

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FRIDAY, 13TH JULY, 1951.

The Council met at 2 p.m., His Excellency the Officer Administering the Government, Mr. John Gutch, O.B.E., President, in the Chair.

PRESENT:

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

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Mr. D. J. Parkinson, O.B.E., (Acting).

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

The Hon. the Financial Secretary and Treasurer, Mr. W. O. Fraser, (Acting).

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

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

The Hon. T. Lee (Essequibo River).

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

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

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

The Hon. Capt. J. P. Coghlan (Demerara River).

The Hon. D. P. Debidin (Eastern Demerara).

The Hon. J. Fernandes (Georgetown Central).

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

The Hon. J. Carter (Georgetown South).

The Hon. L. A. Luckhoo (Nominated).

The Hon. R. B. Gajraj (Nominated).

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

The Hon. D. C. J. Bobb (Nominated).

The Clerk read prayers.

MR. DEBIDIN'S QUESTIONS.

MR. DEBIDIN: Sir, I must draw attention to the fact that the minutes of yesterday's proceedings of this Council are incorrect because a list of questions which I tabled yesterday are not included. I can see no reason why those questions have been omitted because they are plain and straightforward. If there is any objection to them at all I would regard it as inviting the criticism that British Guiana is in the state in which Germany was when the Gestapo was in full operation. I feel that Members' questions should not be treated in that way.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: May I suggest to the hon. Member that his remarks would be more effective if he used more temperate language?

MR. DEBIDIN: I consider my remarks most fitting language. What is the reason for keeping my questions out of the minutes? I certainly take exception to the minutes and I shall vote against their confirmation.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I may say that the reason for the non-

inclusion of the hon. Member's questions (I think there are about 18 or 19 questions) is that certain of them require a certain amount of examination which I have been making myself, as to whether they should be permitted or not, and particularly the last two questions. The matter is being investigated, and I told the hon. Member a moment ago that it was hoped that his questions would be included in the minutes of today's meeting. Questions 15 and 16 were being investigated by me this morning but certain information was not available at the time.

Mr. DEBIDIN: The answers to the questions can be investigated after they are printed in the minutes, and if Government does not wish to answer them it can say so in its reply.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: The hon. Member does not appreciate the point. There has been a change in the organization of the body which may be in a position to give the information requested by the hon. Member.

The PRESIDENT: I have not read the hon. Member's questions myself but perhaps the hon. Member is aware of the Standing Rule and Order which lays down certain considerations which have to be settled before questions can be admitted. It is not a question of the answer but as to the form of question. I have not yet read the hon. Member's questions and I cannot say whether they are in order or not. That is the point which the Attorney-General is looking into, and when the matter is submitted to me the questions will appear in the minutes if they are in order.

Mr. DEBIDIN: If those questions are not allowed I do not know what questions would be. It is certainly a restriction of the liberty of the subject and a Member of this Legislature.

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member should read the Standing Rules and Orders. As I have said, I have not read his questions myself but I see there is

a list of about 20 or so which will require looking through. Rule 14 (e) says:

"Questions shall be put in such a manner as not to involve opinion, argument or inference; and no facts shall be stated unless they be necessary to make the question intelligible."

Those matters are being looked into

Mr. DEBIDIN: I have complied with all of that.

MINUTES AMENDED.

Mr. ROTH: I regret to have to bring to the notice of the Council an error on page 5 of the minutes where it is stated that the motion by the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Farnum, with respect to the gift of rice in relief of the famine in India was seconded by me. I had left the Council before that motion was taken.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I seconded that motion.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, that is correct. With that amendment is it the wish of the Council that the minutes of yesterday's meeting be confirmed?

Minutes confirmed.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY laid on the table the following documents:—

The Annual Report of British Guiana for the year 1950.

The Governor in Council's decision on the petition tabled by Mr. J. Fernandes in the Legislative Council on the 18th of May, 1951, on behalf of Mr. E. A. Bollers, a Public Works Contractor.

Mr. ROTH: Permit me, sir, on behalf of the Council to congratulate Government on the expedition with which the Annual Report of the Colony for 1950 has been produced—less than seven months after the close of the year. It is something for which Government should be commended.

MR. FERNANDES EXPLAINS.

Mr. FERNANDES: Sir, I crave your indulgence to correct a statement I made yesterday that less than 1,500 bags of rice had been shipped to India on behalf of the Famine Relief Committee. That was the information I received before I left home at mid-day yesterday but in the meantime a sum of money was received from Nickerie and an extra 400 bags were contributed by the Berbice section, which enabled a total of 2,000 bags of rice to be shipped.

ORDER OF THE DAY

ASPHALTING OF VILLAGE PUBLIC ROADS.

Mr. DEBIDIN: Sir, I beg to move the motion standing in my name which reads:—

“Whereas in dry weather the dust nuisance of the public roads of the Colony is seriously felt by motorists, pedestrians and villagers living alongside the roads, and there is a definite danger not only to pedestrians and motorists and others using the roads but also to the health of the villagers living alongside the public roads, due to the dust which rises up;

“Be it resolved that this Honourable Council recommend to Government that immediate steps be taken to asphalt all these portions of roads passing through the villages of the Colony.”

This motion deals with a matter which has been exercising the minds of the rural population for a long time, and about five years ago the Village Chairmen's Conference, at a meeting held at Mahaica, passed a resolution requesting Government to asphalt the public roads which pass through the village areas. On one occasion I also brought the matter to the attention of Government in open Council but not in the form of a motion. As long as the roads in the country districts of the Colony are made of burnt earth, a material which has been used since I was a child, it seems to me that we will have to put up with the nuisance of red dust. Government is now doing everything in

its power to put our public roads in first-class condition, and a start has been made on the Courentyne road which is being reconstructed and covered with asphalt. When the Courentyne road is completed in about another year or so the reconstruction of the East and West Coast roads and the East and West Bank roads will remain to be undertaken.

What this motion seeks is that the portions of public road which pass through the various village be covered with asphalt so as to eliminate the dust nuisance to which I have referred. We know that the facade of a village is not very long. In the village of Triumph-Beterverwagting the public road is already asphalted, but in villages like Golden Grove-Nabaclis, Victoria and Belfield, which are near to each other, there are burnt earth roads, and the houses are on each side of the public road and very close to the road. I have had many complaints from villagers that after a motor vehicle has passed along the public road it leaves in its wake a column of red dust which rises to about 50 feet and is blown into the houses. I have been told that in the morning a considerable quantity of red dust is found deposited on their bed sheets and blankets, and that it often gets into their food.

There is one point which I should urge very strongly in favour of the motion. It is that we are spending a great deal of money on public health in this Colony. For instance, during this year we have voted considerable sums of money to provide extra accommodation at the Best Hospital and a new surgical Ward at the Georgetown Hospital. We know that people spit about and animals leave deposits on the roads, and that disease germs are blown with the dust into people's houses. There may be a serious epidemic some day, and I cannot too strongly emphasize the necessity for asphaltting those public roads passing through the villages from a public health standpoint. In the few villages in which the public road has been asphalted the absence of the dust

nuisance is reflected in the clean and tidy appearance of the houses as compared with the dust-ridden houses and trees in those villages in which the public road is made up of burnt earth. It must also be borne in mind that children have to travel along the public roads to go to school. While travelling in my car I have seen children enveloped by red dust from the road. Apart from the danger to health there is also the risk of accidents occurring as a result of the dust cloud that is left by a passing vehicle.

I do not think I need labour the advantages to be derived from having the public roads which pass through villages asphalted. There is no village I know which has more than a mile of public road passing through it, and in the interest of the health of the people in the rural areas I feel that this Council will agree to this very necessary expenditure. This morning I brought the matter up at a meeting of the Public Works Advisory Committee and it was suggested that the Village Authorities may be asked to contribute 25 per cent. of the cost of asphaltting the portions of public roads passing through their villages. The cost has been worked out at \$5,000 per mile for a sheeting of crushed stone and bitumen, which provides a surface with considerably longer wear than the burnt earth roads. While the cost of bitumen may be heavy it stands up to traffic much better than burnt earth, so that the cost of maintenance is much less in the long run. I have seen a minute by the Director of Public Works in which he estimates that the cost of doing all the public roads in the villages should not be more than \$25,000.

I do not think that Government would embark on this proposal right away, in view of the fact that the construction of the road to Atkinson Field will have to be undertaken as early as possible. Most of the East Bank road has been asphalted as far as Peter's Hall, but the lower East Coast road is in a horrible condition. Immediately after the completion of the Courten-

tyne road Government might have to turn its attention to the East Coast road, and as often as it turns to new roads it may be able to asphalt the portions of the public road running through villages. The fact is that Government will not be able to embark on the reconstruction of the East Coast and other roads for another two or three years. I am hoping that the motion will find ready acceptance by this Council.

Mr. BOBB seconded.

Mr. FARNUM: I wish to support this motion because I have had experience of the discomfort caused by these red earth roads which pass through villages. Not very long ago I had to make representations on behalf of the residents at Bagotstown, on the East Bank, whose complaint was the same as that mentioned by the hon. Mover. The people had to keep their houses closed all day because red dust from the road was blown into them, and I am glad to say that the Public Works Department has now macadamized that portion of the road.

But, apart from the discomfort which these people suffer, we have to look at the matter from another angle. There is no doubt that when a road is macadamized the loss of road material is reduced to a minimum because the washing of the road ceases. I think we have an illustration of that in this very Public Buildings compound. If my recollection is correct, years ago it had a burnt-earth foundation, and there was quite a lot of washing away of the material whenever the rains came. In addition to that, there used to be dust blowing all over the place. Now that the compound has been macadamized, however, there is no washing away of the material and the dust nuisance has been reduced to a minimum.

I am one of those who believe that our villagers ought to be taught self-help. They should practise self-help in matters such as this, and while I support the motion that Government should macada-

mize these roads I think that the villages through which they pass should bear some portion of the cost. I do not think that 25 per cent of the cost would be too much for them to bear. I think I should draw the attention of the Council to the fact that in quite a large number of places where the public road passes through the villages those villages collect rates from the buildings on each side of the road, so that a certain amount of revenue accrues to them through the road. I believe there are some villages which only tax land and not the buildings, but I think that such villages should be compelled to tax buildings also. That is very necessary in my opinion, because one would find that in most cases the buildings near the public road are substantial ones and should be taxed. Those of us who are connected with village Authorities are making every endeavour—and I think everyone interested in the welfare of the people in the villages should assist—to make conditions as congenial and as comfortable as possible for our villagers in order to prevent them from coming into the City and increasing unemployment here. I think that is one of the reasons why we should consider this motion seriously.

Mr. FERNANDES: There can be no question about it that it is very inconvenient for anyone to live alongside one of these dusty roads. I live in a village alongside one of them but, unfortunately, this motion would not help me. I happen to be on the leeward side of a village road and it is certainly inconvenient in the dry season. In spite of the fact that it would not benefit me I am going to support the motion in principle. Whether the request can be carried out immediately or not, is something I cannot give an opinion on. I take it for granted that what the hon. Mover means is that it should be done as early as possible and I think he might amend his motion to read that way because the word "immediate" has a definite mean-

ing and I think it has hampered the success of quite a few motions moved in this Council. Sometimes Government is asked to do something immediately which cannot be done immediately. I think everyone is in sympathy with the motion and that the Administration would be willing to give effect to it as early as possible. I can certainly vouch for the inconvenience one suffers when one has to live on the leeward side of a dusty road.

Mr. BOBB: I desire to speak in support of the motion at this stage.

Mr. DEBIDIN: If the hon. Member who has seconded the motion does not mind, I would ask that the amendment suggested by the hon. Member for Georgetown Central be made now.

The PRESIDENT: Very well.

Mr. BOBB: I think that the idea behind this motion is a very good one and that it has been brought up at a very appropriate time. It is true that, as the hon. Mover of the motion has told us, some years ago this matter came up at the Village Chairmen's Conference and my recollection is that the usual course which is adopted when resolutions are passed at that Conference was followed in respect of this. What developed afterwards, I am unable now to say, but there was a very strong feeling in the Conference that active steps should be taken to bring to the notice of Government the necessity for doing this very thing. The reasons so far advanced were the reasons shared by the village Chairman. I believe, sir, that it will go down with very good grace and appreciation among the villagers to know that Government has not only expressed sympathy with the motion, but that it intends to take active steps at the earliest possible time to give effect to it. Of course, the whole thing to my mind brings up the question of a road policy for this country. Perhaps the hon. Mover of the motion who happens to be serving

on another Committee dealing with this same matter might be better informed as to what that policy is but, surely, if anything could be done for the rural areas I think the policy should be so flexible as to provide for definite improvement in the surfacing and the durability of the roads.

The present inconvenience has not been as fully expressed as the sympathetic supporters of the motion feel. I have lived for a long time in the country and I can say something of the inconvenience and bother which is experienced all the time by people who have to be contending with the columns of dust that rise behind vehicles and even when nothing is passing along these roads. I think, therefore, that all that could be done should be attempted in order to improve the situation. I realize that if all the public roads passing through the villages were to be tackled on a large scale the total commitment would be quite a large one, but it would be satisfying to know that a start has been made somewhere and though I should, for obvious reasons, wish to see the start made on the East Coast, I would not say definitely that it should be there. If I may advance one reason in favour of the East Coast, however, it is that there is quite a lot of traffic in that area and, perhaps, the East Coast is one of the most populous and flourishing of the country districts in British Guiana. The same argument might be applied to certain parts of the Corentyne Coast also.

The hon. Member for Eastern Demerara feels very strongly in this matter and I know he would get the support needed in this Council. There are two points, however, on which I differ somewhat from him. My opinion might not call for immediate action but it might be regarded as a marginal note and taken into account later on. The first point deals with the question of the ability of the villages to maintain these roads and recondition them. We

know that there is a definite village Ordinance which is used as a guide in village affairs and that Ordinance prescribes that a certain area should come under the jurisdiction of the Drainage Board. If the villages are now called upon to participate in the cost of reconditioning the roads in that area it seems to me that the motion would tend to strike at the very framework of the Drainage Board policy. At the present time certain things like public roads and the area 12 ft. from the public road, on each side, are not touched by the villages. That is the direct responsibility of the Drainage Board save in those instances where the villages have consented as from the beginning of this year to accept the responsibility with the idea of being able to reduce expenditure. What I am getting at is that there would have to be a great deal of alterations in the Ordinance and I am not sure that the villagers will receive them happily. In fact, at two Village Chairmen Conferences—in 1938 and 1942—there were resolutions which asked for a Government subvention for roads passing through the villages and being kept up by the respective councils themselves. The suggestion which has been made from the floor seems to point to help from the other direction.

I feel, personally, that this is a matter for the Central Government and that the Public Works Department ought to accept full responsibility for the condition of the roads which pass through the villages. By so doing, the eventual cost would be reduced and in a short period of time the contribution which they would make from that Department would be less than that being made at present in relation to the work being done and they would have put an end to the nuisance which we have to endure. Therefore, I would vary some of the opinions expressed on this point and would urge that Government look at the matter as their own responsibility. I would like to know, for instance, whether those portions of the road

passing through the villages on the East Bank, Demerara, are receiving any help from the villages in that area. I should also like to know whether those portions of the public road passing through Kitty and Alexanderville on the East Coast, are being contributed to by Government or if they would have to participate in the new arrangement which would be made.

Finally, I would like to say that our forefathers endured a lot but we are living in an age where we ought not only to see that the amenities we enjoy are put on a higher standard than those which our forefathers had to endure, but we should make sure that we are leaving something worth while for posterity. I can see one way by which we shall make a very important contribution towards the improvement of the health of the people through this effort for the better serviceability of the roads, and that is by asking the Central Government to undertake this piece of work, particularly on those of the public roads passing through the villages, for the time being. I hope that there is going to be propounded a Colony-wide policy and that the other sections of the public roads would receive proper attention in conjunction with the rural areas. I hope also that this Council would give its whole-hearted support to the motion and that the Central Government would take active steps to put into effect what this motion is requesting.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I should like to say at once that the Administration is in sympathy with the object of this motion. The inconvenience and unpleasant conditions referred to cannot be disputed. However, as has been accurately anticipated, there are difficulties in the matter. I should like to say that with the amendment proposed, and accepted by the mover, the Administration would not oppose the motion. At the same time, I should like to make it quite clear that I cannot

hold out any early hope of Government being able to take action. There are two difficulties; the first is, of course, financial. This question of road construction is an expensive business. The figures from the Public Works Department show that for a road 18 ft. wide with a thin surface of stone and asphalt would cost between \$5,000 and \$6,000 a mile, and the life of the surface would not be more than one year. It would then have to be re-surfaced so that it would, in effect, involve an annual recurrent expenditure of \$5,000 or \$6,000 a mile.

A road with a heavier surface would last 10 or 15 years but it would cost between \$20,000 and \$25,000 a mile and the wearing surface would have to be renewed every 3 to 5 years at a cost of \$5,000 a mile. The minimum cost of maintenance would be \$1,000 per mile a year; so that it is an expensive business and I am sure my friend, the Financial Secretary, will agree that it is not very clear where the money would come from. I welcome the suggestion that the villages should contribute, but I have also heard opposition to that suggestion. It is not a question which has been given any consideration and it should be clear that I am not committing Government in any way, but I say that if it were possible to make a start—once it is decided where to start—Government might be sympathetically disposed towards the villages which are prepared to do something to help themselves. That is my personal feeling.

The second difficulty is a practical one. In view of the commitment on the Corentyne in connection with the road programme there, it would be extremely difficult at the present time to secure adequate supplies of boulder stone to undertake additional work of this nature, so that there could be no prospect of making an immediate start. It would be probably difficult to do very much until the Corentyne road is in an advanced state. There has been some difficulty, as some hon. Members are aware, in securing

adequate supplies of stone for the Corentyne road. The hon. the Seventh Nominated Member has referred to Government's policy. Well, Government is considering this question very comprehensively with regard to the three major roads in the Colony—the East Coast, the East Bank and the Corentyne roads. As hon. Members are aware, there has been considerable discussion as to which should be given priority. The East Coast road is bound up to some extent with the future of the railway. It was eventually decided to give priority to the Corentyne road; the East Bank road would be done afterwards. I have to repeat that while I am not opposing the motion I cannot, I am afraid, hold out any hope that it would be possible to make any substantial progress in the near future for the two reasons which I have indicated.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I should just like to say a word on the statement made by the hon. the Colonial Secretary about supplies of stone. Only this morning we had a very full meeting of the Public Works Advisory Committee when this matter was dealt with and I am in a position to say that we have adequate supplies of stone. We can get all the stone we want and, moreover, at present the crusher is not working to full capacity. Therefore, if we buy stone for this particular purpose we can get it crushed at the particular dimensions required. The next thing is that the Corentyne road is now fairly well stocked with stone. More might be required later, but without saying more I would like to remove the impression that we cannot get material for this particular purpose.

With regard to the remarks made by the hon. the Colonial Secretary—that Government would not only hold a sympathetic view in this matter but would try to implement the motion as early as possible—I find that apart from what has been stated here, there are some roads which have been asphalted and I know that they have lasted several years. The stretch of road from Vigilance to

Strathspey has an asphalt surface about 6 inches thick only, but it has stood up against wear and tear and kept its smooth surface for a number of years. I venture to think that if such work is done by the Public Works Department it would last much longer. I would not say more now, but hope that the motion would be implemented as early as possible.

As regards the remarks made by the hon. the Seventh Nominated Member on the question of policy, I would like to say that only this morning the matter was discussed by the Public Works Advisory Committee and I think a suggestion would be put up to Government for the appointment of a Committee to deal with the matter. It is a fact however that a road policy has been practically settled and, as stated by the Colonial Secretary, the Corentyne road is being tackled at the present time and after that the East Bank road will be done. As regards the Drainage and Irrigation Board, it is not a question of policy that we are up against. The Board is governed by statute and certain areas are declared to be drainage areas. When they are so declared they come entirely under the control of the Board. This Board deals chiefly with the question of internal drainage and that hardly affects the public roads of the Colony. In every drainage area there is a reserve of 12 ft. on each side of the trench and the balance belongs to the village. There has been a movement recently whereby some of the villages have undertaken to clean all the trenches and parapets in their drainage areas, but so far as the policy is concerned this is all regulated by agreement.

Motion put and agreed to.

INVESTIGATION OF CONTROLS.

Mr. WIGHT: I desire to move the following motion standing in my name:—

“WHEREAS general public dissatisfaction is expressed as to the several and/or

various forms of export, import and local control including currency control;

"BE IT RESOLVED that Government be requested to appoint a Committee to investigate and report on the said Controls and whether such Controls are necessary and expedient in the interests of the Colony of British Guiana.

Since I gave notice of this motion nearly a year ago, I think—if my memory serves me correctly—there have been indications that there is a general policy throughout the Commonwealth and the United Nations to relax controls in more ways than one. It is true that the policy advocated by the bigger nations would be well out of our depth and, may be, well out of our understanding, but there can be no doubt that the setting up of a Committee in this Colony to go into the question from every point of view would be to our benefit. This question was discussed at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference held in New Zealand in November and December last, and at which British Guiana's representative was the hon. Member for Georgetown Central. I do not propose to go fully into the speeches made on that occasion, but with your permission, sir, I propose to summarize a few extracts. The Rt. Hon. Walter Nash, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, was called upon to open the discussion at the first session, the question of Economic Relations, Trade and Finance, and he outlined very lucidly the history of the economic position of the British Commonwealth dating away back to 1929. In one passage he suggests that the United Kingdom and Europe were overcoming the dollar shortage, and then on page 10 of the report of the Conference which I presume all hon. Members of this Council have been supplied with and have studied, he also expresses a view—after having quoted President Truman—in favour of a system of free enterprise as opposed to monopoly.

This is his comment upon what the President said:

"I think, however, that experience will show that it will be necessary to have some planning rather than straight-out-free-enterprise competition. We must have planning, and I do not think President Truman would question that in any way when he looks at the tariffs that the United States Government have themselves imposed to stop goods entering their own country. I do not think it is possible to have free trade, based on free enterprise, without colossal disturbance and suffering. To talk about complete free trade means you have missed entirely the position of Australia, Canada, the United States, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and other countries. It would be excellent if we could bring it into being, but it looks impracticable at present. Yet the extension of trade must be the major objective. We have no right to keep resources in the ground in any sovereign area if those resources can be brought out for the benefit of nationals of countries with insufficient resources. The job is to utilize those resources, and after satisfying the needs of our own people, to see that the remainder is available to the people of other countries if they are unable at once to pay for them. We have got to find a way to ensure a more just sharing of world resources."

He goes on to say:

"Trade is good, prices have gone up, and everybody is better off than before because they are stockpiling in every country preparing for a possible war. This fear of war has resulted in an improvement of trade; it has fostered employment, and the people are getting more wages in many countries. There is something wrong when war brings improvement to living-standards. A living-standard cannot—if wisdom prevailed—be as high during war, or preparation for war, as it could be if there was no preparation for war. There is, however, no room for the domination of the world by any nation or group of nations."

There are a few other passages which I consider very appropriate, and I shall quote briefly from them. The first is a quotation from the speech of Mr. G. T. Fullford, a Member of the Canadian Parliament, in which he says; on page 47 of the report:

"I said there was no resentment at the selling-and-buying policy in Canada. There is one part of the world that we wish we were allowed to trade with a little more freely. I refer to the British West Indies. Last year we sold them only 67 million dollars' worth of goods, but bought from them only 43 million dollars' worth. This year new negotiations have been entered into. We feel in Canada that we are producing a type of heavy machinery—farm equipment, electrical equipment, sugar-making machinery and other articles—which is necessary for the proper development of the West Indies, and that if we were allowed to sell to them at least as much as we buy we would in no small way be helping to increase the prosperity of those nations and Colonies in the Caribbean."

Further down he says:

"Canada, I repeat, is prosperous; we are now on the threshold of our greatest development. This has been all brought about by our system of free enterprise, which has been endorsed by an overwhelming vote of the people of Canada in a succession of elections, both Provincial and Federal, with the sole exception of the Province of Saskatchewan."

The hon. Member for Georgetown Central (Mr. Fernandes) was present at the Conference and also spoke, and I trust that we will hear his views on the subject. The next passage I desire to quote is again from the remarks of Mr. Nash, in the course of which he said:

"We could not have been as far advanced as we are today, with living-standards, low as they are, had it not been for free enterprise."

And continuing, at page 57, he said:

"Will private enterprise, as it is called, deliver more and better goods or more goods, or better goods? To the extent that they will, we should let them."

I have quoted some passages around which the general proposition might be advanced, and I propose to deal with this motion under three heads. The first head will be currency and import control. It will be appreciated that it is a difficult subject

which gives rise to differences of opinion and for that very obvious reason it is necessary that a Committee should be appointed to investigate the various aspects of the question. I would suggest for the consideration of the Administration that the Committee to be appointed should be divided into three sub-committees which, under one Chairman, might deal with the three heads with which I propose to deal now. The question of currency control which involves hard and soft currency, will have to be considered in the light of the needs of this country. Perhaps we may have the advantage of some consideration being given to the question by the Regional Economic Committee but, as I see it, we are entirely bound by the currency control policy of the United Kingdom.

Our neighbours in Surinam have freed themselves entirely of the burden of currency control. They are a hard currency country and are doing quite well with it. They have almost the same export commodities as we have—sugar, timber, bauxite and various other things—but one would not like to suggest that we should break away and follow in Surinam's footsteps, but that is a matter for consideration. Now that the United Kingdom is prepared to allow a relaxation of import control with respect to goods from Canada and the United States it is my opinion, from what I have gleaned in discussions with members of the mercantile community, the removal of import control in respect of certain lines of goods would automatically reduce the cost of living through competition.

I find myself in a somewhat invidious and difficult position as a member of a Committee whose minutes are confidential, and I do not think I should, without your permission, sir, refer to those minutes, or any portions of them, indiscriminately. I will just refer to one or two passages in a summarized form. We know that there was submitted for consideration a proposal of

general decontrol by stages. In other words, that the Committee should consider decontrol immediately, or as soon as possible, where goods were in full supply, but I do not think anything has been done in that connection as yet. Why the delay I do not know. If articles are easily obtainable and price control is removed prices are bound to come down, because with the removal of price control there is bound to be competition among the merchants.

I submit that if the Banks were to withdraw their financial support of the local merchants there are very few of them who would not find themselves in difficulties, and perhaps in the hands of the Official Receiver, as a result of the rising cost of imported articles and the strain on their capital to obtain replacements. It is all very well to say that because control is necessary in England it is also necessary in this Colony. In England there is total control, even at the consumer's end, but it is not so here, and I am submitting that perhaps that is one of the reasons why there is so much blackmarketing here. In the dry goods trade there are utility prices which are fixed, and there are other prices which are not fixed. The position is that a certain quantity of the same goods has to be set aside for sale at utility prices, and when those goods have been disposed of the remainder can be sold at higher prices. That is a form of control which people in England have to suffer. I do submit that relaxation of import control along the lines proposed, but upon which no action has been taken, would, especially in the case of dry goods and foodstuffs, induce competition and thereby a reduction in the cost of living in this country.

The next head which needs consideration is the question of price control which, of course, will present greater difficulty and arouse greater controversy. The opinion has been expressed that with the abolition of price control and the onrush of competition there would

be an automatic reduction in the cost of imported articles, because the merchants would be forced to sell at the lowest possible margin of profit. On the other hand we may have hon. Members arguing that the removal of price control would result in a soaring of prices. Personally I do not think that a relaxation of price control would necessarily mean that prices would go up. We know that even with price control in operation large quantities of commodities are sold at blackmarket prices. Price control provides avenues for evading the law, such as conditional sales. Price control also aids the inefficient trader because he is protected by the fixed margin of profit allowed him, and has no incentive to keen buying. Price control has never saved a poor man from having to buy an article which he needs at a price above the controlled price, and we know what he has to do sometimes in order to get that article. I need not go into details which are well known to every Member.

Lastly I will deal with the general question of local produce control. In my opinion price control of local produce should be removed completely so as to permit competition and let us see what would happen. We have just had a debate on the question of the decontrol of crude coconut oil, with which I am in perfect sympathy. I think that is one of the items of local produce which should be decontrolled and let us see what is going to happen. We know of the blackmarketing of local produce that takes place in the markets in spite of price control, and how people cannot obtain certain articles of food unless they buy something else. I feel that the only way we would be able to create a stable market and find out what we really can produce in this Colony is to decontrol the prices of all locally produced foodstuffs. It may be that we may have to continue price control of imported articles.

From November, 1949, the Central Imports Committee has been considering the question of relaxation of con-

trols. The suggestion was that as soon as adequate supplies became available price control should be removed on as many items as possible, with the exception of foodstuffs. I would really like to know what action has been taken in the matter since I gave notice of my motion, and since the relaxation policy has been adumbrated. Recently we were told that flour would be decontrolled. I have been informed outside of official sources that some commission agents have made representations to Government that it should not be done because the price would go up. I suppose they have also told Government that it is much easier for them to sit in their offices and let Government, with its huge Commodity Control staff and overhead expenses, get the flour in and allow them to draw their commissions without doing any work, than to have to run around asking Mr. Tom Jones if he would like to order 100 bags of flour. I do not know whether they have related that aspect to Government, but I think they have told Government that it would be able to secure flour at better prices than they would as commission agents.

But to whom is the commission paid? I would not like to accuse Government of being keen businessmen, but the position is that it is Government's handling of the situation that is causing prices to be favourable to the importers. Yet Government turns round and pays those gentlemen a commission because they cannot handle the bulk purchasing of flour as effectively as Government. Whether that only obtains in the case of flour, or whether it does in the case of other commodities also, the merchants around this table will be better able to say. With these few remarks I will suggest that this motion should meet with the approval of this Council.

Mr. GAJRAJ: I rise to second the motion. I heard the hon. Mover say that it is rather harmless because all it asks for is the appointment of a Committee to delve into these various

matters of control. I do not think that any motion which might come before this Council and which might have as its object the consideration of the various forms of control which we have at the moment, can be considered as being in any way harmful. The hon. the Deputy President has gone very carefully into the various aspects of control, and I would like to invite hon. Members to take their minds back somewhat and realize that control came to this Colony hand in hand with other members of the British Commonwealth. Even other parts of the world introduced it because there was a time when demand outstripped supplies.

It is because we did not have adequate supplies of certain articles such as foodstuffs, wearing apparel and things which go to make wearing apparel, that it became necessary to introduce some measure of control whereby the small supplies available for each population could be fairly distributed and, secondly, that distribution should be made at reasonable prices. But although this meant control of both prices and distribution, the policy or idea was diametrically opposed to the policy of free trade. Nevertheless, all the people of British Guiana accepted it because they felt it was being introduced for the benefit of all. I think it was the intention of Government then—and I feel sure Government would say that is still their intention—to do away with control when the crisis was over.

I think it is an accepted fact that the British Empire stands firmly upon a system of free enterprise. We in British Guiana ourselves have made progress in past years on this basis of free enterprise and free trade. It is only natural that mankind should exert himself and use his powers of thinking, and according to the extent of his own limitations would depend the measure of progress he achieves. I know that there are many people who would say that the prices of all

commodities have increased considerably, but while that is true it is not the case in British Guiana alone. It is a world-wide condition and we have got to realize that prices have become high because the value of money has been reduced. We now have to pay three and a half times more than what we paid in years gone by for a unit of foodstuff, clothing or hardware, and this reduction in the value of money is reflected not only in the cost of goods but also in the cost of administration by Government.

It is well for us to realize that as things are at present and as they appear likely to remain for many years to come, we cannot hope to go back to the days when foodstuff, clothing and other manufactured articles were sold at low prices. In order to go back to those days there will have to be a reduction in the standard of living not only among ourselves, but among people in other parts of the world. Therefore, we must realize that whatever prices exist today, they are based on a new standard of living and a new valuation of goods. I have been told that the cost of living can be kept low provided there is effective control, but that would bring about complication not only in British Guiana but in many other parts of the world. The countries of the world are dependent upon one another for what they eat and wear and use, and very many of our needs have to be imported. In turn, we export our primary agricultural and mineral products.

Our great difficulty in this country, as already expressed in this Council, is that we have had to pay world prices for everything we import but, unfortunately, we have not been getting world prices for our goods. I see that even with respect to our rice the matter will, most probably, have to go to arbitration because the neighbouring Colonies feel that their cost of living would increase if they pay us world prices for our rice. I believe a similar thing is happening with

respect to sugar—that we do not get the full world price for what we produce—and we find that, to some extent, the scales do not balance evenly. We pay more for the products of other countries, but get less for those of our own.

We have heard from time to time, both in and out of this Council, that people have expressed a desire for control, specific or general, and we heard only last week a discussion on a motion here for the removal of control in relation to coconuts and coconut oil. Therefore, when the Deputy President stated that there is public dissatisfaction with respect to other forms of control, he merely stated what was true. I think he has been well-advised in asking Government to appoint a Committee to go into this varied problem. I am not saying that all these controls should be abolished at this time, because I feel that there are certain items which are in short supply and which we cannot get as easily as we would wish to supply our local demands.

Let us take iron and steel goods, galvanized sheets, lead products and things like automobile batteries; the supplies are limited and so long as this difficulty exists it would be the duty of Government to keep a watchful eye over them. Within the last year, however, there has been a large number of items in which the difficulty of supply disappeared, and since that is so, it would seem to me that not only should the Control Board grant open licences for their importation, but that the price control in the United Kingdom should be seriously examined. What the Deputy President has said is quite true; so long as margins of profits are prescribed in the control order, the importers, in calculating their selling price, would calculate right through and utilize all their margin of profit on the selling price. In the past when there was free trade, merchants, on the whole, did not work strictly on the percentage basis.

I feel that if price control is removed from those items which are no longer in short supply, we would see a progressive drop in the selling price and, ultimately, competition might bring prices down to a point where the merchants might say that it would not pay them to sell. Many importers, I know, would benefit—and, therefore, consumers also—rather than being led to fear that if price control is removed prices would go up. Anyone who takes the trouble to study this question of competition knows that prices are bound to go down, and if we realize that there are possibilities which we can make use of for the benefit of this Colony, we would see the necessity to go into this question. The motion does not say that a Committee comprised of Members of this Council alone should be appointed, and I think that a few members of the commercial community might be included.

It is also pointed out that the question of currency control is creating a great deal of dissatisfaction, not only in this country but even in the hard currency countries like Canada. We have had trade ties with Canada for a considerable number of years, but because of this difference in currency we have had to give up trade with that country. It might be said that Canada buys our sugar and bauxite, and that we can earn dollars as a result of trading with her, but unless we can buy in return from the people we sell to, we will find that those people will not look upon the trade as being worth while. I happen to know of my own knowledge that the control Board has considered the question of relaxing control of flour, and I was very pleased indeed when I learnt that consideration was being given to it. I noticed this week that they were still calling for tenders, the idea being, probably, to make one large bulk purchase on behalf of the Colony.

I will say, in all fairness to the Control authorities, that in the bulk purchasing of flour they have done a

very fine job for this Colony. It might be that, as claimed sometimes, the bulk purchasing of flour gives an opportunity to the flour Associations of America to get together and fix one price for the whole of this area, and by removing competition in that way they might have gained a few cents more on the price. During the years when flour was being bulk-purchased, it was very difficult to get supplies in this Colony. Every individual importer had to place an order with the mills. It is to be remembered that there was a tremendous demand for flour as well as wheat from all parts of the world, and unless we had bought in bulk through this Government and had ample quantities allocated to us we might have found ourselves very short of this vital food.

For the information of the Deputy President I would say that Commission agents perform a very useful function, not only in this Colony but in other parts of the world as well. With regard to flour, it has always been the custom of the trade to purchase supplies through the agents of the mills appointed in this Colony. The Deputy President was, perhaps, considering that merchants could buy direct from the mills instead of through the agents in this Colony, but because of these agents there is always very keen competition and, as a result, prices are always very keen—right down to the barest minimum. Consequently, the importers benefit. Even when the Control Board calls for tenders the agents contact their principals and when they receive quotations they are sent over to the Flour Tenders Board. No one knows what the quotations are until the awards are made and posted on the notice board of the Department. It is true that there is incentive not only to the miller but also to the agent to see that the lowest price possible is quoted, because if the agent of every miller does not take that keen interest to give the lowest price the chances are that someone keener than himself would come away with the business.

Finally, in supporting this motion I would like to say that I am looking forward to the day when there will be free trade once again, not only in this country but all over the world, because I know of my own knowledge and experience that that is the form of trade which will bring the best results and the greatest advantage to all concerned. In other words, there is no prosperity which is more lasting to a country than prosperity built upon the principles of free trade and free enterprise.

Dr. NICHOLSON: Whatever controls are allowed to go, I think we should not release our hold on price control because whatever the evils of control from the point of view of the producer may be, the evils of decontrol are going to be greater and will be very acutely felt by the consumer. It is going to lead to higher prices and there are going to be demands for higher wages and salaries, with a concomitant increase in taxation to meet those demands. Everything will go around in a vicious circle in the spiral of inflation. I have heard an argument like this: "Release price control and permit us to import things from all quarters;" but in the same breath we hear that we are not producing more goods because the prices we get for them are not economic prices.

Since December, 1948, when the margins of profit were reduced through the Nicholson Committee, there has been a continuous endeavour on the part of the commercial community to get price controls abolished. Before this Fourth Legislative Council came into being Excess Profits Tax was abolished, and while it was in existence considerable margins of profits were allowed to the commercial people. The two things went together—the high margins of profits and the collection of excess profits tax, along with the subsidization of certain articles. Since we abolished the collection of excess profits tax, we could not very well leave these high profit margins. The introduction of this tax came shortly after

this Fourth Legislature came into being. Arguments were raised in Finance Committee urging a reduction of the tax, but the reply from me was that we had to reduce margins of profit. The commercial people were content to accept the high margins of profit, and it was after we reduced them that they began to clamour for the abolition of price controls. I suppose that is what is responsible for the introduction of this motion.

Mr. WIGHT: To a point of correction: That is not the reason. I do not wish to be insulting, but I think the person speaking about excess profits tax today does not know what he is talking about.

Dr. NICHOLSON: Very well. We are not getting adequate supplies of beef today because we are being told that the control price is not an economic price. This morning we heard that the pig-rearers had no objection to paying a higher price for copra meal if they could get more for their pork. A few days ago we considered a motion for the decontrol of coconuts and coconut oil, but it was defeated. It is always the poor man who stands to suffer in these matters, and I am convinced that it is on behalf of the bigger men that these measures for decontrol are always being brought forward. We have also heard that we should decontrol vegetables, rice and other articles of food, and the prices will go down. I do not agree with that idea. Some of us only speak of the masses—as being one of them—when we want to put over something, but that is a weak attitude.

I have been told that "such and such" a man in the street has bought a Frigidaire, an electric range, or some such article, but the point is that if a man earns \$400 a month and can live comfortably on \$300, why shouldn't he be allowed to save the other \$100 so that when the time comes for him to retire he would have something to live on? Why is he supposed to pass all his earnings over to the commer-

cial people? Why not leave them to get something back from the man who is living at a higher level? I do not think merely from the standpoint of the masses, but of everybody. We also heard an argument to the effect that if we decontrol certain articles like textiles, clothing and other things, more goods will appear in the country, and when that happens there is bound to be competition. So far as I know, however, control does not prevent competition. It merely fixes the selling price of an article, and it leaves ample room for competition. I remember that when we were about to revise the margin of profits relating to motor cars, the dealers were receiving 30 per cent. and we reduced it to 20 per cent. We were told that they would go out of business, but a certain dealer came along and said that his firm would sell their motor cars at 18 per cent. profit.

Take the question of motor cars for example. The price of \$2,800 was quoted for car "X" and within one year from that date the price of that car has moved up to \$3,800—an increase of \$1,000. It means that with a margin of 20 per cent. the dealer has put roughly \$200 more into his pocket as a result of the sale of that car. If we removed control more cars would come into the country and the price of \$3,800 would go down. I do not think it would encourage more people to buy cars. I have heard the argument that because of control Frigidaires are not being sold, and electric ranges are not being sold. The argument is that if Government removed control the psychological effect would be so great that people would readily part with their money in purchasing Frigidaires and electric ranges, but I cannot see that.

I do not intend to vote against the motion for an examination of the question of controls, because an examination is always a fruitful thing, and it would do no harm. After the examination recommendations would be made which would be examined and either accepted or rejected, but I warn this Council

that if Government removed price control the cost of living would go up, and there would be demands for increased salaries and wages. In fact, groups of persons from the sugar estates have gone to the office of the Control Board and said that they knew that the sugar companies could not afford to pay them higher wages, but the cost of living was going up and they expected Government to do something to keep prices down.

If prices are increased abroad the bulk profits here must increase, because the percentage of profit allowed remains the same. As I have pointed out in the instance of a motor car, the price of that car has risen in England. When that car arrives here the percentage of profit remains constant, and the dealer puts about \$200 more into his pocket on the sale of that car. The hon. mover quoted a speaker at the Commonwealth Conference as having said "The opportunity has come; prices are going up." That is all very well from the point of view of the producer, but what about the poor consumer? I have no doubt that all merchants in the Colony and the representatives of mercantile organizations will support this measure, but I stand on the side of the poor consumer, whether he belongs to the masses or whether he lives on a higher level, because, as I have argued, if a man earns \$400 and can live on \$300 the other \$100 belongs to him and should not pass to the mercantile community.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I think I should follow the last speaker because he seems to be championing the cause of the consumer. I am grateful because I am a consumer and not a member of the commercial community, and I feel sure that my interests would be taken care of by him. Yet, outside of my position as a consumer I hold a brief for the producers today, for it seems to me, judging by the speech of the last speaker, that the general opinion is that the prices of local produce must be pegged in the

interest of the consumers. It happens that the producers are also consumers, and are suffering more from the impact of devaluation and all the other factors responsible for the rising cost of living. They have to pay more for imported articles and also for articles produced in this Colony, more particularly in the case of rice and oil which have to be brought to the marketing organizations in Georgetown, with added cost of handling and transportation, and afterwards bought by them at enhanced prices.

It has been found that the cost of living in the rural districts is higher than it is in Georgetown. I know that the hon. Member for Georgetown North (Dr. Nicholson) has to do his duty towards the people of Georgetown, but I venture to say that if a careful analysis is made of the position it will be found that the people of Georgetown have a greater buying capacity and should be more charitable towards the producers of this Colony. My friend, the hon. Member for Georgetown Central (Mr. Fernandes) might on this occasion agree with me that if the people of Georgetown were prepared to pay half a cent per pound more for rice it would have the effect of inducing a higher export price than what has so far been demanded. The result would be that between two and three million dollars more would come into circulation in this Colony, not only among the producers but indirectly among the people of Georgetown.

But what is the effect of control so far as the people in the rural districts are concerned? They have to pay one cent more on every yard of cloth and something more on their foodstuff, because shopkeepers in the rural districts are allowed to add to their selling price transportation and other charges. All that adds to the cost of living. From the excellent speech made by the hon. nominated Member, Mr. Gajraj, it is clear that price control is neces-

sary where a particular commodity is in short supply, but not where there is free importation and an adequate supply of any commodity. I observe from the Annual Report of British Guiana that there is almost complete relaxation of import restrictions. If there is a free market it seems to me that a person purchasing for the rural districts would take into consideration the ability of the people in those areas to buy. He would be able to bargain with the wholesaler in Georgetown for reduced prices, but with prices fixed as at present that is not possible. That is one of the reasons why control should be relaxed in respect of prices and markets.

That brings me to the larger question. I feel that the Commodity Control Department should go. The time has come when we should allow ourselves to free ourselves from Defence Regulations which, in some Colonies, have been completely withdrawn. I have recently observed that action to that effect has been taken in Great Britain, and I think we should do the same thing. If there is a crisis or a short supply of any commodity ordinary legislation can be introduced in order to control the marketing and distribution of that commodity. I hate to think that we are still circumscribed by war legislation. It makes the public feel that there are still those very trying conditions which we had to endure during the war. It makes us feel that the war is still going on, although there is a war going on in Korea. Remove control and let us know that in British Guiana there is freedom in so far as the purchasing of commodities is concerned.

I wish to make it perfectly clear that the Commodity Control Department did a very good job during the war. It was necessary and it did an excellent job in spite of the great number of complaints made against it, and the suspicion that some phoney business was going on here and there. As we review the situation today we can-

not help thinking that there is still some phoney business going on.

On this point I must refer to an appalling situation which has arisen with regard to the importation of refined sugar from Great Britain. An individual who owns a new business in Lombard Street was appointed local agent for the importation of that sugar, but as a result of a process of juggling by the Commodity Control authorities he was refused an import licence and another individual came forward to apply for a licence. Luckily for the original applicant an agent of the U.K. producers visited the Colony and examined the situation, and on his return to the U.K. wrote back declining to allow any other person to have the agency in this Colony. It is a disgraceful state of affairs and one that justified condemnation of the activities of the Commodity Control Board. That is only one instance of the complaints which have been made against the Board from time to time. I know that during the war years many small businessmen had to get down on their knees, and it has been stated that in many cases bribes had to be given in order to get goods. It is a sorry thing to say but many people were prevented from establishing new businesses because of the existence of the Commodity Control Board, and that much of the blackmarketing was due to the activities of the Control Board.

I feel that now that the war is long ended the Commodity Control Department, which has been under suspicion for a long time, should be abolished, and a marketing organisation established in its place. In my opinion we have reached the stage when we can safely say that the merchants in Water Street have had their holiday, and that there should be an end of it. I say "holiday" because in the first place they have had their businesses run for them by the Commodity Control Board at the expense of somebody else. There is no question about it that as the cost of clothing or foodstuffs in-

creased the local merchants made higher profits because a margin of 20 per cent. profit on an article which costs five times more than before means five times more profit for the merchants. It is not 20 per cent. on the original cost of the article but on the increased cost as a result of the devaluation of the pound sterling and the efforts of the United Kingdom to rehabilitate itself. Goods from the U.K. are being thrown upon this market at prices far higher than for similar goods from the U.S.A. I was one who said that we owed the United Kingdom a great debt because she bore the brunt of the war, and she deserved every assistance in her effort at rehabilitation. But when we review the situation today we find that the merchants in Water Street have been benefitting by the very rehabilitation effort by Great Britain, and that that is one of the things responsible for the terrific rise in the cost of living in this Colony. Our general revenue has gone up as a result of the tremendous rise in the prices of articles imported into the Colony, and I think there has been a warning from the Colonial Office to this Government that if care was not taken there might at some time be a fall in revenue which depended so much on imported commodities.

Therefore, when we think of the aspect of the profits being made by local importers, we have to consider how wrong it was to stifle private enterprise at all times in favour of the merchants in Water Street whose holiday should now cease. If everything is to be controlled every person should have the right to import and sell, contrary to what the hon. Member for Georgetown North (Dr. Nicholson) has said, and I agree with the commercial man who said that the tendency would be towards a terrific drop in the cost of living in this country. This motion deals with currency and other things which are controlled. I am supporting the suggestion that a Committee be appointed to go into the whole matter, because we cannot be very sure

about what might be decontrolled from now. I cannot say what controls should remain and what should not, but the fact remains that we have to include the question of tariffs and so forth in considering the whole question, because it would be of no use to have an open market with increased tariffs.

The hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Gajraj, spoke of the reduction in the value of money when the prices of goods become higher. I want to say that in so far as British Guiana is concerned we have to aim at two things, and the Committee might very well offer an opinion as to when we might have a greater relaxation so far as the spending of dollars is concerned, or the granting of licences for imports from hard currency areas in the interest of the people of British Guiana, for many commodities can be brought into this Colony at cheaper cost from those areas. In view of what has taken place at the conference in England regarding Cuban sugar I feel that we have every justification in asking that more relaxation be allowed in the spending of dollars in hard currency areas.

My motion for the decontrol of crude oil and coconuts was thrown out because many Members felt that it should be taken up in dealing with this motion. I believe that whoever was responsible for the exportation of such a large quantity of oil from this Colony in 1950 committed a criminal act against the people of this country who suffered great privation, and I do not know whether some of them should not be charged with murder. The point has been made by the hon. the Colonial Secretary, and supported by the hon. the Financial Secretary, that it is a usual thing to have shortages at this time of the year. If that is so, why export at all? The Colonial Secretary's answer to that question was that we did not have drums to store the oil. In my opinion he put his foot into it. Did Government not commit a breach of faith with the community in not providing drums? If Government depended upon the Con-

trol Board the Board should have anticipated all those difficulties. Therefore, what can be done except to decontrol it, thus removing the control at \$4.70. If that is done they would not be able to make coconut oil and sell it at \$1.28 per gallon. That is why that motion was brought—to let the makers of crude oil compete with the producers of copra—and I am taking this opportunity of saying, once more, that the situation is extremely critical throughout the Colony.

Since that motion was considered in this Council I have had meetings with these people and they disclosed that they are very dissatisfied with the result of the motion. They say that they are going to come to Georgetown, sir, and ask you to do something about the matter, in a very emphatic manner. Hon. Members can take it from me that the situation is critical, but Government appears to be very callous in trying to remedy it.

Mr. RAATGEVER: I did not intend to take any part in this discussion, but I must rise to take exception to the statement made by the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara representing an attack on the Control Board which, in my humble opinion, is not only unwarranted but uncalled for. It is true that there may have been some minor mistakes by the people at the Control Board in the past—when the organisation was in its infancy—but I think the Board has done a wonderful job for the people of this Colony. If the hon. Member was dissatisfied with any action by the Board, all he had to do was to go to a recognized source—to any of the responsible members—and he would have been told the facts about the allocations to which he referred. There was nothing wrong about them. On that Board there are Members of the Executive Council and also of this Council, so that in his attack on the Board the hon. Member is also attacking them.

Mr. DEBIDIN: To a point of correction: The question I am referring to is not connected with the position of any hon. Member on the Board, but with the issue of licences for goods from the United Kingdom.

Mr. MACNIE: I propose to support the motion because it calls for the appointment of a Committee to examine this complex subject, and there can be little doubt that there is need for that examination. But, I may be forgiven if I make one or two observations in the light of some little experience of this matter. It has been suggested that price controls should be removed entirely, but I would ask those who advocate such a policy to apply their minds seriously to the chaotic conditions that would result in this Colony if such a thing was done, willy nilly. I think price control should only be removed with respect to articles which are more than ample in supplies to meet demands. Until that happens, I am convinced that if the control is removed chaos will result. Further, the removal of control on articles which are in short supply will not increase supplies. All it will do is to increase blackmarketing and the price which the merchants get.

Experience has shown that even though there may be blackmarketing of an article which is price-controlled, the mere fact that the market price has been fixed for that article in itself acts as a criterion for the blackmarket price. That has been proved over and over again since price control was introduced into this Colony a few days before the beginning of the war. It is a fact that it had to be introduced a few days before war was declared.

One other point I would like to make is that all of us are anxious and look forward to the day when this Commodity Control organization would be no longer necessary, but we still live in a world in which a large number of

these items—both local and imported—are in short supply, and while we would like to see the Commodity Control organisation disappear, I am, personally, convinced that it has to remain a little longer. It is interesting to note that those hon. Members who are advocating the removal of price control have not read the last paragraph on page 56 of the Annual Report of British Guiana which was laid on the table by the Colonial Secretary, today. It states:—

"The progressive removal of controls has been accompanied by corresponding reductions in staff during the year amounting to 48 per cent. of the figure of 108 at the beginning of the year."

I feel that the Commodity Control organisation is to be congratulated for that, and also for the job which it is at present performing under difficult conditions. Finally, sir, reference has been made to currency control, especially in so far as it affects imports. There can be little doubt that if more hard currency is made available to this Colony and to others in this region, the consumer will be able to obtain goods which are more suitable to his needs, and the possibility is that he would be able to obtain some at lower prices than at present. But, there is a more serious aspect than that in this matter of hard currency, and that is our relationship with the Dominion of Canada to the North of us, a relationship which has been very good over a long period of years.

I had the good fortune recently of spending three weeks in Canada and of renewing contacts with persons whom I have known and worked with during the war. As a result of those contacts I say there can be little doubt that we are in great danger in the Caribbean—and especially in the British Caribbean Colonies—of losing a great deal of the sympathy and support, as well as the friendship which has existed for very many years between that Dominion and ourselves. This Colony

was fortunate in that we were able to send over a trade representative in the person of the hon. the Second Nominated Member (Mr. Raatgever), recently, and I am sure this Council hopes that as a result of the Caribbean Trade Delegation which went to London and Canada we will get more dollars and see them more freely spent in this Colony, so that we could get back to better trade with Canada.

Mr. FERNANDES: This motion is a simple one, and I agree with both the preamble and the resolve clause. If it had called for the complete abolition of price control I would have been forced to vote against it. Like the hon. the Sixth Nominated Member who has just spoken, I feel that control of prices is necessary where articles are in short supply, but where articles are plentiful price control does very little, if any, good. As a matter of fact, it might do some little harm. Because of war some prices should be controlled, since certain essential articles are very difficult to obtain. There is no doubt—and any unbiassed person is bound to admit—that the Commodity Control Department has done a very good job in this Colony. It is true that I have not always agreed with the things they did and the decisions they made from time to time but, on the whole, I think they have done a good job.

When we adopted the policy of devaluation in this Colony I made a point—and it is a point worth repeating because, if this motion is carried and Government appoints a Committee immediately, I can quite see that we would not get the report for quite a long while, and then the implementation of the report would be another matter. Perhaps, by the time the report is handed to us and we are ready to implement it, the situation might change again and we might have to get another Committee to consider the changes. The point I made about devaluation is a very simple one. The article

which are produced in British Guiana and not sold at economic prices are bound to become shorter and shorter in supply, and are bound to go on the blackmarket. Any article that can be produced and exported at a high price should be encouraged, even if it means carrying up the cost of living slightly, because the general benefit that would result will far outweigh the bit of harm.

If British Guiana is able to produce more for export, more customers would be found and we would become better off, financially, since more money would come into the Colony. There is one definite injury that control has done to many articles produced in this Colony. I know from my own experience that when a control price is put on a locally-produced article the quality of that article simply deteriorates right down to nothing, particularly if it is in short supply. If it is in short supply, one can sell the inferior stuff for the same price as the good quality article that would be normally produced. Somebody mentioned that in the course of this debate, and I will just give one instance.

The wallaba posts used for fences in this Colony were never controlled and, therefore, the quality is the same today as it was pre-war. Paling staves, unlike wallaba posts, are controlled, and the result is that this article has so deteriorated that, today, one can hardly recognize it. The staves are now shorter in length and also in width, and because the price was controlled at an uneconomic level all these subterfuges are being indulged in by the producers in order to make two ends meet. Charcoal is in a similar position. The price of charcoal was controlled in relation to weight. There was no stipulation with respect to quality and so on, and practically everybody just bought charcoal not knowing that approximately 30 per cent of the weight was due to water and moisture, in most cases. Naturally, when a person buys one hundred-weight

of charcoal under these conditions, it costs him quite a lot more than if he had bought the genuine article at a slightly higher price.

I had the privilege of having a name for charcoal in pre-war days. I do not want to lose that name, so today I still sift my charcoal. I was able to do that and still sell my normal quantity for local consumption, because I was able to make up the difference on exports, but a person who was producing charcoal entirely for local consumption was bound to sell it with a very high moisture content so as to be able to get by. That is one point I would ask the Commodity Control Department to go into. I am not speaking about charcoal only, but about all locally-produced articles. If a control price is fixed for any article it should be of a certain standard, and if it falls below that standard there should be a lower price for that lower standard. I am not suggesting that prices should be sent sky high, because we have to consider the persons at the other end—the consumers. Every person in this Colony is a consumer, and I am sure that the consumers will also prefer to get an article of a normally high standard even if they have to pay a slightly higher price for it, because it would mean less loss in the end.

As regards shingles, I think the Controller of Supplies will agree that the quality has gone so low that we have practically lost the export market. People who bought for export found that when they paid for the bundles, by weight, instead of getting 50 shingles from each bundle, as is customary, if they got 20 or 25 they were lucky. Control should not be allowed to destroy the standard of any of British Guiana's products, whether manufactured or otherwise. I do not envy the Committee its difficult job, and I hope Government will appoint a suitable Committee as I shall await its recommendations.

I also hope Government will try to

avoid the little irritating incidents which really do not amount to a row of pins but, nevertheless, do irritate. There is one that gave me some unnecessary worry a few weeks ago. A member of my constituency came to me and said that he and his family were going to Grenada and wanted to take a few chickens with them. He reminded me that he had been growing them all his life and did not want to leave the few he had behind. I sent my clerk across to the Control Department, but he was told that he should go to the Produce Department and see the Marketing Officer—Mr. Wan-Ping. I wrote a definite letter to Mr. Wan-Ping, who said that if the chickens were not for breeding purposes he would let them go. The majority of them were capons and anybody could have seen that they were not for breeding purposes. I told Mr. Wan-Ping that if they could not go he should do me the favour of writing to say that they had been rejected. Before I sent that, however, I got another message from him stating that I should send my messenger back as the Director of Agriculture had undertaken to accept the responsibility.

I have been told by several persons that if the export of chickens is restricted more would become available for local consumption and the price would become cheaper, but these people, probably, want to eat chicken without paying a reasonable price for rearing them. If a man wants to eat chicken he should rear them himself and he would see how much it would cost to do so. If Government does not want to produce chickens for local consumption, all they should do is to fix an economic price and people will come forward and produce them. I have made reference to this incident because it affected a friend of mine and a member of my constituency which has put me where I am in this Council. These little things though not very important, are the things that irritate. There are certain Members of this Council who would not have taken the trouble to try and

get that matter straightened out, but would have told the gentleman in question to go and see how difficult it is to get things done. Those of us who like to see things running smoothly in British Guiana, however, would always find some time to devote to such a purpose although we need it for other matters.

I would ask that since Government is about to appoint a Committee, these little things which are so difficult to remedy—either from the point of view

of exports or currency—be dealt

I think that everything is too stereotyped and that the time for that kind of policy is gone. These little things irritate me, as I have said before. I would not say they make me see "red," because I never see "red." I only get irritated.

The PRESIDENT: As it is getting towards 5 o'clock, we will have to adjourn and continue the debate on this motion later. Council will now adjourn until 2 p.m. on Wednesday, July 18.