extent wrong that the detailed estimates should not have proper comparison by having the Cost of Living Allowances included in the approved estimates of the previous year and not in the estimates of the year under consideration. But hon. Members will excuse me for having given way to the fancy of another very emphatic Member of the Council, who is no longer with us, and who insisted last year that on no account should we include anything in the departmental estimates for the Cost of Living Allowance until we are quite sure it is going to be provided at all; secondly it is not going to be reduced, or thirdly it is not going to be increased. His idea was that we should make quite sure that this Cost of Living charge was an emergency charge and not a continuing one, and it was improper from his point of view to include it in the Estimates at all until we are quite sure what the position is going to be. This method of presentation was to meet that particu-