

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FRIDAY, 11TH JUNE, 1948.

The Council met at 2 p.m. the Hon. C. Vibart Wight, O.B.E., Deputy President, in the Chair.

PRESENT.

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

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

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

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

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 (Nominated).

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

The Hon. J. Fernandes (Georgetown Central).

The Hon. Dr. G. M. Gonsalves (Eastern Berbice).

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

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

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

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

The Hon. W. A. Phang (North Western District).

The Hon. J. Carter (Georgetown South).

The Hon. E. M. Gonsalves (Nominated).

The Clerk read prayers.

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 4th June, 1948, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

PAPERS LAID.

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

The Reports of the Colonial Treasurer for the years 1945 and 1946.

GOVERNMENT NOTICE.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL gave notice of the introduction and first reading of the following Bill —

A Bill intituled "An Ordinance to amend the Diplomatic Privileges (Extension) Ordinance, 1947."

ORDER OF THE DAY.

HOSPITAL FEES (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS, 1948.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I ask leave to proceed with item 5 of the Order Paper.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The hon. the Attorney-General is not in a position to carry on with items 1 to 4, and therefore we will proceed with item 5.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Sir, I beg to move —

"That this Council approves of the Hospital Fees (Amendment) Regulations, 1948."

It should be within the knowledge of hon. Members that Specialist Officers of the Medical Department are now refunded 50 per cent. of the fees collected for consultation at the Public Hospital under

Schedule 1 of the Hospital Fees Regulations of 1932. Paragraph 9 of Schedule 1 provides:

"Any person desiring to consult a member of the staff of any hospital other than the Medical Officer in charge of the Out-Patient Department shall be required to produce a recommendation either from a private medical practitioner or from a medical officer in charge of a district or a Government Dispensary. Such consultation shall be charged for at the rate of \$1 to \$5 according to the means of the patient, unless the latter produces in addition to the recommendation a certificate of poverty or pauperism on the approved form "

Then follows this sentence which is the relevant sentence in so far as this amended regulation is concerned —

"If the person is admitted to hospital as a result of the consultation the above fee shall be waived."

This point has arisen and some argument has taken place in regard to it, and it was claimed notwithstanding the fee is waived the Specialist Officer should be paid the 50 per cent. as if the fee had not been waived. Hon. Members will see that may be regarded as an unenviable position, and so the position is being made perfectly clear by means of the amendment in the proposed Regulation. Hon. Members will see from the Regulations that where a patient is admitted to hospital no fee is chargeable for consultation and the Specialist Officer collects nothing and, therefore, there is no refund. The proposal is to delete that last sentence of paragraph 9, so that the Doctor will be in a position to get his fee which, I think, is very reasonable under the terms of the Hospital Fees Regulations.

I do not think it is necessary for me to say anything further. I am sure hon. Members appreciate the reason for this amendment. That is, by the deletion of the last part of that Regulation the Specialist will now be entitled to his fees and will no longer be required to waive his fees if as the result of the consultation the patient is admitted to hospital. I beg to move that this Regulation be approved by hon. Members.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY seconded.

Mr. LEE: Dealing with the Hospital Fees Regulations I would like to draw Government's attention to the fact that we have some very capable doctors coming to the institution. Although I am against the principle of charges by Government Medical Officers, yet at the same time we are losing these very good doctors on account of the salaries offered to them. I learn there were alternative proposals put up by those doctors. I am sorry that the Chairman of the Advisory Board is not here. I would certainly ask Government to reconsider the position of the Government Medical Officer who has given notice to quit within three months. From the reports I have learnt he is a very capable officer and the offer that has been made to him is not sufficient to satisfy his qualification. I hope that Government will see its way to do the best that can be done for some of these experts who have to come here. I will give one instance. Dr. Finlayson, a very capable man, has gone away. The other gentleman from Barbados, Dr. Leacock, has also gone away. I am authoritatively informed that had not certain things occurred at the hospital he would not have left.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: May I ask the hon. Member to which officer is he referring?

Mr. LEE: Several medical officers had to leave the Colony on account of the meagre salary offered them and the non-acceptance of their alternative proposal. Here is Dr. Richardson who has tendered his resignation and is going away in the next three months. If we can retain the services of these men who are qualified we ought to do so, but not to so increase their emoluments as to create a disadvantage to other officers who are serving at the present time. I understand the present Surgeon is not satisfied with certain things at the hospital. I ask you, Sir, to convey to Government my sincere wish that some investigation be made into the dissatisfaction of the expert officers now serving Government.

Dr. GONSALVES: I would like to say without calling names and in support of this amendment, knowing, as I do, that the medical profession is one of the most

expensive, when one thinks that after having completed his course additional money has to be spent to specialise in a particular branch of the profession, it will be seen in spite of the fact that the salary scale is higher than what it has been heretofore these Specialists are at a disadvantage when compared with the Medical Officers in the districts who draw a regular salary and have private practice. They make far in excess of the emoluments of these men who are Specialists. What I would like to say without much ado is this: After the deletion of that paragraph, the fees should be amended to make them \$1 to \$10, because if I can pay \$7 or \$10 for the kind of treatment that I will have to pay \$1,000 for abroad there should be that elasticity in the fees to afford that. I am sure there will be that discretion exercised by the officers as not to overdo it, and it will not work a hardship on the poor. I therefore ask in support of this that the fees be changed, instead of being \$1 to \$5 they be made \$1 to \$10.

Mr. PETERS: I desire to express agreement with the sentiments expressed. I think that we are prone to be too parsimonious when it comes to paying these Specialists for the work we expect them to do. A ceiling figure of \$5 is certainly too low, and even if the fees are made \$1 to \$10 we will be still not quite up to what we anticipate the fees generally ought to be. I am in agreement with the hon. the Attorney-General in regard to the deletion of that final sentence in the Regulation. I desire also to express agreement with the hon. Member for Eastern Berbice that the ceiling fee should not be \$5 but \$10 instead.

Mr. GONSALVES: Is this confined just to the Specialists of the Hospital or to any medical practitioner, as at one time I heard mentioned Specialist Doctor and Specialist Surgeon? There is a distinction.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I think hon. Members are aware of the fact that there is a distinction between those who are Specialist Officers and are unable by reason of the fact to be engaged in a certain amount of private practice and to enjoy a certain amount of remuneration as the result of those fees and the ordinary

Government Medical Officer. They stand in a different category in regard to the collection of fees. We are determining the Specialists' fees. So far as the point raised by the hon. Member for Eastern Berbice is concerned, and which has been supported by the hon. Member for Western Berbice, the question of the amount is not at the moment really before us. It will require very full consideration of the fees. We are dealing with the question of where the fee is waived obviously because as the result of the consultation and the Specialist's advice there is immediate admission to hospital for the purpose of treatment. As the paragraph stood the Specialist was not entitled to fees, because the two things were merged, admission to hospital having taken place reasonably soon after the consultation. The quantum of the fee is a different matter. I suggest to hon. Members they should not deal with that while we are dealing with this waiving of the fees, because it opens up issue which cannot now be properly dealt with. I suggest to hon. Members we are meeting a difficulty by the removal of that last sentence in the Regulation.

Motion put, and agreed to.

Regulation 9 of Schedule of the Hospital Fees Regulation as amended approved.

CANE GROVE AND LA BONNE MERE LAND SETTLEMENT SCHEME.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I beg to introduce the motion standing in my name as Item No. 6 on the Order Paper —

"That with reference to His Excellency the Governor's Message No. 11 of the 3rd of June, 1948, this Council approves of the proposals outlined therein for the establishment of a Land Settlement Scheme at Plns. Cane Grove and La Bonne Mere and of the estimated expenditure of \$500,000 being met from the Development Trust Fund and the general revenue of the Colony."

Some Members would recall the discussion which took place in this Council on the 1st November, 1946, when a resolution was passed approving of the purchase of Plns. Cane Grove and La Bonne Mere and the proposals which were then put forward for reconditioning the properties

and making them available for settlement by the people who had been living and working in that area under estate management as a sugar proposition. The terms of that resolution were the approving of an expenditure of \$363,100 of which a token of \$100 was in respect of the purchase of Cane Grove itself, \$60,000 in respect of the purchase of La Bonne Mere and the balance of \$303,000 was for the reconditioning of the drainage system of the estate. The Message on which that resolution was passed, No. 11 of the 25th October, 1946, indicated that there will be probably the necessity of expending another \$240,000 in affecting the laying out of the property for settlement. Action has been taken. The estate has been taken over and a good deal of work has already been accomplished on that estate, but in the meantime it has been found necessary to vary substantially the original proposals in regard to the reconditioning of the lands and of the drainage system. However the new plan which is now before the Council involves no greater expenditure of money than that originally proposed. I said that the approval on the first resolution was for \$363,100 with probably another \$240,000. That is to say, it was envisaged that the sum of \$600,000 would be spent on this scheme. The new scheme calls for precisely the same estimated total.

I should explain as regards the source of the funds, the \$300,000 for the drainage and the purchase was intended to be met as a charge on what we know as our local Development Trust Fund. That Fund is the inheritor of the funds of the old Colonial Development Fund. It was understood at the time that sum would be available and would be used for the purpose, and the balance of the expenditure would have to be met on the economic estimates, probably from our surplus. The question before the Council now is to approve of the variation in the scheme to which I referred and also to give formal approval for the expenditure of the whole amount which is involved. Formal approval was only obtained for \$363,000.

I do not wish to attempt to explain the variation of the scheme. Mr. Laing, the Commissioner of Local Government,

who is very much concerned and who is really the Officer in supreme charge of this particular scheme, is here and I shall ask him to address the Council with your permission and go into the question of the variation which has been proposed — the first scheme put to this Council and the second scheme now proposed to be carried out. May I ask you to invite Mr. Laing to address the Council?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Would the Council like to hear Mr. Laing?

Mr. M. B. LAING, C.M.G., O.B.E., (Commissioner of Local Government): Mr. Deputy President and Members of the Council. When Messrs. Booker Bros., advised the Government that they proposed to discontinue the manufacture of sugar at Pln. Cane Grove, Government was faced with a somewhat difficult administrative problem. There were some 300 families residing at Cane Grove and those families were entirely dependent upon that estate as a sugar plantation for their livelihood. Government therefore had to decide what was best to be done in the interest of the welfare of those families resident on the plantation. There were three alternatives. One was to permit the plantation to be acquired by anybody to whom the owners were prepared to sell and so abandon those families to their fate. The next proposal was to endeavour to transfer those families to other places where suitable occupation would be available to them. The third alternative was to acquire the estate from the owners and develop it as a Land Settlement Scheme and provide land for those families from which they could earn a livelihood.

Government considered that to abandon those families to their fate would not be humane treatment. Investigation of the proposal to transfer them elsewhere proved to be exceedingly expensive per family, and suitable lands were not available. Any such proposal also envisaged providing immediately housing accommodation for those families and, as you know, lumber and hardware, particularly nails, were not at the time and, perhaps, are not at this time available in sufficient quantities. Government therefore decided to purchase the estates and

lay them out as a land settlement in order that the people could settle there and make a livelihood by planting the lands. That was the proposal to which this Council gave approval and voted a sum of money — as the hon. the Colonial Treasurer told you, \$300,000 — for the reconditioning of the drainage of the estates and to provide the purchase money.

It is necessary for me to explain that in the development of Cane Grove as a Land Settlement Scheme Government is faced with one major difficulty; the drainage of Cane Grove is a very difficult matter. Very little gravity drainage can be obtained because of the height of the water in the Mahaica river into which the estates drain, and to drain the area mechanically by pumping would cost so large a sum as to make the whole scheme uneconomical. An endeavour was made to provide as much gravity drainage as practicable, and Members will see in the second paragraph of the Message that the original scheme provided for gravity drainage for 3,000 acres. The proposal was that there should be an inner empolder for the crop land and an outer empolder, which would be the greater part of the estate, and would be retained for seasonal pasturage for cattle. The Committee who made those recommendations stated also that in spite of their recommendations in regard to gravity drainage it would be essential to purchase a pump for emergency purposes. Hon. Members will see that on an estate of some 7,000 acres only 3,000 acres would be available for crop lands, and 4,000 acres for pasturage of a rough nature, from which very little revenue could be expected. The only land from which reasonable income could have been obtained was the 3,000 acres, and this was found to be quite inadequate to maintain the difficult and rather intricate drainage and empoldering works originally proposed. Government therefore directed me to submit a modified scheme with the hope that it would make the administration of the estate as economic, or as nearly so, as possible.

I should here remark that it is well known that rice is unable to pay for mechanical drainage, and rice of course was to me, and is to me, the economic crop

of this land settlement scheme. In drawing up the modified plan it was therefore essential that I should endeavour to provide as large an acreage for crops as possible, from which we could derive revenue, and that as large an acreage as possible of the entire estate should be drained by gravity so as to reduce the cost of pumping the drainage water. You will see in paragraph 5 of the Message that the modified scheme provides for gravity drainage for 5,167 acres, and that 2,066 acres will be drained by pump. Pumping, of course, is not essential the year round, but it does mean that for that 2,000 acres in wet weather the pump would have to be operated.

In the same paragraph of the Message a statement is given showing how it is proposed to divide the lands — 3,000 acres for rice cultivation, 300 acres for ground provisions, 273 acres for coconuts, 2,134 acres for pasturage, 100 acres for house lots, and 454 acres to be made available to the Department of Agriculture for dairy farming and experimental purposes. Members will notice that there is a difference between the sum of the two figures given in the first part of paragraph 5, that is the total of the acreage to be drained by gravity and pumping amounts to 916 acres more than the division of the land into crop land and pasturage. The explanation of that is that no less than 916 acres of the estate is occupied by dams and trenches which are essential for the drainage and irrigation of the estate. An estimate has been prepared by the Deputy Director of Public Works which shows that, including the cost of purchase of the drainage pump, the cost of re-constructing the structures, providing buildings and other things including the reconditioning of all the trenches and dams, amounts to \$488,782.

It is necessary to provide a housing site for the settlers because, while the present site where the families now live was suitable for sugar estate purposes, being near to the centre of administration and the factory, it is low-lying and unsuitable as a building site for settlers, because if the settlement is to be a success a major consideration is that the settlers should be maintained in good health, and should have a healthy locality in which to

live. It is proposed, therefore, to lay out an area of 100 acres as a housing site, and that is estimated to cost, with roads, playing grounds, and other amenities, a sum of \$36,733. This sum, together with \$13,600, the cost of the house which the Superintendent will occupy, an office for the settlement, and a small electric lighting plant and the cost of purchasing the estate, reconditioning it and laying it out as a settlement, brings the total cost to \$599,000, or \$600,000, which was the original estimated cost of the first scheme.

For the reasons already stated, that Government was primarily concerned with the welfare of the families at Cane Grove, it was essential that we should proceed with the work of reconditioning the estate lands and settlement of the people immediately. This Council has already voted \$300,000 for the purpose, and that money has been drawn upon for the works in progress at the present time. It was essential that the work should be started and the families settled, because the estate authorities ceased sugar manufacture in February, and that deprived the resident population of what they had been dependent upon for a very long time — wage-earning employment and Saturday afternoon pay table. It was essential, therefore, to put them on the land so that they might plant it in time for the Autumn rice crop; that they should also plant food crops, and that proper provision should be made for the cattle on the estate. That work is progressing but it is not sufficient to give the settlers lands to plant, because while the grass is growing the horse would be starving. The settlers are at present employed on the work of re-conditioning the drainage. Government's proposals, therefore, are that the settlers should work part-time on the re-conditioning work on the estate, and that the balance of their time should be devoted to the cultivation of their land.

The time has been short, and to add to our worries weather conditions have been exceedingly difficult. As fast as the estate authorities reaped their sugar crop we took over the fields and started to break and level the land for rice cultivation. I think it is well known to all of us that rice cannot be grown on lands which

have been used for the cultivation of sugar cane unless the old cane beds are broken, the drains filled in and the land levelled for rice cultivation. That has been done by the use of tractors, ploughs and harrows and, where the land was suitable, by the use of ploughing oxen. Whilst it cannot be expected that in so short a time we would be able to put the whole of the estate in proper condition for rice and for the cultivation of ground provisions, and also to provide suitable pasturage for cattle, we have been able to a very large extent to provide sufficient land to enable the families at least to provide themselves with subsistence during the first year.

There has been another difficulty. The settlers had only the re-conditioning work to depend upon for cash, and that was not sufficient to pay for labour to assist them in the breaking, re-conditioning and levelling of the land for rice cultivation. It has therefore been essential to help them with small loans to enable them to provide themselves with labour, and also to pay the cost of the tractors and oxen used for levelling the rice lands. The repayment of those loans will be spread over a fairly long period, and in any case no repayment of those charges will be demanded during the first year, so that the crop will be entirely free from the repayment of any of those charges. I may say that the amounts loaned to them have been fixed at a figure which the settlers might reasonably be expected to repay, and any amount in addition to that has been charged against the amount allocated in the estimates for clearing the land.

The present position, therefore, is that we have to some extent re-conditioned the drainage of the estates, but much more remains to be done. Only the essential work could be attempted, and the most essential work in converting the estate from sugar to rice, is adequate provision for irrigation water. So that the first work we had to undertake was the re-conditioning of the irrigation trenches so that adequate supplies of water should be available for the crops. The land has been allocated to as many families as possible, and it is believed that all the families who desire to remain as settlers

have been given lands and will be able to cultivate some of that land for the rice crop this year. So that in 1949, the settlers should have income from their rice crop, ground provision crop and their cattle — those who have cattle — and from wage-earning employment at least from which to provide themselves with reasonable subsistence until the estate can be fully developed. If there are any questions Members would care to ask, I will endeavour to reply to them.

Mr. LEE: I desire to support this motion and I am asking Members to support it. There has been complaint in this Council over a number of years, that Government has not undertaken land settlement schemes, but if they would visit Vergenoegen they would see what Government has done there. In regard to Cane Grove I have received several letters requesting me to ask Government to give out the lands as soon as the cane is cut : order that they might be cultivated by the settlers. I wrote the Commissioner of Local Government asking him to try his utmost to see what could be done. Recently I received a letter stating that their lands were flooded by the heavy rainfall, and I again wrote Government about the drainage of the area. I received a reply from the Commissioner stating that the pump was out of order but would soon be repaired.

To remove those 300 families and settle them somewhere else would cost Government much more than what is being asked for. Apart from that, the estate has some sentiment attached to it by those people who have been born there, and they would like it to be converted into a settlement for the benefit of themselves and their children. I take it that the social welfare scheme would be extended to the people in that area, and I urge Members to support the motion in order that the work might be carried out as early as possible.

I would like to warn Government that after spending this large sum of money on this scheme it should not permit the Conservancy authorities to flood the land with their surplus water. I ask the Council to pass this motion, and that Government

take immediate steps to carry out its proposals.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I support the motion in its entirety, but there are a few observations I would like to make on the question of land settlement. In the first place I am glad for this opportunity to observe that there seems to have been a departure by Government from the freehold type of land settlement to one of leasehold. From experience gained, particularly within the last six months at Cane Grove and La Bonne Mere, I am afraid that the type of holding of the people is far from satisfactory. I think this Council will agree with me that it amounts to this: that Government is employing people to cultivate a plantation which it owns under conditions which are unstable and subject to all the disadvantages of the usual landlord and tenant business in this Colony. That, however, does not prevent me from expressing appreciation of Government's action, not only in purchasing this plantation for a land settlement scheme but in making a genuine attempt to settle people who formerly lived at Cane Grove, and to provide a means of livelihood for them after the closing down of the estate. I think Government is to be congratulated, and I think I voice the sentiments of the people at Cane Grove when I say it is certainly a kindly act on the part of Government.

Nevertheless, I would ask Government to be careful about one or two features of this land settlement scheme. In the first place I think Mr. Laing has practically admitted that these people would have been abandoned to a fate which would have been very sad indeed had there not been this bit of re-conditioning work for them to do on the land. I agree with him that there is not sufficient work to go around, and because of that they are being afforded an opportunity to implement their earnings by doing their own work on plots allotted to them as soon as they are available. It is common knowledge now that the people have not received real saving wages on the estate, and as a result the majority of them are penniless. There is therefore only one solution, and that is that while the people are engaged in cultivation of their lands they should be given loans to enable them

to live while their crops are growing. As Mr. Laing has said in his remarks, rice cannot be planted on land upon which sugar cane has been growing until the land is put into suitable condition for rice cultivation. It is a well known fact that whenever new land is let out for cultivation of any kind — either rice or provision—a period of grace is given—maybe a year or two years — and that is intended to offset not only the probability of low returns during the first crop, but also the expenditure incurred in breaking down the land and preparing it for that particular type of cultivation. This has not been done as yet at Cane Grove.

Since November last ploughing was started with tractors, but it was soon discovered that the tractors could not work on the estate because, as we all know, canefields carry deep drains between the beds, and the tractors cannot work in these drains and trenches, so they were only able to plough on the top of each bank and the canefields are still there. Unless the water rises to a height which would enable it to cover the top of those lands they would not be suitable for the cultivation of rice. It has been admitted, however, that the lands are suitable for bull ploughing, and the farmers say they had to pay \$12, for reploughing the lands and converting them from cane lands to rice lands. Some of the people were unable to take up the lands and, as a result, grass has taken them over. It has been found that there is only one type of tractor—the Caterpillar—that is suitable for operation on those lands, but only one is available. Each holder of land has signed a pro-note for \$12, to cover the cost incurred by Government for the ploughing of the land, but that sum represents a distinct loss to some of them. Re-ploughing is now being done with one tractor at an average cost of \$6 per acre, but the tractor cannot work in the drains. It is reasonable to suggest that Government should pay the cost of reploughing by bulls and this would cost about \$10.50 per acre.

I can only express the hope that Government would so carry out this scheme that it would not become unduly oppressive to the people because, as I have already said, they have no resources upon which they can fall back. I received a

telegram from that district recently and, as far as I know, there is no proposal to assist the people who have to meet the expenses of ploughing by bull. They would like to have this money advanced to them and added to the \$12, they have already received.

I see the sum of \$50,000 put down for the purchase of a pump which, I think, is absolutely necessary. The breakdown of the present pump resulted in the flooding out of whatever crops the people had. That is something which should not have occurred and we should purchase a pump which would enable the people to carry on their work with reasonable certainty from year to year. I agree with Mr. Laing when he says that the important problem is drainage, and one is tempted to conclude that Pln. Cane Grove has been abandoned because of drainage difficulties and not because of pests. I raised an objection to the purchase of this estate by Government because I happen to know that up to recently cane cultivation was fairly successful there, and that the second ratoons came up as strong as anything without moulding or anything else. Here we find that an estate with a production of over 5,000 tons of sugar per annum has been abandoned. Cane cultivation is more profitable than any other kind of cultivation in this Colony, and if these people can cultivate canes and grind them they would make more money than they could from any other kind of cultivation.

In my petition to Government, I suggested how the estate could survive but I was told that I was too late, and that the sugar producers would not go back to their decision. There is no doubt that the Mahaica river, according to Mr. Case's report, is flooded periodically through heavy rainfall, and again I am tempted to feel that this question of drainage is the principal reason why Cane Grove has been abandoned. If this opinion is capable of being formed I can only express the hope that the people residing on the estate would not suffer as much as those residing south of it. I hope that this particular settlement scheme would be so controlled and managed that these people would not suffer a similar

fate to those on the other bank of the river.

I feel that this land settlement scheme can be made to result in a great impetus to the people of the Colony as a whole, and that it is also a ground for asking Government to reconsider the question of draining all the excess water from that area into the Demerara river instead of the Mahaica river. If that is done Cane Grove would be well drained by gravity drainage through the Mahaica river. I have said that Government is to be congratulated for bringing forward this scheme and I believe I speak not only for the people in the area, but for everyone else in the Colony when I express appreciation and thanks to Messrs. Booker Brothers for their generosity in enabling Government to purchase this estate for the nominal sum of \$100. I feel it is a gesture which we cannot overlook, and one for which we must express our gratitude sincerely. I think it represents a recognition of the fact that the people have given faithful service to the estate over a long number of years, first as immigrants and then as settlers, and there is that moral obligation on the part of Government to look after their welfare. These people would have found themselves in an extremely sad state if they had been left without any work to do.

That is why I said from the start that I would support this motion. A land settlement scheme is the most logical thing to follow the cessation of operations on this estate, and so long as I am the representative of that district, I would look forward to the happy working of this scheme. I hope that Government will appoint as controller of the scheme someone who is equipped with a sound knowledge not only of the people, but of what is required of Land Settlement Officers and for such schemes in this Colony. I cannot say whether the present holder of the office is capable or not; that is left to be seen, and I hope it will be found that he is a capable officer.

As regards the question of housing, I wish to say that these people are without means and that one of the problems which must face Government in this scheme is that of building houses for the settlers.

The estate ranges would certainly not provide all, if any, of the materials necessary for the houses of the settlers, and it seems to me that apart from this \$600,000, to be voted, Government would have to undertake the lending of other sums for the building of houses. This, I think, would be the first opportunity afforded Government to embark on what I described at one time as a rental-purchase housing scheme. I feel that if these houses are built by Government and these people are allowed to own them after a number of years they would be satisfied. That would meet the welfare of the people who now find themselves in this difficult position. I support this motion and feel that every hon. Member of this Council should do likewise. I also trust that the Committee of this land settlement scheme would keep very much alive and do their utmost to make it a success.

Mr. McDOOM: I happen to be a new member of this Committee which is charged with the carrying out of this land settlement scheme and I have had an opportunity of visiting the estate on three occasions only, but I have been able to see the difficult task with which the Committee and other persons connected with the scheme would be faced for some time. I must say with all sincerity that they have done well up to the present time. They found themselves this year with bad weather conditions, and they were hoping to be able to convert a large area of sugar lands into rice lands by means of tractors. Tractors, as we know, are expected to do the work at a cheaper cost than hand labour or bull-drawn ploughs, but weather conditions have made the position a very difficult one for the management of the scheme and they were not able to convert as much land as they expected. I was able to see, however, that good work has been done, and had it not been for the rainy weather this year progress would have been very much greater, and perhaps there would have been nothing to complain about. I have seen there three kinds of land—land that can be best handled by bull-ploughing, some suitable for handling by tractors and hand labour, and some by tractors and bull work. This year conditions were very unfavourable, and I must say that those responsible for the

management of the scheme have done well.

There is one point on which I desire to agree with the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara, and that is the conversion of the cane lands into rice lands. I have had the experience—and I think the hon. Members here also know—that whenever cane lands are being converted into rice lands the people who undertake to do that work at their own cost are given two years' grace for so doing. It does appear to me that it would have been a good thing if it had been considered advisable to give the people lands which they would have to convert at their own cost and then give them two years' grace—free of rent—for doing so. I think such a scheme would have been very satisfactory from all points of view, and if there was any mistake made I think that was it. I support this motion heartily, and I think that every hon. Member would support it, when told that some 300 families would be thrown out of employment overnight through the closing down of this estate. Government has come to their rescue and I do not think any Member of this Council would object to any reasonable sum of money being expended on this scheme.

Dr. NICHOLSON: I was glad to hear the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. McDoom, speak as he has done because the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara would like Government to go all the way — 100 per cent. It should be realised that Government has done exceedingly well by providing \$600,000 out of the Colony's funds in order to settle 300 families, and that works out at \$2,000 per head. If we help people along the road to development I think they should try to help themselves also. There are 375,000 people in this Colony, and there are many besides those at Cane Grove who are also looking forward for help from Government. The ex-servicemen, for instance, are coming with a land settlement scheme, and we will have to find money for that. I am supporting this motion wholeheartedly, but I want to remind hon. Members that we cannot find the money at present to carry out the scheme 100 per cent. — to find land and homes and everything else for the people. We have gone a long way

by providing \$600,000—\$2,000 per head — to improve the condition of people who are living on the land already. We have to find money for the people at Hague also, and while we should congratulate Government for having brought forward this motion we should realise that we cannot find more money just now to spend on the scheme.

Mr. ROTH: The hon. Member who has just taken his seat seems to be wrong in his calculation when he says that the expenditure of \$600,000 for settling 300 families at Cane Grove works out at \$2,000 per head. What I think he means is \$2,000 per family.

Dr. NICHOLSON: I should think hon. Members would realise that it was an obvious mistake.

Mr. DEBIDIN: Government is meeting this initial expenditure in order to hire out the lands to these people who will have to pay rent from the start. The people themselves would not get the benefit of this expenditure at the rate of \$2,000 per family.

Mr. GONSALVES: I have read this motion throughout and I have not found any of the things I have heard some hon. Members objecting to. We are asked to vote \$600,000 for this scheme, and I think the other things can come later. I am in favour of this scheme as it stands, and I think we should get ahead as fast as we can because it is urgent and necessary. I have seen in the Press and have heard otherwise, objections to land settlement schemes, but I think we must get ahead in that direction now.

As regards the question of housing, I do not think it would be possible to provide houses for the settlers on a rental-purchase basis, because a house would become absolutely rotten before a man is able to pay for it. I am in favour of the scheme as it stands and I think hon. Members should get down to the real facts.

Dr. SINGH: I am a member of the Committee dealing with the land settlement schemes at Vergenoegen and Cane Grove, and I endorse this motion wholeheartedly. There was one point I desired

to settlers at Vergenoegen; that is, a lease for a period of 21 years automatically renewable for further periods -- you will note the plural -- of 21 years. I cannot see myself anything unstable in that. The settler would be able to mortgage his land, with the approval of the Government, which approval would not be unreasonably withheld, and to do with it, it would seem to me, everything that the owner of a freehold title is able to do. Again I say I do not see anything unstabled in the title to be issued under the Land Settlement Schemes.

If the lands were sold to the settlers, and they have been referred to by Members as penniless persons, we would have to find the capital with which to pay for the lands. All they will be required to pay as rent under their lease is the nominal rent charged by Government -- 20 cents an acre -- and their contribution to the upkeep of the drainage and irrigation works of the estate. A condition under this lease is if the lessee desires to give up his land and he has, as will be the case in this settlement, done work to improve the land, he will be entitled to have payment for those improvements, but if he has damaged the land he will be chargeable with the cost of such dilapidation. That seems to me to be a fair contract between Government and its lessee, and that is the reason among others, why our lessees on settlements are being required to pay for the improvement of the land. It is land which is virtually theirs by reason of the long lease which is to be issued and under which, as I have said, they will be paid for any improvement they have effected if they wish to give up the land. The hon. Member for Georgetown North hit the nail on the head when he said that Government is prepared to spend no small amount of money -- \$600,000 or \$2,000 per family -- it is expected that the settlers will do something to assist themselves. I personally am opposed to any policy by which everything is done for the settlers. The policy my Department has always adopted is to encourage the rural population towards self-help.

I do not agree that it would be right for the general taxpayer of this Colony to put his hand in his pocket and pay

\$600,000 for the reconditioning of this estate, and so provide work for these people, and still to be expected to put their land in condition so that all that remains for them to do is to scatter the seed and reap their crops. I may add this: Should this Council decide that everything is to be done for these settlers, a policy with which I entirely disagreed, we would have to extend the same conditions to the settlers at Vergenoegen who are clearing their land and who have had to fell trees, and get out stumps and roots so as to enable them to plant their crops. One Member, I think it is the hon. Member for Central Demerara, referred to Hague. I would like to say this: At Hague we did the drainage incurring that expense, but the people cleared their land of palms and other bush, planted it and are now reaping a good reward from the ground provisions they are growing there. I cannot accept the suggestion that it will be a good thing to do everything for these people and leave them with nothing to do for themselves. I believe if we are to be successful in any of these schemes of welfare, there is one thing we must insist on and insist all the time, and that is self-help. I think any policy that is adopted to destroy self-help amongst our people will be a very great mistake indeed.

The hon. Member for Central Demerara has referred to settlers being allowed to plant coconuts. He also suggested that they should have co-operative societies and they should be the holders of land under different kinds of crops. I, perhaps, did not explain in my first remarks that in laying out a settlement of this kind great care must be taken not to mix lands suitable for rice with those suitable for ground provisions. You cannot grow ground provisions in the centre of rice fields, no more than you can grow rice in the centre of ground provisions. The two must be separated entirely, and that is what we are doing. If I understood the hon. Member correctly, I think what he was anxious to achieve is that the settlers should have the right to plant permanent crops. I do not know if I understood him correctly or not, but there is no reason why settlers should not have lands for ground provisions and also for permanent crops. There is no reason why they should not plant coconuts

or any other permanent crops for which the land may be suitable.

There was some reference to the ploughing of land by tractors and by oxen, and the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara left me with the impression that the lands ploughed by tractor were still cane fields and not suitable for rice cultivation. There I must disagree with him. It is true that the tractors are not ideally suited for the levelling of cane fields, for the reason that they cannot fill the drains, and those drains must be filled by hand afterwards. But I will not say that those lands that have been ploughed by those tractors are not now suitable for the planting of rice. It is true that oxen can be used for ploughing but, I think, Members who know the area and know the difficulties of ploughing old sugar lands will agree with me that unless those lands had been flood-fallowed and the height of the cane bed reduced, it would be quite impossible for oxen to work there. It is true that much of the reploughing can now be done by oxen, and there are oxen working in the estate in the reconditioning of those lands, but I may add that everything possible is being done to bring those lands under cultivation, and where it is possible to use tractors and where it is possible to use oxen, full use is being made of them.

There was reference to the pump. We had some slight breakdown when two boiler tubes gave out. No one was responsible for it. It was not a matter of negligence, but merely the tubes had become worn and they started to leak and the pump had to be stopped, the tubes taken out and new ones replaced. That was the reason for the temporary stoppage of the pump which did lead to some flooding of the lower part of the estate, and particularly the present housing site. It is for that reason we are removing the housing site to higher and more suitable lands.

Mr. FERNANDES: Mr. Laing did not quite answer my question directly, but I understood from his remarks that Government has no intention of selling those lands eventually to the people, and in future all land settlements will be done on the lease principle instead of owner-

ship principle. I thank him very much for the statement. I just want to get that for future reference. I was not here when this Council agreed on that. I want to be sure that what is done in one case will be done in all cases. I am accepting that answer. I am supporting Land Settlement and I will continue to support all efforts of Government at Land Settlement, because it is something that should be encouraged.

I spoke to Mr. Laing some time ago about the possibility of having Land Settlement in the Demerara River District, because I feel sure—if I remember rightly he agreed with me—that it could be done there cheaper than in any other part of the Colony. British Guiana having a limited amount of money at its disposal and having the desire to house as many people as possible with that limited amount of money, I feel sure Mr. Laing and everybody will agree with me that we should keep our eyes in the direction where the money can be stretched as far as possible and will give relief to as many families as possible.

Mr. LEE: I would like to know if the house lots would be freehold, that the land would be transported to the people in order that the houses could be built under the Housing Scheme, and the backlands or cultivation lands and pasturage would be leaseholds. Unless that is not the policy —

Mr. LAING: The position is this, Mr. Deputy-President. The house lots will be leased, but there will be a provision in the lease that if the settler is satisfactory and decides to remain on the estate as a permanent settler, after a period of years he will have the option of acquiring his house lot but not the cultivation area.

Mr. FERNANDES: That is not the answer I got. I now find that it is Government's intention to sell the people the house lots. It puts me in an awkward position. I had the house lots in mind when I asked the question. I can quite see a man taking a quantity of land and having through illness to give it up. I take it that the position is now changed. At some future time these people are

going to be allowed to own their house lots.

Mr. LAING: I think the hon. Member will understand the difference between a cultivation area and house lots. There is no reason, as far as I can see, why a man should not own a house lot and have freehold title for it, provided he is a satisfactory settler and wishes to remain on the settlement.

In regard to the cultivation area, it is all drained and irrigated by one system, and it is essential that we should have control over the drainage and irrigation system. That is so in all these areas, and that is what makes the laying out of land in this Colony a very different matter from what it is in other countries where drainage and irrigation schemes are not necessary. But that is only one of the reasons why leasehold is preferable to freehold. A more important reason is the one I have already given. As regards the house lots I am sorry I did not give that information at the time, but the hon. Member will admit that he did not refer particularly to house lots.

Mr. FERNANDES: My question was quite simple. Has Government any intention whatever of selling any of these lands to the people who are going to settle in the area? That was the question. If Government is going to sell a part and lease the balance, that was the answer I expected, but when I got a contrary answer I could do nothing but ask that it be recorded for future guidance. I thank Mr. Laing very much for saying it. In my opinion the house lots should become the property of the settlers. He says that they can get mortgages on the leases, but for his information I will say that they could not get money from the Building Society no matter how long the leases are for. They must have transport for the land. That is why I asked the question.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I gather that the land is at present being given out on a yearly lease. I would like to know

whether that is a temporary arrangement or whether the idea is to give land out on annual lease in future.

Mr. LAING: The answer to that is that when we took over the La Bonne Mere section, we had to give out as much land as possible to enable the people to reap the crops. Those lands were given out in small parcels and under an annual lease. It has never been the intention to develop any land settlement scheme on the principle of annual leases.

Motion put and carried.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE COLONIAL TREASURER.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Before we adjourn there are two matters I would like to mention. The first is that I feel I will receive the unanimous support of this Council in offering our congratulations to the hon. the Colonial Treasurer on the honour recently conferred on him by His Majesty the King. (Applause). It has brought a great deal of pleasure to those of us who were born in this Colony, and it shows that we have officers who are quite capable to carry on the work of Government.

THE GOVERNOR'S ILLNESS.

The other matter is that I feel sure I would be expressing the feeling of hon. Members when I say that we regret to hear of His Excellency's indisposition and wish him a speedy recovery to health.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: Sir, may I say how deeply grateful I am and how much I appreciate the sentiments you have expressed on behalf of the Members of the Council. Naturally, sir, I am gratified at the honour which has been conferred on me, but I am doubly gratified that it has been the occasion of compliments of this nature in this Council.

The Council was then adjourned *sine die*.