

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 12TH AUGUST, 1948.

The Council met at 2 p.m., His Excellency the Governor, Sir Charles Woolley, K.C.M.G., O.B.E., M.C., President, in the Chair

### PRESENT.

The President, His Excellency the Governor, Sir Charles Campbell Woolley, K.C.M.G., O.B.E., M.C.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Mr. 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. C. V. Wight, O.B.E., (Western Essequibo).

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

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

The Hon. T. Lee (Essequibo River).

The Hon. V. Roth (Nominated).

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hon. J. Fernandes (Georgetown Central).

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

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

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

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

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

The Hon. John Carter (Georgetown South).

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

The Clerk read prayers.

### PRESENTATIONS

O.B.E. FOR MR. C. V. WIGHT.

The PRESIDENT: I direct the Colonial Secretary to read the Royal Warrant conferring on Mr. Claude Vibart Wight the dignity of an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

Warrant read.

The PRESIDENT: Mr. Wight, by Command of the King, conveyed to me by His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, I present to you the Insignia of an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. This honour has been conferred upon you by the King in recognition of your meritorious public service over many years as a Member of both the Executive and the Legislative Councils, as Mayor of Georgetown and member of the Town Council and in many other capacities. I have very great pleasure in presenting you with the Insignia. (Applause).

## M.B.E. FOR MR. R. A. DUMMETT.

The PRESIDENT: I direct the Colonial Secretary to read the Royal Warrant conferring on Mr. Robert Arthur Dummett the dignity of a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

Warrant read.

The PRESIDENT: Mr. Dummett, by Command of the King, conveyed to me by His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, I present to you the Insignia of a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. This award has been made to you by the King in recognition of your outstanding ability in commodity control organisation and in particular for the very valuable service which you rendered in this connection during the War — service of great value both to the Government and to the community. I have very much pleasure in presenting you with the Insignia. (Applause).

## M.B.E. FOR DR. L. H. WHARTON.

The PRESIDENT: I direct the Colonial Secretary to read the Royal Warrant conferring on Dr. Laureston Hewley Wharton the dignity of a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

Warrant read.

The PRESIDENT: Dr. Wharton, by Command of the King, conveyed to me by His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, I present to you the Insignia of a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. This honour has been conferred on you by the King in recognition of your highly meritorious services not only to the inmates of the Leprosy Hospital but also in connection with the treatment of leprosy. It gives me very great pleasure to present to you this Insignia. (Applause).

## C.B.E. FOR MR. J. I. DE AGUIAR.

The PRESIDENT: I direct the Colonial Secretary to read the Royal Warrant conferring on Mr. John Ignatius

de Aguiar the dignity of an Ordinary Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

Warrant read.

The PRESIDENT: Mr. de Aguiar, by Command of the King, conveyed to me by His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, I present to you the Insignia of a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. This honour has been conferred on you by the King in recognition of your meritorious public services over a period of years as a Member of both the Executive Council and the Legislative Council, and as Chairman and member of various boards and committees which were set up by the Government. It is in recognition of those services that I have very great pleasure in presenting you with the Insignia of a Commander of the Order. (Applause).

## M.B.E. FOR MR. J. A. MITCHELL.

The PRESIDENT: I direct the Colonial Secretary to read the Royal Warrant conferring on Mr. John Alexander Mitchell the dignity of a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

Warrant read.

The PRESIDENT: Mr. Mitchell, by Command of the King, conveyed to me by His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, I present to you the Insignia of a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. This honour has been conferred on you by the King for specially meritorious services in the Transport and Harbours Department and more particularly in the work which you have done in the reorganisation of the workshops of that Department. I am quite sure the members of the Department will share with me the pleasure it gives to know that your services have been recognised by His Majesty the King. I have much pleasure in presenting to you the Insignia of a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. (Applause).

M.B.E. FOR LT.-COL. G. A. MOORHEAD.

The PRESIDENT: I direct the Colonial Secretary to read the Royal Warrant conferring on Lieut.-Colonel Gerald Augustine Moorhead the dignity of a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

Warrant read.

The PRESIDENT: Lieutenant-Colonel Moorhead, by Command of the King, conveyed to me by His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, I present to you the Insignia of a Member of the Military Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. This military decoration has been conferred upon you by the King in recognition of the meritorious services which you rendered during the last war in the Fortress of Gibraltar as an Officer in the Corps of the Royal Engineers. I have very much pleasure in presenting you with the Insignia. (Applause).

#### MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Thursday, the 11th of June, 1948, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

##### LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ADVISORY COMMITTEES.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY communicated the following Message to the Council:—

##### MESSAGE No. 12

Honourable Members of Legislative Council,

I have the honour to refer to my Message No. 2 of the 17th of December, 1948, regarding the Legislative Council Advisory Committees, and to inform you that the Advisory Committees for Communications and for the Interior, Forestry and Mines, have suggested their amalgamation into one joint advisory body, as it has been found in practice that most of the matters which fall within the terms of reference of the Communications Committee also come within the ambit of the Committee for the Interior, Forestry and Mines. I have therefore decided, with the concurrence of my

Executive Council, to amalgamate the two Committees mentioned above into one body to be known as the Legislative Council Advisory Committee for Communications and the Interior.

2. The personnel of the new Advisory Committee will be as follows:—

Honourable V. Roth (Chairman).

Honourable Captain G. H. S. Smellie (Vice-Chairman).

Honourable T. Lee.

Honourable C. P. Ferreira.

Honourable W. J. Raatgever

Honourable John Fernandes

Honourable Dr. G. M. Gonsalves

Honourable W. A. Phang

Honourable John Carter

The Commissioner for the Interior

The Postmaster General.

3. During the absence on leave of the Honourable Captain Smellie, the Honourable W. J. Raatgever will act as Vice Chairman of the new Advisory Committee.

C. C. WOOLLEY,  
Governor.

Government House,  
British Guiana.  
21st July, 1948.

#### 1948 ESTIMATES.

The COLONIAL TREASURER communicated the following Message:—

##### MESSAGE No. 13.

Honourable Members of Legislative Council,

I have the honour to inform the Council that I have received a despatch dated 17th July, 1948, from the Secretary of State for the Colonies confirming his approval of the Estimates for the current year which had been previously conveyed to me by telegram.

2. In his despatch the Secretary of State comments favourably on the evidence of the great care taken in the preparation of the Estimates and records his appreciation of the admirable way in which they were presented by the Colonial Treasurer.

3. The Secretary of State notes with satisfaction that for 1948 a balanced budget with a small surplus has been achieved ensuring the retention of the accumulated surplus balance at a total

of approximately \$6,000,000. He expresses the view that the new taxes imposed to balance the budget in 1948 have been framed with the needs of economic development in mind as well as the narrower needs of revenue; and that the new taxes appear to have been well conceived and the general tax structure of the Colony appears to be sound.

4. Mr. Creech Jones also makes several important observations of a general character on the Colony's financial situation which, I feel sure, will be of great interest to Honourable Members. These are contained in the extracts from the despatch reproduced below:—

“The main weakness in the Colony's financial position as set out in the 1948 Estimates appears to lie in:—

- (a) the fact that a balanced budget in 1948 has been achieved with the assistance of \$800,000 from His Majesty's Government in respect of subsidization of expenditure incurred last year.
- (b) the uncertainty of Customs revenue.
- (c) the increase in recurrent expenditure.”

“The receipt of \$800,000 from His Majesty's Government in 1948 may be regarded as fortuitous. It is, however, difficult to judge the extent to which the balanced budget for 1948 depends upon this factor. Much depends on the future revenue receipts from Customs.

“I am concerned about the tendency of recurrent expenditure to increase. In 1939 expenditure was \$6 400,000 and by 1944 this had doubled to \$12,800,000. There has since been an increase of \$2,500,000. In paragraph 8 of the Treasurer's Budget Statement it is stated that the increased cost of subsidization and the increased scale of cost of living allowances account for more than three quarters of the excess of over \$2,000,000 by which the revised Estimates exceed the original Estimates for 1947. I appreciate that there is also a great back-log of expenditure from the war years and that much new development expenditure is required. But paragraph 20 of the Treasurer's Budget Statement shows that annual recurrent charges have considerably increased owing to provision for new services and staff posts and I note that some schemes previously financed by Colonial Development and Welfare grants have been taken on to the local budget now that the grants have expired. The proposed salaries revision will also probably result in increased recurrent expenditure. It is clear therefore that the expenditure side of the budget needs very careful watching.

“The needs of the Colony are considerable, but its financial resources are lim-

ited and, during a period of inflation, Government should be particularly careful not to commit itself to recurrent expenditure beyond its probable future resources, if the risk of any subsequent deflation forcing a contraction of Government activities is to be avoided. Great care will be needed to ensure that the surplus balances built up in recent years are maintained for expenditure on the purposes for which they are intended.”

5. As Honourable Members are already aware from reports made by the Treasurer in Finance Committee receipts from Customs for the first half of the year have exceeded expectations, and instead of there being any danger of a short-fall there will be a substantial excess over the estimate under this head. The collections under the other principal heads of Revenue have also been well maintained and, notwithstanding the substantial items of supplementary provision which it has been necessary to invite Finance Committee to approve, it is not unlikely that there will be a fair surplus on the year's transactions. Nevertheless, you will, I think, agree that the Secretary of State's warnings, and particularly his expression of concern at the prospective increases in recurrent expenditure, are timely.

6. In concluding his despatch the Secretary of State referred to the report by the Settlement Commission under the chairmanship of Sir Geoffry Evans and expressed the hope that the recommendations of this Commission will bring economic developments which will increase the resources and strengthen the financial position of the Colony. This report is now being printed in England, and I trust that it will shortly be available for issue in the Colony.

C. C. WOOLLEY,  
Governor.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE,  
British Guiana,  
9th August, 1948.

#### MEETING OF FINANCE COMMITTEE.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I should like to take this opportunity to announce that it is proposed to hold a special meeting of the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council tomorrow afternoon, at 4 o'clock, or earlier, should the Council adjourn before that hour. There is an important matter to be put before hon. Members and I do hope, Sir, that all hon. Members will be present.

## PAPERS LAID.

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

Report of the Forest Department for the year 1947.

Report on the Post and Telecommunications Department for the year 1947.

Report of the Department of Interior for the year 1947.

Reports on the Customs Department for the years 1945, 1946 and 1947.

Report on the work of the Income Tax Office for the year 1947

Report of the Medical Department for the year 1947.

Report on the Lands and Mines Department for the year 1947.

Report of the Geological Survey Department for the year 1947.

Report on the Local Government Department for the year 1947.

Report of the Commissioners of Currency for the year 1947.

Report of the Committee of the Trotman Trust Fund for the year 1947.

Report of the Imperial Institute for the year 1947.

Report on the Education Department for the year 1947.

Report of the Bureau of Public Information for the year 1947.

The Housing (Form of Letting Agreement) Regulations, No. 15 of 1948.

The Post Office Savings Bank (Amendment) Regulations, No. 14 of 1948.

The Co-operative Societies Regulations, No. 16 of 1948.

Proclamations Nos. 6 of the 16th of June, 1948, 7 and 8 of the 17th of June, 1948, and 9 and 10 of the 19th of June, 1948.

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

Minutes of the meetings of Finance Committee held on the 20th of

May, 24th of June, 1st of July and 22nd of July, 1948.

Statement of supplementary expenditure totalling \$182,445.56, which has occurred during the year 1947 and which has not been included in any previous schedule for the year 1947 and is to be admitted as a charge to Public Funds under Colonial Regulation 265 (2).

Schedule of certain items totalling \$1,216,103 carried on Suspense Accounts and charged to final expenditure in the Colony's Accounts for 1947.

Schedule of Additional Provision for the Quarter ended 30th June, 1948, totalling \$444,399.62.

Financial Statements in respect of the year 1947.

## GOVERNMENT NOTICES

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS.

The ATTORNEY GENERAL gave notice of the introduction and first reading of the following Bills:—

A Bill intituled "An ordinance to amend the Summary Jurisdiction (Magistrates) Ordinance with respect to maintenance orders."

A Bill intituled "An ordinance to amend the Crown Lands resumption Ordinance with respect to lands which may be resumed by the Crown.

A Bill intituled "An ordinance to amend the Post Office Savings Bank Ordinance, 1937, with respect to the date of calculation of interest on deposits."

A Bill intituled "An ordinance to extend the powers of Co-operative Credit Banks for the purpose of the increase of food production."

A Bill intituled "An ordinance further to amend the Licensed Premises Ordinance, 1944, with respect to the opening and closing hours of licensed premises and for purposes connected therewith."

SUPPLEMENTARY EXPENDITURE.  
1947.

The COLONIAL TREASURER gave notice of the following motions:—

That, this Council approves of the Statement, which has been laid on the table, of supplementary expenditure totalling \$182,445.56 which has not been included in any previous schedule for the year 1947 and agrees that it be admitted as a charge to Public Funds under Colonial Regulation 265 (2).

#### 1947 COLONY ACCOUNTS.

That, this Council approves of the Schedule of certain items totalling \$1,216,103 carried on Suspense Accounts and charged as final expenditure in the Colony's Accounts for 1947, which has been laid on the table.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISION TO JUNE 30.

That, this Council approves of the Schedule of Additional Provision for the Quarter ended 30th June, 1948, which has been laid on the table.

### UNOFFICIAL NOTICES

#### TRADE UNIONISM.

Mr. ROTH gave notice of the following motion in substitution for the motion he had tabled in Council on the 3rd of June, 1948:-

WHEREAS the recent growth of multiple Trade Unions purporting to represent identical industries and occupations is militating against the best interests of Trade Unionism, to the detriment of the economic life of the Colony;

BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable Council re-affirms the policy of encouraging the development of Trade Unions, and towards this end endorses the policy of the Department of Labour as outlined to this Council on the 26th of February, 1948, as follows: "What is wanted is not more unions, but better unions — not a multiplicity of unions covering one form of employment," and condemns any act by any persons or trade unions that seeks to compel an employer or employers to recognise or discuss questions with unions other than those already recognised by that employer or employers."

#### TECHNICAL AND AGRICULTURAL SCHOOL ON CORENTYNE.

Dr. GONSALVES gave notice of the following motion:-

"WHEREAS the population of the Corentyne district has been steadily increasing during the past ten years so that now it is one of the most flourishing areas in the Colony; and

WHEREAS it is desirable that vocational educational facilities should be made to keep pace with the growth of population in any area; and

WHEREAS mention was made during the lifetime of the First Legislative Council of the possibility of approaching the Carnegie Corporation for the foundation in Berbice of a Vocational School for Boys similar in scope and activity to the Carnegie Trade School for Women now operating in Georgetown;

BE IT RESOLVED that this Council recommends to the Government the desirability of establishing in the Corentyne district, a Technical and Agricultural Training School for Boys which will provide a 3-year course of instruction in post-primary, technical and agricultural subjects to boys between the ages of 14 and 17 years."

#### HOURS OF WORK IN BAKERIES.

Mr. CARTER gave notice of the following motions:—

"THAT WHEREAS the Bakeries (Hours of Work) Ordinance No. 4 of 1946 only provides for the Commissioner of Labour or someone authorised by him to have the right of entry and to prosecute Bakeries that violate the aforesaid ordinance;

AND WHEREAS experience has shown that it is necessary that this right should also be given to the Commissioner of Police or someone authorised by him;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Bakeries (Hours of Work) Ordinance No. 4 of 1946 be amended to provide also for the Commissioner of Police or someone authorised by him to have the right of entry and the right to prosecute Bakeries that violate the Ordinance referred to above.

## SHORTAGE OF EDIBLE OILS

WHEREAS the shortage of edible oils is causing considerable hardship among householders in Georgetown and elsewhere in the Colony; and

WHEREAS any measure of subsidization of edible oil is likely to necessitate considerable expenditure by Government without appreciable relief to the majority of persons in the lower income groups; and

WHEREAS black-marketing of this essential household commodity seems to be rampant and is likely to increase; and

WHEREAS it is alleged that the obtaining of edible oil is being increasingly made a condition of sale of other articles;

BE IT RESOLVED that this Legislative Council take immediate steps to order the rationing of edible oil for a period of 6 months as from the 15th of September, 1948, with a review of the situation at the end of this period.

## NOTICES OF QUESTIONS.

## RE-BUILDING OF THE MUSEUM.

Mr. ROTH gave notice of the following questions:—

Whereas at a meeting held at Government House on 15th March, 1945, at which were present His Excellency the Governor, the Honourable the Colonial Secretary, the Honourable the Colonial Treasurer, the Chief Representative of the British Council in the West Indies, the local Representative of the British Council in British Guiana, the President and other Representatives of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society of British Guiana, the question was considered favourably of establishing a comprehensive Cultural Centre on the Company Path, Georgetown, to consist of the Library of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society, the British Guiana Museum and an Auditorium—will Government now state—

- (a) What further steps, if any, with regard to the rebuilding of the Museum, have been taken as a result of that discussion?
- (b) If no such steps have been taken will Government enunciate its present policy with regard to the re-establishment of the British

Guiana Museum to its former position of pre-eminence in the Guiana and Caribbean area?

## POSITION OF THE IMMIGRATION FUND.

Mr. DEBIDIN gave notice of the following questions:—

1. What is the sum standing to date to the credit of the Immigration Fund? What amount represents the fund proper and what amount represents interest?
2. Does the above amount of the Immigration Fund represent the full amount of what the Immigration Fund should be? By what amount is it deficient, if at all, and what are the causes of any such deficiency?

## PETITION.

Mr. FERREIRA presented a petition regarding the question of granting a pension and/or gratuity to retired Nurse-Midwife J. T. LaRose in respect of her service under the Infant Welfare and Maternity League.

## ORDER OF THE DAY.

## THE TORANI CANAL.

Mr. ROTH asked, and the COLONIAL SECRETARY laid over the replies to the following questions:—

- Q.—(a) 1. Is Government satisfied as to the accuracy of the level of the Berbice River at the intake of the proposed canal at Torani and of the level of the outfall of the canal on the Canje River?
2. In view of the magnitude of the project and its estimated cost, have these levels been checked and re-checked?
- A.—(a) 1. Yes.
2. Yes. When checking levels between the Berbice and Canje Rivers, two errors were discovered and corrected; the corrections have not affected the Scheme as originally designed.

## PRIVATE SCHOOLS LEGISLATION.

- Q.—(b) 1. Is Government aware that for more than four years there have been lying in one of its pigeon-holes or file-dips the draft of "The Private Schools (Primary and Secondary) Ordinance 1944" and Regulations proposed to be made thereunder, the said draft Ordinance having been published in the local Press on 6th January, 1944?
2. Does Government propose to proceed with the said Ordinance and Regulations?
3. If so, when?
4. If not, why?

- A.—(b) 1. No.
2. Yes.
3. As soon as the Law Officers have submitted the draft.
4. See reply to Question 3.

## WORKING HOURS OF FIRE BRIGADE.

Mr. FARNUM asked, and the COLONIAL SECRETARY laid over replies to the following questions:—

- Q.— 1. Whether it is a fact that the mechanical staff of the Fire Brigade work 84 hours per week?

- A.— 1. No. The mechanical staff of the Fire Brigade are on duty, though not necessarily working, for 12 hours each day, but have a rest-day every fifteenth day. Thus the average number of hours of duty (though not actual hours of work) each week is 79.

When on "day duty" the maximum normal working

period is six hours per day on Mondays to Fridays, four and a half hours each Saturday, and one hour only on Sundays and Public Holidays when only watch room duties and daily tests are performed, thus giving a maximum normal working week of 35½ hours.

When on "night duty" the maximum normal working week is 19 hours.

The cycle of duty is fifteen days as, on every fifteenth day, each member of the staff has a period of 24 hours free from duty. As the total number of hours worked by day, and by night in period of 15 days is only 54½, this works out at a daily average of less than 4 hours of actual work.

- Q.— 2. Do the firemen work the same number of hours per week as the mechanical staff?

- A.— 2. No. The Police personnel attached to the Fire Brigade are similarly on duty 12 hours each day, but they have a rest-day every thirteenth day. Thus the average number of hours of duty in their case is 78 each week.

Again these figures refer to hours of duty and not to actual hours of work.

- Q.— 3. What is the maximum number of hours weekly fixed by law for manual and other workers?

- A.— 3. There is no general law fixing the maximum weekly hours for all workers. Maximum hours are however prescribed in three Ordinances for certain occupations as follows:—



Ordinance	Occupation	Maximum Weekly hours
<b>Licensed Premises Ordinance</b> No. 22 of 1944 (as amended by Ordinance No. 11 of 1947).	Employees	46 hours.
<b>Shops Ordinance</b> No. 5 of 1944	Shop Assistants	47 hours
<b>Bakeries Ordinance</b> No. 4 of 1946	All persons employed in the manufacture of bread or flour confectionery or any other work incidental thereto.	60 hours. The normal hours per week are 48 and the Ordinance provides that work performed in excess of 8 hours in any day (except Sundays and certain holidays) shall be paid for at the over-time rates of time-and-a-half.

In addition, normal hours have been prescribed as follows:—

**Post Office (Overtime Regulations —**  
No. 8 of 1944. 39 to 45 hours per week.

**Hours of Work (Georgetown Waterfront Workers) Regulations—** No. 4 of 1942 8 hours per day.

**Hours of Work (Georgetown and New Amsterdam Watchmen) Regulations—** No. 6 of 1948 64 hours per week.

Q.—4. Has the Government arrived at a decision with regard to the proposals which were under consideration for the general re-organisation of the Fire Brigade?

repealing all references to the Militia Force.”  
Mr. WIGHT seconded.

A.—4. Government is awaiting a Report by the Advisory Fire Prevention Board.

Question put,, and agreed to.

Bill read a third time and passed.

#### UNIVERSAL ADULT SUFFRAGE.

#### DIPLOMATIC PRIVILEGES (EXTENSION) BILL, 1948.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL moved that the following Bill be read the first time:—

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

Mr. WIGHT seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read the first time.

#### MILITIA BAND BILL, 1948.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL moved that the following Bill be read a third time and passed:

A Bill intituled “An Ordinance further to amend the Militia Ordinance with respect to the constitution of the British Guiana Militia Band and by

The Council then considered the following motion by Mr. LEE.

“Whereas certain members of the 1941 Franchise Commission recommended that the introduction of universal adult suffrage should be postponed for a period of five years, while other members thought that universal adult suffrage should have been introduced in 1944;

“And Whereas universal adult suffrage has already been introduced in the other two first-class Colonies of Jamaica and Trinidad, in the West Indies;

“Be it resolved that the Secretary of State for the Colonies be respectfully requested to approve of the introduction of an amendment to the Legislative Council (Elections) Ordinance, 1945, thereby giving the right to every male and female over the age of 21 years, resident in the Colony, to be registered as a voter.”

The PRESIDENT: The next item is a motion standing in the name of the

hon. Member for Essequibo River (Mr. Lec). I need hardly emphasise its importance, relating as it does to the constitutional progress of the Colony. The question which the hon. Member will raise in his motion is one which should be given very close study and thought, not only by each of us in this Council but by all who have the future welfare and progress of this Colony at heart. I have no doubt myself that every Member of the Council will give this question that serious thought and study, and that they will be guided by what they believe to be desirable in the best interests of the Colony.

The question of the franchise was last discussed in this Council in September, 1945. Many Members of this Council, including myself, were not present at that time, and I think it is important that before this debate opens we should have clearly before us the decision then reached upon the question, and that the Council should be fully aware of what is in fact the position today. Linking matters up further, I should like, before the debate begins, to read a statement made by the Secretary of State for the Colonies at the time, and communicated to the Legislative Council by my predecessor on the 13th of September, 1945. I am tabling a copy of the statement for each Member. The statement is as follows:—

**Announcement made in Legislative Council on Thursday, the 13th of September, 1945, by His Excellency the Governor, Sir Gordon Leithem, K.C.M.G., in regard to the British Guiana Constitution.**

"I have a very important announcement to make and that is the decision of the Secretary of State on the question of the franchise. I have been authorised to make this announcement today and I am going to read it. I shall endeavour to get copies to each Member of the Council during this present sitting, for comment. This is the announcement:—

"In regard to the new franchise for voters in election of Members of the Legislative Council in British Guiana, various and conflicting representations have been made to me. The qualifications for such voters are set out in the Bill now before the existing Legislative Council and provide for a very substantial reduction in qualification and a very wide extension of franchise generally. The presentation of this Bill is in accordance

with the decision of the Secretary of State for the Colonies made in 1944."

"It was, however, very clearly stated by the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1944 that the aim of policy was the adoption of Universal Adult Suffrage at a later date, and this had been the recommendation of the Franchise Commission which considered the question in the Colony and reported in 1944."

"Representations have been made to me now, that in spite of the decision made in 1944 by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the time has come when Universal Adult Suffrage should be adopted in the present Bill both as a matter of principle and in response to demand in the Colony."

"It is the case that the Franchise Commission after very full consideration pronounced, by a very large majority, for adult suffrage at a later date, and in the meantime for the very considerable reduction of the Franchise qualifications as now set out in the Bill, and this view was definitely supported in 1944 in the Legislative Council by a large majority."

"It is also the case that very strong representations to the Governor and to the Secretary of State were made in 1944, that despite the above facts there was a wide demand, which was not adequately reflected in the Franchise Commission and in the Legislative Council, for adult suffrage immediately and without the deferment recommended. These representations were very carefully reviewed and their weight given every consideration by the Secretary of State."

"The Secretary of State nevertheless thereafter decided that in view, among other things, of the evident and considerable division of opinion in the Colony, further extension of the franchise beyond the substantial extension recommended by the Franchise Commission and by the Legislative Council, should not be pressed upon the Colony at that date. It is very clear to me from the representations made to me now from all points of view, that this very considerable division of opinion still exists."

"I am therefore satisfied that at this date when a very substantial reduction of qualification and extension of franchise with acceptance in principle of adult suffrage at a later date, has been agreed willingly by all classes in the community, it would be wrong to impose now the immediate adoption of adult suffrage in face of the very substantial body of responsible opinion which desires to defer the adoption till a later date."

"I therefore consider that the 1944 decision should stand as regards present action, and that the legislation to imple-

ment the majority report of the Franchise Commission should be carried through as at present proposed.”

“It appears to me nevertheless desirable and a logical development of the 1944 statement, that some indication should now be given of the time when and conditions upon which, the further extension of the franchise should be contemplated. It is not possible to give an unqualified guarantee on such a matter as so much must depend on experience and development. His Majesty’s Government would nevertheless be prepared to give sympathetic consideration in 5 years’ time from the election of a new Legislative Council, provided that experience during those five years of working of the constitution with the extended franchise now intended has proved to be satisfactory, and that recommendation for the adoption of adult suffrage be made by the Legislative Council then sitting, or by any representative *ad hoc* body appointed by Government to consider. In the meantime, also, necessary other steps will be taken, such as census, for which arrangements for 1946 are now being made.”

“This decision appears to me to be all the more proper in view of the differing conditions which exist in British Guiana, from those which exist in other Colonies where adult suffrage has been introduced at the present time.”

In comment on this announcement, I should say in the first place that this is no hasty decision: It is more than a month since I telegraphed to London the views which had been expressed in this Council and outside, and the representations made that opportunity should be taken of the Franchise Bill being in Council to bring into effect immediate universal adult suffrage; and, of course, opinions expressed and representations made in the opposite sense, that universal adult suffrage should not be brought into effect until a later date, and that in the meantime Government should proceed with the present Franchise Bill. I understand, too, that representations have been made to the Secretary of State indirectly through other agencies.

It will be accepted, I am sure, by Members and public opinion that in these five weeks very full consideration will have been given to this whole question. The other day in Council I said that there were three alternatives; firstly, a direction by His Majesty’s Government to introduce universal adult suffrage now as a matter of principle; secondly, that this should be deferred and the franchise recommended in 1944 effected, which while it gives a very wide extension of franchise does not go beyond what a very substantial degree of responsible opinion in the Colony is prepared to regard at the

moment as proper; the third alternative was that the Secretary of State would desire further discussion in London or elsewhere and possibly require a visit to London by myself and delegations.

The Secretary of State has preferred to make a firm decision in the sense of the second of these alternatives and we must of course regard that decision as absolutely final.

It will be our business, therefore, to pull together in the one common objective of bringing the new franchise into effect and holding elections under it. I trust that hope will commend itself to all who are genuinely interested and desire the common good of the Colony, even though opinion on detail may differ.

There is another aspect of this matter and one which has been touched upon from time to time in debate, and that is constitutional reform, quite apart from franchise or elections. I am entirely ready to envisage such constitutional reform for the future, and I think that it will be desirable and necessary, parallel with the further extension of franchise envisaged by the Secretary of State in five years. That will touch such things as more adequate representation, perhaps, of all districts of the Colony, the relations of Executive and Legislature, the Executive Council and so on. These are things which will require very particular consideration. They are scarcely for immediate formal action. It is nevertheless my personal wish and intention to pursue that aim, and in the meantime pursue the policy of increasingly closer association of this Council in its present or in its coming form with the executive work of Government.

In accord with the decision given in the announcement to proceed to implement the franchise as set out in the Bill I will, of course, continue action immediately with the Bill, now in the Committee stage actually completed, and the third reading remaining.

That, hon. Members, is where we stand at present, and I will now call upon the hon. Member to move this motion.

Mr. LEE: I am very grateful to you, Sir, for having had this extract printed, so that those hon. Members who are new Members of the Council may see what the decision was in 1944.

The PRESIDENT: No, in 1945.

Mr. LEE: Thank you, Sir. Hon. Members will realise that this is a very important question affecting the political

advancement of the Colony. If hon. Members consider that this country is ready and willing to accept political advancement then it is necessary, I respectfully submit, that this Council should agree to the motion standing in my name, for the introduction of universal adult suffrage. The question which I am submitting for the serious consideration of this Council is whether we should have universal adult suffrage without a literacy test. The Franchise Commission considered it fair and reasonable to recommend the reduction of the franchise qualification to \$10 per month, and it was thought that large numbers of women would have taken the opportunity to register as voters, but perusal of the new list of voters will show that many of them have not taken advantage of the opportunity. The question is whether the introduction of universal adult suffrage will make them conscious of their political rights and induce them to exercise that right for the political advancement of the country. In my humble opinion the time has come when we should bring it to their notice that they have this right, and that they should exercise that right in selecting representatives for this Council. Those who have lived in this country know that until the people are hard hit in some form they do not fight for their rights. In view of the Ten-year Development Plan and the prospects of the industrial and agricultural development of the Colony, I think the people should be made to realise that this is the time when they should exercise their political rights as regards the selection of representatives in the Legislative Council.

During the sittings of the Franchise Commission the majority of the people, in my humble opinion, clamoured for universal adult suffrage, but the fear then was that a certain section of the community would have flooded the Council with a majority of representatives if adult suffrage was granted. The composition of the present Council is a reflection of the character and intelligence of the voters in selecting men who will serve them rightly for the next five years. I submit that the time is ripe for us to try out the experiment — if it can be called an experiment — of giving the people the right of universal adult suffrage as

has been done in other Colonies which are advancing politically, such as Jamaica and Trinidad. I have attended conferences in Barbados, Trinidad and Jamaica quite recently and found that though there is a large percentage of illiteracy, especially in Jamaica, the people are exercising their votes in such a manner that they are able to call upon the Imperial Government to allow them to govern themselves. Of course it may be said that Jamaica's economic advancement has been retarded by its political advancement, but if we examine the position carefully we would find that Jamaica has got more out of the Social Welfare Fund than any of the other Colonies in the West Indies.

I admit that we must advance politically in stages, and the Franchise Commission has recommended that adult suffrage should be tried out in five years. I have travelled regularly in all parts of this Colony and I am convinced that it is necessary that the right to vote should be given the people so that they may be able to exercise it when the time comes for the economic and social advancement of the country. We should not fear a majority of any particular section of the community. As I have seen in Jamaica, there are certain things occurring there which are not to the liking of large sections of the community, but the time will come when reason, logic and common-sense will prevail. If we give the people the right of universal adult suffrage and they exercise it wrongly they would see for themselves that the vote is not a weapon to be played with. We have expended, and we are still spending, large sums of money for the education of the masses, but there are some people who say that the results do not justify the expenditure. Be that as it may, I think the standard of education provided is sufficient to bring the people to their senses, to realise that in choosing candidates for the Legislature no other qualification is necessary but that of service. With those words, I wish to thank you, Sir, for the printed memorandum you have provided for us, and I move the adoption of the motion.

The PRESIDENT: Will the hon. Member deal with the second part of his motion?

Mr. LEE: No, Sir, I propose to deal with that separately. I am going to ask for a division on each section.

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member might clear the ground for us.

Mr. LEE: My remarks have only been directed towards universal adult suffrage and not to the question of the Constitution. I have reasons for asking you to allow me to deal with them separately. There are certain definite reasons, which I cannot disclose to this Council, why I would like to hear the arguments of hon. Members with respect to adult suffrage first. I would then be in a better position to tackle the other question. I think it is right, if I may be permitted to do so, that I should read the then President's comments on the decision of the Secretary of State with regard to universal adult suffrage. (Mr. Lee then read Sir Gordon Lethem's comments on the Secretary of State's decision, which were included in the extract read by the President). Paragraph 53 of the Franchise Commission's report states:—

"53. Some of our members are of the opinion that the introduction of universal adult suffrage should be postponed for a period of five years, while others consider that the entire question of the franchise should again be examined before a final decision is reached on so important a question, and then only after a new Census — last undertaken in 1931 — has been taken."

In my opinion this paragraph clinches the matter as regards the period of five years. A census, as we all know, has been taken but the report is not yet out. The time has, however, arrived that 5 years should be given for the introduction of a new franchise, and I respectfully submit that since the report of the Commission was printed on March 3, 1944, we should pass in this Council, if we accept that report, an Ordinance whereby universal adult suffrage would be given to the people of British Guiana. I would like to say before I take my seat, that one does not know the opinion of the public in British Guiana because the newspapers do not express the exact and correct opinion of the majority of the people, and unless one moves among them as I do — among the trade unions, the cultural unions and

the agricultural people — day after day, one would not realise how these people are clamouring that they be granted universal adult suffrage. I therefore move the motion standing in my name for the due consideration of this Council.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I rise to second the motion just moved, and I certainly agree that it should be dealt with separately from the other motion of which the hon. Member for Essequibo River has given notice because the issues are entirely different and, as a matter of fact, they deal with different matters entirely. I hope this Council would not hesitate to give its whole-hearted support and its assent to the motion we are discussing now, for an extended franchise. We are living today in a democratic age — a very highly democratic age — and it seems to me that it would be a somewhat pernicious policy for us to be without universal adult suffrage in this Colony at this time. I would regard it as being most unprogressive, most undemocratic and somewhat dangerous not to have the people of this Colony — everyone who is above the age of 21 years — enjoying what I regard as being a God-given right in a democratic country. There is no question that Great Britain stands out as one of the great democratic nations of the world today, and we have another great democratic nation in the United States of America. In both these countries there is universal adult suffrage. We see from the recommendations of the Royal Commission — the recommendations which were published earlier than the extended report — that tremendous emphasis was placed on the point that the Members of the Legislative Council should be truly representative of the people. To put it in a nutshell, they strongly recommend that there must be wider representation than that which existed hitherto. To my mind, wider representation would be given if the Elected Members of this Council are returned by the people in the exercise of what is commonly known as universal adult suffrage. There is a well known democratic axiom that there should be "government of the people, by the people and for the people." "By the people" — we do not mean a few rich people, we do not mean the commercial community or those

who form a group of employers with capital in their hands; we mean the people who are farmers, artisans and others of the working classes. If all these are to be regarded as the people, then it seems to me that this Council would be exercising a proper function in granting to them what is a rightful privilege of democracy — the right to choose their representatives.

After all, what is the granting of the franchise? It is the granting of power to the people to choose their own representatives — to exercise the faculty of choice — and I do not see why the people of any civilised community should be denied that right. This is an up-to-date Colony and, I think, we should be proud of that fact, seeing that we have every facility for education and so forth. Since this is not a backward Colony, I do not see why every adult person should not be given the fundamental right to choose his or her own representative.

We have often repeated the phrase that there should be no taxation without representation and one wonders whether the people of this Colony should be prepared to remain in the mire in this respect. Should they lose their right and freedom and be content to be hewers of wood and drawers of water while others exercise the right of taxing them and regulating their conduct in society? Surely these people are entitled to say "We belong to society, we owe society many things such as the way in which we live and conform to the laws of society." After all, to deny a man the right to exercise the franchise is to deprive him of his manhood and his individuality. In other words, you are almost depriving him of his citizenship. We do not want to do so, but at the moment it is a serious indictment against us, since we are saying to many unfortunate people in the community "You have not got the right to choose your representative as the other man next door can do." The whole world is made up of different strata of society; some are more educated than others and some, because of better opportunities, are more independent than others but, nevertheless, each individual has a personality and "a man's a man for a' that." Every man, as

long as he exists among his fellow man, should share in the right to exercise the franchise, and that fact has been recognised in other countries. In Jamaica universal adult suffrage has been introduced, and in Trinidad the same thing has been done. What is more important is, it seems to me, that it is one of the essentials in the march of any Colony towards self-government and a better Constitution. It has been stated that the Secretary of State for the Colonies is anxious to see this Colony federated with the British West Indian islands and attain self-government, but it seems to me to be a preliminary condition that the people should have a wider exercise of the franchise. We can have universal adult suffrage without self-government in this Colony, and in this respect I should like to point out that the Franchise Commission, on page 7 of its report, states:—

"46. We are all in favour of the promotion and establishment in the Colony of a more democratic form of Government than has hitherto existed...."

Then, the par. goes on to say:—

"but we are not prepared to admit that this can best be achieved, or that the ultimate goal of self-government can only be reached by suddenly conferring on the community and on all and sundry of its adult population the right to exercise the franchise, for which so many possess no qualification of any kind whatever."

There are two parts in this report. In one of them there seems to be an acknowledgement of the fact that there should be the promotion or establishment of a more democratic form of government and, on the other hand, the Commission is saying that the people are not sufficiently qualified to take on universal adult suffrage. That was stated since 1941, however. You have, Sir, read portions of the Message by your predecessor relating to this matter, but I would like to remind hon. Members of this Council that a long time has elapsed since then and we have actually had a general election, so that the position is quite different from what it was in 1941. At the general elections there was a party known as the British Guiana Labour Party and its policy which had two main

objects was widely circulated — printed and published — and discussed on political platforms. One of these objects was that we should have universal adult suffrage and the other, that we should have self-government within 5 years. Therefore, during the political fever of 1947 the public became more politically minded and learnt more of what the franchise means. As a matter of fact, we have an extended franchise already and five times more people exercised the vote during the last general elections than ever before. The people have become conscious of the value of the franchise and, to my mind, that feeling has spread throughout the whole of the population of the Colony. Not only have the people become aware of the advantages of universal adult suffrage, self-government and so forth as a result of the last general elections but, I think, a great deal of misunderstanding in other respects has been removed from their minds. I venture to say that so far as the people are concerned they have a better understanding of the situation as a whole and are entitled to enjoy the privilege of universal adult suffrage.

So far as illiteracy is concerned, I want to make the same point lest hon. Members think that I have omitted to deal with the question. I am aware of the fact that the majority opinion of the Franchise Commission of 1941 is that illiteracy was an obstacle in the way of granting universal adult suffrage. The Commission made much of that question and, to my mind, that was one respect in which a great amount of harm was done to the Colony. For one thing, it caused a great deal of racial disunity. If we had a better report — possibly one advocating universal adult suffrage — we would not have had so much conflict and bitterness as we had during the general elections. What I want to say is that the question of illiteracy is no longer an important or vital one as regards the granting of universal adult suffrage. I should like to point out that in the Courts throughout the Colony where interpreters were once employed by Government — both in the Supreme and in the Magistrates' Courts — their employment is no longer necessary and that, to my mind, shows clearly that the people now speak

and understand English throughout the Colony.

Mr. ROTH: To a point of order, Sir! Is everybody able to read the English language? That is important as regards qualification as a voter.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I am going to answer that. I am saying that everybody speaks and understands the English language. I would invite the hon. Member who has just interposed to study the Trinidad Constitution, and he would find that the position in that Colony is that many people cannot read or write, but the Legislature of that Colony instead of regarding that as a disqualification provided that every person who could speak and understand the English language should be given the right to vote. Why should the ordinary man in this Colony be denied that right — the power to choose his representative in this Council so long as he has the ability to understand what is said. It is within my experience that an illiterate man sometimes comes to a point much faster than a man who has some knowledge. There are many men, like moneylenders, who have not got the ability to read and write and yet they can tell you exactly how much anyone owes them and give other accurate details about their business. The whole question as regards illiteracy is the question of choosing, and if a man can exercise his faculty of choice as regards his wife or a piece of cloth with which to make a suit, surely he would be able to exercise that faculty with the same degree of accuracy in choosing the person he would like to represent him in this Council. That is what the ordinary man in this Colony desires to have — the right to choose a representative who, he believes, would do good for him. Every adult person has a right to come forward in a country as democratic as this and say "I want to exercise my vote as a man and as a citizen, choosing as my representative the person who, I believe, will do everything necessary to improve my general welfare; I want the right to be an individual and a human being." When one considers that aspect, one cannot help looking with appreciation at the Constitution of Jamaica. There we had a Colony with a larger proportion

of illiteracy than British Guiana but they solved the problem without any difficulty and by the simple method of using colour symbols, whether it was a goat, an elephant, or else that was made to represent a particular candidate. I am sure that during the period before election a candidate, in order to be well in the forefront, would not mind being called an elephant for instance, because that helps the voters to understand much faster whom they would be voting for. Before the elections took place in Jamaica the Government of the island caused the whole system of voting to be explained by films which were shown all over the island, so that the people knew perfectly well how to vote on polling day. These facts were given to me by someone who arrived in this Colony recently from Jamaica. I am told that everything went through there with precision, and I am sure similar arrangements can be made in this Colony. I am particularly anxious to know that we are making some headway politically, and that we are moving towards bigger and better things in British Guiana. As you have rightly said, Sir, this is an extremely important matter and, since the whole Colony is looking forward with great interest and expectation to the outcome of this motion, I feel sure that all hon. Members will give due consideration to the wishes of the people and vote in support of it. We are not living under a dictatorship; I am sure, Your Excellency, no one would say that you are a dictator.

The PRESIDENT: They have said so.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I am sure that if the Constitution is changed they would not have any opportunity to say that you are dictating, Sir. After all, the percentage of voters we represent is a very small one. We, who are standing here as Elected Members of this Council, must remember that we represent only 15 per cent. of the voters of this Colony.

The PRESIDENT: Not 15 per cent. of the voters of the Colony; 15 per cent. of the population.

Mr. DEBIDIN: Approximately 15 per cent. of the population were regis-

tered as voters, and I am assuming that they all voted. As a matter of fact, if all did not vote we are here through the votes of less than 15 per cent. of the population of the Colony, and it seems to me that if we are going to have such a small percentage voting for us to be here we open ourselves to being called a dictatorship government. We have a representative Government with an Unofficial majority in the Legislative Council and also in the Executive Council, but though we have a majority of Unofficial Members in both Councils how are we to be regarded as fully representative of the people when we are here on the votes of only 15 per cent. of the population? It seems to me that if we have the future destiny of this Colony at heart we must think very carefully on this point, especially since the Secretary of State for the Colonies has emphasized that we should be truly representative of the people. By "truly representative" I mean that they are not representative of 100 per cent. of the people who are capable of voting. I say that the adult population of the Colony should be given the right to exercise the franchise.

There is one point I would like to make on the question of literacy, and that is that if we accept the position that there is need for extending the franchise to the people we must not raise the question of literacy because it would be an indictment and a reproach of our educational system. We should not continue to deny the people their God-given right to exercise the franchise by raising the question of literacy, but rather we should eradicate the cause of illiteracy by improving our educational system. In par. 28 of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission it is stated:—

"... More, and not less, participation by the people in the work of government is a real necessity for lasting social advancement. At the present stage, we attach more importance to the truly representative character of Legislative Councils than to any drastic change in their functions."

In par. 28 it is stated:—

"(d) That in order to secure that the elected element in Legislative Councils shall be as truly representative as possible, the object of policy



should be the introduction of universal adult suffrage. Some of us hold that this should be introduced forthwith; others that it should be reached by gradual stages, and to this end recommend the appointment of local committees to consider the extension of the franchise, both for local and for central government. Such committees should keep in close touch with their counterparts in other West Indian Colonies, and should consider carefully whether, as is strongly desirable, their recommendations would assure substantial equality as between the sexes;"

That is a specified recommendation, and I commend it to Members of the Council in dealing with the motion. In examining all aspects of our political and social life we should give full weight to what the Royal Commission has recommended—that "the object of policy should be the introduction of universal adult suffrage."

The PRESIDENT: I do not want to interrupt the hon. Member, but that is exactly the policy of H.M. Government. It was stated by the Secretary of State for the Colonies—and I quoted it—that "It was however very clearly stated by the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1944 that the aim of policy was the adoption of Universal Adult Suffrage at a later date, and this had been the recommendation of the Franchise Commission which considered the question in the Colony and reported in 1944." That is exactly what the Royal Commission recommended.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I am glad that the Secretary of State has rather re-emphasised what the Royal Commission has emphasised.

The PRESIDENT: It does not say that it should be introduced tomorrow. The hon. Member has given me the impression that they say it must be done tomorrow or today.

Mr. DEBIDIN: If these things are emphasised, as they are, by both the Royal Commission and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, it seems to me that we should consider them at a reasonable time. Is this the time or is it not? One part of the question has been answered by the policy enunciated by the Royal Commission and the Secretary of

State, therefore the only other aspect to be considered is whether the time is opportune or not. For the reasons I have given, that we have advanced our political education before and since the last General Election, and in view of the suggestion of the Royal Commission that "Such committees should keep in close touch with their counterparts in other West Indian Colonies," we get the answer as to the opportuneness of the proposal. Jamaica and Trinidad are both first-rate Colonies, and it seems to me, therefore, that if we look at our counterparts in those Colonies, both of which have got universal adult suffrage, we get the second answer to the question, because we should be able to move on together, as the ultimate aim is federation. When we look around and see that our counterparts have got adult suffrage it seems to me that the time is also ripe for us to have it too. It is nearly five years since the report of the Franchise Commission was published, and the position is quite different today. It seems to me that our population is more educated and better qualified for adult suffrage, and I hope that the Council will accept the motion in order that we might move on to prepare the necessary machinery, so that when the time for the next General Election arrives we would be prepared to proceed on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

Dr. SINGH: In supporting the motion: I feel that the time is opportune for us to take a step forward towards the political advancement of British Guiana. This Colony and British Honduras are the only two British possessions on the Continent of South America. We are surrounded by neighbours who are politically independent, and at the moment are breathing in an atmosphere of freedom. Those factors will surely have some influence on us, for with a widened Constitution and the exploitation of the potentialities of the Colony under the 10-year plan, I believe that British Guiana will be treading on the road to prosperity. Our parents were more fortunate; they had a taste of prosperity some 80 years ago, and there are landmarks of that prosperity today in our Victoria Law Courts, the Town Hall, St. George's Cathedral, and this very building in which we are assembled today. Those

are all landmarks of that brief period of prosperity, but why should we not have a wider Constitution in British Guiana? Up to the year 1928 British Guiana enjoyed a unique Constitution; I believe it was better than that of any of the Colonies in the British West Indies except that of Barbados, but it was withdrawn because of some political manoeuvre. There was strong opposition in the Colony to the change in the Constitution, but the waterfront workers said that we should give the change a chance, as it would protect the capitalists and provide more work for the working people. But the new Constitution brought no happiness to British Guiana; it was a damper. There was general inertia in the Colony; we could not balance our budget, and I believe in that period our Colony was under Treasury control. After that the Royal Commission came out and improved the morale of our people.

I need not go much further into the report of the Royal Commission, but we know that a Franchise Commission was appointed locally. That Commission was quite representative, and reported after sitting for about a year or two. There was general agreement on all points except on the question of universal adult suffrage, but we of the minority said that whilst it was true that there were still many illiterate people in the Colony they were nevertheless intelligent, and we saw no reason why we should retard the political progress of British Guiana. As I have said before, I would like to see British Guiana put on the same level with Jamaica and Trinidad, and with that in view I feel it is time for us to plan and get the machinery ready, so that by the end of the life of the present Council we would be able to give universal adult suffrage a trial.

Mr. McDOOM: I agree whole-heartedly with the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara (Mr. Debidin) when he says that there are many people in this Colony who understand the English language although they cannot speak it. I have travelled a good deal in this Colony among the Indian people and other people, and I certainly have not found many people, if any at all, who cannot understand or speak the English language.

I agree with the mover of the motion that there is no reason why we should not extend to our people the same privilege which is enjoyed by the people of Jamaica and Trinidad. I know Trinidad very well, and I have found that the people of all classes in Trinidad are about the same as those in this Colony. The Indian people in that island came from the same source as those in this Colony, and they have developed in the same way as those in this Colony. The same applies to the people of African descent in the two Colonies. That being so, I certainly feel that if the Legislature of Trinidad saw the wisdom of extending to the people of that island universal adult suffrage without any literacy qualification, there is no reason why this Legislature should not extend the same privilege to the people of this Colony. For the information of the Council I should say that the people of the Colony are certainly not satisfied with the manner in which they are given the right to exercise the franchise, and I feel that they are justified.

It is true that many men who are unable to read and write any language have done very well. I know of my own knowledge many successful businessmen who are unable to read or write any language, but they are able to do business successfully and with due respect by the community. I hope it would not be out of place for me to refer to my own father and mother. My father came to this Colony unlettered; he was indentured, like all other Indians who came to work on sugar estates. I think he started business about two or three years after he came to this Colony, and he continued that business in his own way with, I think, a good deal of success. He was a prominent resident on the East Bank of Demerara, and was very well known to the commercial community in Georgetown. I have known of several cases of people, like my father, who, though unlettered, have come to this Colony and made good.

I would also like to say something about my mother. She was also unlettered, but it was remarkable how she was able to keep accounts in her brain and keep them correctly. The hon. Mem-

and would not be able to make a right contribution to the progress of democracy.

When we stop to think what are the implications one has to be careful in attempting to speak of a wider Constitution. We are talking about universal adult suffrage and I am giving my views on the question as I see it. When it comes to the question of a wider Constitution I might argue entirely different, but I do not think I should take up the time of this Council with that now. The point I want to re-emphasise is that we should consider the events of the last general elections and, although it has been stated by the mover and seconder of the motion that certain people do not feel the masses have a right to vote, if we are to be guided by the reasons of democracy—unless I am not able to psycho-analyse the meaning of democracy—I do not think we should have adult suffrage without a literacy test. If certain people feel they have not got the right persons to represent them according to the principles of democracy, then those of us who have contested seats and won by the votes of the majority would still fight for democracy when the time comes again and whoever are the defeated candidates should be quite satisfied. In conclusion I say I would agree to universal adult suffrage but with a literacy test.

Mr. FERNANDES: I agree entirely that universal adult suffrage is something that we should all aim at, but I am one of those who feel at all times that we must climb the ladder step by step and not try to put one foot on the ground and the other on the top of the ladder, because we would fall. If we rush this matter we are likely to get a serious set-back. I have no serious fears of the results of adult suffrage. As a matter of fact where men are concerned — I observed that most of the previous speakers concentrated their efforts on the denial of the right of men to vote, and said very little about the ladies — I cannot see for one moment that it is going to make any very serious difference to men, particularly working men, whether we have adult suffrage or retain the present very low income qualification, because the labour organisations in this country would be failing in their

duty if there was a single working man who could not or did not earn \$10 per month. I do not think the introduction of adult suffrage would give very much relief or make very much difference where men are concerned. It would certainly make quite a lot of difference where the ladies are concerned, and I think the ladies are entitled to vote. As a matter of fact someone told me a few days ago that the ladies have an uncanny way of picking the right horses — he said “colt.” In this case I would say the right candidate. Their sense of selection is every bit as good as that of men, and I certainly think they should be given an opportunity to select those whom they would wish to represent them.

I have listened to a great deal of argument that Members of this Council are not truly representative of the people, because we do not represent more than 15 per cent. of the population. Your Excellency was perfectly right when you said that we do represent quite a lot more than 15 per cent. of the population. Take my own home as an instance. On November 24 there were my wife, myself and 12 children — 14 persons — but there was only a single vote in my household. Therefore my household was represented by exactly  $7\frac{1}{7}$  per cent. of the inmates, but the fact remains that even if adult suffrage was in force on November 24, instead of one vote my family would have had two votes, or would have been represented by  $14\frac{2}{7}$  per cent. of the total number of persons in it. Even then we would still have been below 15 per cent. I have just made that point to illustrate very clearly what the situation is.

I am going to support adult suffrage because I feel that withholding the right to vote from a few people creates a certain amount of dissatisfaction. It gives certain people an opportunity of raising the question of how much they are really being denied, whereas, with the exception of the ladies, they are really being denied very little.

On the question of illiteracy I take it that if we decided to adopt adult suffrage it would not be brought into force until just prior to the next General Election.

We still have 4½ years in which those people who cannot read and write would have an opportunity to learn to do so. A number of folk may be illiterate at the moment but the vast majority of them have children who are educated, and it should not be difficult for those children to teach their parents, or to teach their friends to read and write in 4½ years. There was some talk about a literacy campaign which was to be based on the principle of each one teach one, and I am sure that more than 50 per cent. of the population of British Guiana are literate. That being so, if each one teaches one, in a good deal less than 4½ years we should have practically no illiteracy. It would then boil down to such a small issue that we could afford to ignore it. Therefore I will support adult suffrage as the next step for people who can read and write any language whatever. As the next step following that, we could decide from the experience gained whether we should go a little further and allow adult voting whether a person is literate or not.

Dr. NICHOLSON: On a point of information I would like to know whether the hon. Member for Eastern Berbice (Dr. Gonsalves) has moved an amendment to the motion that there should be adult suffrage with a literacy test, and whether the hon. Member for Central Demerara (Dr. Jagan) has seconded that amendment.

Dr. GONSALVES: It was only an observation I made. I would have moved an amendment if I had a seconder. I can now formally move an amendment to that effect.

Mr. LEE: I wish to point out that the hon. Member has already spoken. Someone else would have to move an amendment.

Mr. CARTER: I rise to support the motion for adult suffrage which has been moved by the hon. Member for Essequibo River (Mr. Lee) and which has been so ably supported by other speakers. I appreciate that the subject matter of this debate reaches the very roots of our political life, and the very foundation of our political structure. For us to make a mistake at this stage would be to put

this Colony back 10 or perhaps 20 years, or impede still further what has been considered by many people the funeral pace of our Colony's advancement. As I stand here I am fortified in the assurance that if I err in supporting this fundamental issue which now faces the Council I would be erring on the side of the people, and while I am a Member of this Council, if I ever err I trust it will always be on the side of the people.

This problem of adult suffrage is undoubtedly the most important political formation to present itself to this Council since federation. It is the political parallel to responsibility in the human person, and in order to understand the significance of this proposal I think we must realise that the most important achievements today are not so much wealth, letters, or tradition, but continuity in the patterns of liberty — that trial and error are the only real tradition of progress. Today this country is passing through a crisis; it is not a local crisis but a universal crisis. We are made starkly aware of the implication of tragedy, and I feel that some fundamental re-organisation of our resources is what is demanded of each and every one of us.

There was a time when people in this country opposed adult suffrage on the ground that warring individualisms would come into the political arena, but those persons who offered that opposition did not foresee the horrible perversion that would be the issue of such a denial of personality and expression. They were themselves individualists at heart, with an empty and unfruitful individualism — one that could easily be intimidated by the bogey man threat — but this in a sense is understandable, for this complex of the bogey man is a complex of our modern and ancient societies — Roman and barbarian, Jew and Gentile, black and white, Christian and Communist. This myth has been entertained so effectively that civilisation has collapsed not so much through external pressure but more from internal decay. I think the time has come when we must meet this bogey man threat face to face, and I think that the whole question of our security must be examined afresh.

The hon. Member for Central Demerara (Dr. Jagan) made certain expressions of opinion, and I am happy that he withdrew certain phrases of his speech, but one must realise that there is a hostile section in our community which might very well become a dynamic in any scheme for advancement. One must realise also that there might come with adult suffrage certain excesses, but they would be excesses which we have heaped upon ourselves by the mistakes of the past. It is for this very reason that I feel that this hostile section should be brought within the pale of law and constitutional procedure by extending the franchise to adult suffrage. Everyone in this Council knows the progress which has been made towards adult suffrage in this country. It has been cautious, it has been painstaking, and there have been no revolutionary results. I do not think that this final step towards the broadening of the

basis of representation can have any ill effects upon the welfare of our people. We cannot be democratic and deny to our people the fundamental principles of all democratic peoples. I know that my group in this country have certain misgivings and fears with regard to adult suffrage. They fear domination of one section of people by another, but I feel I can say here and now that when the time comes for the exercise of the franchise the people will eventually cast their votes, not influenced so much by racial ties but by the conviction that the person whom they support is the fittest person for the task before him. It is for this reason that I feel the time has come when this Council should adopt the motion which has been moved by the hon. Member for Essequibo River.

At this stage the Council was adjourned until 2 p.m. the following day.