

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

FRIDAY, 13th 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.M.G., C.B.E.

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

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

The Hon. 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. J. Carter (Georgetown South).

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

The Clerk read prayers.

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Thursday, the 12th of August, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

PAPERS LAID

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

Reports of the Registrar General for the year 1947.

Schedule of gratuities paid to dependents of deceased teachers during the year 1947.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES

LEGAL PRACTITIONERS (AMENDMENT) BILL

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

A Bill intituled "An Ordinance to amend the legal practitioners Ordinance with respect to articles of clerkship."

UNOFFICIAL NOTICES

CLERK OF COURT, CORENTYNE

Mr. THOMPSON gave notice of the following questions :—

1. Is there a Clerk of Court of the Corentyne District? If so, who is he and what is his status?

DUTIES OF LEGAL DRAFTSMAN

2. Is anyone performing the duties of Legal Draftsman now that the Officer who was acting in this post has been seconded to the Control Office?

CLERK TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

3. Has anyone been appointed as Clerk to the Attorney-General?
4. Who is now performing those duties?

ADDITIONAL JUDGE

5. In view of the considerable arrears of work in the Judicial Section which is inconveniencing the public, will Government give early consideration to the appointment of a fourth Judge?

ORDER OF THE DAY

UNIVERSAL ADULT SUFFRAGE

The Council resumed the debate on 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.”

Dr. NICHOLSON: I beg to move an amendment to the effect that the words appearing after the word “resolved” be deleted and that the following be substituted therefor:—

“that this Council is of opinion that adult suffrage with a literacy test should be brought into force on the

dissolution of the Council as at present constituted, and that the Secretary of State for the Colonies should be asked to agree to the necessary steps being taken to give effect to this motion.”

Mr. THOMPSON seconded.

Dr. NICHOLSON: In spite of all that has been said by the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara on behalf of illiteracy, I have had enough experience of persons in this country to know that those who are illiterate are at the mercy of the unscrupulous. They may possess a certain amount of “horse sense”, but we know that they are sometimes led like sheep. The hon. Member feels that the difficulty can be easily got over by the institution of a system of symbols or signs at the time of election. That might be all well and good in case where there are two or three candidates at an election, but if there are five or six or more candidates there is bound to be, I am certain, great confusion and difficulty in distinguishing the horse from the ass, or the wolf from the sheep, or the fox from the hare.

Mr. LEE: To a point of explanation! May I ask Your Excellency whether the hon. Member is reading from a paper or whether he is reading from notes?

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member may use notes, but he cannot read his speech.

Dr. NICHOLSON: I have notes, Your Excellency. I have had representations from my constituents yesterday and this very morning asking me to introduce this amendment.

Mr. DEBIDIN: To a point of explanation! I live in the hon. Member's constituency and I have not been interviewed in the matter.

Dr. NICHOLSON: The hon. Member is only one of the 3,000 voters in the constituency.

The PRESIDENT: I don't suppose the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara would have been very much interested in the amendment.

Dr. NICHOLSON: The qualification for the exercise of the franchise, as it stands at present, is exceedingly low—\$10 per month—and any man or woman who cannot earn \$10 per month cannot possibly exist in these strenuous times, so if we introduce adult suffrage we would bring in women many of whom are well qualified to exercise the vote. They have had a more liberal education than those of yesterday, and they are able to understand things better and take a more lively interest in things political than the majority of their elders. But what is even worse, we find that our wives who have no earning capacity or who do not own property are not allowed to exercise the franchise. That, Sir, was a very sore point at the last general elections. My wife could not exercise the vote because she did not earn money and had no property of her own, while her maids and the gardener could have exercised the franchise because they earned money. It seems to me that the disparity should be removed in order to allow the women of the community to exercise the franchise and take an active interest in the affairs of the country. I have moved this amendment because I know that the motion moved by the hon. Member for Essequibo River is not going to succeed, and every wise politician must be quick to discern and know when he should climb down. I feel certain that this amendment will find favourable acceptance with the Secretary of State. We should, I think, go on for 5 years, and at the end of that period we would be in a position to judge whether we should have adult suffrage with a literacy test. I do feel that we should have adult suffrage with a literacy test in any language; I am not going to tie it down to English. I am not going to keep the Council waiting any longer because I do not believe in begging a question. I have great pleasure in moving the amendment.

Mr. ROTH: So far, on the face of it, this debate may be likened to a storm in a teapot. We have had two hours of talk on the question whether we should reduce the franchise from \$10 per month to nil dollars per month. Actually the motion, if passed as it stands, will on the one hand abolish the literacy test and on the other efface the anomaly of many married

women being unable to exercise the vote although their employees may do so. I was not in favour of the arguments for the abolition of the literacy test, but my desire to retain it is based not so much on the necessity to preserve the secrecy of the ballot as it is on the necessity that every voter should have an equal opportunity of judging the pros and cons of a question for himself rather than having them dinned repeatedly into his ears in the hysteria of public meetings presided over by disgruntled politicians and self-appointed so-called leaders. I venture to assert that the trend of recent local events would have been different and less tragic had the masses concerned, as a body, been in a position to read for themselves about both sides of the question rather than being the victims of mass suggestion through the shouted word. Thus, in fairness to the people themselves, if we are going to have universal adult suffrage which in itself is quite a good thing, we must see to it that they are in a position to vote on their own personal and quietly-thought-out judgment, and not only on that which they are told by interested parties as will, to some extent at least, be the case if the literacy test is abolished.

With regard to the married woman's position in which her cook can vote whilst she herself cannot, this is an anomaly which, incidentally, is believed to have won at least one seat at the recent general elections, but I think it can be easily got over by providing that the allowance she receives from her husband be treated as income. On this ground, therefore, I move that the motion be amended by (a) the insertion of the words "and passing a literacy test in English" between the words "resident in the Colony" and the words "to be registered as a voter"; and (b) the insertion of the words "provided that the allowance received by a married woman from her husband be treated as income" after the word "voter". The resolve clause, as amended, will then read:—

"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 and passing a literacy test in English, to be registered as a voter, provided that the allowance received by a married woman from her husband be treated as income."

Mr. RAATGEVER: If the hon. the second Nominated Member would delete the words after "voter" I would second the amendment. I think it would be redundant to insert those words after "voter", as they are unnecessary.

Mr. ROTH: I am thankful for the suggestion made by the hon. Member, and I will be pleased to accept it.

Mr. RAATGEVER: I second the amendment. It seems to me that in this matter we should make haste slowly. The Colony, at the moment, is at the crossroads, if I may say so, and we are looking ahead towards development. The Evans Commission report will shortly be released and, I understand, it will be very favourable to conditions in this Colony. For many years we have all been looking forward to development of the interior of this Colony, and I do not think we should do anything that might tend to retard the progress of that development. If we are going to allow illiterates to vote, it means that the people with capital are going to fight shy of bringing their money to invest it here. The Colony would then be left in the same position in which it has been for the last 100 years, and the future instead of being bright would be critical. I think hon. Members should consider this matter seriously and do not make any false step which would retard the progress of the Colony. I speak now as representing the commercial section of the community, and I say that no member of that community will be prepared to put up any money for development unless there are prior safeguards—unless there is the feeling that that money will be safe. I myself have no doubt as to the future prosperity of this Colony if it is properly governed. The professional men around this table are fully aware of the fact that they had to be literate before they could have qualified in their profession, and I am surprised to find that some of them should come to this Council and ask that illiterate people be allowed to run the country. I do not think they are serious when they do that.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I am not suggesting at all that illiterates should have the right to be candidates for election, but merely that they should have the right to choose their candidates.

Mr. RAATGEVER: These illiterate people would be free to select their representatives. There is an old saying that like attracts like, and they are going to select as candidates people they are familiar with—the irresponsibles. I think this amendment, if carried, will do all that is necessary to give responsible people in this Colony what they need for the management of their own affairs.

Mr. THOMPSON: I am in favour of the amendment except for the question of having English alone as a literacy test. If we take out the word "English" I shall be quite prepared to accept the amendment. As regards the necessity for having a literacy test, I would say that we cannot attempt to encourage a population of illiterates. I heard a lot yesterday about the ability of men who cannot read or write, but I am in a position to say that if you give these people any document—a receipt or anything of the kind—they would never be satisfied unless they show it to four or five different persons in order to find out whether it is correct. It is alarming to find Members of this Council willing to encourage such a state of affairs. We have got compulsory education in this Colony, and why should we be spending so much money on education if we feel it is not necessary for the people—the masses—to be educated? I shall regret to be living in a country where I will have to point to an elephant or any other symbol in order to let a voter know which candidate I desire him to support. Let us do away with all that by making provision for a literacy test and we will be on the right track. I will support the motion as amended by the first amendment.

Mr. FARNUM: I do not think the time is ripe for universal adult suffrage, but I do feel that the time is approaching, and that is why I agree with the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Georgetown North (Dr. Nicholson), that we should have adult suffrage with a

literacy test. We have heard the opinion expressed in this Council that the culture of this country is very much higher than that of the West Indian Islands, yet we want to bring ourselves down to the level of those places where we say the culture is not high enough. I remember, after the 1914 war, when our soldiers of the B.W.I. Regiment returned to the Colony, it was their proud boast that at the payable every Guianese soldier was able to sign his name for his pay, but it was not so with many of the men from the West Indies, with whom it was rather the exception than the rule. We felt proud of that. Why then should we lower our standard? We have heard that in Jamaica symbols are used in voting, but surely no Member of this Council or Guianese would like to see our people resorting to what I regard as the most unedifying method of registering their votes by having certain animals representing the various candidates. That is what it amounts to. I repeat that I do not think the time is ripe for universal adult suffrage, but I think the time is approaching when adult suffrage may be introduced with a literacy test.

Mr. PETERS: I too happen to be one of those who feel that the time has not yet come to adopt the motion as presented by the hon. Member for Essequibo River. For my part, if I had to state certain portions of my political creed I should say firstly, I believe in democracy. Secondly, I believe in universal adult suffrage, if that arrangement were so limited as to deliver us from the evil of the tyranny of aspiring to literacy on the one hand and bombastic and pompous irresponsibility on the other hand. We are living in an age when we cannot but prefer the wisdom, at least the apparent wisdom, of the man who effects to be literate. We can always hope that we may be able to convince such a person by reasoning with him, by appealing to his judgment. But what of the other man who can barely bring to bear on any question his limited commonsense, and who in consequence has to rely upon the assistance of someone who might be a sort of unscrupulous demagogue and might in the long run lead such a person astray? If there is one evil that my soul abhors it is the evil of tyranny in any form

whatever, and I would say that the tyranny which can be inflicted upon those people who are painfully illiterate but ambitious, and those who are pompous and bombastic in their irresponsibilities, is a tyranny which is as gruesome and painful as any form of tyranny that one might conceive.

Further, I think the time has come for us to give due consideration to the disqualification imposed upon literate women or wives in our community who, because of force of circumstances, their literacy notwithstanding, have been precluded from exercising the franchise in our land. I am prepared to support most heartily the amendment proffered today by the hon. the Second Nominated Member (Mr. Roth) so that we might bring in the large number of responsible women in our community who are at present unable to exercise the franchise. By all means let us have universal adult suffrage, but within the ambit of the limitations that are considered most wise in the circumstances. When the time comes for us to remove the barrier I hope that many of us will be alive and be able to grant to our folk in the Colony in a large measure that which the hon. Member for Essequibo River seeks to offer to them today.

Mr. WIGHT: Undoubtedly, every Member of this Council desires to see the representation in this Council as wide as is compatible with a matured and reasoned decision, but at the opportune moment. There can be no doubt that every Member desires to see every person who is fully qualified exercising the franchise. As one of the signatories of the report of the British Guiana Franchise Commission of 1941, I do not feel that the moment has arrived for me to change the views I then expressed and the expressions of opinion to which I appended my signature. With your permission, Sir, I would like to read par. 43 of that report which states:—

“43. In the circumstances the majority of us regret that we are unable to agree that this Colony, peopled as it is, and for the reasons we have already given, should embark on so hazardous an experiment without a further examination of the entire problem.”

During the period of the Commission's investigations opportunity was given to several persons, individually and in bodies, to come forward and express their views, and it would appear to be only right and logical that a similar opportunity should be given to those persons to say whether they have changed their views on the subject of adult suffrage. The Franchise Commission heard divergent opinions, some of them from Labour groups, as to whether a literacy test should be applied, as suggested in the amendment moved by the hon. the Second Nominated Member. There were others who did not agree and, I think, it would be only fair to the community at large that an opportunity should be given the public to express their views before some body, whether it is an *ad hoc* Committee, as suggested by the Secretary of State, or a Commission or Select Committee of this Council. Some of those bodies who gave evidence before the Franchise Commission clearly indicated that the time was not then ripe for the introduction of adult suffrage—that it should be postponed until we saw how the Constitution of the Council would work with the extended franchise. At this stage I will interpose to read the opinion expressed by the Secretary of State in his despatch on the point. He states

“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 on the constitution with the extended franchise now intended has proved to be satisfactory . . .”

That is the opinion of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. We have not gone very far on this extended franchise. We were elected in November last year, and we are now in August—a matter of eight or nine months. The Secretary of State in his despatch proceeds to state:

“ . . . 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 . . .”

I would suggest, as one hon. Member

has suggested, that we should go slowly in this matter and, perhaps, it would be better if the suggestion of the appointment of a Commission or *ad hoc* Committee, or Select Committee of the Council were adopted, and that opportunity be given to persons and bodies to give evidence and express their views on this very important subject. I would like to make one or two more quotations from the report of the Franchise Commission. Par. 46 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, 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.”

Then par. 53 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.”

We have had that census, and I support the suggestion that the matter be given consideration as suggested by the Secretary of State. I do not think it is necessary for me to traverse the various points made by the previous speakers, but I think it was the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara (Mr. Debidin) who spoke about “the people.” I think he was referring to the people of the Colony and not people outside. I take it, then, that the first people of the Colony, the Amerindians, would be included in his definition. I do not know what symbols would be used for them but they would also have to be included in the scheme of universal adult suffrage. We could not exclude them, and I take it that the mover of the motion and the hon. Member appreciate that. The hon. Member for Eastern Demerara confined his remarks to farmers and artisans in his reference to

the people, as distinct from capitalists and merchants. I wonder if he forgot that there are professional men. I do not know how he regards the ordinary everyday collar-and-tie workers—whether they are included in the term “the people” or not.

I would also like to advise hon. Members to be careful and not to use these terms loosely. One of the terms constantly used by certain persons, who are no longer Members of this Council but who threatened the exit of several of us when they were here, was that we were not representative of the people of the Colony; that we were a moribund Council. Hon. Members should bear in mind that, despite the number of voters on the register, there are large numbers of people who are dependent on those voters, not only as members of their household but for their advice, and those people are far more than the number of voters actually on the register.

Then there is talk about percentage. At one time I wondered whether certain hon. Members who referred to that were thinking of the actual percentage of voters they represent, because if hon. Members think so I would like them to take the actual number of votes recorded at the General Election and see how many voters they represent out of the total on the register. I do not intend any reflection on hon. Members when I say that about eight of them do not represent 50 per cent. of the registered voters. Some of them may represent as high as 29 or 30 per cent., and in that sense they may be perfectly correct when they say of themselves “We do not represent the people of our constituencies.” If they mean it in that sense I should have nothing to say against that. I will go into that phase of the question more fully when the other motion is before the Council.

It was suggested by one hon. Member that in the Soviet Union every person over 18 years has the right to vote, but I would ask that hon. Member to ponder on the fact that in that country, unless a person belonged to the party in power, the Communist Party, he would not be

entitled to vote or to ask the people to vote for him. So that it does not matter whether a person is privileged to vote at 18 or 21 years. or can read and write or not, he cannot exercise his vote with any freedom of choice; he has to exercise it in the way he is told to. For that reason it is safer for a person to keep out of the polling booth entirely.

Dr. JAGAN: I would like to tell the hon. Member that the people of the Soviet Union who are not members of the Communist Party can stand for election.

Mr. WIGHT: I have no doubt that that is what is stated — that they can stand for election — but it takes a very plucky man to stand up and say that he does not agree with the Government of Stalin. He would be a very plucky man who would stand before millions of people at street corners with loud speakers and decry Stalin and his particular *entourage*.

I quite agree with hon. Members when they say that we have had, and we still have, many admirable citizens in this Colony who can neither read nor write. I know some of them to be men of very fine character. They are a credit to the community, but there can be no doubt that they are in the minority, and that they have inculcated that strength of character from other people who have had better opportunities for education and culture. I am prepared to support universal adult suffrage at the proper time. I am not prepared to rush into a decision until the time is opportune. The question needs very close examination and, I think, we would do well to follow the advice given by the Secretary of State in his despatch.

With regard to the suggested use of symbols for voting by illiterate people, I would hate to think that an elephant or a donkey, popularly known as a jack-ass, should be used as symbols to represent candidates for election. I can visualise quite a lot of disturbance at election time if voting by symbols was introduced in this Colony. We are a heterogeneous community but we have lived quite happily and worked together for years until quite recently when one or two intruders

arrived in this Colony to tell us how we are to work for disaster and not for the progress of the Colony.

Capt. COGHLAN: I shall not detain the Council by going into all the arguments for and against universal adult suffrage. I have risen to support the Second Nominated Member's amendment, and the best way of doing so is to quote some statistics to show how the Colony stands with regard to illiteracy. The figures show that among the East Indians in this Colony 44 per cent. are illiterate. Africans 2.7 per cent., Chinese 6.6., Portuguese 3.4 per cent., and mixed races 3.2 per cent. So that, apart from the East Indians, there is very little real illiteracy in this Colony. Let us take the population of the Colony. In a total of 375,000 there are 57,000 illiterates.

On the present Register of Voters there are 60,000 people, and if we had universal adult suffrage we would have had a Register of 85,000 people. The hon. Member for Western Essequibo has referred to the Amerindians. There are about 1,800 Amerindians in this Colony, and what a great many people do not realise is that 50 per cent. of these Amerindians are able to read and write the English language. Of the 60,000 people on the Register of Voters only 42,000 voted at the last general elections and of these there were 2,518 spoilt votes. When we take into consideration the fact that only 40,000 people exercised the franchise out of the 60,000 who had the right to do so, it is very extraordinary that only 66 $\frac{2}{3}$ per cent. of the registered voters exercised the vote. Yet, we hear a lot of complaints to the effect that the people are not being allowed to exercise the franchise. It is the intention of the Home Government to give self-government when needs be and when it can be achieved to all British subjects. That intention has been expressed, and one must accept it at that. It is therefore left to us to decide whether the Colony is ripe to exercise the right of universal adult suffrage.

Now, Sir, as regards this question of the use of symbols, I certainly do not think we ought to go back to the Stone Age.

Even if it requires another 5 years before we put universal adult suffrage into practice, we should give an opportunity to those people who have not yet acquired a knowledge of the English language to do so because English is the language of the Colony — the official, the legal and the commercial language. If one goes to any country — to France, Spain or any other place — he will find that he has to adapt himself to the language of that country. This being a British Colony I do not see any reason why there should not be a literacy test in English, when there is free education for the masses and everyone who wants to learn the language of the Colony. It has been jocularly pointed out that no candidate would like to see himself being represented as a donkey or any other animal. I am sure the hon. Member for Berbice River would not like to see himself being represented as a Polar bear with a bottle of rum in his hand. (Laughter). No doubt, the bottle of rum would induce some people to vote for him, and if another candidate finds himself being represented by something else with \$5 notes in his hand that also might induce people to vote for him. If that sort of thing is done I have no doubt that some of my friends would select very attractive symbols, but we would really be going back to the practices of the Stone Age. The man who selects a bottle of rum would stand a good chance and, no doubt, the man who sets himself down with \$5 notes in his hand would also stand a good chance — much better than the candidate who puts himself down as a donkey or, as the hon. Member for Western Essequibo has said, a jack-ass.

I can hardly imagine what would have happened if the Jamaicans at the last general elections had called for an identification parade so that the voters could see the men and the symbols they were voting for. Take, for instance, the hon. Member for Essequibo River; if he was dressed in his own national costume, with pigtails, people would know exactly whom they were voting for. (Laughter). I cannot but suggest that in Jamaica they still have a lot to learn and that in adopting the use of symbols they are going back to the Stone Age instead of advancing. I do not

see any reason why we should copy what has been done in Jamaica in this matter of voting.

A lot has been said to the effect that even if some people cannot read or write they have intelligence. A person is either born with or without intelligence, and education will not give a person brains. If you go to a university and you haven't got brains, then you will go in without any and also come out without any, being left just an educated fool. I know from my own experience that some illiterate people might be able to keep accounts from memory or even run a little business, but if one has to trust his memory in such cases he cannot be as reliable as another who can just write a transaction on a slip of paper and keep it.

There are two forms of education; in one case a man tries to memorize and keep everything in his mind and in the other, which is a much better form, a man knows what he wants and knows where to look for it. This is the better form because if a man's memory is faulty he can go wrong easily. If these illiterate people are capable of transacting business and so on, as some hon. Members have stated, why don't they make use of the brains God has given them and learn to read and write? At the recent general elections I saw certain people in my own constituency explaining to some of the voters what to do — to cross out No. 1 and leave No. 2, and so on. That meant, of course, that as soon as the ballot papers were issued there was hopeless confusion all around. Some of the voters actually disregarded what they were told and crossed out the wrong names. There was not only confusion but there was a great deal of dissatisfaction as evinced by the number of spoilt votes. If some of the voters were not illiterate that could not have happened.

Some of my hon. friends are making a great mistake in thinking that if universal adult suffrage is granted one particular race would gain all the advantage. It is nothing of the kind and it may be the other way about. It might depend on the candidate who can appeal more to the intelligence and the commonsense

of the voters than the others. For instance, take my own constituency; there were three members of that particular race as candidates and all of them were representing labour. One represented the M.P.C.A., and, as there are 10 sugar estates in my constituency, one would, naturally, come to the conclusion that that candidate should have topped the polls and left the rest of us lagging at the starting post, but that did not happen. There were also two members of the British Guiana Labour Union — the Secretary and a member of the Committee — among the candidates, and notwithstanding the fact that they belonged to the same union they were contesting the seat against each other. That certainly did not go to prove that the Union was being run along proper lines. There was another gentleman who represented the African race among the candidates and, as a result of his being free, it was supposed that he would have controlled most of the African votes. The result was, very naturally — by a process of deduction and elimination — I would have been left at the starting pole, but what do you find, Sir? I won on the 10 sugar estates, the very first being Ruimveldt where I got 220 votes and the four other candidates did not secure that much among themselves.

I did not ask anybody for a vote; I did not promise anyone rum or cigarettes or anything else, I told the voters I would not do any such thing. I never did because the East Indians in this Colony are not as gullible as many people in this Colony seem to believe. They are a people of a very high standard of intelligence, and those who feel that if we get universal adult suffrage there will be only one ruling race in this Colony can take it from me that they are making a very big mistake. It will not be so. I was not representing any labour union at the general elections; my opponents said I was representing the capitalistic class; but I doubt whether I got 20 votes from the capitalist class. It was the East Indians who put me in and, therefore, I have as much right to call myself a labour member as any man sitting around this table. If we get universal adult suffrage in this Colony it would work a lot better

than some people think but, provided we have a literacy test. Personally, I am very well aware of the events which took place at the last general elections, and I have reason to believe that unless we have a literacy test the situation will become worse at subsequent elections where instead of having only 60,000 voters we will have some 220,000 on the register. There would have been about 185,000 voters on the register at the last general elections if universal adult suffrage was in force, and in another 5 years if the population of the Colony continues to grow as it has been doing I should think we would have between 220,000 and 240,000 voters on the register if the wider franchise is granted. I have great pleasure in supporting the amendment moved by the Second Nominated Member and I hope it will receive the unanimous support of the Council.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY: With your permission, Sir. I would like to read a telegram addressed to the Clerk of the Legislative Council. It says:—

“Wakenaam solicits literacy test.”

(sgd.) Newark.,

President, Farmers' Association,
Wakenaam.”

The address does not show the place at which the telegram was handed in. To a point of explanation, however, I desire to invite the attention of hon. Members to one important fact. Under the present franchise there is provision for a literacy test in any language, and it would seem inconsistent to adopt the limitation in the amendment by the Second Nominated Member to widen the franchise by the introduction of universal adult suffrage but with a new limitation that the literacy test should only be in English. If there is now a literacy test in any language and we widen the franchise to universal adult suffrage, surely it would be inconsistent to impose a stricter literacy test than that which we have now.

Mr. ROTH: To a point of explanation! You have another 4½ years before the next general elections take place and that, surely, will be time enough for any-

body to learn English and pass the test in English.

Mr. FERREIRA: There is divided opinion on this motion. There is no doubt that representatives of the people in this Council would like to see the franchise extended and, whether the time is now or the near future, universal adult suffrage must come to the Colony. One wonders, however, whether this is the most opportune moment to introduce it. As far as I see the question is whether we should have universal adult suffrage complete or whether there should be a literacy test. I should like to mention one constituency in Berbice as supporting the idea that there should be a literacy test, because not less than 10 per cent. of the votes cast there during the last general elections were spoilt. What, therefore, would have been the position if those elections had been run on universal adult suffrage? I suggest that at least 40 per cent. of the votes cast in that constituency would have been spoilt. It strikes me that since this is a Colony with a population of 375,000 people and since we are spending 1½ million dollars annually on education, it is high time that we demand a literacy test of our voters. I go further and say that if we expect development, say what we like, it must come from the capitalists and we must satisfy the outside world that we have a stable population.

I am in agreement with the amendment moved by the Second Nominated Member in spite of the remarks made by the hon. the Colonial Secretary. This is a British Colony and English is the language spoken by the residents and, I think, it is only right that there should be a literacy test in that language. It would not be a retrogressive step as has been suggested; I think it would be a progressive one. If I should vote on the motion I would support the amendment as moved by the Second Nominated Member. Having been brought forward at this stage — seven months after the last general elections — I think the motion, as amended, should be adopted. The Deputy-President has stated that some of the people concerned might like to come and state their views. My opinion is that this matter should be referred to a Committee for thorough

investigation. I am very much against rushing through such a very important matter with undue haste.

Mr. KENDALL: I, too, am in agreement with the idea of introducing adult suffrage, and —

Mr. FERREIRA: I think I have moved, formally, that this matter be put before a Committee — that a Committee be appointed to consider it.

The PRESIDENT: Will the hon. Member please put his amendment in writing?

Mr. FERREIRA: Very well, Sir.

Mr. KENDALL: I am in agreement with the idea of introducing adult suffrage with a literacy test in English, but I am very suspicious of the indecent haste with which the motion has been brought before this Council — at such an early stage of its existence. I think there are more important things to be considered before adult suffrage is introduced into this Colony, and that the first thing we need to consider is the fostering of a spirit of Guianese consciousness. There are too many sections in this community fighting for political and economic supremacy and, I think, this Council, as constituted, should go into this question seriously; yet I want to agree that some Committee or Commission should be appointed to consider it. I am from New Amsterdam. I represent that constituency — and have had experience in political and municipal elections, and I know it would be a very dangerous thing for us to accept at this moment the motion as put by the hon. Member for Essequibo River. Therefore, I would suggest that this matter be considered thoroughly by a Committee to be set up. When the hon. Member for Berbice River submits his amendment I will surely second it.

Mr. GONSALVES: I am wholeheartedly in agreement with the views of the last two speakers. This Council, as it exists today, is still in its infancy; it has not got its milk teeth as yet, and instead of going ahead with the business we have before us we are trying to create a Con-

stitutional issue. I see there are other motions on the waiting list dealing with things like the development of this country and so on and, I think, we should devote our attention to them rather than going into the question of a new Constitution within just seven months of our existence. I think this question should be gone into carefully and that there should be no undue haste. I am not in favour of the motion as drafted and, if the amendment by the Second Nominated Member is accepted, I think it would be a progressive step. There can be no doubt that it will be fair for hon. Members to support it, because this is a British Colony and the official language is English. Let us take the situation today in a place like New York; there are several communities there and several different languages are spoken but those people have their own newspapers as channels of information. The Jews, for instance, have their own newspapers which one can get at any time and read information about people and things he is interested in. Here in British Guiana, however, we have newspapers in only one language and that is English. That, surely, is a disadvantage to those who cannot read English and, I think, we would be going forward if we provide that those who enjoy the franchise in future must be able to do so.

Mr. DEBIDIN: To a point of explanation! I would like to know, Your Excellency, whether a Member can speak on an amendment to a motion which he could not have anticipated?

The PRESIDENT: Yes; the hon. Member may speak on an amendment provided he confines himself to the new matter in the amendment.

Mr. DEBIDIN: May I crave your indulgence, Sir, to speak on the motion proper?

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member cannot speak again on the motion. The hon. Member can speak on any amendment provided that amendment has been seconded.

Mr. DEBIDIN: I propose to make only a few remarks.

Mr. LEE: I would like to know whether I should reply now, Sir.

The PRESIDENT: No. There are amendments before the Council and I would like to make the situation very clear. What I propose is that the question as it stands be put; that is, that the motion by the hon. Member for Essequibo River be put to the Council as it stands. If the motion is rejected as it stands, then I shall put the amendments in their order. That is the procedure.

Mr. LEE: What I am asking is whether I should reply now, Sir.

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member has the right to reply to the debate, and when he has done so the debate is at an end. No one can speak after that.

Mr. DEBIDIN: Speaking on the amendments I wish to emphasise that if they are accepted a particular section of the community would be hard hit through no fault of their own. It is true that we have spent, and are spending, a tremendous sum of money on education, but it has been emphasised over and over, and I think it was given in evidence before the Franchise Commission, that the people who were brought here and planted on the sugar estates have not had the same opportunities in regard to the educational system as other people in the Colony have had. There is no doubt that the report of the Franchise Commission is a black mark on the history of our Colony, as it opened what has become a racial issue, and it seems to me that if either of the amendments is adopted there would be a perpetuation of that state of things. I am looking forward to the day when a Guianese outlook will be established, and I am asking Members to bear in mind that in accepting either of the amendments they would be creating machinery for a racial fight between the people of the Colony.

A point has been made about spoilt votes, but that should not be regarded as a criterion in view of the system of

voting. It was my experience at the last General Election that very few people understood the explanations given from time to time as to how the forms were to be filled up. Whether symbols are used or not, I think it should not be beyond our ingenuity to devise some method of voting so as to facilitate illiterate people.

As regards the question of the secrecy of the ballot I think that is mainly for the protection of the voter. If I wished to vote openly there is nothing in the law to prevent me from doing so.

I was alarmed at the statement by the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Raatgever, that capital would not come into this Colony if we adopted adult suffrage without a literacy test in English. I wonder if the hon. Member visualises the effect of what he said. In other words he is saying that capital would not come into this Colony if the votes were in the hands of the East Indians of the Colony.

Mr. RAATGEVER: I never said that.

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member cannot put constructions on the hon. Member's remarks. He can quote what the hon. Member said but he must not put constructions which are quite unjust. The hon. Nominated Member said nothing of the sort. Hon. Members are not allowed to interpret other Members' remarks.

Mr. DEBIDIN: He said that the development and progress of the Colony would be retarded if the right to vote was extended to all the people in the Colony. That is universal adult suffrage, and the natural inference to be drawn from that is that if, as the hon. Member for Demerara River (Capt. Coghlan) has pointed out, 42 per cent. of the East Indians in the Colony are illiterate, the introduction of universal adult suffrage would enfranchise those illiterates and retard the progress of this Colony to the extent that it would not encourage capital to come in. Perhaps the hon. Member did not mean it but he has raised a racial issue. I am appealing to hon. Members to think of the future progress of the Colony. If the people of the Colony are given the right to vote whether they are literate or not,

their interest in the Colony is automatically raised. They would be invested with the right to participate in the Government of the Colony, and that in itself would mean progress and the creation of a real Guianese outlook.

The PRESIDENT: There is a third amendment for the deletion of the words appearing after the word "Resolved," and the insertion of the following words: "that an *ad hoc* Committee be appointed to consider whether, and if so in what form, and when, universal adult suffrage should be introduced." I would like to make it clear what the position is as regards procedure. Standing Order 17 states:

"17. When an amendment to a question shall have been submitted, and when more amendments than one shall have been submitted, the President at the close of the Debate shall put the question for the decision of the Council in this wise: "That the words of the question stand as in the original motion" which, if it be decided in the affirmative, will throw out all amendments; and he shall then put the original motion to be affirmed or negated; If the first question which would preclude all amendments be negated, then, in case only one amendment shall have been proposed and seconded, he shall put the question as it was proposed to be amended; but in case more amendments than one shall have been proposed and seconded, he shall put the questions of amendment *seriatim* and in the inverse order of their having been proposed; and when any one amendment is affirmed all other amendments shall be thereby negated, and the President shall then put the motion, as so amended, to be affirmed or negated."

The effect of that is that, assuming the motion is negated, the last amendment would be voted upon first. That is to say that the amendment by the hon. Member for Berbice River (Mr. Ferreira) would be put to the vote before any of the others, Is that quite clear to hon. Members?

There are one or two points about the amendments. We now have three of them. The first amendment is that of the hon. Member for Georgetown North (Dr. Nicholson) which suggests the deletion of the words appearing after the word "resolved" in the motion, and the substi-

tution therefor of the words "that this Council is of opinion that adult suffrage with a literacy test should be brought into force on the dissolution of the Council as at present constituted, and that the Secretary of State for the Colonies should be asked to agree to the necessary steps being taken to give effect to this motion."

Then there is a second amendment by the hon. the Second Nominated Member (Mr. Roth) in practically the same terms, except that it suggests a literacy test in English. Otherwise there is practically no difference between the two amendments as far as I can make out.

Mr. LEE: Except as regards the time of introduction.

The PRESIDENT: There is no time fixed when it should be introduced. Then there is the third amendment that the question should be referred to an *ad hoc* Committee. I do not know what the hon. Member means by an *ad hoc* Committee—whether it should be a Select Committee of the Council or a Committee appointed by the Governor.

Mr. FERREIRA: A Committee appointed by the Governor in Council.

Mr. LEE: Before I reply to the debate I would like to find out whether it was the proper thing for the Colonial Secretary to read that telegram in Council. In my humble opinion I do not think it should have been permitted, and I am asking that it be expunged from the Hansard report of the debate. I am not objecting to it because it came from my constituency, but as a matter of procedure in this Council. It might be taken as a precedent.

The PRESIDENT: I do not think any notice need be taken of it.

Mr. LEE: I desire to deal with the first amendment moved by the hon. Member for Georgetown North (Dr. Nicholson) who, in effect, is in favour of adult suffrage with a literacy test, to be brought into force on the dissolution of the Council. I would like hon. Members to consider that since 1927, when the change of the Constitution was being

debated in this Chamber, there was talk about lowering the franchise with a view to the eventual introduction of universal adult suffrage. That was 21 years ago, but the people of this Colony are still without that privilege. I would not call it a right but a privilege to the people who work hard and contribute towards the revenue of the Colony. I would also like to remind hon. Members that illiterate people are permitted to vote at village elections provided they own property, but the same people are not allowed to vote at elections for this Council.

From the figures quoted by the hon. Member for Demerara River (Capt. Coganlan) it will be seen that only one section of the community is affected by the disqualification of illiteracy, and that section is in the majority. I was a member of the Franchise Commission, and so was Mr. Jacob. He and I held meetings in every constituency except Georgetown and New Amsterdam, but as regards Georgetown I may say that the trade unions told the Franchise Commission that they were in agreement with universal adult suffrage without any literacy test. Similarly, the Labour Party in their election campaign supported universal adult suffrage, but now that members of that Party are in the Council the people will judge their conduct at the next election. After hearing the views of the various bodies was it fair that the Franchise Commission should recommend that the question of adult suffrage should be considered after five years? It is clear that the Swettenham Circular deprived the East Indian workers of the primary education which was necessary to enable them to obtain the literacy qualification. In par. 45 of the Franchise Commission's report it is stated:

"45. We are, therefore, not prepared on the evidence before us to apotheosise the crusade that is being waged for the admittance of all illiterates to the same franchise privileges as those who cannot be so classified, because, as we have already shown, those who espouse their cause claim that they were denied the opportunity of receiving an early education; that they are contributors to the revenue of the Colony, and are taxpayers who enjoy no representation. There is, we think, no foundation for such a claim, and we do not feel justified in supporting it and thus placing, as has been so often emphasised, a premium on illiteracy."

I say it was proved conclusively before the Commission, and as a member of the Commission I feel very hurt that that particular section of the community was debarred from exercising the franchise. Let us face the facts and see whether this Council has not an obligation to those people who were brought to this country and have carried the rice industry on their shoulders.

The PRESIDENT: Does the hon. Member intend to go on for some time? The Council agreed to adjourn at 4 o'clock, and I will now adjourn the Council until Wednesday week, the 25th inst. I propose that we should meet on Wednesdays to deal with Unofficial motions, and also on the Thursday and Friday following, so that precedence might be given on those days to Government business. I suggest that we should sit on Wednesdays until we have got through the business before the Council.

The Council was accordingly adjourned until 2 p.m. on Wednesday, 25th of August.