

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY, 27TH JUNE, 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. B. Singh, O.B.E. (Demerara-Essequibo).

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

The Hon. T. Lee (Essequibo River).

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

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

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

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

The Hon. J. Fernandes (Georgetown Central).

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

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

The Hon. J. Carter (Georgetown South).

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

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

The Clerk read prayers.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE.

The Rev. D. C. J. Bobb took the Oath of Allegiance and his seat as a Nominated Member of the Council.

The PRESIDENT: I am sure hon. Members will wish me to welcome Mr. Bobb to this Council.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES.

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Wednesday, the 20th of June, 1951, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS.

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

Order in Council No. 19 of 1951 made under the Post and Telegraph Ordinance (Chapter 155).

Report on the Postal and Telecommunications Department for the year 1950

Report of the Commissioner of the Interior for the year 1950,

UNOFFICIAL NOTICES.

DECONTROL OF CRUDE OIL
AND COCONUTS.

Mr. DEBIDIN gave notice of the following motions:—

Whereas there is an acute shortage of cooking oil in the Colony which will be intensified by the rainy weather;

And Whereas coconut producers will be able to do more intensive picking of nuts and over 200 crude oil manufacturers can manufacture at least 50,000 gallons of crude oil per week, if a more attractive price is paid for the nuts to the producers;

And Whereas this can be achieved if both the price of crude oil and of coconuts be decontrolled for a short period until the situation is improved;

Be It Resolved that this Council recommend to Government the immediate decontrol of the price of crude oil and of the price of coconuts for a short period in the discretion of the Government.

INSURANCE FOR FARMERS.

Whereas farmers throughout the Colony have been suffering severe set-backs from time to time from droughts, floods, and to a smaller degree from pests and other causes;

And Whereas with the high cost of living and the very small scope for employment of the increasing population, the population in the main will have to depend more and more upon the land for a living;

And Whereas recent floodings have shown how seriously the population can be affected;

Be It Resolved that this Honourable Council recommend to Government the establishment of a Government controlled insurance for farmers in the Colony against loss of cattle and crops from floods, droughts and other causes, and that a Committee be appointed by the Officer Administering the Government to go into the matter and report thereon.

REFUND ON STAMP DUTY ON
PRIVATE BILL.

Mr. PETERS gave notice of the following motion:—

Whereas a Bill intituled "An Ordinance to incorporate the Board of Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in British Guiana, to vest therein certain property, and for purposes connected with the matters aforesaid" was on the 31st of May, 1951, passed by this Honourable Council;

And Whereas the sum of one hundred dollars was paid as Stamp Duty pursuant to the Tax Ordinance, 1939 (No. 43) in respect of the said Bill;

And Whereas the said Church has made a useful contribution to the religious and educational life of this Colony during its operations in this Colony;

And Whereas it has been customary for this Honourable Council to recommend the refund of Stamp Duty paid in respect of private Bills dealing with the incorporation of Churches;

Be It Resolved that this Honourable Council be pleased to recommend to Government the refund of the sum of one hundred dollars paid in terms of the Tax Ordinance, 1939, for the private Bill intituled "An Ordinance to incorporate the Board of Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in British Guiana to vest therein certain property, and for purposes connected with the matters aforesaid".

DECONTROL OF CRUDE OIL AND
COCONUTS.

Mr. DEBIDIN: Sir, before we proceed to the Order of the Day I desire to ask leave to move the suspension of the relevant Standing Rule and Order to enable me to move the motion which I have just tabled, asking this Council to recommend to Government the immediate decontrol of the price of crude coconut oil and of the price of coconuts for a short period in the discretion of the Government. It is an extremely important motion at this moment when there is a crisis in the community. My friend has reminded me that I must not speak on the motion now, therefore I will merely state that an emergency exists, and that if the Council agrees to the suspension of the Standing Rules and Orders I will deal with the very grave situation which I have come up against, not only in the City but in the rural districts of the Colony.

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member's motion does not appear to be seconded, so I will proceed to the Order of the Day.

Dr. JAGAN: I was about to second the motion.

The PRESIDENT: I gave the hon. Member sufficient time to second the motion if he desired to do so. I do not wish to interfere with the motion going through if it is the wish of the Council that it should be discussed, but I would just like to mention that a few weeks ago the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara (Mr. Debidin) brought a deputation of crude coconut oil producers to me and requested that the price of coconuts, which at that time was controlled, should be decontrolled again, and that has been done. His motion now asks that the price of coconuts should be controlled again.

Mr. DEBIDIN: May I be permitted to say that we asked that the price be controlled at \$5.20 per drum, which was far in excess of the fixed price of \$4.70 which could not be expected to assist the producers of crude coconut oil. I feel that a discussion on my motion would help to explain the true situation.

The PRESIDENT: I will put the motion for the suspension of the relevant Standing Rule and Order.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: I would just like to say that I am opposed to the motion being taken today, because I am certainly not in a position to reply to it. There may or may not be a case, but I am not apprised as to the facts, and if the motion is debated by the Council this afternoon without any notice at all, (I imagine there are many Members in exactly the same position) it would be a very one-sided debate, and it would be very difficult for the Council to reach a balanced decision on the sub-

ject. In the circumstances I think we must ask for notice before we debate the motion. I must therefore oppose the motion for a suspension of the standing Rules and Orders.

Dr. JAGAN: May I suggest that in view of the urgency of the situation we might take the motion first thing on Friday next, if it is agreeable to Members of the Council.

The PRESIDENT: That will be considered. I will now put the motion for the suspension of the Standing Rules and Orders.

Motion lost.

ORDER OF THE DAY

FORESTRY (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1951.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I beg to move the first reading of a Bill intitled:

"An Ordinance further to amend the Forestry Ordinance by making provision for the registration of sawmills and dealers in forest produce; for the abolition of the Forest Trust and for purposes connected with the matters aforesaid."

Mr. WIGHT seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read the first time.

SUGGESTED ABOLITION OF RICE MARKETING BOARD.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I circulated a while ago an amendment which I propose to move to the resolve clause of the motion standing in my name which will now read as follows:

Whereas the rice industry in British Guiana is one of the largest industries and offers greatest scope for expansion and absorption of the Colony's steadily increasing population;

And Whereas the Rice Marketing Board, functioning under the Rice Mar-

keting Ordinance, 1946, has been controlling the price of paddy as well as is the sole marketing organisation for the export of rice;

And Whereas the present price of paddy is uneconomic for the majority of rice farmers;

And Whereas the cost of production and other circumstances demand that the price of paddy be not less than \$5.00 per bag of 140 pounds;

And Whereas the ability to pay this purchase price for paddy would depend on the Board securing immediately for the unexpired period of the contracts between the Board and the contracting Colonies in the West Indies at least the minimum world market prices for the rice exported to these Colonies;

And Whereas the following motion was carried in the Legislative Council on the 24th of November, 1950 "that this Honourable Council recommend to Government that they request the British Guiana Rice Marketing Board to approach the Governments of the Caribbean Colonies concerned with a view to securing such an increase in the export price of rice as would bring it on a level with prevailing average world market prices of equivalent grades";

And Whereas the Rice Marketing Board took no action on this Resolution;

And Whereas it should be apparent to the Board and to the contracting Colonies that devaluation of sterling and various other supervening causes, which have affected and will affect cost of production considerably, and which could not have been contemplated at the time the contracts were made between this Colony and the Caribbean Colonies concerned for the supply of rice at the prices fixed thereunder, would make it proper to repudiate, vary or re-open the said contracts in so far as the selling prices are concerned, and the Board ought in all the circumstances to have taken steps to secure payment immediately of at least the minimum world market prices by the Contracting Colonies;

And Whereas the functioning of the Board is to be regarded as being highly unsatisfactory and inimical to the interests of rice producers in the Colony;

And Whereas the Rice Marketing Ordinance, 1946, is not in the best inter-

est and aspiration of rice producers and the industry;

Now, Therefore, be it resolved that this Honourable Council recommend the repeal of the Rice Marketing Ordinance, 1946, and all amendments thereto, and the abolition of the Rice Marketing Board, upon the establishment of a co-operative organisation for the rice industry as referred to hereunder;

And be it further resolved that this Honourable Council recommend to Government that it should take immediate steps to organise and place the industry on a truly co-operative basis in the direct interest of the rice producers of the Colony.

Contrary to the erroneous impression given by the Press, and probably gathered also by some Members of this Council, I am anxious to have this motion put before the Council, otherwise I should not have brought it. I am anxious to assist the rice industry of British Guiana but I gave a very cogent reason on the previous occasion why I wanted it to be deferred, which was because I wanted to wait until the negotiations with Trinidad were completed. Today I see that there are present only five elected Members who will determine the fortunes of the rice industry on this motion. Nevertheless I shall proceed with the motion which I have introduced with the object of bringing the Rice Marketing Board under discussion and a thorough examination of its working in this Council. It is important that that should be done at this stage in the history of the industry and the development of our Colony, and I trust that after considering this important question sincerely the Council will see wisdom in the conversion of the Rice Marketing Board into a co-operative organization in the interest of the rice producers of this Colony. If, however, because of the constitution of this Council my motion is not accepted, it would still have provided an opportunity for an expression of opinion on this very important question.

I would like to say at the very outset that I am not, as some people seem to think, merely urging the abolition of the Rice Marketing Board so as to allow the industry to run into chaos. That is certainly not my intention for, with all its faults, the Board is functioning at this moment and is certainly fulfilling its part as a marketing organization, though not, as I respectfully suggest, in the best interests of the rice producers of this Colony. I would like to declare at the outset that I believe in a single marketing organization. I believe that a single-seller is desirable for the rice industry. There have been many arguments on the point in the past, and the principle has been accepted, but we must regard the rice industry as one which was developed by its own impetus but which was taken over by war legislation in the interest,—to use the words of our Financial Secretary and Treasurer, Mr. McDavid,—of the Colony and of the West Indian Colonies. I wish particularly to stress those words “in the interest of the West Indian Colonies.” The people who had actually built the rice industry were thus deprived of the marketing powers, and even the proper control and development of the industry, by emergency legislation in 1946.

What is wanted is an organization in which the rice industry would be managed and controlled by the producers themselves. That is to my mind the ideal for the rice industry in this Colony which, in my humble opinion, was accepted by our late Governor, Sir Gordon Lethem, and by the prime mover in the enactment of war legislation—Mr. McDavid. I can quote no better authority for the placing of the rice industry on a co-operative basis. I quote his words which appear in *Hansard* report of the debate on the second reading of the Rice Marketing Bill on January 31, 1946:

“I concluded my remarks in the Council by stating that I gave an undertaking that as soon as the war is over I would

do my best to have the present Board converted into a co-operative organization of a democratic character, in the management and control of which those engaged in the industry would take an important share. It is, therefore, a matter of great personal satisfaction to me that I am able to introduce this Bill with that objective in Council, and to move the second reading today.”

It does appear from that quotation that we must accept the fact that the idea of placing the rice industry on a co-operative basis is not something which is thought of now by me, or by any individual in this Council, but something which had been thought of since 1946. In time of war it was perhaps extremely necessary that control of the rice industry should be effected by stringent Regulations to ensure food supplies in the interests of the people of this Colony and the West Indies.

It was felt that the statement of the hon. E. F. McDavid could not have indicated anything else but that the measures were temporary and that there would be a co-operative movement some time in the future in place of these stringent Regulations. There seemed to be reason for that because if we were to examine the Rice Marketing Ordinance we would find that it is based on War legislation, and those of us who know how the Board functions under the Ordinance and how the industry is controlled by various restrictions under that Ordinance, must conclude that there is nothing short of nationalisation of the rice industry by the Government of British Guiana in the present set-up. There can be no better set-up for the nationalisation of the industry than the 1946 Ordinance, and it seems to me that the only thing left for the producer to do is to plant the rice and look at it, but the moment it is cut it no longer belongs to him, except for two bags which are allotted to him for his own consumption. If he keeps a single grain for himself in addition to that, he has committed a breach of the law.

Mr. ROTH: To a point of information: Does not the rice grower get something for all the grains that are taken away from him?

Mr. DEBIDIN: I always refer to interruptions by the hon. Member in a very uncomplimentary way but I would not like to do so again. If he is asking whether the producers are paid for the rice they grow I can reply to that but, certainly, that does not seem to be a cause for interruption. I was pointing out that the Ordinance, as it stands, is one which, by its very nature, gives reason for this Council and the Colony to find that it should be repealed and that a co-operative organisation should be introduced for the benefit of the industry. Here, I will seek support again from the words of the Hon. E. F. McDavid—and his words must be taken as having considerable weight because he had very much to do with the genesis of these provisions. He said:—

“... The Rice Marketing Board as at present constituted (I do not mean its membership; I mean its structure) is a monopoly of the most extreme kind, containing in its constitution stringent restrictive powers with corresponding sanctions imposing severe penalties for infringement of those prescriptions. It is not in any sense of the word a true co-operative organisation—not even a compulsory co-operative. It is purely and simply a successor in the same form of the kind of control that is imposed on a vital industry during a war...”

Those are the words of the author of this legislation, and I am going to rely upon them and use them in this Council as the strongest possible argument for the repeal of this Ordinance, with a view to establishing a co-operative organisation. The words I am referring to were uttered by the hon. the Financial Secretary on July 20, 1950, in this Council. He has established the need for this debate when he says that the Rice Marketing Board is not, in any sense of the word, a co-operative organisation. Secondly, he says that the Board is a

monopoly of the most extreme kind, with stringent powers and so forth. Then there is, to my mind, a far greater objection to the Board because of the fact that, as constituted, it is responsible for fixing the prices to be paid to the producers of rice in this Colony. In other words, the producers cannot get one cent more for their padi or rice unless the Board decides to pass on that benefit to them.

Apart from the fact that the Board is a marketing organisation which was born under the 1946 Ordinance it is controlling the industry as a whole, and I would like to lay that down as an important premise for this debate. In other words, the producers are absolutely helpless unless the Board recommends an increase in the price of padi. It has nothing to do with the question whether the producers are starving or whether the prices fixed are uneconomical, and I claim that the position today is intolerable. I do not want to go over all the figures I have already used in an effort to get the Board to obtain better prices for the rice sold in the West Indian market. I have consulted producers and have found that the price of padi today should be more than \$5 per bag in view of the high cost of production. It seems to me that the producers are entitled to a fair share in the conduct and management of their affairs, but what do we find? I am not attempting to cast a reflection on anyone or to indulge in personalities, but the personnel is such that the producers cannot hope for any great deal of consideration.

In 1946 the Rice Producers' Ordinance was also passed. It provides for the appointment of eight members by His Excellency the Governor, and in the last amendment to the Ordinance various categories were provided under which these appointments would be made, but the members remain the same in number. If one were to take the first important point in this respect, he would find that all appointments

are made by the Governor. Even if the Council of the Rice Producers' Association recommends eight persons for membership, it is still open to the Governor to say that he would not accept all of them and that he would appoint other persons in place of one or two of those recommended. That happened last year; the Governor did not accept all eight of the persons recommended by the Board, but substituted other persons for three of them. Therefore, Government had 11 members on that Board, while those who represented the rice producers were really five in number.

It is in that set-up that one must look for argument to prove that the Board can never be satisfactory in its working with respect to the rice producers in the Colony. At this moment we have a large number of non-producing persons as members of the Board, and they include the hon. J. Fernandes and W. J. Raatgever, the Director of Agriculture, the Comptroller of Customs, Mr. J. I. De Aguiar, Mr. H. G. Seaford, Mr. E. P. Niven and Mr. H. Gadd. Thus you have a crop of men most of whom, if not all, are not really connected with the production of rice in the Colony. As regards the hon. Mr. Raatgever, I do not know if anyone can tell me what is his real connection with rice in this Colony. Even if we take the Chairman of the Rice Marketing Board (the hon. Mr. John Fernandes) I do not know what is his connection with rice in this Colony. I would say, however, that he is a very keen businessman. Then we have Mr. H. G. Seaford. What is his connection with rice? As regards Mr. Niven, he is in charge of land settlement schemes. We know the position of the land settlement schemes today but, surely, that is no excuse for his appointment to the Rice Marketing Board. There are many persons who have had much more experience in the rice industry than Mr. Niven.

In my opinion the set-up is of such that the rice producers in the Colony stand a very slender chance of real progress in the face of the personnel of the Board such as I have referred to. In other words, the Board is in a position to be dictatorial and to by-pass the best interests of the rice producers in the Colony, notwithstanding the fact that there are rice-producing members on it. The Board is in a position to strangle not only the economic interests of the producers, but also their potential for development. I know that before any expansion was done—when there was no Mahaicony-Abary rice development scheme—this Colony exported as much rice as it is exporting today, and yet fed the people. The producers found ways of getting to the land, and they stuck to the land. Those were the days, however, when they were in control of the industry. Though certain things were condemned in those days, we find today a different story. The Board is able to do what it likes, and that brings me to the next important point—the question of domination by the Board.

In November last a motion was moved by me in this Council—a very urgent appeal asking that the Rice Marketing Board which is vested with the power to contract for the supply of rice, should approach the contracting Colonies in the West Indies immediately, with a view to securing an increase in the export price in order to bring the prices into line with those obtainable in the world market for equivalent grades. I do not bring motions into this Council just for fun, and the serious plight in which the rice producers found themselves through the impact of devaluation was urged. It was also pointed out that unless the export price was increased to a certain figure—let us say the average world market price—the people in this Colony would not be able to increase production and would suffer seriously. That motion was accepted by a majority in this Council, but to our amusement—

and at least to my consternation—a Message was subsequently tabled here communicating a refusal by the Board to entertain the motion. When the motion was being discussed the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Raatgever, was acting as Chairman of the Board, and he expressed strong disapproval of the motion. He was charged with espousing the cause of the Contracting Colonies, but he was able to carry his opinion to the Board which resulted in the rejection of the motion by that body.

It amounts to this: that the Board can ignore this Council also and can say, in effect, "At our meeting we can treat you with contempt, you have no right to dictate to us." The Board has told this Council that it would not approach the Contracting Colonies for better prices because the agreement had to be renewed, but the point is that the producers in this Colony have been suffering and the motion asked for an immediate increase in price. The Board said, in effect, that the producers in British Guiana must wait a year and a half before they could get any increase in price. In other words it was carrying out the War legislation policy—that the Board was established in the interest of the West Indian Colonies. It was also saying, in effect, that British Guiana had lost \$1,000,000 or \$2,000,000 in previous years through supplying rice to the West Indian Colonies at such low prices, but that is where the producers have been suffering.

I have been making a very careful study of the debates and other proceedings which led up to this legislation—the War legislation and then the establishment of the Rice Marketing Board—and it seems to me that the over-riding factor at all times has been the Imperial interests. It was an Imperial policy; so it was said, to control this vital product in the interest of this Colony and the West Indies, and the policy was to last so long as there

was war. In the debates relating to War legislation and the establishment of the Rice Marketing Board, Government assured the producers that they would get a long-term price for their padi and that some advantage would be gained by increased production, but there is abundant authority for saying that development of the industry such as we have today was never contemplated. The people of the Colony have suffered through the Board and through its adherence to this Imperial policy. Further, I contend that the Board, as at present constituted, can still carry out this Imperial policy, in spite of the representations on behalf of the producers in this Colony. Since this Board has been functioning it has deprived the Colony of some \$30,000,000. That is the additional income which would have come to this Colony had the correct prices been paid by the West Indian islands at all times.

It is also a matter of regret to note in the proceedings which I have been reading that the very Government of this Colony was saying: "We cannot guarantee what would happen in future—whether the contracting Colonies would take your rice if there is no cheaper rice." In spite of our sacrifices for them, Trinidad and the other contracting Colonies could have said at any time after the War: "We do not want your rice; we can do without you now." There is a world shortage of rice, however, and we can get more lucrative markets. The very Rice Marketing Board has been offering this Colony's surplus rice to other Colonies at the following prices:—Super—\$17.40 (per bag); 1st quality—\$16; and 2nd quality—\$15.50. That is what the Board was asking for surplus rice under the Agreement. I argue that when the Board made this offer, in 1950, it proved conclusively that it was not getting the correct prices under the contract. That is also argument, to my mind, that the Board could have asked and got from the contracting Colonies

an immediate revision of the prices. It would not sell rice to Venezuela and elsewhere so as to get prices which the producers deserved and also what this Colony deserved by way of increase in its national income.

That is what I asked for and what I was trying to get when my motion was moved. This Colony is being deprived of income and the producers are being made helpless because they have been tacked on by the Ordinance to the Board and they have only received an increase of 50 per cent. in the price of their products during the last decade. This increase is out of all proportion with the increased cost of production. The money that should go to the producers does not belong to the Board, but that is why the Manager of the Board is getting a salary of \$600 a month, and his assistant \$460, and so on. The salary of the Manager is as big as that of the Director of Agriculture, but that is specious argument, perhaps, because the Board handles some \$5,000,000 worth of produce every year. If, however, I am handling a bag of gold valued at \$5,000,000 that does not mean that one man owns it and that I must be paid an exorbitant salary for doing so. The Board is paying exorbitant salaries, and its personnel includes elements foreign to the interests of the rice producers in this Colony. That is something serious because the people in the Colony are not aware of what is going on by way of administrative cost in the Board.

It is most appalling. Where are the producers in this? They are in mud, knee deep. They are helpless, struggling against all the privations which the rural population suffer. They have to grin and bear it, but it is said that even a worm turns, and perhaps in the not too distant future there will be salvation for those people. I speak feelingly because I am in intimate contact with the people who are suffering, the producers of this Colony, and I think it is an uncharitable

thing to accuse them (I use the word advisedly), as was done in a previous debate, of being well-off with a few cows, and of being big land-owners. That does not mean that the rice industry is not in a parlous condition, which can be attributed to the Rice Marketing Board. There is an amount of \$23,000 being paid by the Board as interest on overdrafts at the Bank. That is how the industry is being carried on. It is said that it is in connection with the purchase of machinery. I understand that a portion of the machinery is obsolete. The fact remains that this sorry condition of things is due to bad marketing.

I maintain that if the producers were allowed to sell their own rice and find their own markets through a co-operative organisation, they would be able to obtain the best prices. The Mahaicony-Abary Rice Expansion Scheme has been able to market its own rice. It has done so perhaps through the Board, but in the accounts of the Board one discovers that the profits are paid over to the Scheme. What greater argument can one have than that a scheme highly geared and mechanized is that it is suffering severe loss, judging from its last report? I wonder why no further accounts or reports of that worthy scheme have been issued since the last one I saw which I think was about two years late. It is illuminating to find loss being sustained in spite of the well equipped mill and Government assistance from time to time. We do not know what the position is today; at least I do not know. The profits of the Mahaicony-Abary Scheme are not pooled with the Board.

That brings me to another very important point. If a co-operative organization is set up for the development of the industry as well as for the marketing of rice the Mahaicony-Abary Scheme would have to join the co-operative, and would have the right, like other units, to vote for the directorate. It would be a semi State-controlled

organization which would run the industry in the interest of the producers themselves. I think the time is ripe for us to examine these aspects of the Rice Marketing Board and ask ourselves: Where is the producer in the present set-up? The answer must be that he is in a very precarious position. I am speaking as one who has not been thinking about this industry only today. When the Bill of 1946 was before the Council I was one of the principal movers in the opposition to the measure which eventually became law. I remember that I strongly opposed it at a meeting in the Town Hall in 1945 when I saw, as the Financial Secretary saw, that it was not intended to benefit the industry, as the Financial Secretary himself has admitted.

I therefore commend the motion to this Council, a motion which is very simple in its design. It seeks the repeal of the Rice Marketing Ordinance which established the Rice Marketing Board, and to establish the rice industry on a co-operative basis. I venture to say that the experience which has been gained and the staff at present employed by the Board would not be jettisoned, but would be available to the new organization. In a co-operative organization the producers themselves would take the places of the present personnel of the Board and run the industry for their mutual benefit. They would share the profits by way of bonuses at the end of each year, and would co-operate with the C.D.C. and other undertakings which may come into the industry. A co-operative organisation would remove the suspicion against the C.D.C. which has been created by the fact that they will market their own rice at the best possible price. Not so long ago Sir Charles Woolley initiated a Bill for the establishment of co-operatives in this Colony, and we see how well the movement is taking root. Education along co-operative lines is being given to the people, and we need have no fear

of the rice producers being able to establish a co-operative organization to handle the rice industry. The Financial Secretary and Treasurer (Mr. Mc David) has indicated that such an organization was desirable. I suggest that the time is ripe for Government to take immediate steps to organize the industry on a truly co-operative basis in the interest of the rice producers of the Colony. I commend the motion to this Council.

Dr. JAGAN: I beg to second it.

Mr. CARTER: To a point of explanation. May I ask the mover to whom he refers when he speaks of the "foreigners" who are employed by the Rice Marketing Board?

Mr. DEBIDIN: I cannot remember whether I used the word "foreigners." I never said that. I referred to personnel foreign to the rice industry.

The PRESIDENT: I think the hon. Member referred really to non-producers of rice rather than to non-Guianese. I took what he said to mean that.

Mr. DEBIDIN: Yes, Sir.

Mr. LEE: It is regrettable that Government's delay in establishing a co-operative organization to run the Colony's rice industry has caused bricks to be hurled at the Rice Marketing Board and other Departments of the Government. Be that as it may it must be admitted that the rice producers have established the industry with no appreciable increase in the cost of living when compared with other industries, and it is time that Government, the Rice Marketing Board, the Rice Producers' Association and its Council set to work to formulate a co-operative system whereby the industry can be put on a proper footing so as to provide contentment for the rice producers and the advancement of the industry. Hon. Members have been told from time to time that steps taken by the Rice Marketing Board for the ad-

vancement of the industry have cost a great deal of money, but up to the present time such expenditure has been of no benefit to the producers. Perhaps the present Chairman and the members of the Rice Marketing Board nominated by Government and the Rice Producers Association can shelter themselves under the umbrella that they do not formulate the policy of the rice industry, being only concerned with the marketing of the rice and obtaining the best prices, but they cannot dispute the fact that their recommendations have weight with Government.

It cannot be denied that the contracts with the West Indian Colonies were entered into by the Board with all due consideration for the benefit of the industry, but it turned out that the price was not sufficiently remunerative owing to certain world conditions. As the mover has pointed out, a promise was made to the farmers some time ago that the profits made by the Board would be accumulated for the purpose of paying better prices to the producers of padi, but those profits were applied to carry out Government's policy with respect to the purchase of certain machinery and the provision of storage bonds. The bond has not yet been completed and the rice farmers are not getting prices commensurate with the increased cost of living. I regret to say that this has caused discontent and distrust in the minds of the rice producers.

On the other hand Government has introduced into the industry the Colonial Development Corporation, an organization which is backed by His Majesty's Government, and asked this Council to pass legislation giving Government and the C.D.C., or any other company coming into the Colony for the purpose of producing rice, complete bargaining power with respect to the sale of that rice abroad. Let us assume that it is in the interest of the rice industry that capital should be introduced. The fact remains that nothing has been done with respect to the representations made to Government for the amendment of the Rice Pro-

ducers' Association Ordinance with a view to securing more democratic representation of the Rice Marketing Board. I suggest that Government take early steps to bring the C.D.C. and all rice producers in the Colony into one co-operative organization and introduce a new policy for the advancement of the industry. Until that is done I will have to criticise Government for its slow progress in this matter.

The resolution of the motion calls for the abolition of the Rice Marketing Board, but I do not agree with that. All the rice producers would like to deal with a single-selling organization and we should have it in a democratic form so that the smallest producer would have a voice in the formation of the policy and the contracts that would be entered into. Government, in the interest of the industry, introduced the Rice Producers Association Ordinance, but can we say that it carries out the will of the producers? It does not, and many of the producers have refused to join it for that reason. I know that Government has asked the Association to put forward an amendment considered necessary to the Ordinance, but it should be given effect to before the C.D.C. comes into the business. If the world prices are obtainable by the producers in this Colony we would get investors to put money into the industry, but I do hope that we would get our drainage and irrigation improved so as to make the industry a profitable one. If the Constitution of the Colony is being changed the Ministry of Agriculture should put that problem before the policy-making body and we would get the money to tackle it and advance the industry in a big way. I do ask Government to consider the points I have raised.

Something that is very trying also, is the fact that although the price of rice has not been advanced the Transport and Harbours Department has increased its freight rates for the product. The Board has decided, on representations made, that it would pay the difference in the freight charges on the rice produced but it has

overlooked the fact that there is an increase not only in freight rates, but also in the cost of labour, milling fees and so on. If the producers were not getting assistance from Government through the Loan Banks they would have had to get back to the old order of borrowing money from the millers and from shopkeepers and others. Government might not be able to control the cost of labour, but they can certainly control the milling fees and also the agistment fees for the oxen which plough the fields. All these things are not considered by Government, but the poor rice farmers have to consider them and they become discontented. I hope Government will endeavour to amend the Rice Marketing Ordinance before the end of the year and introduce a single-selling organisation.

Mr. FERNANDES: The hon. Member's motion in so far as it suggests that the Rice Marketing Board should be a co-operative body, is quite good. He is not saying anything new in this Council, however, when he says that that should be the ideal—a single-selling organisation for the rice industry. The very first few words I uttered in this Council, in reply to the opening address by His Excellency the Governor, Sir Charles Woolley, in December, 1947, was a statement to that effect. His Excellency had stated that Government was going to push co-operatives as hard as possible and give it abundant support. In the few words I have referred to, I stated very clearly that I was going to support Government in its efforts to establish the co-operative movement in British Guiana, as far as it was humanly possible for me to do so. Every time I get on my feet to speak on rice and the Rice Marketing Board in this Council I repeat the statement—that I look forward eagerly to the day when the Rice Marketing Board would be completely co-operative. The last time I used that remark was during the debate on the last amending Bill to the Rice Marketing Ordinance, when there was so much discussion as to whether the C.D.C. should be allowed to operate

outside the Rice Marketing Board providing a satisfactory agreement could be reached. Therefore, there can be no doubt whatever that I would like to see a completely co-operative organisation handling rice.

Now that I have got that off I would like to go through the statements made by the hon. Mover of this motion, many of them being absolutely incorrect as I shall show. He says that Government has complete control of the Rice Marketing Board because of the fact that it has appointed eight non-producing members to the Board and only five of the Rice Producers' Association's nominees, thereby causing the other three appointees on the producers' section to become automatically subject to Government's dictation. He says that that gave Government a majority, but what he meant, on the face of it, was that eight non-producers plus three producers whom Government put there, made eleven against five. Where did these three additional members come from? Did Government just look around and pick out three persons whom they thought would be "yes-men" and add them to the Board when it was obvious that even if the Governor wanted to do that he could not.

The Ordinance says that eight members must be appointed from a panel of the Rice Producers' Association—the members who are appointed to their Committee. These members were elected, in the first place, by the rice industry and they were elected in the second place to the Council of the Rice Producers' Association, again by producers. After they had been selected twice—the first time by the general producers in the Colony and put on the various District Committees, then by these District Committees. In most cases, even if they were not sent as having been elected to the Rice Council, they were elected a second time by the electors to sit on the Council. It is from these people that the very three members were selected, so it should be obvious to the hon. Member that even if they were nominated by

the Rice Producers' Association they were, nevertheless, representatives of the industry itself. in the names put forward by the Association.

The Ordinance also states that the Governor has the right to appoint eight members, and if the entire eight members as put forward by the Rice Producers' Association were to be nominated automatically by the Governor then the Ordinance should be changed but, so long as that Ordinance has not been changed—and the hon. Mover of the motion has not suggested that it should be changed—I am sure we will all have to agree that there is nothing wrong in the Governor appointing any eight members he chooses to appoint from the 24 members of the Council of the Rice Producers' Association.

The Rice Marketing Board, of itself, has done everything possible to encourage co-operatives in the rice industry, and the hon. Member for Essequibo River knows that fully well. There was one organisation in Essequibo which purchased a mill and wanted some assistance from the Rice Marketing Board, and I am sure he will agree with me when I say that the Board gave every possible assistance to that organisation. The organisation failed, but through no fault of the Board or any lack of help from the Board. Quite recently another co-operative organisation which was about to be formed applied to the Board, for the use of one of its bonds. The request was granted and that bond is in the area being represented in this Council by the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara. It is the Mahaica bond. They asked for the loan of the bond for the purpose of erecting a co-operative rice mill. The Board has gone out of its way to encourage the industry to be co-operative more and more, and in the last-mentioned case they pointed out that they would grant the loan of the bond on very easy terms as long as the applicants were a properly registered co-operative,

Now, sir, I think that these two instances alone will show that no matter how horrible the constitution of the Board may be, it has a desire to see the industry move more and more towards a co-operative end. I have listened to the hon. Member referring to his motion which was passed in this Council during my absence—some time in November last, he said. I happened to have been in New Zealand at the time. He made it appear to this Council that all the Rice Marketing Board had to do was to press a button and it would have been able to pay the producers increased prices for this year. Now, sir, I had the privilege of going to these very West Indian Colonies exactly a year earlier in order to try and get the first increase in prices out of them. I did not go alone, but along with me were members of the producing section of the Rice Marketing Board, including the present Chairman of the Rice Producers' Association. He was not in the first delegation, but he went in order to try and get from the Governments of these Colonies an increase similar to what the first group had managed to extract from them. He went to try and see if he could get it dated back from January 1, instead of April 1. We did not succeed even then in getting the increase pushed back by even three months, or in getting them to make the price 1c per pound more.

It was somewhat less than nine months afterwards that the hon. Member moved his motion that he must have realised that if the Board had gone back they would have had no chance of success, and that they might have affected the next negotiations relating to price. Once again I must point out that I was not in the Colony when the Board decided that it would not be wise to carry out the request contained in the hon. Member's motion. However, I am going to say that had I been here I would have adopted the same attitude and

would have cast my vote in support of that decision. I do not want anyone to feel that I am trying to shirk responsibilities, because I never do that.

Now, let us get down to another inaccuracy. The hon. Mover of the motion states that at present the producer grows his rice and that the moment he reaps it Government takes it away from him, with the exception of two bags which he is allowed to keep for his own consumption. Nothing is further from the truth than that. The Rice Marketing Board has not got any control over anyone's padi, and as long as he does not place it in the hands of a rice miller he is at liberty to sell it to whoever he likes for consumption in British Guiana. The hon. Member must know that, because in his constituency a large number of rice farmers sell a good deal of the padi they grow for animal consumption and the Rice Marketing Board does not control it.

I should also like to take this opportunity of saying that while, theoretically, the Board has eight non-producing members on it, the producing members can out-vote them at all times. I do not think there are more than two—or possibly three—meetings of the Board at which the producers section do not completely out-number the non-producing section. In the last two months or so that has been most noticeable and, therefore, if anything is absolutely against the interest of the rice producers in British Guiana, these horrible eight persons whom Government has seen fit to appoint on the non-producing section have got to be aided and abetted by two or perhaps three of the producers of rice. I can assure you, sir, that that also is incorrect. None of them would have aided or abetted any of those eight persons to do anything that would be detrimental to the interest of the rice producers in British Guiana. Of course, we are all always wise after the event.

I was very pleased, however, to hear the hon. Member for Essequibo River who knows everything about the

transactions of the Board. He was a Member of this Council when the Ordinance was passed and also when the contract was signed with the West Indian Colonies. I was very pleased to hear him say that at the time the contract was made it was obviously done for the benefit of the industry. I was also pleased to hear the hon. Mover of the motion say that the rice producers only accepted the Rice Marketing Board on the condition that it would enter into long-term contracts with the West Indian Colonies. He said that that is recorded in Hansard and, I must admit, it is perfectly true. When Government came into the industry it was for the purpose of making the rice marketing organization a statutory body so as to enable it to obtain long-term contracts. Now prices have gone up and we are all wise after the event. Had prices gone down we would not have been discussing the industry this afternoon. Nobody said anything when the contracts were made, but as prices have gone the wrong way—due to circumstances which no one could have foreseen—the Board is being attacked and people are being told that we have done everything to ruin the rice industry.

I was most surprised to hear the hon. Member say that when the Board approached the West Indian Colonies and did not get any increase in prices, what they should have done was to sell their rice to Venezuela. I am sorry I do not agree with that. That is the kind of thing that is going to spoil the fair name of British Guiana—when people abroad begin to feel that we cannot accept a bad thing even if the bargain was a good one. I wonder what the hon. Member would have said if the rice prices had gone the other way and Trinidad had come along and asked for a reduction, pointing out that the prices were now half of what they were when the contract was made? I wonder what the hon. Member would have said to Trinidad, Barbados and the Leeward Islands in such circumstances? Whatever he would have said about them is exactly what they

would think of him when they read his statement in the newspapers.

I have always heard in this Council—not only today but for some time—about the suffering and the starving rice producers in this Colony. I am not going to say that they would not have been better off if better prices were obtained for rice, because I am a primary producer myself and I know how the shoe pinches, but if I could have got the same percentage of increase in price as the rice producers have got within the last few years, I would have been one of the happiest men in the world—not only I, myself, but also my employees. Everybody knows that the price of padi before the War was 60c per bag, but today it exceeds \$3 and is sometimes as much as \$3.25. Let us take \$3 for the purposes of our calculation, however.

The price of charcoal was 64c per bag before the War, and today it is only \$1.44. If the price of charcoal had been increased in a similar way to that of padi, it would have exceeded \$3 per bag today. The rice industry, being a small peasant industry, was subjected to various immoral practices. There were groups of persons who bought rice and traded with it, and actually made money from it. Today that group of persons no longer get anything out of rice, therefore a greater portion of the actual value of the rice is going to the producers than has ever gone before. Of course, when it comes to charcoal one has to produce it himself, otherwise no one would do so for him and, naturally, there were no "parasites," as we call them, in that industry. If the Rice Marketing Board did anything else, it eliminated this class of person from the industry. Hon. Members will remember themselves what happened when the Rice Marketing Board was brought in as a war-time organisation. We had the producer, the miller and the exporter, and when prices were fixed all of these had to make a profit. I remember the words of Sir John Waddington when he met the then

members of the Board—and I happen to have been a member of the Board prior to its being brought in as a war-time organisation. I remember that when the Mahaicony-Abary scheme was going to be linked with the Board, I said I would serve on the Board again if ever they separated them, and as soon as that was done I joined the Board again. Sir John Waddington said that he had had a meeting with growers, millers and exporters, and each of them had complained that they were not getting anything out of the industry. Each one claimed that the other had got too much, and he said "Now I realize that we have done the right thing because as long as each in turn says he has not got enough I know that they have all got exactly what should be given to them."

The rice industry has vast possibilities. The hon. Member said that rice production has not increased; that British Guiana exported as much rice in one year before the Rice Marketing Board was established than has been exported by the Board in any one year. That is perfectly correct if one takes the export figures with respect to the dates on which rice was exported, because there was one year when British Guiana had a plenty of rice but nobody would buy it. It was held as long as possible and when it could not be held any longer it was exported in 160 lb. bags to Trinidad at \$2.60 per bag for No. 2 rice. It happened that one year's crop met the previous year's. There is one thing of which the hon. Member has not taken cognizance, and it is that in those days nobody used padi to feed animals. Oats were so cheap that the sugar estates used nothing else but oats as stock feed. Today everybody is trying to use the cheapest feed available, and advantage is naturally being taken of padi produced in the Colony. A large quantity of padi is therefore going into stock feed. I would like to see it exported because, if it was exported, the Board could have paid the producers more.

I would like to say that the members of the Board, bad as they are, are

in sympathy with the rice producers. I have been the Chairman of the Board since late in December, 1947. If we take the three years' operations it will be seen that the Board gave the producers of rice every penny that it earned. It kept nothing back for reserve in those three years, and the reason was obvious. The contracts had worked out against the producers, therefore the members of the Board felt that they should do everything possible to give them as much money as we could. Last year we ran at a loss because we gave an additional 20 cents per bag to millers, dating back to the 1st of January, and in asking Government to permit us to do so (because all prices are subject to the approval of Government) we pointed out that we would recoup that loss this year.

I come now to the question of finance. We have heard of the large amount of interest which the Board has to pay to the Banks. In empty bags alone the Board owns well over a million dollars. We have to carry sufficient stocks to supply the industry, which means that money has to come from somewhere. I am very happy to be able to say that because the Rice Marketing Board is a responsible organisation the Banks have no fear in advancing it money. If the Board was not a responsible organisation the hon. Member might have found that it would either have had to ask Government for money, which this Council might not have voted, or it might have had to put up its shutters, because it had not sufficient capital to handle the industry which has developed considerably not only in volume but also in value. I am sure that if the hon. Member took the trouble to look at the first report of the Board and see how much money passed through its hands then as compared with what appears in the last report, he would realise how the Board has grown.

I deprecate the hon. Member's remark that the personnel of the employees of the Board was "foreign" to the industry. I cannot exactly picture

in my mind what he was trying to get at, except he was thinking along the same lines as a member of the Board who moved a motion that among the employees of the Board there should be the same percentage of East Indians as the rice producers. When that member of the Board was shown exactly where he was heading when he suggested that the only qualification an employee should have was his race he realized that he was running into trouble. Fortunately, the race question cannot be levelled at me, because I am sure the hon. Member will admit that he can count the number of Portuguese employees of the Board on the fingers of one hand. Apart from that the Board does not engage personnel. The Manager employs personnel up to a very high level, after which the Board comes into it, and in any case I do not think the hon. Member would suggest that any member of the Board would suggest to the Manager that he should employ people on the ground of race, colour, creed, or anything along those lines. This is British Guiana, and every person, regardless of colour, class or creed, has the same rights, and we should never try to discriminate against any one of them.

I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Essequibo River (Mr. Lee) say that the Rice Producers' Association does not carry out the will of the producers, and that for that reason some of them have refused to join the Association. For that reason he suggested that the Ordinance should be amended. Of course I had no part in the drafting of that Ordinance but if he feels that it should be amended in the interest of the rice producers I would suggest to him that he give notice of a motion putting forward his amendment.

Mr. LEE: I have given notice of a motion. I was not blaming the Chairman of the Board at all.

Mr. FERNANDES: I thank the hon. Member for that correction. I had

lost sight of his proposed amendment. I have taken up a good deal of time but I would like in closing to say that I would suggest to the hon. Member that he should think carefully. While everyone agrees that the Rice Marketing Board should be a co-operative organization, I would ask him to think of the difficulties at this moment in making it a co-operative. In my opinion we would have to start by getting the producers of rice to own their own mills, so that the whole industry could be fully co-operative. It is going to be very difficult to set up a co-operative organization for one section of the industry without the other, because it would be difficult to arrive at what would be fair and just for two interests which are entirely different. Where a miller mills rice for a producer he is an entirely different entity, and I do not see how he can come into a co-operative.

To make an organization like the Rice Marketing Board a co-operative would need quite a good deal of study. I have given the matter serious thought, and as an individual member of the Board of which I am Chairman, I have done everything to encourage the idea of co-operation among the producers of rice. Co-operatives are not easy to organize. They are of a voluntary nature, and except there is a desire among the producers to co-operate with each other for their mutual good no co-operative organization for the handling of rice would be satisfactory. I trust that Members of this Council who represent rice-producing constituencies will do everything possible to get producers in their area to get together and establish co-operatives in their areas, so that when the time comes they would be able to fit right into the general co-operative organization.

The second resolution of the motion asks:

"And be it further resolved that this Honourable Council recommend to Government that it should take immediate steps to organize and place the industry

on a truly co-operative basis in the direct interest of the rice producers of the Colony."

That may sound quite good, but Government are no magicians; they cannot press a button and produce an organization of that kind. I would have suggested that the hon. Member ask Government to appoint a Committee to go into the possibilities of converting the Rice Marketing Board into a co-operative organization. The question of the abolition of the Board does not arise because the Rice Marketing Board can be made a co-operative organization without its abolition. All that would be needed would be an amendment of the Ordinance. The funds at the credit of the Board belong to the industry; they do not belong to the Government or to the members of the Board.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I must challenge that. The hon. Member has made a definite statement which is erroneous. There is no statutory provision that the money belongs to the industry.

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member has his right to reply. He should not interrupt.

Mr. FERNANDES: The hon. Member always complains about interruptions. After all he is in the best position, because he has the last say. Nevertheless, whether there is provision in the Ordinance or not, any sane, thinking person must realize that the property of the Board belongs to the industry. If the hon. Member is going to argue that because there is no provision in the Ordinance the funds of the Board do not belong to the industry, he may find that if a co-operative organization was set up the funds of the Board would not go to the industry. But I am sure that, like myself, he would expect the funds to go to the industry, and I am sure that if a co-operative organization could be formed the funds would go to the industry.

The Rice Marketing Board has made mistakes, as other organizations

or individuals have done. Of course the only person who has never made a mistake is the person who has never done anything, but has always suggested that the other fellow should do it. A person who accepts responsibility is liable to make mistakes and is always open to criticism. Speaking for myself, I am never afraid of criticism. I know I will make mistakes as long as I live, but I will accept responsibility instead of just sitting on the sideline and criticizing.

The hon. Mover remarked that Government was using communist principles in the rice industry, but nothing could be further from the truth. Nationalisation is not communism. What is communism is expropriation without compensation, and dictation as to how, when and where one should work, and what one should be given for the work he does. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that nothing is further from the truth than such a suggestion as regards the Rice Marketing Board as at present constituted.

I cannot support the motion as it stands but I have expressed my views on co-operatives, and I am sure that whether the motion succeeds or is defeated Government will take the necessary steps to investigate the possibilities of converting the Rice Marketing Board ultimately into a co-operative organization. It may be a long road; it may have to be done by stages. We may have to start with several small co-operatives, but as I said long before the hon. Member ever dreamt of bringing this motion, I look forward to the day when the Rice Marketing Board will be fully and truly a co-operative organization.

Dr. JAGAN: I seconded the motion because I felt that the implementation of the idea of converting the Rice Marketing Board into a co-operative is a very urgent matter. Unfortunately Government moves so slowly that one wonders whether it is a deliberate policy to continue this most extreme type

of monopoly, to use the words of the Financial Secretary, under the guise of converting the Board into a co-operative. In the course of this debate I have heard a lot about monopolies, communism and such like. On the one hand we are told that the Rice Marketing Board is a monopoly of monopolies, and that it savours of communism. That was said by the mover of the motion. Then the last speaker, who is the Chairman of the Board and in a position to know better, said that communism means expropriation. I suppose I have to go back to school to learn the various definitions of communism, nationalisation and so on. There appears to be a great deal of confusion about these ideological terms, and perhaps a little time should be taken to explain what the true position is. I cannot agree that the control of the Rice Marketing Board is either socialism or communism. I suppose that in saying that it was not communism the last speaker was inferring that it was socialism.

Mr. FERNANDES: I did not infer anything. I just said that it was not, as the mover said, communism. That is all I said.

Mr. DEBIDIN: To a point of correction. I did not say it was communism. I said it was almost communism.

Dr. JAGAN: Nobody seems to want to accept any responsibility, but I say that if any term can be applied to the Board the true term would be fascism. It is the type of socialism which is known as national socialism—the Nazi type—and it is far removed from any socialism or communism I know about. Communism means control of the interests of the people by the people, but when we study the set-up of the Rice Marketing Board and its predecessors we find that the control was not in the interests of the people but a most diabolical plot to shackle hands and feet the thousands of people who came here as indentured labourers.

I would like to get a complete picture of the whole situation, and the more I look at it the more I feel that the control of the rice industry by means of a single-selling organization has definitely done a great deal of good. The hon. Member who spoke last remarked that there were many parasites in the form of middlemen who were living on the rice producers before the inception of the Rice Marketing Board, but he did not name them. I wonder whether the hon. Member would carry his socialism a little further by suggesting that Government should control our foreign trade, in which there are many middlemen and a lot of black-marketing—control our exports and imports under a Government monopoly such as the Rice Marketing Board? We hear it proclaimed from the house-tops that we must have control like this which eliminates the parasites, but we do not take our socialist tendencies and consciences any further.

I have been reading Prof. Arthur Lewis's booklet on "Industrialisation of the British West Indies", and in doing so one comes to the conclusion that the problem of over-population is a very urgent one so far as the Caribbean area is concerned. But when one reads between the lines of that booklet one finds that Prof. Lewis finds that in the Caribbean Colonies, excluding British Guiana, the population problem is more acute because of the limited area of land available in the rocky islands. Consequently, to improve the situation industrialization must proceed in those Colonies more rapidly than in a place like British Guiana where there is more room for expansion. Perhaps that policy is being carried out, because I observe that some of the West Indian Colonies are advancing towards industrialization much more rapidly than we are in British Guiana. But if we accept that policy then surely we must get adequate prices for our raw materials and

the food we have to supply to the people of the West Indies. If there is to come within the immediate future an era in which industrialization is to be speeded up while we expand our food resources so as to be able to feed the people in those Colonies, by all means we must be given a square deal, because we know that people who are industrialized are usually better off than those who have to produce the raw materials and the food.

We have been told that we could not abrogate our rice contracts with the West Indian Colonies because it would have spoiled the good name of British Guiana. In Persia today a good name is being tossed around all over the world. In that country the Government—not a Communist Government—is nationalizing the oil industry, and it may be said that no mention is made of compensation, but perhaps the Government of Persia is taking steps to find out how much the oil installations are worth, and how much wealth has been drained out of the country during what its Prime Minister referred to as "50 years of imperialism." It is good to talk about compensation, but it is always good to find out how much robbery has taken place before.

In speaking about the rice contracts we must keep the whole situation in mind—who made the contracts and on whose behalf they were made. The Rice Marketing Board as a single-selling organisation is a good idea. Going through the reports on the files I find that the idea of a single-seller was mooted long before the war, but one becomes very suspicious when one finds that it was not until the advent of the war that the Board was created. One feels that opportunity was taken then to put the rice industry into a straight jacket, to stifle it perhaps in the interest of other concerns in this Colony—vested interests.

I also observe that the Ordinance was specifically framed to preserve certain vested interests. It is difficult to

put these things together, but one can see in the broad aspect how it all works. Had there not been any control instituted at the beginning of the war with respect to the rice industry one wonders whether the Colony would have been worse off or better off today, taking everything into consideration. However, this is not the time to go back into the past, because we cannot turn the hands of the clock back. We cannot say that in 1939 we should not have instituted control but should have left the farmers to sell their rice to whoever wanted to pay world prices from year to year, because we do know that at that time there was a world shortage of food due to the war situation, and farmers usually benefit in such circumstances.

But then, there came this single-seller organisation to replace the middle-man and the parasites. My information is that the Board guaranteed these people their profits for a number of years, but I do not know whether that statement is true in all its aspects. My hon. Friend, the Deputy President, says that it is true. If we are to go along in any regional set-up with the West Indian territories—and I feel that that must be done—we must, at the same time, see to it that conditions are so made that the producers would get a fair return for their labour. The farmers, particularly in this Colony, have to produce their rice, ground provisions and so on, under very adverse conditions. While the hon. Member can compare rice with charcoal, he should take into consideration the various factors such as drainage and irrigation, and the difficulty as regards land availability to the peasants in this Colony, which conditions are not the same so far as charcoal is concerned. Year by year in this Colony the people suffer from floods. Aren't these factors to be taken into consideration in deciding whether a contract made five years ago should be valid; let alone who made it, because it was not the people's representatives who did so?

In this Colony we have a very serious situation. Our records have shown that the average farmer only has 3½ acres of land at his disposal. I was sent as a delegate from this Colony to the Curacao conference where all the experts told us that if a farmer is to earn a decent livelihood he would need about 15 to 24 acres of land. In this Colony, however, he has only 3¾ acres and when we take into consideration the fact that some of the sugar estates have such large areas under their control, I think something more should be done for the benefit of these farmers. Let us make a rough average of what it takes to produce an acre of rice, and let us take a yield of 20 bags of padi from an acre of land, and we shall see what the farmers are deriving from the rice industry. Apart from the shortage of land, there is the perpetual problem of drainage and irrigation, and we find that when the farmers have produced their crops they come up against the unsatisfactory operations of the Rice Marketing Board.

There would be no objection to the Board's helping the people to produce rice and saying at what price it should be sold and to whom it should be sold. Those are usual conditions and we should implement that policy. Like the last speaker, I realize the advantages of co-operatives. When Government started the Co-operative Department and wanted to expend a large sum of money to set it up, I said that if it was going to proceed at a snail's pace it would be better not to have it at all. The Department has been set up about three or four years now, but what are the officers doing? Why should we have to appoint another Committee? It was agreed that there should be a Rice Marketing Board and a Rice Producers' Association working for a co-operative industry, and if the Co-operative Department is there why haven't all these people attempted to find out the ramifications and the needs of the industry and got down to solving this problem?

I am always sceptical when I see names such as Seaford, De Aguiar, Raatgever and others figuring in the rice marketing set-up, because these people have no direct interest in the rice industry. Every time I see an indirect influence in anything, I cannot help recalling the words of the P. W. King Committee which reported in 1944 (on labour disputes on sugar estates) and stated that the reason why people were working only two or three days a week on the sugar estates was because they were finding it more profitable to work on their own farms and ricefields. As a result of that report, nearly 2,000 acres of land were taken away from the people by the sugar estate authorities. I cannot help thinking that there must be some people somewhere endeavouring to put a stranglehold on development in this Colony. There is the drainage and irrigation problem to be faced and, of course, everywhere the farmer goes he finds himself up against a brick wall. Yet we are always talking about producing more.

I have never seen any country in this world adopting policies such as we adopt here for the improvement of production. The United States of America can outsell any other country so far as industrial goods are concerned. They have introduced mechanization into the rice industry, but their prices are far greater than ours. If they can outbid and outsell other countries with respect to industrial goods and they are selling their rice at perhaps the world's highest prices, they should certainly know what is happening, taking into consideration other factors such as the price of machinery and so on. Why then should we in British Guiana continue to sell our rice at the past low prices? It is true that we have made a contract with some of the West Indian Colonies—and the hon. Member for Georgetown Central has spoken about damaging the fair name of British Guiana—but that is no reason why we should continue to sell at uneconomic prices.

I remember that this Government made a printing contract with the Argosy Company at a certain figure, and yet hon. Members of this Council recommended subsequently that we should give them a 25 per cent. increase because of the rise in the cost of labour and certain articles. This year, I am sorry to say, our contract figure has jumped from \$70,000 to \$200,000. It is all well and good to talk about the inviolability of a contract, but due consideration must be taken of all the circumstances. I see nothing that should prolong this debate unduly, and I do feel that the set-up relating to the Rice Marketing Board must be changed, and changed very quickly. There are certain people who can give ideas as to how this matter should be gone into. I feel that the motion is straightforward and would not involve the immediate abolition of the Board. I cannot see that any good would be done under present conditions especially when we find that simultaneous with the setting up of the Rice Marketing Board Government enacted the Rice Producers' Association Ordinance. Whether that was the correct thing or not, it seems to me that Government should have, at least, embraced what was set up there in principle.

The hon. Member who spoke last supported very strongly Government's action in choosing five out of eight persons for membership of the Rice Producers' Association, saying that the Ordinance provided for it and therefore Government had a right to do so. If Government intended to make a co-operative set-up of the Rice Marketing Board, however, action such as that should not have been taken, because it does not in any way show that Government believes in the co-operative principle which is definitely based on the principle of election. The basic principle of co-operatives is that each man has a right to vote; one man one vote, regardless of position. It is the truest form of democracy, yet when the Rice Producers' Association, acting under their Ordinance, selected eight members to sit on the Rice Marketing Board.

Government saw fit to accept only five of them and to nominate three others themselves. While it is true, as the hon. Member stated, that the three others came from the panel of the Rice Producers' Council, one finds that in many such councils a great number of elected members become stooges in any case. In this case, the provisions of the Rice Producers' Association themselves cry to high heaven for revision.

The hon. Member for Georgetown Central has stated that the three members chosen by Government were representatives of the people, but when one considers that a rice producer in choosing his delegate has to do so by a show of hands in the presence of the moneylenders, the landlords and the millers, one can understand how careful he has to be. Those are bad practices which do not, in the long run, lead to any democratic set-up, and I would urge upon Government to tackle this issue immediately—the issue of the people's representation on the Rice Producers' Association—so as to make that body a democratic body of rice producers only. I am thinking of producing rice, soon, myself. I used to grow rice at one time and I am thinking of doing so again, because it looks as if only a person like me would get on with the Rice Producers' Association and the Rice Marketing Board. If farming in general is to improve in this Colony, then the producer must get a fair return, having to brave the weather and the difficult conditions including floods and so on, and having to deal with the merciless landlords in this Colony.

That is the only way in which we are going to solve our problem here. Right now we have a shortage in coconuts and, as a result, the copra as well as the pig industry has been affected. We are not getting good prices for our produce because the farmers have not the money to do otherwise. Whatever they produce they have to sell in a straight jacket—under control prices. A better policy is needed. We should stop the importation of a lot of things from abroad, since

they are killing production in this Colony. Unless Government endeavours to tackle the situation I am afraid it will only go from bad to worse, and we would never make any progress in this Colony. It is said that handsome profits have been made by some of these rice producers, but I do not think that is so at all. I am saying that unless Government puts forward a sound policy there would never be a genuine desire on the part of the people to produce more in this Colony. I have great pleasure in supporting this motion and I do hope that after it has been accepted Government would not pigeon-hole it and possibly wait another two or three years before taking any action. This matter is urgent and I think a deadline should be fixed for action, and that it should be dealt with before the end of the year.

Mr. GAJRAJ: When first I read the preamble and the resolve clause of the motion on the Order Paper, I was struck particularly by that very part which the hon. Member has now removed from the resolve clause, and that is the word "immediate" before the word "repeal." I could not understand how we could have been asked in this Council to agree to the abolition of a statutory body without having, at the same time, something—some measure agreed upon as workable—to replace that organisation. I am happy to see that the hon. Member has changed that part of the resolve clause so as to give us the assurance—as he has himself done in the course of moving the motion—that he has no intention of asking for the immediate abolition of the Rice Marketing Board, or the immediate repeal of the Ordinance. Yet, in the course of the debate which we have had today, it does seem that instead of dealing very much with the loss which the Ordinance itself has created through the years of its operation, we have spent more time—and I would say very properly—in focussing attention on the principle of co-operatives which Government itself has shown favour with in this country.

I am sure that if this motion had been framed in such a way as to invite Government to give urgent consideration to the fostering of producer co-operatives within the rice industry, there would have been excellent results from it. By virtue of the knowledge and experience gained by the producers themselves, the time would have surely come when, under the leadership of the Rice Marketing Board, the entire industry would have found itself in a position whereby these producers would have had a very strong say on the way in which their produce should be sold and distributed. I do not see myself that the Rice Marketing Board, as a marketing organisation, needs to be scrapped. In any case, in my humble opinion, should we be able to encourage and start producer co-operatives all over this country, it would still be necessary to have the Rice Marketing Board as the single seller, standing apart from the producer co-operatives but, of course, having as representatives thereon, a majority of members or delegates from the producer co-operatives.

I have had a fair amount of experience in the selling of rice in this country long before the Rice Marketing Board, as a war-time measure, came into existence. I remember the days referred to by the hon. Member for Georgetown Central, when rice was produced in this country and the farmers experienced the utmost difficulty in trying to sell it at a reasonable price. Those were the days when they had, sometimes, to turn their rice over to the millers without receiving any money for it, because the millers themselves might not have been in a position to pay them there and then. Sometimes a miller himself would bring the rice down to Georgetown and try to contact an exporter in order to sell it. There used to be competition of a very serious nature—competition between the exporters who were sometimes entrusted with large quantities of rice—and, as a result, one came across a cer-

tain type of middleman—a speculator—who used to go over to Trinidad and Barbados and undersell the established exporters. The result was that whenever he cut his price it was reflected in the returns which the producer received for his produce. As time went on it became obvious that unless there was some measure of co-operation between the various factors engaged in the industry, then the industry would languish and die because of the low prices. It was in these circumstances that producers and then millers got together and found some means whereby their toil and endeavour and lifeblood could be saved.

That is how the very first step was taken and the Rice Growers' Board was set up. The first step made was to get rice exported from this country graded and certified by the bag through the Board, and when the West Indian islands paid \$5 per bag for No. 2 rice they were getting something of standard. I agree with those speakers who stated that in this Colony things move very slowly because, when the producers in those days were feeling the pinch and were asking for some organisation which would give them a better price for their rice—and the question of price was really the crux of the matter—nothing was done for years and years, until the War came along. Of course, we can all be wise after the event. We can always say that we foresaw that the War would have lasted five years and that food shortages and so on were bound to take place all over the world.

I think everyone in this Colony felt it was necessary and binding during the war years that we should conserve our crops of rice so that we would be able to help our fellow colonists in the West Indies, although in the pre-war years they did not give us a fair break so far as prices were concerned. They were always using the competition and low prices of the speculators who went across and were working one against the other. Because of this, our prices were kept low. It is considered that we should have done

something whereby the people in the West Indies would pay reasonable prices for their supplies of rice, but nothing was done. When the War Regulations came to the end of their usefulness, however, it became obvious to Government that the measure of control introduced should be continued, and this Council in its wisdom passed the Rice Marketing Ordinance. Persons competent to judge came to the decision that the Board was a useful organisation, but could not be expected to be perfect in every respect.

I think the hon Member for Central Georgetown has agreed that the Rice Marketing Board has made mistakes, but we all can benefit from the mistakes we make. Therefore, we should not say

that we must not have the Rice Marketing Board because mistakes were made in the past by its members, acting in all sincerity. If we feel that any of the provisions of the Board should be amended or deleted so that it might be of greater benefit to the industry, then I think it is the duty of Government or of this Council to go into the matter and have the necessary changes made as early as possible. I am going to be fairly long, Sir, and I do not know if you wish to adjourn the Council at this stage as it is already 5 o'clock.

The PRESIDENT: In view of the fact that Members will be engaged in Finance Committee tomorrow, Council will now adjourn until Friday, next, at 2 p.m.