

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.**

FRIDAY, 16th JUNE, 1950.

The Council met at 2 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. F. W. Holder, K.C.

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

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

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

The Hon. T. Lee (Essequibo River).

The Hon. V. Roth (Nominated).

The Hon. C. P. Ferreira (Berbice River).

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

The Hon. G. A. C. Farnum (Nominated).

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

The Hon. J. Fernandes (Georgetown Central).

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

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

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

The Hon. G. H. Smellie (Nominated)

The Hon. J. Carter (Georgetown South).

The Hon. F. E. Morrish (Nominated).

The Clerk read prayers.

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 15th of June, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

**PAPERS LAID**

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

The Report of the Official Receiver and Public Trustee for the year 1949.

**NOTICE OF QUESTIONS**

Mr. THOMPSON gave notice of the following questions:—

1. For what period has Major C. E. Darlington, Principal of the Kingston Trade Centre been away? Give date of departure from the Colony.
2. Has any machinery been received or information of selection of technical officers? If so how many? Give names and qualifications.
3. What has been the cost to Government to date of —
  - (a) Passage to England
  - (b) Subsistence
  - (c) Daily Rate
  - (d) Cost of travelling around in course of selection
  - (e) Who is deputising for the Principal?

**ORDER OF THE DAY.****AMERINDIANS' WAGES IN RUPUNUNI**

Dr. JAGAN asked and the COLONIAL SECRETARY laid over replies to the following questions:—

- Q. 1.—Is it true that before an Amerindian is employed a permit to

employ must first be obtained by the employer from the Sub-Protector of Indians? What is considered to be a fair wage for the protection of Amerindians before a permit to employ is granted?

- A. 1.—Section IV of the Aboriginal Indians Protection Ordinance (Chapter 262) requires that a permit be obtained from the Protector or any Sub-Protector of Indians before any Aboriginal Indian or half-caste is employed. Section 25 (1) of the Ordinance prescribes a minimum wage of 10/- a month, exclusive of food, accommodation and other necessaries.
- Q. 2.—If the answer to the above is in the affirmative, will Government state whether this is observed in the Rupununi District and if not why not?
- A. 2.—The limited number of officers in the area has made it impossible to enforce the Ordinance strictly in the Rupununi District.
- Q. 3.—Will Government consider the setting up of a minimum wage for the employment of Amerindians?
- Q. 3.—It is not considered that it would be practicable to prescribe or enforce a single minimum wage for all Amerindians. As indicated in the reply to question 4, actual wages greatly exceed the minimum prescribed in section 25 (1) of the Ordinance.
- Q. 4.—What is the wage paid to Amerindians by Contractor or Contractors engaged in making bricks for Government at Lethem?
- A. 4.—There are no Amerindians at present employed by Contractors engaged in making bricks at Lethem, but those last employed on this work were paid at the rate of \$1 per day plus rations (including tobacco) the value of which is estimated to have exceeded \$1 a day.

WIDOWS' AND ORPHANS' PENSION  
(AMENDMENT) BILL, 1950.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I move the second reading of a Bill intituled:

“An Ordinance further to amend the Widows' and Orphans' Pensions Ordinance, Chapter 207.”

Since the termination of the mandate in Palestine, the Palestine Widows' and Orphans' Pensions Fund which was instituted in 1944 has been wound up and accumulated contributions of contributors returned to them. Notwithstanding anything contained in the Principal Ordinance, an officer who was a contributor under the Palestine Widows' and Orphans' Pensions Ordinance, 1944, immediately before the termination of His Majesty's jurisdiction in Palestine, and who is transferred to the service of the Government of British Guiana may, not later than three months after such transfer or after the commencement of this Ordinance, whichever is the later, make a lump sum payment under this Ordinance equal to the accumulated contribution he has paid under the aforesaid Palestine Ordinance. Clause 2 of this Bill seeks to secure the benefits of a contributor in respect of past contributions paid to the Palestine Widow's and Orphans' Pensions Fund should such a contributor be transferred to this Colony.

Clauses 3, 4, and 5 seek to make certain minor amendments to the Principal Ordinance. A valuation of the assets and liabilities of the New Widows and Orphans Fund as at 31st December, 1945, revealed a surplus of approximately £103,000. The Actuary recommended that of this sum £75,000 should be allocated for distribution to contributors, and that the sum of £28,000 should be retained in the Fund to provide against future contingencies. The Actuary further recommended that an equitable method of distribution of the aforesaid sum of £75,000 would be the grant of an addition of 60 per centum to pensions registered at 31st December, 1948, and the use of new benefit tables effective from 1st January, 1949. The increase of 60 per centum to registered pensions was made effective by the Widows and Orphans Pension (Amendment) Ordinance, 1949, (No. 27), and Clauses 6 and 7 of this Bill seek to introduce the new tables with effect from the 1st of January, 1949.

The effect is retroactive. I formally move that the Bill be now read a second time.

Mr. WIGHT seconded.

Mr. DEBIDIN: May I ask the hon. the Financial Secretary what is the amount at the credit of this Fund?

The FINANCIAL SECRETARY & TREASURER: A sum approaching a million dollars.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

The Council resolved itself into Committee to consider the Bill clause by clause.

First Schedule — Section 10 (2).

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I move that section 10 (2) of the Principal Ordinance be amended by the substitution for the words "the Governor in Council" the words "the directors".

Mr. WIGHT seconded.

Amendment agreed to.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I move that in Table C in the column "Age of Husband Last Birthday" the figures "35" be substituted for the figures "25" in the 18th line.

Mr. WIGHT seconded.

Amendment agreed to.

The Council resumed.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: With the consent of the Council I move that the Bill be now read a third time and passed.

Mr. WIGHT seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a third time and passed.

#### OLD AGE PENSIONS AT 55 YEARS

Dr. JAGAN: With your permission, Sir, I propose to take my two motions at items 3 and 4 on the Order Paper together for the sake of convenience, so as not to have to put forward the same argument twice. If you so desire, Members can speak and vote on the motions separately, but with your permission, Sir, I would like to speak on both motions at the same time. The motions read:

Whereas the qualifying age under the Old Age Pensions Ordinance is 65;

And Whereas the retiring age for Civil Servants and other Government employees is between 55 and 60 years;

Be It Resolved that this Honourable Council recommend that the qualifying age under the Old Age Pensions Ordinance be reduced from 65 to 55.

#### ABOLITION OF MEANS TEST

Whereas the Old Age Pensions Ordinance provides for a Means Test whereby anyone having an income of more than \$4.50 per month in Georgetown of \$3.50 per month in the rural districts is excluded from the benefit of receiving \$4.50 per month in Georgetown and \$3.00 per month in the rural areas;

And Whereas the 1947 Margate Conference of the Labour Party resolved *inter alia* that "the Means Test, which this Conference believes to be a degrading and unjustified inquisition into the houses of the working class of this country, should be abolished";

Be It Resolved that this Honourable Council recommend that the Means Test be abolished from the Old Age Pensions Ordinance.

The first motion seeks to reduce the qualifying age from 65 to 55 years. At present the Ordinance provides that before an individual can receive old age pension he must have reached the age of 65 years. The second motion provides that the means test should be abolished. Under the existing Ordinance if an individual at 65 is earning \$4.50 per month in Georgetown or \$3.50 in the country districts, he is disqualified from receiving old age pension. Consequently this motion resolves to abolish this qualification, so that as soon as a person reaches the qualifying age he would automatically receive the pension which is allowable under the Ordinance.

I move these motions because I am fully aware of the hardships which the old people of this country are experiencing at the present time. First of all, knowing the backwardness of most colonial legislation, I must indeed praise the Government for having placed in the Statute Book of this Colony an Ordinance to provide for the aged. I think there is no more urgent task than to alleviate the

shadow of insecurity which hangs over the heads of many of the working people in this Colony — the shadow of insecurity which faces them when they get old. There are some individuals who hold the view that the old people are an unnecessary burden on the State, and that the sooner they die the lesser the responsibility of the Government would be. We find that view expressed especially in the field of employment. As a man approaches a mature age one finds that he naturally cannot exert himself as he could in his younger and more useful days, consequently employers, perhaps rightly in many cases, either demote him, reduce his pay or dismiss him from their employment. Individuals who have grown old without having any means of support are thus placed in a desperate position. They are thrown on the scrap heap with very little means of support.

Modern political thought is beginning to accept an entirely different outlook so far as the old people are concerned. Old people are no longer looked upon as an unnecessary burden on the Government, but the whole community is looked upon as a permanent and self-renewing organism. In other words, society is made up first of all of people who are working, or are capable of working. Then there are those who are expected to be able to work — the youths — and there are those people who are unable to work, for reasons of disability, old age and so on. Nevertheless it behoves the working people to contribute the necessary amount of money for the upkeep of the youths and young people, and also of the old people of any country. We have made attempts in this Colony but I feel that those attempts have not gone far enough. These motions seek to remove some of the anomalies by which certain individuals are prevented from achieving their rightful share of the revenues of the Colony.

The first motion deals with the age qualification for old age pensions. It is true that if the age qualification is reduced from 65 to 55 years a large number of individuals would necessarily come within the Old Age Pensions Ordinance. Perhaps hon. Members would like to know how many persons would then be entitled to old age pension, and

what additional burden Government would have to bear. I have some figures here which show that in the age group 55 to 59 there are 11,127 persons; between 60 and 64 there are 8,833; 65 to 69, 7,134 persons; 70 to 74, 3,867; 75 to 79, 2,167; 80 to 84, 973; 85 years and over, 595 persons making a total between the ages of 55 to 85 and over of 34,696 persons. Those figures have been obtained from the 1946 Census Report, and I should qualify that by saying that the 1946 figures with respect to those above 65 years are 14,736. Of that number Government is now paying pensions to 8,930 persons, and even though those persons have reached the age of 65, because of their ability to earn above the statutory limit, 5,806 persons are disqualified. At the present time Government is incurring an expenditure of \$381,700 in respect of old age pensions, whereas if all of the 34,696 persons were to receive old age pensions — that is if the age qualification was reduced to 55 years — the total expenditure would be in the vicinity of \$1,394,550.

For the benefit of hon. Members I have also got out figures with respect to persons 60 years and over. Perhaps hon. Members may desire to reduce the age qualification to 60 years instead of 55 as I propose. If the age qualification is reduced to 60 years then the expenditure involved would be in the vicinity of \$841,076. I might point out that these figures include all the persons who are within the age limit, whether it is 55 and above, or 60 and above, or 65 and above. We have to bear in mind the fact that there are many individuals above this age limit who are already receiving pensions from Government under various Ordinances apart from the Old Age Pensions Ordinance. The question of the introduction of a lower age limit — from 65 to 55 years — should be given very serious consideration by this Council because we find that it is the policy not only in certain departments of Government but by private employers also to put people who have reached the age of 55 years out of employment.

I know that in the Public Works Department, since the new scheme has been inaugurated for the maintenance of roads, where formerly the Department undertook all the work under the super-



vision of their own engineers, drivers and overseers, the work is now given out to contractors and these contractors are loath to employ persons who are over a certain age limit. They prefer to employ persons who are young and can produce as much work as possible. Consequently, I had to take up this matter only recently with the Director of Public Works who, I am afraid, thought the matter was a very big one and was not able to offer any solution for it. These people have to be provided for and, especially in these days of growing unemployment, there is great need to put people of 55 years and over within the Old Age Pensions Ordinance. It may be said that Old Age Pension Ordinances in other countries have an age limit of either 60 or 65 years and, therefore, we in British Guiana cannot reduce ours to 55 years, but in adducing that argument we have to take into consideration the conditions existing in our own country. One has to consider the questions of poor sanitation and the small amount of medical care which the people receive; one has to consider the state of nutrition of the people and things like that.

I remember reading in the report of a sub-Committee of the Main Development Committee that 25 per cent of the school children in this Colony are necessitous, and these are children who will probably grow up to be charges on other people. We know also that the late Dr. Francis, in the report of the Cost of Living Survey Committee stated that the working people were not eating proper quantities and varieties of food in this Colony. I remember also reading in the report of the Evans Commission that "the inherited debility of generations of disease cannot be expected to vanish at once." All these statements point to the fact that our people, because of disease, because of a low nutritional state, grow old before their time. They age and mature very much more rapidly than the people in other countries. I have in front of me a book on Population Problems by Mr. Thompson, giving the expectation of life in various countries, and in a chart which is tabulated he compares England and Wales with India and shows that at the age of 50 years the expectation of life is 14.3 in India as against 21.4 in Great Britain. At the age of sixty it is 10

in India as against 14 in Great Britain and at the age of seventy it is 6.4 in India as against 8.6 in England and Wales. Our expectation in this Colony will, no doubt, bear some comparison with the situation as it exists in India and that goes to prove that the people here, because of the arduous nature of their work and the environment in which they live, do mature much more rapidly and, consequently, are not in a position to earn their livelihood as they grow older. I therefore commend to hon. Members of this Council for consideration the first part of this motion — that the age limit should be reduced to 55 years.

I have already given the figures indicating the expenditure which will have to be incurred by Government in this case, and I have also indicated what the expenditure will be for an age limit of 60 years, if hon. Members feel that there should be a reduction to that extent. I may point out that the figures — 1¼ million dollars if the age limit is reduced to 55 years, and nearly three quarters of a million dollars if it is reduced to 60 years—are totally inclusive and do not provide for the means test. They will permit every person to receive old age pension as long as they have reached the age of 55 years or 60 years, as the case might be.

With regard to the second part of the motion — asking that the means test be abolished — I know that hon. Members of this Council are fully apprised of the situation. Only recently a case was reported in the newspapers relating to a woman named Mrs. Isabella Dalrymple, residing at 104, Regent Street, Bourda. She worked with the Town Council drawing water for sale and she received \$7 per month for doing that, along with social assistance to the extent of \$2.40 per month but this has been taken away. Now, she has to pay a rent of \$3.29 per month leaving an income of approximately \$4.50 to live on for a whole month. It is obvious, however, that in view of the high cost of living today this sum is not adequate and should be increased. We have other cases in which persons have been told that because they are living with relatives — perhaps a son or a daughter — those relatives should provide

for them. In these days of the high cost of living, we know that many persons can hardly support their own families much less to carry the increased burden of supporting their mothers and fathers.

Another factor which has to be taken into consideration is that dealing with individuals who may be attempting to produce more for their own benefit. By that I mean they might be producing ground provision or other crops on half an acre or an acre of land and may be earning \$10 or \$15 a month therefrom, and because it is thought that they are earning above the statutory limit they would not be entitled to old age pension. Only recently a case was brought to my notice where a man was renting a piece of land for agricultural purposes and it was felt that his earnings therefrom were above the statutory limit. He asked my advice and I told him that as long as it could be proved he had no claim to old age pension. He said the only thing he could do was to give up the plot of land, but that would take another few months. In other words, the statutory limit is really causing individuals who may be attempting to secure some better means of livelihood to show a disinclination to do so, in order to qualify for the old age pension. I do not think that at this time when we are attempting to increase production we should encourage any such behaviourism. Those are all the points which occur to me at the present moment.

I must point out in closing, however, that Government must do everything in its power to ensure a feeling of social security in our population. Social psychology has agreed that as long as there is a fear of insecurity in old age particularly, it acts as a brake to productivity—the source from which the national income of the Colony or the revenue is derived. I have given the figures and I know they seem large, but at the same time one has to consider that these old people are entitled to kind consideration by the very fact that they have contributed to the well-being of this Colony in the past and if they cannot do so any longer, then those who are able to do so should see to it that they get a fair and adequate treatment. As I have said, the

figures I have given are all inclusive and one has to remember that, as in the case I have just cited, a person might not be qualified for old age pension but might be considered for social assistance. We have in the Estimates a figure of \$165,000 for social assistance for 1950, and that is a reduced amount by nearly \$41,000 from the amount voted last year. If more people qualify for old age pension by having the age limit reduced and the means test abolished, then it means that the administration of social assistance may be transferred and the amount voted under that head utilized for the payment of old age payment. With those few words, I heartily commend this motion to the consideration of hon. Members of this Council.

Mr. DEBIDIN I rise to second both motions which have been moved by the hon. Member for Central Demerara. I confess that the subject of the first motion had been exercising my mind a great deal in the past and that I was contemplating myself the bringing forward of a motion such as this. I became aware of the necessity for it all the necessity for it when I read recently of similar efforts in our neighbouring Colony of Trinidad, and a great question which, I think, should strike everyone is whether we really intend to provide for the class of people named in this Ordinance in a way which would relieve them of the burdens of life in the particular age they have reached. If we examine this question carefully we would realize how little benefit can be derived from the amount mentioned in the Ordinance, and I feel that it is out of all proportion with the needs of the people who have reached the age of 65 years. I have found that in this Colony there is large number of people who are struggling to find employment—not only in the 55-65 age group, but even far below that.

There is a tendency on the part of the sugar estates—and one which was strongly emphasized about two years ago during the controversy over the “cut and load” and the “cut and drop” systems in the cutting of cane—to hold that what is needed for increased production is healthy and able-bodied workers. They say they

do not want to slow down production by the employment of gangs including old people to load the punts aback, and that argument seems to have come up very strongly today in favour of the motion which has just been moved. We cannot have it both ways. If in the struggle to increase production in any industry we are inclined to utilize only able-bodied workers, then it seems to me that something has to be done by way of social security measures for the class of people who, to use an ordinary term, would be beached. The hon. Mover of the Motion has referred to certain cases relating to the shortness of life and early old age in this Colony and I would ask hon. Members of this Council to consider that point very carefully.

There can be no doubt that people outside the Civil Service have to struggle very hard in this Colony to earn their living and they struggle under conditions which are not very conducive to good health and long life. That applies particularly to the women in the rural districts of the Colony. I know that their lot is very, very unfortunate indeed, not only because they do arrive at a premature old age through the burdens of family life, but because many of them also become saddled with the cares of widowhood through the fact that their husbands were unable to live the allotted span of life. I have gathered these facts in the course of my own experience in this Colony, particularly among the working classes. The struggle today is even harder than it was in days gone by; conditions have become harder and harder and the stress is greater. Some hon. Members may feel that I am saying something which is not true; I see the Financial Secretary watching me and I wish he had been going around as much as I have done, as he would have satisfied himself to the contrary. Except for the Civil Servants the other people in the Colony have had very little leeway as regards income and the cost of living—a cost of living which has risen disastrously high and the stress of which has been felt throughout the Colony.

Another fact is that the rise in the cost of living has not been met by a rise

in production and by other means. The elements have even taken a hand in causing distress in the form of floods and so on, and all of these things have hindered production and development. I think that if we should go through the rural districts and take a census at this moment, we would find that nearly all of the people there are living a very hand-to-mouth existence. I do not want to paint a very gloomy picture of our Colony, but the fact remains that what I am saying is very true. I have seen these conditions myself in the rural areas, and in some of them it may be said that starvation faces the people. Parents are unable to provide for the every-day life of their children, and they have incurred considerable debt which they are unable to meet at this moment. What I am saying can be backed very fully, and all those are conditions which, I respectfully submit, tend to cause premature old age in this Colony.

The hon. Mover has referred to people on the sugar estates, but I do not think I have to use much argument to convince anyone about conditions on the estates and of the fact that the average man or woman there hardly lives above the age of 60 years. In Trinidad, provision has been made for the benefit of Women particularly, because it was felt that the Old Age Pensions Ordinance hardly benefited them when it fixed such a high age limit as 65 years. If hon. Members are not prepared to accept these points, then let us postpone this motion and have a census taken and that would certainly show that there is some disparity in the age limit as fixed. I would suggest that the limit for men be fixed at 55 years and that for men at 60 years. I think that would be a very equitable limit. The argument to have the limit for men fixed at 60 years is all the more cogent because of the fact that Government itself has accepted the theory that Civil Servants cannot go further and give efficient service after they have reached that age, therefore they are pensioned off at the age of sixty. As a matter of fact, Government has gone further and said that it is in the option of Civil Servants to leave the Service at the age of 55 years. We can put the argument in that way

and then ignore it in another case. If we legislate for Civil Servants to retire at the age of 60 years, it follows that we feel they deserve to retire and get a little bit of leisure with their pension at that stage.

It seems to me that in considering this Bill we have to go to the fundamentals of the whole business. I feel sure that when the mover of the original motion—the hon. Member for Western Essequibo—brought it forward in 1944, he was thinking of a class of people whose condition had struck his heart through pity and who should not be forgotten as regards social security. I think it is one of the strongest measures which has been brought up in this Council within the last decade. It obtains in our neighbouring Colonies. It seems to me that if we are to take the reason for putting forward this Bill as relief to that class of people then this Council must be sincere in that relief to that class of people. In other words, we must not think in dollars and cents. We cannot think in terms of dollars and cents in matters of this kind. Just as how Education is a social item, an item of social welfare work for which we cannot think too much in terms of dollars and cents because we must undertake that in the interest of the masses, so it is if we are to consider the relief to people of old age we cannot think in terms of dollars and cents but think of the relief which must be brought to that class of people. When the hon. Member moved that motion he could not have anticipated how much it would cost this Colony, but at the same time it is an amount which will increase with the increasing of our population. He must have envisaged at that time this Council taking into consideration the possibility of the variation of the Ordinance, the increase of the population and the increase of the cost that will be entailed in that particular Ordinance. So today we must adjust our minds to the question of the class of people and the nature of the relief, and when we do so, Sir, respectfully submit to this Council that you will find that in giving Old Age Pension to people above 65 years you are merely holding out a half-loaf to the class of people who are benefited. In other words, people of old age

have not been benefited to the full extent because Old Age in this Colony embraces people of 65 years and above.

I respectfully submit that the man of 60 years and the woman of 55 years have reached the stage where they must need some help. I know of the countless numbers who try to get a shilling or two by going to the Magistrate under the Maintenance Ordinance of our Laws, but under that Ordinance the total amount they can ever get is \$2.00 per week. If there are ten children involved the total amount that can be obtained is \$2.00 per week. It seems that when people have to resort to such a thing, they must be in need at an early age. I am really asking hon. Members to consider the women of this Colony and particularly the working class women and that class of women who may come under this on the sugar plantations and who, I know, at the age of 55 years are certainly prematurely old, or let us say they are old within the meaning of the Old Age Pensions Ordinance. They are definitely old at 55 years, and why their case needs more consideration is this: The family to whom that old lady may be attached may be a family just earning enough to carry out their own expenses, and her lot, as I know the case to be, is one of having to be shunted from the home of one child to the home of another child, and with tears in her eyes she goes from house to house to be buffeted in some cases. That is a case I know of my own knowledge. They come to me and I see them with my own eyes. If we are really to exercise this act of social welfare work, we must exercise it fully and benefit fully the class of people who are really people of old age.

I would strongly suggest that, if at some stage in the course of this debate on this question this Council should feel that instead of the limit being 55 years, as the hon. Member desires, it be left at 60 for men and 55 for women, a strong case has certainly been made out and I strongly ask hon. Members to consider that. There is one point the hon. Member has made, and that is, it seems to me, of the total number who are above the present old age of 55 only 60 per cent. are asking for help. The hon. Member says about



\$¾ million would be involved if all above 60 years are taken into consideration. We can sift that down to the same proportion, about two-thirds. If we have to spend \$400,000 or \$450,000 instead of \$381,700 and really relieve the poor people of old age in this Colony, I think we can do no better that support this motion. On the other aspect of this motion I am certainly in agreement with the hon. Mover, because I have had many complaints. I think I have referred to them either in Finance Committee or in this Council. The Committees or Boards, having to do with this question of coming to the conclusion of means of an individual, do so in some cases arbitrarily and in some cases very partially, the way in which they look at things.

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member should not make that accusation against a Committee working in the interest of the public. It is a very grave allegation to make on the people who serve on this Committee.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I am referring to the local boards in the districts. I am not referring to the Social Assistance Department or Executive Officers. They have appointed local committees of the Chairmen of the Districts and other people, who go into the means of the applicant. I know as a fact—that is the complaint made to me—that because a man has one or two acres of barren land he gets nothing.

The PRESIDENT: I do not want the hon. Member to misunderstand me. He said the committees are very partial. That is a very grave accusation to make against any committee doing public work. He did not say it was reported to him that they were partial. I would ask the hon. Member to weigh his words.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I am sorry if you misunderstood me. I started off by saying that many complaints had come to me.

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member did not say that!

Mr. DEBIDIN: What I say really relates to the nature of those complaints. It is certainly a matter for grave concern

the way in which decisions are come to as to the deserving or not of the people entitled to old age pension.

Mr. LEE: To a point of explanation! The hon. Member can easily ask the Committee to reconsider their decision. I have done so and the Committee did it.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I think the hon. Member's point is pointless and I am sorry for his interruption. I am not talking of what may be done or may not be done. I am talking of the working of the present system. A person may not go to the hon. Member to complain and ask his assistance; he may have to accept in his own ignorance or lack of initiative whatever is put up in their decision determining his means. That is the position in the rural districts of the Colony. And it is a sad state of things prevailing, and the complaints are many. I say that for the benefit of the people concerned and not for the benefit of the Members of this Council only. I feel, Sir, that this Ordinance itself can be tightened up in the way of measuring the means of individuals, apart from what the hon. Mover of the motion has asked for in his motion. It seems to me that whereas this motion is asking to abolish the means test, there is on the other hand a grave risk that people who normally ought not to be entitled may be asking and stretching out their hands for money which really should not go to them. A means test may be necessary, but the way in which that is to be exercised should be considerably looked into. What I am concerned about is this: The means test for the country districts is \$3.00 and, taking what is to be gained in the way of old age pension—\$2.40—It seems to me to indicate that a person must not be worth more or need not live on more than \$5.40. That to my mind is ridiculously low, and that is what the means test is doing today by fixing the figure at \$4.50 for Georgetown and \$3.00 for the country. It seems to me that a person who is just able to show an income of \$3.02 is deprived of this \$2.40 to make up \$5.42 for him to live on, and that is per month.

Are we really benefiting the people of this Colony by saying all they should

live on is \$5.01? Sir, I feel that is one way in which this means test must be looked at. When you restrict it to \$4.50 and \$3.00, it means many people will continue to suffer very badly from distress and want from which this Ordinance was intended to relieve them. It is to this class of people the relief must be directed, and it must be sure. We have not got—and it is one other important point to make—in this Colony yet, possibly one of us may move for that, Unemployment Insurance. In the absence of Unemployment Insurance it seems to me we have to be generous enough under this Ordinance until that time comes. If what is being asked for here today does not meet with a measure of success, then it follows, as obtains in every democratic country—Great Britain, U.S.A.—where you have all kinds of social insurances—unemployment insurance, social security insurance—for the people of the class that may be benefited under this Ordinance, that should be provided. In all that has been said and may be said for these motions, I feel it is something which concerns the livelihood of a class of people who should draw forth our sympathy, and these motions, therefore, should get the sympathy of the Council.

Mr. CARTER: I do not think that Members of this Council would be unsympathetic to these motions, although I think that those of us who are called Labour Members should claim to have a monopoly of charitable feelings in this particular matter, because there can be no sadder spectacle in any community than poverty in old age. Sir, I think it is a sad commentary on our local industries that 90 per cent. of the people who are employed therein must look forward to an old age which must be spent in poverty and want and invariably in the Alms House or some other institution of the Colony. I say that Members will not be unsympathetic because the only argument that can be adduced against these motions for which I congratulate the hon. Mover is that this country cannot afford to implement a scheme such as is suggested by the hon. Mover of the motions. We will hear, I suppose, that revenue is not large enough to meet the expenditure which will be necessary if these motions

are to be implemented. While I am on that, I would like to remind the hon. the Financial Secretary that since Devaluation there are many industries in this country whose incomes have been increased by, I think, 30 per cent. because of Devaluation and not because of any capital expenditure or because of any energy or effort on their part; that is, on the part of the persons who own those industries. I think it is time that something be done to rope in the whole or some substantial part of what I may describe as this unearned income from certain industries which have benefited greatly as the result of Devaluation.

I am not an expert in these matters and I speak subject to correction, but I believe the Bauxite industry, the Gold industry and the Timber industry have all benefited as the result of Devaluation, and I feel that some substantial part of that benefit — I should say all of it — should come to the revenue of this country. I know that our revenue is small. I was looking at the prospectus of Columbia University, and saw that our revenue compares almost equally with that of Columbia University. I feel if we tap all these sources of income our revenue would be substantially increased. I say so because I substantially support, though not the whole, the two motions which have been moved today. I had in mind also a motion of my own, the one of Family Allowance, which is now in Committee, in which a similar request for expenditure has been made, and we are still awaiting certain figures before a report can be submitted by the Committee which has been set up, because I find that the Census figures are very bare and it is very difficult to arrive at any accurate amount of expenditure to implement that scheme. I would suggest to my friend that a Committee should be set up to go into this question of Old Age Pension. When the Old Age Pension Ordinance was passed, I suppose, it was a very rough and ready document as it was a new thing to this country and, I feel, the time has come when that Ordinance has to be reviewed. I am a member of the Board of Poor Law Commissioners set up to investigate cases for Old Age Pension, and I have attended many of

the sessions. It is a pathetic sight to see the old people coming up week after week to put their case to the Board and ask for relief, and the members of the Board feel—and I share their feeling—that the sum of \$4.50 per month is much too small to qualify for relief. I do not agree that the means test should be abolished altogether. It may be desirable in those countries where poverty is something more apparent than real and persons go around as paupers who have means. I would suggest that a means test be retained, but certainly the ridiculous sum of \$4.50 and \$3.00 should be increased substantially. I think if a Committee is set up that Committee will be able to go into the figures and arrive at a sum which can be regarded as reasonable. I repeat the present figures are absurd.

With regard to the qualifying age there should also be some reduction. That again is a question the Committee can consider. I myself feel that it should be reduced to at least 60 years. That is my personal view, and I will support that at any time it comes before this Council. This is a most admirable motion, and I feel that I should win the sympathy of Members. I would suggest to my friend—there may be certain Members of the Council who may not accept the figures which he has given here, especially after we hear what the hon. the Financial Secretary has to say — that he should agree that a Committee be set up to consider his motion. I know that sometimes when one moves a motion and the suggestion is made that it should go to a Committee, the mover feels it is more or less a suggestion that it should go into cold storage. I have no such idea behind my suggestion. I have no doubt the Mover himself will be on that Committee if it is set up, and I feel that he can get some results from this Committee within a short time. Rather than have the motion defeated I would suggest to him that he considers the possibility or good sense of having a Committee set up to consider the motion.

The FINANCIAL SECRETARY & TREASURER: I think I would like at this stage to make a few brief remarks. In the first place I would like to compli-

ment and congratulate the hon. Mover of the motion on the very admirable way in which he has presented his motion. I think Members would agree with me that he marshalled his facts concisely. He presented his arguments with a due sense of moderation and without exaggeration. I would also like to say that from such figures as I have in the Government files, his figures appear to be quite correct. The figures he quoted of the numbers of persons in the various age groups are correct, and his estimate of the cost of giving effect to the recommendations in his motion appears also to be correct. That is to say if both motions can be implemented it would involve an addition to our annually recurrent expenditure of something like \$1,000,000.

Sir, the hon. Member who has just spoken, the hon. Member for Georgetown South, touched on the vitally important criterion by which we must judge this proposition, and that is the financial effect. The hon. Mover used several rather important phrases in his speech. He spoke of social security, social psychology, and lastly he talked about national income. He referred quite rightly to the fact that it is out of our national income that we derive the revenue from which all expenditure of the Government is met, but he did not go far enough. He did not suggest the measure of that national income; he did not suggest either whether his estimate of \$1,000,000 per annum can be found out of the present national income of this country, or if it could not he did not suggest the means by which that national income can be advanced in order to meet it. I do not know if hon. Members realize that I tried in Finance Committee to hint at our position. I explained that we have to move very cautiously in regard to the undertaking of further burdens on our revenue and, of course, our national income.

On this question of Old Age Pension, everyone would sympathize with the argument which was brought forward. I do not think anyone would deny the fact that it is very desirable that people, who have reached that stage in life when they can no longer work for themselves, should

be provided with the means of security, but social security of that form must come after our economic and financial security has been secured, otherwise we must face ruin. A million dollars a year, if we could find it, might be much better spent in paying the annual charges on a large additional loan of something like 15 million dollars in order to try to provide for an improvement in our economy rather than in the way he proposes.

The hon. Member for Georgetown South touched on a most important point. What we should really try to secure is the means by which industry can be made to bear some share of the cost of providing pensions for those who have been employed. That, I think, is the first step, and I am a little surprised that the hon. Member chose, in the preamble to his motion, to base his argument so much on the fact that the retiring age of civil servants is between 55 and 60. To my mind—and here I am making a personal observation—old age pension and a pension to a Government employee who retires are different things. There is no analogy between the two. One is a pension which really is almost part of his remuneration; it is the employer's contribution towards his upkeep after retirement. On the other hand, an old age pension is a contribution from the community as a whole. It is not, however, relief; that word has a significance of its own. But it is not in the same position as an employer's pension. That is the point I am trying to make.

It has also developed out of this debate that the rate of old age pension at present is considered to be too low. The hon. Member for Georgetown South made some strong remarks about that. If we take this argument to its logical conclusion we should find ourselves not only reducing the age qualification and abolishing the means test but faced with the argument that old age pension should be a living wage—something like \$20 or \$30 per month so that the recipient could live on it. I make this point to suggest to hon. Members that if we take the argument of the social security basis too far we would find ourselves in the position where the economy of our Colony would

be just breaking down. If we could find a million dollars to add to our social assistance commitments the total vote would be something like \$1,600,000, allowing for some saving on the Poor Relief vote to which the hon. Member referred. Our estimate for primary education is \$2,300,000, and we know it is not enough, but can hon. Members conceive that we can afford to spend \$1,600,000 on social assistance or social security if we can only spend \$2,300,000 on education? Quite obviously we should have to spend more on education, and it would be to our economic advantage to spend more along that line. We ought to move very slowly and very cautiously. Social security is very desirable. But I am sure that those countries which try to move too fast along that particular line, before their economies are developed and their national incomes have developed to the stage where they can stand it, will find themselves broken. We must not in this Colony allow our sympathy and our regard for the modern trend along these lines to overcome our judgment, however much we feel that we should like to see these things come about here. We must not go too fast or we shall find ourselves much worse off than before.

Finally I would like to touch on the point of family responsibility. One hon. Member spoke of the liability which the law places on sons and daughters to provide for their aged parents, and I gathered the impression that he thought it was a harsh and a bad thing. I submit that that is quite a wrong idea.

Mr. DEBIDIN: If I gave that impression—I could not be understood to have given that impression.

The FINANCIAL SECRETARY & TREASURER: I am sorry if I am drawing a wrong conclusion from the hon. Member's remarks, but I wish to say that the responsibility of children for their aged parents remains. I am sure that in no ideology that I would like to see introduced in this Colony, that should be broken down. If children can afford it there is no reason whatever why they should not contribute to the relief of their aged parents. If that is the suggestion—



I do not say it is—that there should be no such contribution, and that an aged parent who is without means should be entirely the burden of the State, notwithstanding the position of the children, I submit that that is not the correct idea.

Mr. WIGHT: As the protagonist of old age pensions I say without hesitation that the subject matter of the motions should receive the whole-hearted sympathy of all Members of this Council. If I may be permitted I would like to give a brief analysis of the history of old age pension in this Colony. Hon. Members will see that we have progressed as fast as we could within our circumscribed limits. I say that because the hon. mover has quoted words of mine when moving the original motion for the introduction of old age pension, and also from the report of the Committee which dealt with the subject. The Committee considered the question whether further provision for the poor and/or aged inhabitants of the Colony and gave an analysis of the payments then being made by the Poor Law Commissioners. They also considered the question of provision for the blind, and suggested that in the case of blind persons the age qualification for old age pension should be 40 years. They also suggested—and I think we are well on the way to it—that some institution should be set up along the lines of St. Dunstan's Home for the Blind in Brighton and the Star and Garter Home for the Blind in Surrey, England. The Committee also suggested that there should be training for indigent orphans and poor relief for unemployed adults. I think hon. Members are aware of the action Government proposes to take and has taken in these matters.

The Committee also suggested insurance against sickness and unemployment, and I think perhaps I might venture, with the permission of the Council, to quote that particular paragraph. Paragraph 6 states:

"6. Your Committee ventures to suggest that industrial and commercial firms and plantations in conjunction with Local Insurance Companies, Friendly Societies, and Labour Unions might perhaps be urged and assisted by Government so far as may be practi-

cable to formulate and bring into operation workable schemes of voluntary Unemployment and Sickness Insurance. There are several Friendly Societies already operating on a small scale which provide for sick relief and burial expenses. This voluntary movement might with advantage receive the active encouragement of Government and of employers generally."

I think we have seen certain action being taken with regard to that particular paragraph. Then the last and most important subject of the Committee's report — the qualifying age — 65 — is dealt with in paragraph 8 which reads:

"8. Your Committee is of opinion that the ideal qualifying age for Old Age Pensions in British Guiana would be 60; but in view of the fact that in Barbados Old Age Pensions are paid as from the age of 70, and in Trinidad as from the age of 65, and that to grant pensions in British Guiana at the age of 60 would increase the cost of the scheme by \$138,000 per annum, the Committee recommends that the qualifying age in British Guiana should be fixed at 65 at the commencement of the scheme "

The report of the Committee was signed on April 25, 1940. The report proceeds to deal with the monthly pension scales and income limits. In paragraph 9 it states:

"9. (a) The minimum amount on which an old person can maintain himself is stated to be \$5 per month in Georgetown, and \$4 per month in Country Districts; and your Committee would have been prepared to recommend Old Age Pensions up to these maxima, had the financial cost not been prohibitive in present circumstances. Moreover, your Committee attaches much greater importance to obtaining legislative and public acceptance of the **principle** of the granting of Old Age Pensions and the establishment of the necessary "machinery" for bringing a scheme of Old Age Pensions into effect than it does to the precise **amount granted** or the initial **qualifying age** at the commencement of the scheme."

"(b) After due consideration of all the factors involved, your Committee is unanimous in recommending that Old Age Pensions should be granted as follows:— In Georgetown, from 50 cents per month (in the case of persons having private means of \$4.50 per month) up to \$3 per month (in the case of persons with \$2 and less per month);

and in the Country Districts from 50 cents per month (in the case of persons with private means of \$3.50 per month) up to \$2 per month (in the case of persons with \$2 and less per month)."

It will be seen, therefore, that the Committee of the Council of that day (1940) fully realized that assistance should be given to those unfortunate people. Perhaps it would be better if I travelled along in sequence. In October, 1939, a motion was moved by me, and my remarks are reported fully in Hansard. Among other things I then said :

"I may be presumptuous in saying that the only ground on which a scheme of this nature can be thrown out is that of finance, and that, I submit, is not a necessary factor to prevent consideration of the matter by a Committee. I think that such a scheme will eliminate a considerable amount of poverty which is in this Colony, especially in the City. It will eliminate begging and such conditions as are set out in the report of the Poor Law Commissioners for 1938."

I have quoted those words to show that the very idea permeating hon. Members who have supported these motions, was also present in the minds of the Council when Old Age Pension was introduced in this Colony. There were the questions of finance and the elimination of poverty and begging, and the suggestion that greater production was necessary by Government and private enterprise so as to enable everyone to find work and money in order to make as much provision as they possibly could for their old age.

The next attempt was made in 1942 when a motion was put forward and adopted. In the report of the Committee the amount estimated was \$187,000. The motion recommended that provision be made in the Estimates for \$200,000. In 1946 several attempts were made to increase the amounts payable and to see what further could be done to alleviate the sufferings of those unfortunate people. Mr. H. N. Critchlow, who was then a Member of the Council, moved a motion for the purpose of increasing the rate of old age pension from \$3.60 to \$4.80 per month in Georgetown, and from \$2.40 to \$3.60 per month in other parts of the Colony. That motion was

adopted and the report of the debate can be found in Volume 18 of Hansard commencing at column 2519. I suggest that the only way to meet this situation is the same as suggested by me on that occasion. There is an Appeal Board comprising the Solicitor General, the Crown Solicitor, the Deputy Director of Medical Services, myself and the Welfare Officer who is Secretary, and appeals go before that Board. They are thoroughly sifted and I have no hesitation in saying (it is no secret) that the members of the Board allow their consciences to be as elastic as the Chancellor's. There have been several cases on the border line, and admittedly we err on the wrong side as far as the law permits us.

It is true, as the hon. Member for Georgetown South (Mr. Carter) has suggested, that one way to meet the situation would be, rather than reducing the age qualification or abolishing the means test, to increase the rate of pension payable at present. That is why we lean towards the side of leniency. The other method — and it seems to me the only practical one if we are to put the old age pension scheme or any pension scheme on a sound economic basis, and perhaps within the grasp of our economic position — is to introduce a contributory scheme. As hon. Members are fully aware, a motion to that effect, moved by Mr. Critchlow, was referred to a Committee on an amendment moved by me. That Committee has sat on several occasions but, unfortunately, we found it beyond our powers because none of us had the necessary knowledge, technical or otherwise, to deal with such a very complicated and intricate matter. We gave it up and we have suggested to Government that, if it is possible, we should obtain someone on secondment or otherwise from the United Kingdom to advise us whether or not a contributory pension scheme can be incorporated in this Colony. That seems to me to be the logical solution and one which should be investigated as far as our power suffices. If I may be permitted to quote what I said on that occasion, this is what I said :

"There is one thing, however, that needs immediate and serious considera-

tion, and that is the strictness with which the Ordinance itself has been applied and is being applied in regard to the ascertainment of a figure before payment is made."

I quote those words because hon. Members have practically repeated verbatim what has previously been said by me, but I do not attribute to them that they have read the Hansard report and taken from it the words I have quoted. I went on to say :

"Some people are really in no position; they do not receive a cash payment but they have a small property which is taken into account, or they may be receiving alms. All that is taken into account and they are deprived of the small payments which are made under this scheme. I do not think that at this moment we can rush blindly into this from a financial point of view. If these figures are increased as suggested, then it would mean that this Council will have to face a very large expenditure for this item. I would not like to be guessing, but I would say it would practically treble the amount which is now being paid. That has to receive considerable thought from this Council. I would suggest to the hon. Mover to amend his motion to ask Government to set up a Committee to consider a Contributory Scheme along the lines I have suggested."

That is the history of old age pension in this Colony. There is perhaps one other matter to which reference has been made, and I would suggest that it receive due consideration by the Council. The hon. the Financial Secretary has already suggested to the Council a point which I had in mind. Reference has been made to the protection of aged persons in the community, but one must not forget the youth of the country. The estimated cost of primary education in the Colony for 1950 is in the neighbourhood of \$2,310,000. That, of course, is exclusive of all other contributions being made in furtherance of education, and totally eliminating the provision made in the Estimates for secondary education. To be weighed against that is, perhaps, the sum of \$1,700,000 for the scheme, if carried through as proposed by the hon. Mover. It is an enormous sum of money in relation to the amount being spent on primary education and education generally. Are we to say that the interests of the community lie in the protection of

old age, or are they counter-balanced by what we should do for the future generations of the Colony who, no doubt, will be carrying our burdens and probably the burdens which we have left behind us, and their own? That seems to me to be the issue that faces hon. Members of this Council. It boils down to the question whether we should go ahead with the investigation of a contributory scheme which, if brought into force, would be much more beneficial to the general community, commencing from the youth and going through to old age, or are we at this stage to say that we will increase the amounts given to old age pensioners?

Dr. SINGH: When the Old Age Pensions Bill was first introduced into this Council I suggested that the age limit should not exceed 60 years. People in the tropics do not wear well as compared with people in a temperate climate. In the tropics we have tropical diseases, especially malaria which is endemic in British Guiana. DDT has been introduced recently and has produced very good results, but in years gone by every member of our community must have been attacked by malaria at one time or another, some more frequently than others. The fact remains that malaria has a telling effect on the life of the person attacked, and we can find many people in this Colony with a history of malaria and its attendant effect such as an early senile age. We have made comparisons with Barbados and British Guiana, but Barbados is a healthy place as compared with British Guiana and so also is Trinidad. DDT has done a great deal for British Guiana but we are not thinking of the young people who would benefit mostly from it; we are thinking of the older ones. Let us take the East Indians: When they arrived in British Guiana their ages were not properly assessed, with the result that if you select three old people from a crowd and ask them for their tickets you will be surprised to find that their ages might be 40, 45 or 50 years, whereas they would look like people between 65 and 70 years old.

I think this motion should be con-



sidered by a Committee and while I am in sympathy with it I do not feel like supporting it at the present time owing to what the Financial Secretary told us a few minutes ago. We have to be very guarded because our finances are not what they should be. Some hon. Members might say we had money to give to the Civil Servants, but the money was there then and not today. Therefore, I think the motion should be considered at a time when the financial position of the Colony is better than it is at present.

As regards the means test, I am of the opinion that it should be increased to \$10 per month. We have an increased cost of living to face at the present time; tenement rooms are very expensive in the City and in the rural areas we find that the plots of land which used to be given to people to supplement their earnings have been taken away. Therefore, I suggest that the means test should be increased to \$10 per month.

Mr. LEE: I desire to congratulate the mover of this motion, but I would certainly support the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Georgetown South — that a Committee of this Council be appointed to enquire into all the details relating to the question, and especially the financial position of the Colony, before any recommendations are made. We have at the present moment, if I may say so, an inflated revenue situation— I may be wrong — and, therefore we should be very careful how we embark upon further expenditure. No one can deny that the people concerned are deserving of more assistance, but we have been told of the Colony's financial position and although we have the greatest sympathy with them we have to see whether we can afford the expenditure involved without raising taxation in any form. I heartily support the suggestion of the hon. Member for Georgetown South for the appointment of a Committee to consider the motion.

Mr. FERNANDES: I have listened very carefully to the speech by the Financial Secretary who has put the financial position very clearly before us. Nevertheless, I am going to support the

motion and suggest two small amendments owing to my experience in working for people of this kind. I have worked for the St. Vincent de Paul Society for 20 years, and for the last 5 years I have worked in the village of Plaisance. No one knows more than I do what suffering some of these aged people have to go through. In considering this motion I have asked myself three questions. The first is: Is it right and proper for Government to be responsible for the security of people in their old age, and my answer is that until some other means could be provided for these people it is Government's responsibility. When I say "some other means", I mean some contributory scheme. The second question is whether there should be a means test. It would be simple to operate an old age pensions scheme without a means test. All that would be necessary would be proof of age, but it is obvious that we cannot afford any old age pensions scheme at the present time without a means test. When you fix a means test at too low a figure, there is no question about it that you encourage idleness. Therefore, I am suggesting an increased figure of \$10 for the means test. The third and last question I have asked myself is this: At what age in British Guiana is a man or woman in need of some assistance in order to enable him or her to live without having to suffer starvation. My answer to that is "60 years of age." I think that 60 years is a reasonable age limit and it is very surprising to visit old people and offer them assistance, and when you ask their ages you find that they are often 62, 63, or 64 years of age but are not getting any kind of old age pension. Of course, it may have been reasonable for the hon. Member for Central Demerara to ask for an age limit of 55 years, but I think that in the very few cases where persons below 60 years of age would need assistance they could be met through the ordinary social assistance scheme. I am going to move the following amendments to the Resolve Clauses:—

- (a) "BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable Council recommend that the qualifying age under the Old Age Pensions Ordinance be reduced from 65 to 60."



(b) "BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable Council recommend that the Means Test be adjusted upward to \$10 per month."

Mr. CARTER: I desire to second that amendment.

Mr. THOMPSON: I just want to say briefly that I congratulate the mover of this motion and that I am supporting it with an age limit of 55 years for females and 60 years for males. I want to point out that when this motion was brought forward some time ago I suggested that there should be an age limit of 60 years. I said that was a reasonable limit, but I have found it difficult for persons in the rural districts particularly to understand that this scheme is intended to apply only to persons in indigent circumstances. I also suggested that there should be a contributory allowance scheme and have pointed out to people in the rural areas that until we get that nothing could be done. As soon as a man reaches 65 years of age he feels that he is entitled to an allowance and it is difficult to get him to realise that that is not the case. The people who age quickly are people like farmers, labourers and shovelmens who often work a long way from home and sleep under very unfavourable conditions. I have always thought that a man who reaches 60 years of age should be assisted in this respect, but he should be made to contribute something during the years he is working so that when he attains 60 years of age he would be able to fall into the group of those entitled to assistance.

I realize that the finances of the Colony are in a bad way and that we should watch our expenditure but, at the same time, we have to endeavour to relieve the suffering of these unfortunate people. If we can prevent our people from becoming a charge on the State as they have been hitherto, I think that would be better business. In other words, I think money should be provided as a means of prevention rather than as a cure of this trouble. Therefore, if we drop the age limit from 65 to 60 years and see that a certain contribution is made by these people during their working years, I think it would be better. The whole

problem is one which we have to face, and, as I have said before, I think a means test of \$10 per month would be more reasonable than the present figure. I support the suggestion that there should be a Select Committee to go fully into this question because I do not feel it is one which should be rushed hurriedly. It calls for very careful consideration of the many aspects.

The PRESIDENT: I would like to know what the mover of the amendment means by a means test of \$10 per month.

Mr. FERNANDES: At present there are two rates — one for the City and one for the country — and I am suggesting that both rates be carried upward to \$10 per month.

The PRESIDENT: It is not quite clear to me what the hon. Member means by \$10.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I was trying to find out from the hon. Member whether he means that, having taken the means test, a person's income should not exceed \$10 per month.

Mr. FERNANDES: I mean exactly what is meant by the Ordinance at present.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL: I thought the hon. Member meant that after consideration is given to any property or cash a person has, if it should be found that he does not have an income of \$10 per month, then he would become eligible for the pension.

Mr. FERNANDES: That is exactly what I mean, but I am very much surprised to learn that it is not in the Ordinance.

Mr. DEBIDIN: May I point out that it would be found in section 4 (2) of the Ordinance.

Mr. LEE: As regards the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Georgetown Central and seconded by the hon. Member for Georgetown South, I would like to ask them to withdraw it and agree to the appointment of a Committee as suggested by the hon.

Member for Georgetown South. My point of view is that when the Ordinance was introduced a Committee went into the question of the finances of the Colony and suggested that if certain things were done the revenue could be raised, and so legislation was introduced in order to raise it. If we accept the amendment of the hon. Member for Central Georgetown we would have a deficit at the end of the year because no provision has been made for such increased expenditure.

Dr. JAGAN: I do not think the hon. Member is correct when he says that there will be a deficit. This motion only suggests that a Committee be appointed to recommend legislation; that does not mean that it would be done immediately.

Mr. LEE: What I am thinking is that the Committee would be able to go into details and say where we can get revenue from, and both things can be introduced at the same time in the Council, whether they are done in a month or two or else. Members will be satisfied that it is a deserving cause and that we can get the revenue to meet it. In Finance Committee, quite recently, Members realized where the financial position of the Colony stood, and if it is desired to introduce the measure at any particular time we will have to consider means of raising the revenue to meet it.

Mr. WIGHT: May I suggest that it is not for the Committee to ascertain the financial commitments before the motion is passed. All that would be necessary is an adjournment of the motion to allow the necessary figures to be obtained and to place them on a Supplementary Estimate if the motion is carried for the means test to be increased to \$10 and so on. I myself feel very sympathetic towards such a proposal, but at the moment I do not know that I can support it without seeing what are the financial commitments the Colony would have to face in this matter. As I have already indicated, we had a figure of \$187,000 in 1940 and in 1942 we had \$200,000; and now — in 1950 — we have gone right up to nearly \$1,000,000. We have gone to a figure which is five times

as much as that which the original motion sought. It must be borne in mind that the expenditure on Social Assistance in this Colony — I speak subject to correction — is in the neighbourhood of \$760,000; and I think around \$350,000 or \$400,000 is payable by way of old age pensions. Those are, roughly, the figures of what we are now spending on social assistance in this Colony — about three-quarters of a million dollars, and more than one-half of that is being spent on old age pensions. That excludes entirely certain things that may be considered social assistance but not placed under that head. I refer particularly to the Boys' School at Onderneeming and things of that kind. It is true that the grants given to the Plaisance and the St. Ann's orphanages are also included under social assistance, and while I would not like to hazard the case, the amendment before us at present would probably call for a considerable sum of money. There are several cases which would come within the means test at the new figure suggested. We all appreciate the fact that there is a great deal of assistance being given under this head, and sometimes one feels that just because we are associated with one thing or another we have need. I think the knowledge of these necessitous cases becomes keener when one has to relieve them personally. I am a sufferer in that respect and I am quite sure that several cases of hardship are known individually by every Member of this Council: I do feel, however, that before committing ourselves to any definite action on the amendment we should have the figures before us so that we could see exactly whether we have blundered and to what extent.

The PRESIDENT: I would say for the information of hon. Members that the expenditure to which the hon. Member is referring — the capital expenditure for 1949, last year, was \$724,593. It was made up as follows: The Alms House in which there are 600 inmates — and I think they come from the entire population — cost \$138,955; Out-Door Relief — \$188,543; Old Age Pension — \$381,683; and Grants (to Institutions for the Poor and places like that,

of which there is a number) — \$3,433. That brings the total to \$724,593. I am quoting from the Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners for last year.

The FINANCIAL SECRETARY & TREASURER: I do not know whether I can speak again at this stage, but I will speak on the amendment. The hon. Mover of the motion himself quoted the figure he has estimated for reducing the age limit from 65 to 60 years. In that case he intended a complete abolition of the means test and his figure was \$841,000. I have no idea what the revision of the means test to \$10 per month, as suggested by the hon. Member for Georgetown Central, would mean as regards production. I do not think it would make a substantial difference, so that we must envisage that the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Georgetown Central involves something between \$500,000 and upwards. I feel myself that it would not be correct for this Council to take any action which would raise false hopes.

I feel extremely sure that this Colony cannot take on its budget a commitment of that order of magnitude in addition to the other commitments with which we are faced. We are about to undertake the raising of our Development Loan next year or very shortly after next year — \$10,000,000. We have to find the interest and sinking fund charges on it. We are about to undertake services which will increase our recurrent expenditure. One Member has spoken about revenue. The hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Raatgever, who usually prophesies about it is not here today, but I feel the peak has been reached, and I do not see there is a possibility of any substantial increase on the revenue side of our budget. That is why I have been trying to warn Members of the Council not so much of the present year, but because the future does not seem to hold out any prospect of allowing additions to our recurrent budget. So even if this motion is adopted by the Council it may be impossible to implement it from the sheer fact that we cannot afford it.

I do not know, Sir, what the sug-

gestion is but, as I see it, if the motion is passed it means a recommendation to Government to consider amending the Ordinance; that is, introducing in this Council a Bill to amend the Ordinance to give effect to the motion, and if that is done it would involve finding the money. I take it, it will not be practicable for the necessary amendment to be introduced unless Government is satisfied it is financially practical, and I have no doubt the Council itself will not wish action to be taken unless satisfied the means of implementing it are available. Concluding, I would wish to say that the Council should be very careful in undertaking commitments of this nature in the face of what Members know. We have got to face along the lines of development plans and items on which Members have set their hearts. Some of those items may have to be dropped if we have to undertake this.

Mr. FERNANDES: I have the right to reply to my amendment, I think. But before I start to do so I would like to ask the hon. the Financial Secretary, when he used that figure, \$500,000, if he meant the total expenditure of \$841,000 given by the hon. Mover of the motion. If it is a total expenditure of \$500,000, that would mean an increase of \$119,000 on the present vote. I figure it would be an increase of \$200,000. I am very glad to see his figuring is a little lower than mine.

The FINANCIAL SECRETARY & TREASURER: It was just a guess on it. I do not expect that to be quoted against me. It is only a guess.

Mr. FERNANDES: It only means his guess is a little lower than mine. Both of us have not the actual figures. There was just a point — I did not want to take up too much time in supporting my amendment in answering the points raised — raised by the hon. Member for Central Demerara when he moved this motion to which I would like to refer. That is the question of taking care of those who are old because they cannot produce to the fullest there is no reason why they should be got rid of. I want to be careful that our old people do not

get into that category. They are in other parts of the world disappearing those who cannot pay their way. I want to make sure that we take care of ours and do not let them disappear through starvation. I support the motion, because I know they live in semi-starvation and I feel that the \$180,000 additional expenditure for this purpose will be money very well spent. Even though the amount that will be added to this particular expenditure will show a certain figure, it is natural to expect that included in that increase will be certain amounts which are presently being met from other funds. There are a number of people between the ages of 50 and 65 who are not obtaining any old age pension but are obtaining social assistance. If the age is reduced to 60, no one between the ages of 60 and 65 would be on the social assistance list.

I do not think the amount involved is so staggering that British Guiana is not able to meet it. I am sure that the happiness we will create will well worth the additional money spent. Whether our finances are not so good at the moment is a matter I do not know, but we will know that at the end of the year. Nevertheless I as an individual will be prepared to be taxed a little further in order to meet this small amount. I say "small" in comparison to the expenditure on lots of other things which is considered small in spite of our present financial state.

The PRESIDENT: I suggest to the Council that we get the actual facts and know what the consequences are of the amendment before we come to any decision. There seems to be a difference of \$700,000. Would it not be wise first of all to get the actual facts and know exactly what this amendment proposal would mean?

Dr. JAGAN: As no Member wishes to speak, I wish to reply for a few minutes. The suggestion was made that this motion should go to a Committee so that it could evaluate the true position. If the amendment, which has been moved and seconded, is to go to a Committee then I feel sure that the Council would be no wiser from the report of such a Committee because for one thing, I have already

indicated how much money it would cost the Colony if the age limit is reduced to 60. The other addition which the hon. Member for Georgetown Central sought to put into the amendment, the question of raising the means limit from \$4.50 and \$3.00 per month to \$10 per month, I may say no Committee will be able to evaluate how many people will be able to come within that limit of \$10 per month and, therefore, if this Council or a special committee was appointed the Council would be no wiser at the end of that period. Therefore I feel this Council should make a decision either on the motion as originally introduced or the amendment as was moved by the hon. Member for Georgetown Central. The figures have been already given by me. I want to substantiate what the last speaker has said. Even if the total sum is reduced to \$841,000, that sum will further be reduced by the amounts which are now being spent in other directions. I have cited the case already. On Outdoor Assistance the Colony spent last year \$205,890 and this year the estimated expenditure is \$165,000. I have cited the case of an old lady who, because she was not qualified to receive Old Age Pension, was given \$2.40 as Social Assistance, which seems to indicate that many of the people who are presently receiving social assistance will not get that social assistance but will qualify for pension if the amendment of the hon. Member is accepted.

Under the Old Age Pensions Ordinance, therefore, we are likely not only to save out of this \$165,000 which is estimated here. In fact the note to that in the Estimates explaining why there was a decrease of \$41,000 from the figure which was spent in 1949 states: "**Due to decrease in numbers due to better supervision, full-time officers, reviewing of cases and better travelling facilities.**" We have reduced Social Assistance expenditure by \$41,000, but at the same time we increased the personal emoluments by nearly \$35,000. Perhaps all of that may not be due to the increase staff to review all the cases, but certainly out of that \$35,000 a part is due to increases in salaries and certain of that was incurred in bringing officers to review the case