

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Tuesday, 11th July, 1944.

The Council met at 12 noon, His Excellency the Governor, Sir Gordon Lethem, K.C.M.G., President, in the Chair.

PRESENT.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hon. C. V. Wight (Western Essequibo).

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

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

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

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

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

The Hon. Peer Bacchus (Western Berbice).

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

The Hon. J. W. Jackson, O.B.E. (Nominated).

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

The Hon. V. Roth (Nominated).

The Clerk read prayers.

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Council held on Friday, the 7th day of July, 1944, as printed and circulated were taken as read and confirmed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT.

The PRESIDENT: Hon. Members of Council, — I should wish briefly to record two matters of interest here. The first concerns the question of financial assistance from the Imperial Government to the Colony. My attention has been drawn by a personal letter from the Colonial Office to the proceedings in the House of Commons on the 15th March and debates on the 16th May and the 6th June. My attention was thus invited with direct reference to the proposal pressed upon this Government by the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce that steps should be taken to end or minimise all such financial assistance. My letter points out that it has been made very clear in Parliament for example, by the Secretary of State on the 15th March last and still more explicitly on the 16th May that it is the intention

of His Majesty's Government to review the provisions of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act in the light of the experience gained, and—and this is the important point—in view of the doubts which that experience has thrown upon the adequacy of the sums which it provides. This is the exact phraseology used by the Secretary of State.

It is clear therefore, that the present policy of H.M. Government is to seek in due course Parliamentary authority both for an increase in this scale of provision of the present Act as well as extension of the term of years so as to allow for longer continuity in policy. It is emphasised to me that there has been no dissent in any quarter of the House of Commons from these implications: on the contrary, they were received with applause.

That does not mean that we are any the less under the obligation to attempt to the very utmost to be self sufficient in our own annual recurrent expenditure, but it does mean that there is no reason for us to fear that the very necessary assistance—required in this colony to a degree that cannot be too much insisted upon—will not be forthcoming for “capital equipment,” to use the Secretary of State's excellent phrase, in so far as His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom can foresee it. That is exactly the policy of this Government so far as I am responsible for it, to secure the supply of just that, the greatly lacking “capital equipment” of this Colony.

I think it is necessary for us to bear this point in mind clearly in view of certain misunderstandings which appear to have been aroused by the visit of the Members of Parliament and by subsequent ventilation in the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce.

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' EMOLUMENTS.

The second point to which I would wish to refer is that touching the improved emoluments of Primary School teachers. The Director of Education has brought it to my notice that certain sections of the body of teachers are representing that there is delay and obstruction in bringing into effect the recent report approved by Members of this Council in discussion. I wish to disabuse the public of any such foolish idea. The matter requires the precise approval of the Secretary of State and it is altogether wrong and in fact outrageous to expect that he is either prepared or able to deal with a matter of this importance without consideration and scrutiny, particularly in the light of facts and conditions of which the Colonial Office has a much better knowledge than we have. The Secretary of State is not only the protector of the rights of Government servants individually, but on the reverse side of the picture he has a very considerable responsibility to scrutinise, and not merely to accept and sign on the dotted line what a local Colonial Government or its Legislature may wish to put forward in any matter affecting the public service.

When submitting the recommendations of this Government to the Secretary of State in April/May, I certainly did not expect an immediate telegraphic reply. I would not have made that demand and I would have regarded it as unreasonable. Members and the public know that as far as I am concerned and this local Government we have pushed forward this matter with the utmost possible celerity, consistent with any real kind of consideration, and that was the reason for the appointment of a special committee rather than leaving it to the slower moving Educational Development Committee. I am afraid that the teachers must realise that as

with all public servants this question of alteration of remuneration cannot be and never will be put through except with considerable deliberation, not only within the Colony but within the Secretary of State's office. I would remind Members of Council that that office and the officers working in it are again subjected to the present threat of destruction from the air and if there is anybody who should regard with tolerance the difficulties under which our people are working in London it should surely be most by those who live in safety.

Those of the teachers who cannot realise these things can only alienate the sympathy of those who wish them best and are working hardest on their behalf.

ORDER OF THE DAY

FRANCHISE COMMISSION'S REPORT.

The Council resumed the debate on the following motion:—

Whereas the Report of the members of the Franchise Commission appointed on the 26th day of May, 1941, has now been laid on the table, and has also been printed and made public for the information of the community in general:

Be it Resolved, that the necessary steps be taken by Government to give effect, if so advised, to the recommendations of the said Commission but more particularly to those relating to the qualification of electors or to make decisions with respect to all or any of the said recommendations.

Mr. JACKSON (resuming): Sir I would like to continue my remarks today by making some slight reference to the speech delivered by the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. J. A. Luckhoo. I would like to thank him on behalf of myself and the other signatories of the majority report of the Commission for the fine compliment to us in the speech he made. There has been no doubt considerable work in connection with the Franchise Commission, and to hear from one so well situated and so well

qualified to express an opinion, that the report was well prepared and presented, is to me, and I am sure to the other members who signed the majority report, a source of great satisfaction and appreciation.

I desire, if I may be permitted, to refer to one point of difference which exists between the hon. Member and myself on the question of admitting Ministers of Religion to membership of this Council. My friend the hon. Nominated Member stated that there was a great deal of spiritual degeneration, and he thought that the ministers could be better occupied in trying to reduce that. I take it that the ministers of the Gospel have been labouring for the good of the community all these years, and if there is spiritual degeneration I do not think keeping them out of the Legislature would cause a change in that direction. I rather think that in the Legislature they would be in a better position to speak with authority and, if necessary, to give threats, which they might follow up in their high position, to those who were not behaving as they thought properly.

I wish, however, to compliment the hon. Member on his conceding to women a place in the Legislature. He said he would not like to see two ministers of different persuasions contesting one seat. I wonder what reactions he would have to a husband and wife contesting the same seat. To my mind it would be a far more difficult situation so far as this Council and the Colony are concerned, and perhaps it might end in the Divorce Court. Perhaps when the hon. Member thinks of that he will withdraw his objection to ministers being eligible for election to the Council.

Mr. LUCKHOO: I think the husband would withdraw in favour of his wife. (laughter).

Mr. JACKSON: There is one other matter I would like to refer to

in connection with the hon. Member's speech. He referred to this Council as a moribund Council. I cannot conceive with such able men in this Council as the Deputy President, the hon. Nominated Member himself, the Minister of Agriculture (if I may so term the hon. Member for Central Demerara—(Mr. deAguiar), and the Officials of this Government, how we can look upon this as a dying Legislature. If he refers merely to the number of years I would remind him that the extended life of the Council was conditioned by the war. It was distinctly asked in this Council whether in the circumstances of the war it would be well to proceed with a new election, or whether the present Council should go on, and we decided that the Council should continue. If I am not mistaken the same condition obtains in Parliament. I take serious objection to the hon. Member's reference to this Council as a moribund Council. I am of the opinion that this Council is quite competent to deal with this matter; first of all to have its views represented to the Secretary of State and so far as those views or portions of them are accepted, to pass legislation to give effect to the decisions arrived at. I do not think it would be fair to have a new Council deciding issues which will spring from the new Constitution to be established.

I also wish to make some observations with regard to the speech of the hon. Member for Essequibo River (Mr. Lee). There is a matter which is constantly cropping up in this Council, and when one thinks that it has already been squelched it is brought up again. I refer to the statement made time and again and stressed over and over, that the hon. Member for Essequibo River and the hon. Member for North-Western District (Mr. Jacob) had traversed the country from end to end and addressed every constituency except those in Georgetown and had resolutions passed in the various Divisions. It is very wonderful how those two hon. Members

could continue to stress a theory which has already been exploded. Those resolutions were referred to on one occasion as half-baked, from the fact that one of the hon. Members responsible for them said that he had drafted and another had amended them. Those resolutions were sent to the various constituencies with the request that they should be adopted. My experience of the people in the various districts is that if you summon a meeting the most unintelligent of the people would rush to it, and you can tell them anything. You put a resolution before them and it is accepted.

The hon. Member for Essequibo River said that at those meetings there were more non-voters present than voters. Exactly what he intended to impress upon this Council I do not know, but the impression he made upon me was that the people who attended those meetings were in the main non-voters, and that they were not really the people who count in the districts. So that when those resolutions were passed by those non-voters they were really passed by those who did not represent the intelligent sections of the community, and the less we hear of those resolutions in this Council the better it would be for those who drafted them and thrust them down the throats of unwise and willing people who simply did what they were told. I may add that, naturally, numbers of people are attracted to such meetings by sheer curiosity, and I am sorry that legislators like the hon. Member to whom I refer should allow themselves to be deluded into the idea that those people really care ha' penny for their resolutions. They simply go there to have some fun and to pass resolutions they are asked to pass.

May I for a moment turn my attention to the hon. the Sixth Nominated Member (Mr. Edun). So far as his minority report is concerned, if the issues were to be decided by this Council I should not worry to make any

remarks about it, but as your Excellency desires to have the opinions of Members placed before the Secretary of State, perhaps I may be permitted to say that, deprived of its trappings and denuded of the mannerisms of the hon. Member, there only remain two points in his minority report which may be considered worthy of consideration. One of them is the matter of universal adult suffrage. I do not think that any words of mine are required to show the futility of that minority report, and to satisfy this Council that universal adult suffrage could not properly be granted to the people of this Colony at this time. I think those Members who have spoken in opposition to the remarks made by the hon. Nominated Member have exploded the idea he has put forth, and if there was need for a vote to be taken on the question now I think he would find himself left severely alone.

The other point in his report is with respect to the extension of the electoral districts. If an extension is considered necessary it will be made, but I cannot see that there was any need in this minority report for anything of that kind.

I will conclude my remarks by emphasising the point made by the hon. mover of the motion, that the report which is signed by the majority of the members of the Commission was very carefully considered clause by clause, and every opportunity was taken to permit members who disagreed to take objection and convince the Commission of the wisdom of their objections. From day to day the report was scanned and scrutinized. Attention was paid to the literary construction of it, and over and over again the members of the Commission sat with patience and due regard for the responsibility placed on them. While others were thinking that the report was very long in coming out, those who were charged with the high duty of preparing it were sitting carefully over it, and I have no doubt that those of us who listened and those of

the public who read the remarkable and excellent exposition given by the Chairman of the Commission on that report are quite satisfied that it was not prepared in a hurry, but that much care and thought were expended upon it. No words of mine would be adequate to compliment the Chairman not only on the care and attention he has given to the report, but on his tact, his prudence and his patience in presiding over the deliberations of the Commission. There were many points which, if I had been placed in his position, I would have brushed aside as being totally unnecessary. I compliment him on the fact that he endeavoured on all occasions to go into each point very carefully and to show very great respect for the utterance of the members of the Commission.

Then when we had all very carefully considered everything in connection with this report we decided to sign it as it now appears before us. I venture to say, sir, that this report will be accepted by this Council, that the major portions of it will be accepted by the Secretary of State for the Colonies and, I think too, sir, that when the Secretary of State's acceptance is given with any advice he may offer, this Council will thank the Chairman and the members of this Commission for the results of their efforts.

Mr. ROTH: Sir, I am in general agreement with the major report, as I am satisfied that it was only signed after due and careful consideration had been given by the signatories, but I cannot subscribe to the insinuation of certain hon. Members to the effect that these signatories attempted to draw red herrings across the trail so as to cloud the issues which, they allege, were repugnant to them. I am firmly convinced that the time is not ripe for the introduction of universal adult suffrage although the recommendations of the majority report fall very short of such a suggestion. But universal adult suffrage or not, there

must be a literacy test and in English. This is neither an Indian, African, Portuguese nor Chinese Colony, but British Guiana where the official and everyday language is English. English is the language of communication between the peoples forming the population. I am of the opinion that in the recent past there has been too much pandering of sectionalism. If a person of the nationality of another country happens to be born in and making his living in British Guiana but yet hankers after the customs and usages of the country of his ancestors, let him go to that country and not attempt to force those customs upon a community that is bravely trying to become homogeneous and establish its own attraction as British South America.

With regard to the admission of Ministers of Religion into this Council, I have some doubt as to the advisability of it. It does not necessarily follow that because a custom is suitable to Great Britain *ipso facto* it is suitable to another country. I may be ultra-conservative, but nevertheless I believe in the cobbler sticking to his last and the parson to his pulpit, (laughter). In the separate memorandum attached to the report the hon. Member for Demerara River (Mr. King) has given it as his view that this honourable Council is no place for women. That is as it may be. But the case of women, I submit, is not on all-fours with that of Ministers of Religion in regard to seats on the Legislative Council. From their very nature women look at life from a different point of view than that discerned by men. Very often she sees points which mere man is not even aware of and, I think, that the admission of women to this honourable Council will be not only a very practical but, I may mention, an ornamental advantage.

In conclusion I wish to associate myself with those hon. Members who in no gentle terms joined issue with

the hon. Sixth Nominated Member over the gross misstatements contained in the minority report in which he mentioned that the East Indian community provides 98 per cent. of the producing population of the country. You will recall that during Friday's debate the hon. Member in question on two occasions rose to a point of correction. On the first occasion he bravely asserted that in the absence of other figures he maintained that his were the correct figures, but when the verbal barrage became too hot for the hon. Member he bluntly explained that what he really meant was agricultural producers. Does the hon. Member seriously maintain that 53 per cent. of the population, that is the five peoples other than East Indians comprising the community, provide only two per cent. of the workers, agricultural or otherwise? The idea is so preposterous as to be laughable, tragically laughable, and the sooner the hon. Member realises he cannot bolster up a bad case with exaggeration, distortion and misrepresentation, the sooner he will obtain the position of a reputable and creditable leader of the people. It will be recalled that during the debate the hon. Member more than once tossed about a well-known cliché of American origin. For his most earnest consideration may I remind him of another phrase also of American origin—"The land of the free and the home of the brave."

"You may fool some of the people all the time;

You may fool all the people some of the time,

But you cannot fool all the people all the time."

Mr. SEAFORD: Rising to speak on this motion now before the Council I do so fully conscious of the effect this debate and this motion may have on the future of this Colony, and I think that has been appreciated by the majority of the speakers who have taken part in this debate. I say that because I think the standard has been higher on

this occasion than I had heard it for many long years in this Council with one or two exceptions. We started off on a very high plane—a plane which has been set by the hon. mover of the motion—and I would like at this stage to congratulate the hon. Member for New Amsterdam on the way he put the motion and on his speech. It was a very able speech, — a very carefully prepared speech and, I may say, an extraordinarily statesmanlike speech. I have heard the hon. mover speak on many occasions in this Council, but I do not think that on any occasion have I admired what he has said more than on this occasion. Not because I agree with most of his views, but simply the statesmanlike, straightforward way he put the case without any bias whatever. As I said, the majority of Members have realised that also, and I am afraid that was one of the causes for the rather long speeches we have had. When I heard the hon. Fifth Nominated Member suggest in his speech that a time limit should be set on speeches in this Council, I said "Here, here. I agree." It seemed in listening to some of these speeches that if some Members thought more and spoke less we would get on very quickly. It reminds me of what a girl once said and that was "How can I tell you what I think until I have heard myself speak." That seems to me to be the case with some speakers here. They are carried away by their own oration.

I congratulate the mover of this motion, but one of the speakers—I think it was the Sixth Nominated Member—referred to him or to his speech as being fossilized. I see in the minority report by the hon. Member he says in referring to the Commission:—

"Of course, it will be admitted that many of the members of the Commission, including the Chairman, are adherents of the old school of thought and their minds having been set, it is difficult to infuse new ideas into them. . . ."

I do not think the hon. mover need worry about that, as he is in very good company indeed. I think I saw a leading article the other day emanating from the same gentleman. In that article reference was made to our very wonderful Prime Minister and very able President of the U.S.A. that they are too old to be infused with new thoughts and ideas. Practically the same words he used about the Commission. Though, as I say, I do not think the hon. mover need worry too much because he is in very good company on this occasion, I was rather amused after hearing what he said about the Prime Minister and President Roosevelt to read in his report:—

"...and while the entire British Commonwealth and other Democratic Nations seem marching on to a wider orientation of human values and human rights as enunciated by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, in accordance with the principles of the well-known Four Freedoms. . . ."

What a contradiction? One day we get one thing and another day we get another thing. I think the Prime Minister and President Roosevelt will survive it all. The hon. mover in his speech said that he thought we should try and avoid all thought of sect and race and pull ourselves together. This is a Colony where we all mix together and there should be one thought, and that is we are all Guianese. I will not refer to the hon. Member for Central Demerara who has put it in another way but meaning the same thing that we should all pull together—"all for one and one for all." With that I entirely agree, and I do deplore the speech made by the hon. the Sixth Nominated Member. Although he did say—to use his words—that he disliked racial and sectional representation, yet immediately after he went into a terrific diatribe of practically all races and all sects. It was impossible to follow what he was getting at. He even concluded his speech by saying that he represented this class and this sect. The sooner we realize in this Council

and this Colony that we are all in the same boat and we have got to pull together, the better it would be for all of us.

While on that minority report I desire to endorse every word that has been spoken by the hon. the Seventh Nominated Member with regard to that extraordinary statement that a certain sect represents 97 per cent. of the producing population of the Colony. As has been said, the hon. Member did hedge on being got at and said he meant agricultural workers. But we have seen that hedging before and we know what it means. How he has the effrontery to expect people to believe figures like that is beyond me. It is just on a par with the rest of his minority report and, I am sure, this Council will take it as such. We have heard, sir, a good deal said about meetings held all over the countryside by two Members of this Council and the representation they have got, and the question was also asked as to how many Members have been to the electorate to get a mandate from their electors. But this report which we have got in front of us has been issued by the Commission which, I think, represents very fairly all sections of the population. Here we have a report issued by these ladies and gentlemen dealing with this Franchise question. As far as I can see they have been all over the Colony to hear the views of various people in the Colony, and they have stated in their report:—

"We began our deliberations on the 19th day of June, 1941, and have held 45 meetings altogether, viz: 37 in the city of Georgetown, the capital of the Colony, 1 each in the Suddie and Anna Regina villages in the county of Essequibo, 2 in the Town of New Amsterdam and 1 each in the villages of Whim and Springlands in the county of Berbice, 1 in the island of Leguan, and 1 in the village of Bartica. . ."

Surely, the members of this Commission who have travelled throughout the Colony and besides that have received written evidence from many people in the several parts of the

Colony—I have in front of me figures showing that the verbatim report of Commission comprised over 400 pages of printed matter—are competent to speak for the people of the Colony. I consider, sir, that the report is a reflection of the views expressed and a general feeling of the opinion prevailing throughout the Colony, and as such I am prepared to accept it. We have heard so much about these meetings in this Colony that we know what value to put on them. Instead of accepting the views represented by them I am prepared to accept the views given by the Commission. I was a little bit bothered to understand the whole report because it is signed by every member of the Commission and then a little further on—a few pages—about five members have issued a minority report absolutely contradictory to what has been said in the other report. I also see other minority reports—

The PRESIDENT: The others are not called minority reports. They are memoranda.

Mr. SEAFORD: What are they?

The PRESIDENT: Memoranda.

Mr. SEAFORD: There may be difference in the words but there is no difference in the sense. The hon. Member for Essequibo River (Mr. Lee) dealt rather lengthily on this question of what is called universal adult suffrage. Making his point, he admitted that the franchise has been extended very considerably and that it will embrace a far greater number of people than before, in fact a very large majority of the people in the Colony. He also admitted that there are very few today who are not earning \$10 a month, but asked "How do we know they are going to get \$10 a month two or three years hence?" In fixing the franchise that can only be done on the rates, wages and salaries existing at the time. It is impossible for anyone to conceive what may happen

a few years hence. Wages may go up or go down, but there is one thing I am certain about and that is they will never go down to what they had been in the past, and I do feel that that argument has no merit in it whatever. We must take the salaries and wages ruling at the time.

On the question of universal adult suffrage, we have heard various speakers here claiming that it is the only correct thing and that they have a mandate for their constituents. The hon. the Sixth Nominated Member gave it out that he got a mandate from various people, but I see in the report paragraph 39 says:—

‘There will be found attached to this Report a considerable number of printed circulars addressed to the Secretary of this Commission and purporting to be signed by various individuals in different centres of the Colony, expressing a desire to give evidence before us. It was understood by us that, if they had done so they would have advocated the introduction of adult suffrage the popular reference by which the proposal is known and referred to. These individuals did not eventually appear as witnesses—being content to be represented by one or more delegates to the Man-Power Citizens’ Association of which they are said to be members. It was elicited from these representatives that the circular had been printed at the instance of the Association and distributed among its members in various parts of the Colony. It has been contended by Mr. Edun who is the President of the Association, and also a member of our body that there is thus disclosed, in point of numbers, a numerical superiority of individuals who are in favour of the adoption of universal adult suffrage. There may be such a preponderance, but in the course of our examination of the delegates it was elicited—and the claim was allowed—that the support of the signatories—even where genuine—had been procured by the organisation concerned in support of their propaganda that these workers and producers as a class should be granted an unqualified right to exercise the Franchise.....’

I ask hon. Members to read that and take that carefully to heart—it had

been prepared by this Association in aid of their propaganda—and that was admitted by them. The hon. Member was privileged to contradict it but he never did so and, therefore, I take it as being true. We have been told where we get our information that all the people of this Colony want universal adult suffrage. To put such a thing forward is too preposterous for words. I agree with what has been stated here in the majority report by this Franchise Commission. They go on to say:—

‘We are ready and willing to concede that this very large section have in their midst a considerable number of both sexes who, though handicapped by lack of education of any kind, are possessed of more than an average amount of intelligence.....’

That, I presume, is the illiterate shopkeeper who makes more money than the illiterate worker. The report goes on to say:

‘.....but we cannot admit the claim that these persons are capable of exercising their votes with the same judgment and unbiased decision that the educated classes of the population may be expected to employ in their support of suitable candidates for election to the Legislative Council; nor are we satisfied that they can be depended upon to exercise the franchise freely and/or independently.....’

That I am entirely in agreement with. It simply means that these people will be the tool of unscrupulous political agitators and also be the tool of societies who will procure their votes in support of their propaganda. I am in agreement too with the suggestion here about literacy test, and I agree also with the opinion expressed by the Commission:

‘If, as is generally accepted, it is the ultimate aim of the Imperial Government, as soon as circumstances permit of her doing so, to confer on her Colonies the right of self-Government, it can be more readily achieved

by the adoption of the policy we have advocated than by fostering any increase in the number of registered voters by the indiscriminate admission of large numbers of unlettered persons to the franchise. We are unable to accept the view that such an expedient would hasten the accomplishment of the Imperial plans; and indeed we are inclined to the belief that such a movement would be one of the surest ways of postponing, and perhaps defeating, its attainment."

With all that I am also in entire agreement. I do feel that at least this report recommends a very much wider franchise than obtained in the past and that the number on the register will be considerably increased. I think the correct thing is for us to feel our way instead of jumping into the middle of the ocean, as I feel the other step would be. Let us feel our way. There is one thing that I cannot agree with the Chairman of the Commission on, and that is I do not think it will be fair to disfranchise those who have the vote already. I do feel that those who have been able to express their vote ought to be allowed to retain it. Their numbers are not large. I think you are taking away a right from an individual which he already possesses, and that is not fair.

We come to the other question as to whether this Council is moribund or otherwise. In other words, whether this Council should be retained under the Bill dealing with the new franchise or not. In my opinion, this Council should remain constituted as it is until this new register has been brought into being. I feel that by having an election now on the old register you are defeating the object of this report. I feel that what this report really recommends is the widening of the Franchise, and by doing that you may get a chance in the constitution of this Council. That is the recommendation here and I think it is up to that new body to bring into law any change it may wish in the Constitution of this Colony. I feel, sir,

that there should not be an election until you have prepared the new register on which to base the election. We have been a long time on this debate and I do not propose to take up more time. I do hope, whatever is the outcome of this debate on this very able report we have before us from the Commission, that it will be for the benefit of this Colony and for all the people of this Colony.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT: I support the report of the Commission in its entirety. I have signed it and I have heard nothing from any Member nor read anything in the newspapers of what Members have said which should in any way influence me to change my opinion. I do not propose to go through the various reports, minority or otherwise. Those who signed them are entitled to their own opinions and their own views. Whether I am described as an adherent of the old school of thought, as the Chairman evidently thought he might have been, I would rather be so described and follow in the footsteps and the guidance of the Chairman whose advocacy has been commented on by several Members. I do not think it would be extravagance of thought or language to say that we expected it of him. I feel that it would be fortunate for this Council and the community when we have many Members of the calibre of the hon. Member who has been through the stress and fire of 40 years of political life. He has ripe experience and knowledge of the various changes which have taken place in the Constitution of the Colony, and we should not lightly discard any advice he has given us. You, sir, our Government, and the Imperial Government have recognized his qualities in appointing him Deputy President of this Council. I have been indebted to him on many occasions for what I considered sane advice. The fertility of his brain not only produced something of the old school but something of the new school of progressive thought in which we are about to enter.

I think the political framework or structure we are about to be committed to is indissolubly mixed with the economic position of the Colony, and as far as I am concerned I am going to throw the responsibility on the Secretary of State to decide for us what Constitution he thinks this Colony deserves. I say that because, after all, he is the last court of appeal, and in the end the person who will decide. We shall watch, and watch with care, his decision which should and probably will give us some idea as to the economic future he predicts for this Colony. I do not say for one moment that there will be a breach of faith. At least I trust not. I wish to recall the words Your Excellency used in your address to this Council, which perhaps give us some idea as to the trend of thought in this matter. You were then dealing with the progress of this Colony and with the future of the Colony, and you referred to the fact that you were a British taxpayer. You said that if your policy was wrong "we must confess defeat and failure properly to carry our heritage." Therefore, let us give the Secretary of State the final opportunity to decide for us what shall be our heritage, which I say is indissolubly mixed up with the political framework.

With regard to the question whether this Council should decide the issue, I feel that it should be left to the new Council to be elected under the new franchise to be granted by the Secretary of State. I say that because if we went to the electorate now on the present electoral rolls we would come back either on the platform of the majority report of the Commission or on the minority report supporting the introduction of universal adult suffrage. What would we come back here to do—to decide whether the Council should continue for a year or two until the new electoral register is prepared? We would then have to have a General Election a year or two thereafter, or perhaps as soon as the

new electoral rolls are made, to decide whether we should sit here or those who displace us. It seems to me unnecessary to have two elections immediately succeeding each other. I think we should have a decision from the Secretary of State and then proceed to prepare the new electoral rolls as expeditiously as possible. After that we should go to the country.

I would like to refer to one or two matters in a general way. You, sir, have repeatedly appealed to us as Guianese. In the speech you delivered quite recently you asked for co-operation. I take it that those gentlemen who are so keen and forceful in their representation for the introduction of universal adult suffrage have in mind the ultimate goal of self-government. Self-government for what and for whom? Is it to be self-government on a national basis regardless of race, colour or creed? Is it to be self-government only for a particular section of the community? If we are going forward with the view that we should achieve self-government, not today but 7 or 50 years hence, it should be self-government for Guianese regardless of race, colour or creed. There are at present six East Indians sitting around this table. Are we told that five of them do not represent the community and that one particular member represents the community? I have not heard any Member say in support of universal adult suffrage that not one of those Members should be classed as a member of his race. It seems to me that that in itself envisages that there is in this community an attempt, and a serious attempt, at amalgamation and co-operation of all races. It is unfortunate that only recently this hydra-headed monster has been thrown at us—this general pressure being made by the East Indian people. We have had reasons advanced by hon. Members that in certain ways the East Indian community, or certain members of that community, have not progressed like other races.

I do not think I should say very much more, but I hope they will realize that the decision arrived at by the Secretary of State will be arrived at for the Colony as a whole and not for a section of the community. I hope that when that decision has been made this Council will be given an opportunity to discuss it in full before it is put into effect.

The PRESIDENT: As every Member of the Council present has already spoken, I would ask the hon. mover if he desires to make any further comments on the debate.

Mr. WOOLFORD: Sir, I feel it my duty first of all to thank hon. Members for their very gracious and generous references to me and the remarks I made in submitting to them the motion I have for their considered opinion. In an Assembly where lavish praise is not a conspicuous feature of the contributions of Members to the individual efforts of each other, those references will always remain with me not the least interesting and pleasant recollections of my very long service in this Council chamber. I am more than gratified to know that I was persuaded to table this motion. It is not usual for a Chairman to do so, but it has produced, if I may say so, a resurgence of public interest in this Colony, and I think it has animated some Members of this Council to take a deeper and wider interest in the public affairs of the Colony generally. Many of the contributions that have been made have been extremely valuable, and I have no doubt that in your usual way, sir, you will record them. I know of no one who could be better entrusted with the presentation to the Secretary of State of the mind and attitude of the Council in relation to this very important debate.

The position as I see it, is that there is some slight divergence of opinion on the decision that ought to

be taken by the Secretary of State. It is very difficult to reconcile the views of some hon. Members, but I should like first of all to remind the Council that in considering both the change or the proposed change of the Constitution to be given to the island of Jamaica, and the question of its franchise, I find on reference to a note which I had not with me at the time of speaking on the motion, that it was conveyed in a despatch by the present Secretary of State for the Colonies dated February 10, 1943, to the Governor of the Colony who was then Sir Arthur Richards, and was published as a White Paper. After outlining the Government's offer Colonel Stanley writes that it undoubtedly represents "a far-reaching constitutional advance." His despatch concludes:—

"In formulating my proposals I have been actuated by the desire to meet as far as possible the views placed before me on behalf of the people of Jamaica, to bring controversy to an end, and to create an atmosphere in which the post-war problems of the Island will be faced in the spirit of mutual co-operation and goodwill. It is in that spirit that I hope my proposals will be considered both in the Legislative Council and elsewhere. I shall be glad to receive from you an early report, and I hope in the light of the report, to be able to proceed immediately with the preparation in detail of the new Constitution for early submission to His Majesty the King."

Those proposals, which affect the constitutional position, advocate a House of Assembly of not fewer than 24 Members elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage. That election has not taken place yet, but I believe it to be imminent—some time towards the end of the year. It is also proposed that there should be a Legislative Council of 15 Members nominated from officials and unofficials, and an Executive Committee of 10 Members, but five of those Members shall be chosen by the House of Assembly on the basis of universal adult suffrage. I shall not worry the Council with

further details, but what I have referred to gives some idea of the position in the island of Jamaica which has often been quoted by honourable Members as a model which we should adopt. Universal adult suffrage has not yet been brought into existence in the island of Jamaica. It may be the decision of the community when those general elections take place. At any rate, we should not anticipate the judgment of the people of that Colony who are entitled to make their own decision.

With regard to what I regard as a very important feature of the recommendations of the Commission hon. Members have pointed out that in its actual verbiage the recommendation with regard to the qualification of voters does not appeal to them. The hon. Nominated Member on my left (Mr. J. A. Luckhoo) has referred to the existing disqualification which is to be found on page 12 of Volume 1 of our present laws. It reads:—

“26 No person shall be entitled to be registered as a voter if he—

(1) Cannot read and write some language—”

The words “some language” include the Indian dialects constantly referred to in this Council. Hon. Members who served on the Commission know that we had at our disposal a return showing the composition of the Legislatures in the West Indies, British Guiana and British Honduras, and an examination of the various provisions that exist in other possessions of His Majesty's Empire, and I invite honourable Members to consider how far the recommendation which is made by the Commission on this subject is in conflict with what obtains elsewhere. In Jamaica the matter is disposed of in this way—that one of the qualifications of an elector must be, “being a male, has attained the age of 21 years; or, being a female, has attained the age of 25 years, and is literate.” That, of course, is open to argument as to what literacy means. In Antigua, Dominica,

Montserrat and St. Kitts-Nevis there is the peculiar provision that no person is entitled to be registered as a voter who “has not written his/her name and the date on the registration claim.” It is a dangerous provision. It would certainly be a dangerous one to adopt in this Colony if we have gained any experience from the number of petitions addressed to Members from time to time in which the similarity of signatures is quite apparent, and the number of petitions which must have reached you, sir, in the course of your travels even in the interior. They follow you even there.

Then there is the provision in Trinidad and Tobago that an Elected Member must be “able to read and write English.” I emphasize those words because the community in Trinidad is much the same as ours with a large number of East Indian immigrants. In Sierra Leone an elector must be able to read and write English or Arabic. The Commission decided to adopt as far as possible the phraseology of the Fiji constitution which says: “Can read and write a simple sentence and sign his name in any one of the following languages &c.” to the satisfaction of the officer charged with the duty of registering voters. It is quite apparent that if you simply allowed a claimant to state “I can speak English” the Registering Officer would be bound to accept the claim and the whole electoral system would be destroyed, because one could not be certain that the registration claim is what it purports to be.

On this question of literacy, assuming that it is not to be the test, I would ask hon. Members to consider what would be the position of the electorate of this Colony. No one has referred to the fact that, assuming that the East Indian population, both males and females, took advantage of the extended franchise under universal adult suffrage, we should have the position that East Indian women would be

entitled to be registered as voters. Let us be fair to ourselves. Is there any Indian member of this community who would deny the fact that the wives of illiterate East Indians, or women with whom they live in familiar relationship, are not entirely under the dominion of their husbands? Aren't they people who are very largely in bondage? Are they free people? Isn't it not frequently claimed by their leaders that their proper place is in their homes? I asked a witness before the Commission what he thought would be the attitude of a husband, or a person who stood in that position, to the female resident in his house who wished to register her vote or to vote. Did he think she would be allowed to do so? He said "No". He did not think she would be allowed to. I think that in that position you would have a large number of illiterate people who have no idea why their names are on the register, and who may, if coerced into doing so, be made to vote for the candidate suggested to them by the male occupant of the house. That would be equivalent to plural voting.

Are we going to legislate for factions or sections of the community? I appeal to the East Indian Members of this Council to say whether I am speaking with accuracy or not and not giving a fair picture of what the position is in this Colony, and whether it would not be an undesirable state of things to admit to the register, without some time elapsing at any rate, the illiterate East Indian women of this community? In my opinion they are the people who have been very improperly treated in every possible respect? I know of no women in the world whether the reasons are due to religion or custom, who have been subject to such indignity, and it is amazing to me how they have stood it. Their docility of character and fine sense of duty have allowed such a state of things to continue. Some of them are improving as a result of con-

tact with other races, and I do hope that in the course of time what is suggested to be denied to them today, *i.e.*, admission to the register, will be secured to them for their children, and put a period to what I think is a very unhappy state of things.

With regard to the claim put forward by some of the Members that women should only be allowed to vote and not be admitted to membership of this Council, there is a lady present here today who was a member of the Commission. Would anyone deny that that lady is qualified to be a Member of this Council? I do not think anyone will be found to do so. There are others in the community. A lady appeared before the Commission and expressed her views on the Constitution with great ease and facility, and showed strange familiarity with every aspect of our Constitution. I have especially in mind the hon. Member for Demerara River (Mr. A. G. King) whose leanings towards the fair sex has been a very prominent feature of his life (laughter), but I do not think his popularity with that sex is going to be maintained by his objection to their being made eligible to become Members of the Legislative Council. It must not be assumed that every woman is going to be elected to this Council. What is true of the male part of the register is equally true of the female.

I must refer to some of the remarks made by the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Edun. I have been anticipated in doing so by the remarks of other Members. Since he became a Member of this Council I have heard frequent references to his *magnum opus* entitled "London's Heart Probe and Britain's Destiny", and he was kind enough to say that I had not produced a book. I do not claim to have produced a book, but I have taken part in a great many publications. But the only one with which we are concerned is the one before us, the one of which

I am very largely the author. May I invite him to consider how very closely the title of his book fits this report? This is "Guiana's Heart Probe." This work is the "Destiny of British Guiana." I do not know what induced him to publish his book in London or to appeal to the public, but I do know this: In many cases, in all his references, in all his speeches, in all his writings and even in the minority report and in his reference to this Council he seems to take a very great and undying interest in my fortunes. He has in conjunction with other Members stated how much he reveres me and appreciates what I used to do very many years ago. I do not know what particular infirmity affects me at the moment, and I would like to know if with all these shortcomings why should he and others who belong to his party have invited me to be Chairman of the Political Party which he hoped to frame only a few months ago. Let me give him a little advice. I am said by him to be in my political dotage, I am old enough however to know something. I have seen enough of men who have been daring enough to produce one publication. Tradition says of them, they are apt to be afflicted with *hubris*, which is a form of insolent pride which affects the minds of people who think they have reached the pinnacle of success. Whenever he wishes, and whenever I am not in the position of occupying the Chair to which Your Excellency has done me the honour of appointing me but sitting here and enjoying a position of greater freedom and less responsibility and the hon. Member does me the honour to refer to me in any of his speeches, he will find I am ready to reply.

The hon. Member speaks of democracy. We have seen an instance of democracy. Let me explain to the hon. Member what democracy means. If he looks at the definition of democracy—I want to be correct and so I have taken the trouble to refresh my

memory from the Oxford Dictionary—he would see it means "Government by the people direct or representative." The hon. Member belongs to the latter class. The latter definition of democracy is "the politically unprivileged class." I will give an idea of what democracy means to Members like the hon. Member. I have heard the hon. Member say during the course of his speech that he regretted he was a Nominated Member and would have preferred to be an Elected Member. That is the gratitude the hon. Member shows to democratic nomination in doing him the honour of appointing him to be a Member of this Council on behalf of the politically unprivileged class,—the workers, the producers, the people whom he refers to. "The halt, the maimed, the blind" were brought here as I saw when we last met, and made to take seats in the public gallery in the Chamber to listen to an oration which, no doubt, they knew nothing about, but at what seemed a very appropriate moment when the hon. Member was not saying one word about universal adult suffrage his speech was punctuated by the applause of these persons in this Chamber.

Mr. EDUN: May I interpose to say that I did not speak when the people were here.

Mr. WOOLFORD: It was the hon. Member for Essequibo River, (Mr. Lee) who was speaking. The hon. Member, I know, delivered his speech to an empty hall, but it seemed to be part of his policy as I saw it, the Secretary of the Man-Power Citizens' Association being also there. I was not referring to him but to the others—the people with the rice bags over their shoulders and the other man with the pole who was limping—who were punctuating with applause the speech of the hon. Member who they no doubt, I repeat, thought was speaking about universal adult suffrage. I had expected a better exhibition of judg-

ment than to bring about a show of this kind. I only hope that when the time comes for me to retire I shall retire, but I hope never before I retire to witness a reproduction of that ugly scene.

I do not know that there is anything else I can refer to, except the Education question, the paragraphs dealing with the conditions of things at that time when Sir Alexander Swettenham was here. I recalled his administration then and since. Hardly any occasion ever arises in this Council on this subject but particular reference is made to the neglect of the Government in providing opportunities for the education of East Indian children and to the treachery of the planters in not providing the necessary school buildings for their education. In those days it was compulsory under the Ordinance for the planters to have school buildings for their education, and they did their duty, but as the population grew the accommodation became limited. It is no longer their obligation to do that. I have searched all over the records in this building. I have invited everyone I thought who could give some information on the subject, I have seen the matter commented on and debated here, but I have never been able to get sufficient information from the Government side. The hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Jackson, gave a part of the story and I thought it was my duty to insert the particular reference embodied in this report, because it is a true and exact picture vouched for by a document viz: the absolute original circular furnished to the Education Department of what really did take place. It shows quite clearly and exactly what was the compromise arrived at. Did it not affect the African children too? Why should it always be said by way of propaganda that it only affected the East Indians? The children of those days were made by their parents to go to work because the parents were poorly paid. If that statement was made, if the East Indian

leaders of this community had emphasized what I consider the very low and degrading pay that was given to the East Indian immigrants—one shilling per day and compelled to work six days per week and prosecuted if they did not and fined \$5, or seven days, and not paying the fine being sent to prison—one could understand their attitude. Those were days in which I lived. When I was sixteen years of age I visited more than one estates. I know the conditions as well as any East Indian. Those were days when we had very important planters, as ignorant as the people. When I say so, I mean ignorant educationally.

Although we had that condition of things it was considered proper for them to be able to subsidize immigration. They could not do any better. The people were willing to come and they were willing to accept their services like any manufacturer or industrialist today. Any manufacturer or industrialist who wishes labour and can procure it cheaply will do so. Let us not look backward at the past but look forward to the future. Let us look forward to what will happen as the result of this Commission.

I am of the opinion that the Secretary of State for the Colonies should be asked to consider every feature of this debate and to advise only. That advice will be respected and in my judgment in the light of what constitutionally has been the position elsewhere he will refer it again to this Council, and the attitude of this Council should be to consider that advice. I consider that will be a part of his duty and before it is embodied in the Order in Council because that is still possible—the Order in Council is not suspended—before any decision is made. Even if the Council is in entire agreement with the Secretary of State's proposals, I think that the people of this Colony have a right to demand that the Electives go to them and put the position before them to determine what in their opinion is best for them. (Applause).

The PRESIDENT: Members of the Council, I would wish in the first place, to express my personal gratitude to all Members of the Council who have spoken and, if I may say as others have said, at such a high level. The speakers include all the Members of the Council here today, except the hon. the two Official Members who have declined with thanks my invitation to commit themselves on such questions as Adult Suffrage and as to whether they would welcome as colleagues in this Council ladies and ministers of religion.

I am very sure that it has been well worth while to hold this debate and that it has been of the greatest value to me and to the Members themselves, especially when we come, as may well be, to consider this matter again with the legislation before us. I shall take a complete copy of this debate verbatim with me to England and it will be of the greatest use in discussions there. I trust I may be able, as the hon. the Deputy President suggested, adequately to represent the views of the people of this Colony.

It may be that I shall have to anticipate in my telegram some account of the position to the Secretary of State and to express therein the gist of opinion in this country and in this Council, and with my comments. This debate will have indeed helped me.

One remark I must make, and that is, that in discussions in London and in any decisions founded thereon, racial or sectional considerations will not enter. I repeat that, and say that considerations touching racial sections of the community will not be allowed to be major factors in influencing decisions on a matter of common citizenship.

I said that I would have to take a copy of this debate with me and I regret that in it this very matter has

been so prominent. But I also appreciate the effective manner in which answer was made to it, particularly perhaps, by the hon. Member for Eastern Berbice.

I still more regret it on general grounds, and I take this opportunity to say so. When the East Indian community has a good case, as I think it certainly has a good case *vis-a-vis* this country and this Government and *vis-a-vis* this Colony and the Secretary of State, why spoil it by consistent over-statement and by shrill and unbalanced insistence? That can only discount, it can only delay the bringing about of these better conditions which they and their friends—and I count myself among their friends—are so anxious to forward.

In conclusion I would wish to express particular appreciation of the manner in which the onerous duty in this matter of the Franchise has been discharged over this long period of time and again in this Council by the Deputy President.

In accordance with my arrangement with him we are not proceeding to the vote but will record the motion as withdrawn.

Mr. WOOLFORD: I beg leave formally to withdraw the motion.

Mr. deAGUIAR: I second that.

The motion was withdrawn.

TEACHERS' SALARIES

The PRESIDENT: I had said I would give the hon. Member for North-Western District an opportunity to ask a question on something I said at the opening today.

Mr. JACOB: I have no desire to ask any question, but I would like to confirm almost every word you stated

about the teachers. I have a document here which I would like with your permission to read. It says:

"That the teachers on a whole are abundantly satisfied with Your Excellency's untiring efforts on their behalf and do not attribute any delay to yourself.

"That they are, however, alarmed over the announcement of your impending departure and hope that that would not necessitate any further delay.

"That the junior assistants are really and truly in need of immediate relief and enquiry on their part should not be interpreted as unrighteousness, or failure to appreciate what is being done here and in England, but rather as a means of giving them a chance to live.

"That the truth is that the much underpaid junior assistants receive little or no information from the "moguls" of the British Guiana Teachers' Association, all of whose actions are veiled in secrecy, hence giving rise to dissatisfaction and even suspicion."

This, Your Excellency, is an authoritative statement handed to me by some of the teachers concerned.

Mr. SEAFORD: To a point of order! Are we going to start a debate on this?

The PRESIDENT: Unless the hon. Member wishes to move formally a motion on which everyone can speak, I ask him to be quite brief.

Mr. JACOB: I understand Your Excellency would have made the statement which you did this morning and I was asked to assure you that no blame is attached to your Government for what has been stated to me, but the teachers would like to be advised when they would be able to receive these increased salaries promised them. As I have already mentioned this is an authoritative statement by a number of teachers, and as a member of the Education Advisory Committee I have been asked to say something in the matter.

The PRESIDENT: I appreciate the spirit in which that has been put forward by the hon. Member, and I can only state that as far as I can say, I certainly hope my leaving the country in the next few days will have nothing to do whatever with any delay or holding up of this matter. I can only say that this Government is pressing it as hard as it possibly can. But we must give the Secretary of State appropriate time for his scrutiny. I do not think that there should be any undue delay, but I am afraid that I cannot state specifically any particular step or make any particular promise. We must just go on as we are, realizing the difficulty of war-time. I know the Assistant Teachers particularly have the sympathy of this Council.

I now declare the Council adjourned until the 20th July at 12 noon.