

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Friday, 7th July, 1944.

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

PRESENT:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hon. H. N. Critchlow (Nom-
inated).

The Hon. E. A. Luckhoo, O.B.E.
(Eastern Berbice).

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

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

The Hon. Peer Bacchus (Western
Berbice).

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

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

The Hon. T. Lee (Essequibo
River).

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

The Hon. V. Roth (Nominated).

The Clerk read prayers.

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 6th July, 1944, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

ORDER OF THE DAY

FRANCHISE COMMISSION'S REPORT.

The Council resumed the debates on the following motion:—

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

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

The PRESIDENT: I would just like to express appreciation of the debate yesterday. I am sure it will be of the greatest value to Government and to myself, especially when I go home at the end of the month to London and take a copy with me to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Particularly I would like to express appreciation to the hon. Member for

New Amsterdam on the manner in which he put the various questions before this Council, and to the hon. the Second Nominated Member (Mr. Austin) for bringing it to our attention that the speech should be printed or typed and circulated to Members and to the public as soon as possible. That is being done. I shall proceed too at the earliest possible moment to have a complete report of this debate prepared by the Official Reporters, perhaps over the week-end, and a copy sent around to Members before Government takes any further steps.

We now resume the debate and I have to call on the hon. Member for Central Demerara to continue his remarks.

Mr. De AGUIAR (resuming): When the time came for the Council to adjourn yesterday afternoon I was dealing with a remark that was made by the hon. the Sixth Nominated Member (Mr. Edun) concerning the likely repercussions from Indians. The hon. Member went on to say that he hopes when the war is over he will be ready to make a trip to England and also to proceed to India. There is one thing, sir, I am certain about—and I am sure every hon. Member of this Council will agree with me—and that is this: When the hon. Member leaves this country on his journey he will make sure that he takes with him a return passage for British Guiana. He said he is a British Guianese, and so it is right and proper that he should do so. I am sure we shall all welcome him when he returns. But the warning I would like to give the hon. Member is that as a British Guianese he must take very great care and avoid mixing Indian politics with British Guiana politics. And there is one thing too I would ask him to do when he reaches India if he wants to be of service to British Guiana, and that is he should try to convince Indian leaders, the leaders of Indian thought, that in so far as rice is con-

cerned the West Indian markets are of comparatively little importance to them but of vital importance to the rice industry of British Guiana. If the journey of the hon. Member to India would be for that purpose, then I am sure that he would be doing a very great service to this country.

I referred to the fact that he will certainly be taking with him a return ticket or passage, and I want to support that statement by saying that he is well aware, as most of us are here, that those Indians who did not belong to this country, who were not British Guianese but in respect of whom this Government was responsible for their repatriation—so the story goes according to the information I have—when they were repatriated a good number of them were very glad indeed to get back here. How many of them were assisted to do so I am not in a position to say. Some of them, I believe, did come back but quite a large number of them remained. I think I am right in saying that quite a large number of them regretted the day they left this poor little country of British Guiana. I mention this to illustrate that after all this country is not so bad to the people who are born in it. It is not so bad to those even who are brought here because when the time comes for them to leave us, they are most anxious to return and stay with us if possible for all time. I cannot help but regard the remarks made by the hon. Member as a veiled threat. It is certainly not a veiled threat to the people of this country. I, as a resident, as a colonist, as a Member of this Council, refuse to accept it as a threat; but, sir, it is not enough for me and me alone and those like myself to refuse to regard it as a threat and allow the matter to rest there.

The purpose of this debate is to bring to Your Excellency's notice what is operating in the minds of the people of this community so that when you

go to England, as you indicate you hope to do very shortly, you will be able to represent not only the feelings of the people but their expression of thought. I am not too sure, sir, that when you repeat those words uttered by the hon. Nominated Member they will not be understood on the other side as an introduction of Indian politics into British Guiana politics and that, I say, will be a most retrograde step in so far as this country is concerned. I feel so strongly on that point that I am prepared, as I have done, to express my point of view in the hope that Your Excellency and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies will disregard the remarks made by the hon. Member in the way which I personally think, and I am sure a large number of persons would think if they heard them, he meant them to be. What would happen if the various races of this community attempt to take up a similar attitude? I refer to the minorities. Yesterday when I spoke on the question of reajority and minorities I had in mind the remarks made by the hon. Member. What would happen if our loyal African citizens, our loyal Portuguese citizens of whom I am one and our loyal Chinese citizens and the rest of them attempt to come to you and His Majesty's Government and say "Unless so-and-so happens I will go to Africa or Portugal or China and report the matter to the African or Portuguese or Chinese Government?" I think that is really stretching the matter too far and I am sure, that now that the hon. Member knows and has been told, as I believe I have told him in no uncertain terms, that the eyes of the community are on the look out for strife of that kind, I feel sure he will be sane enough to mend his ways and pull himself together for the common good of all of us who live here.

It seems to me that what is required in a debate of this kind is

a large amount of peace, goodwill and common understanding on all sides. I am not going to close my eyes to any possible errors that may be made in arriving at a decision on such an important matter affecting the peoples of this country. What I do say is that this Commission sat for a very long time. They met a large number of people, it is true, some of whom I shall deal with a little later. They have arrived at certain conclusions, and those conclusions are clearly set out in the Report and have been fully dealt with by the hon. Member for New Amsterdam in his speech. What I say, sir, is that these proposals should not be rejected out of hand. There should be no split in the ranks of Members of this Council and even members of our community. The leaders, and I believe I am one of them, should endeavour to point out whatever there is to be gained if these proposals are accepted by His Majesty's Government for adoption and to urge upon them that by their own conduct, by their own desire to assist, they can help a good deal; for those proposals are only a step forward to what we hope to see in the future. I am not going to say they are perfect in every detail. I am going to agree that they are perhaps not what was expected by some, but all of these points, I suggest, are not sufficient reasons—and I emphasize that—for a split to occur on such a valuable report which we hope will receive favourable consideration by His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies. We often wonder here why it is we cannot get a move on, why when suggestions are put forward, whether by an individual or a body of men in an organization or association, favourable consideration is not given to them. The answer, to my mind, is clear even to a blind man. We cannot hope to make any advance whatever unless we are prepared to sink our individual opinions—in other words to give and take. It is my view, sir, and I think I am right in that view, that so long as we remain divided in our

ideas, so long as we continue to quarrel, as we do here very often over questions that come before this Council for consideration, the longer it will take us before we arrive at anything at all. I, sir, have respected your opinion more than once, and more particularly when you say "Let us make a try; even if we make an error, we can always come back and try to improve just where we left off."

To start off today by making attempts to quash this Report on the ground that the time has come for universal adult suffrage to be given to the people of this community regardless of any qualification whatever, is to my mind not only wrong but in my humble opinion a most retrograde step. I will admit that had I followed some of the people who appeared before us without giving due consideration to the question I would probably have been guided by the opinion that was expressed by the hon. the Sixth Nominated Member to whom I previously referred. It was an ingenious paragraph in his minority report. He wrote:

"Certain members had endeavoured by intensive cross-examination of those who claimed Universal Adult Suffrage as the logical goal to confuse and dissuade them, but the arguments adduced by the claimants were so conclusive, convincing and rational, that, to my mind, I do not see how I can reasonably escape the recommendations of Universal Adult Suffrage by dodging the issue."

A more ingenious paragraph does not appear anywhere else in this Report. The average person reading that paragraph is bound to arrive at the conclusion that there was an intensive cross-examination, that an attempt was made to confuse and dissuade the people who appeared before us, and that the arguments put forward by them were convincing and rational. Whether the hon. Nominated Member likes it or not, I say, that what really did happen was that those people who

appeared before us, to whom the hon. Member referred, were people who were trained; their answers were prepared for them; and, strange as it may seem, every witness who came under my cross-examination—I was one who cross-examined them—gave answers that were the same, word for word. While it is true that the evidence they gave was spoken, it is equally true that the evidence they gave was read. I think when I say that the evidence was read hon. Members will know precisely what I mean, and so there is no necessity for me to elaborate the point. But lest there be any misunderstanding, I think I ought to say that what they read was prepared for them—there is no secret about it, no question of telling tales out of school—and the preparation was made by the same hon. Member himself and his associates. Now I ask,—I am not familiar with the judiciary; I am a poor and humble layman, but my lay mind tells me that evidence of that kind must not be accepted—is not that so? I venture to suggest such evidence will not be accepted in this case and the remarks made by the hon. Member in the Report, to my mind, should be expunged.

In the course of the debate yesterday we heard a good deal about democracy and what it means. Well, sir, it is strange that in this Council we have been hearing quite a lot recently about what democracy means. Speaking for myself, I do not mind that. I claim to be a democrat. There is one thing I do not do; certainly my mind, my conscience, will not allow me to do it, and that is to stretch democracy to mean anything. If a thing suits him today in one form, that is "democracy"; and if it suits him tomorrow or next week in another form that is also "democracy". Well, sir, I do not call that democracy. I call that a twisting of facts. Perhaps sir, he is an opportunist; in other words, he swings wherever it suits his argument. I think it is wrong never-

theless when one is swinging an argument or twisting a fact to try and clothe it under democracy. I am sorry to delay the Council so long on this point, but I feel very strongly on it. It seems to me, when certain hon. Members refer to democracy in the sense I have heard them refer to it and more particularly recently, that they are aiming at a leisure state. What we want here is a state where by our common efforts, our willingness to pull together we will succeed in making this country what we desire it to be. We do not want a leisure state here. We do not want a state of communism. All of the people to whom I have spoken say what they want, sir, is an opportunity to earn a living to protect their families, protect their homes and to make themselves independent. I venture to suggest, sir, that if it is at all possible to make a referendum of our people you will find that they do not want to be lazy; they want work. They complain when they do not get work, or when they do not get sufficient work so as to earn sufficient money to maintain themselves and their families. The hon. Member says he sees hundreds of thousands of people on Sundays. I do not know the impression he expects to form in my mind—

Mr. EDUN: I did not say "hundreds of thousands." I said "hundreds and thousands."

Mr. DeAGUIAR: I accept the correction. It does not destroy the point. I have never counted those I see or those to whom I speak, but I see lots of people, not on Sundays alone but every day of my life. I see and I talk with them, and I know what they want. My desire is to try to make such contribution as I can within my ability, that will assist this country to go forward rather than to go backward. This is the hope I would like to express—that hon. Members would

have the same end in view when they are approaching this problem which will have very far-reaching effects on the community.

There are many things written in the minority reports to which I would like to refer, but I have already taken up a great deal of time. I have been on my feet since yesterday afternoon and I do not think any useful purpose will be served at this stage by detailing them. I am satisfied, however, that the few points I have made will be carefully considered by Your Excellency and by His Majesty's Secretary of State, and in the light of those remarks I leave the rest of the minority reports and the value to the attached to them to be assessed by you, sir, and His Majesty's Government.

To sum up, I say that I entirely support the recommendations of the majority of the Commission as the stepping-stone to what we hope to receive in the future when we are ready to receive them. I think also that the advice of the Secretary of State should be sought on the other recommendations set out in the Report before a final decision is taken on the whole question, and I say further that the Council, as at present constituted, should be given the opportunity to pass the necessary legislation required to implement those recommendations as soon as the advice of the Secretary of State has been received. I conclude my remarks by saying—although I do not think it is necessary to do so—that I stand here as a loyal and devoted servant of His Majesty the King, his person and his Throne; that I am a loyal British Guianese, and that the views I have expressed are my considered and honest views of what I think should be the Constitution of British Guiana in the near future.

Mr. J. A. LUCKHOO: I listened with very great interest to the

remarks of the hon. Mover of the motion yesterday, and also to the several speeches delivered by Members who spoke after him. I think, sir, that we all stand on common ground, and that common ground is that we desire an amendment so as to give greater rights to the inhabitants of this country to be placed on the electoral roll, and also of this Council. There is no doubt that those who considered the changes which are advocated in the majority report of the Commission have done well in making it quite clear that they desire that a greater number of people in this Colony should take part in the election of Members to this Council.

Whilst I agree with some of the main features of the recommendations of the Commission I would like to point out, as I think it is my duty to do, certain inconsistencies in the majority report. But before I do so I wish to say that the facilities which are recommended to be given to the people of this country to have their names placed on the electoral roll is a step in the right direction. I wish to say at the outset that I would not advocate the introduction of universal adult suffrage at the present time. In my view it would be too great a leap to take when we consider the present Constitution of this country. We have to endeavour to reach that goal by progressive stages, and it seems to me that the Commissioners, as indicated in the majority report, have done their duty well in that direction.

There are a few criticisms I would like to offer on the Report because it seems to me that certain paragraphs are not in accord with others. It is important when we are considering changes, and if we are going to move forward, that no person should be disfranchised. The first point to which I would like to direct Your Excellency's attention is at page 4 of the report, paragraph 17, which states:—

"17. The present disqualifications under the Order-in-Council prohibit the registration of any person who—

- (a) Cannot read and write some language, provided always that any person who knows how to read and write, but is incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause from reading or writing, shall not be disqualified from being a voter."

Then in paragraph 18 the Report goes on to state:—

- "18. We are of the opinion that (a) should be amended to read as follows:—
Cannot read and write a simple sentence and sign his or her name in the English Language to the satisfaction of the officer charged with the duty of registering voters, provided always that any person who knows how to read and write English, but is incapacitated by blindness or other physical cause from reading or writing, shall not be disqualified from being a voter."

I think that is tantamount to disfranchising a person who can read and write some language, and I do not think it is what this country would like to enact as part of its legislation, because there are, I believe, not very many but some persons who are capable of reading and writing some language, and who in the ordinary course of things ought to exercise their right to the franchise. But this very recommendation shows, in my opinion, that those who signed this Report were not really thinking of what they wrote subsequently, because it appears to me from paragraph 40 on page 7, that reading and writing a simple sentence in English would entitle a person to be classed among the educated classes of the population. I quote paragraph 40, not in the context in which it has been written, but in reference to the people in general. It says:—

- "40. We are ready and willing to concede that this very large section have in their midst a considerable number of persons of both sexes who, though handicapped by lack of education of any kind,

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

It seems to me that they would class as an educated person one who is only able to read and write a simple sentence and sign his or her name in English. I think it is a mistake on the part of those who wrote paragraph 40 to regard a person who could only read and write a simple sentence to be among those who are capable of exercising their votes. It seems to me that paragraph 40 might very well be corrected in that respect.

So far as the qualification of Members of the Legislature is concerned, I agree that there should be an extension of the right to membership to the female sex. It will be a happy innovation in this country to have members of the other sex taking part with us here in the administration of this Colony. After all, if we were to look to precedent in England we would find that the few ladies there have not done very badly. One or two of them have reached very eminent positions in the political world.

I would like to record my personal opposition to Ministers of Religion being included among the persons qualified to become Members of this Council. I feel that they have a great deal to do in their own sphere. I know I will be criticized for saying it, but when we look around we see a great deal of spiritual degeneration in our midst, and it would be well for those gentlemen of the long cloth to keep in their proper forum. I would not like the day to arrive when two

Ministers of Religion will contest for political honours. It would not make for good feeling at all among our people. Whilst it is true, as the hon. Mover told me yesterday, that there are Members of Parliament who are Ministers of Religion, I think the time has not come for this Colony to open the door for them to become Members of this Council. That is my own personal view and it may be that I will be subjected to very great criticism by those who feel the other way.

I agree with the hon. Member for Western Berbice (Mr. Peer Bacchus) when he said that the qualification suggested for membership of this Council is a little too slow in certain respects. I think he referred to the substitution of a property qualification of \$1,000 for the present one of \$5,000. I think if the amount was halved it would be more in keeping with the other recommendations with regard to the qualifications of electors and Members of the Council.

With respect to those who may be placed on the new electoral roll, if, for instance, legislation is passed to deprive those who can read and write some language of the right to vote, it seems to me a little inconsistent with the recommendation in paragraph 76 of the Report which reads:—

“76. The framework of the new register should, we think, be carefully planned and constructed. The greatest care should be exercised in preparing any new electoral register, the work being entrusted to at least three qualified persons as a whole time service. We think that every person now on the register should re-register, and again be required to prove his claim to be placed on the new lists. Every opportunity should be provided to render registration easy and convenient, Registering Officers appointed being made to visit various centres to render this possible, and to examine, as far as possible, each person's claim to be admitted as a voter in his Electoral District.”

In order to prove his claim to be placed on the new electoral roll, must conform to the recommendations which are set out in paragraph 17 which says that he must be able to read and write a simple sentence and sign his or her name in English. If a person is educated in his own language that is all that is required for him to be placed on the register at present, and if of course it becomes compellable for a person again to prove his claim to be put on the new list, it follows—and it is a logical view—that he would have to prove that he could read and write a simple sentence in English. It seems to me a little inconsistent.

Those are the few observations I desire to make on the Report. My view is that it would not be well for this country that we should plunge into the preparation, or make representations for the preparation, of a new electoral roll on the basis of universal adult suffrage without a literacy test. I do not think the time is ripe enough. As I said before, we would be taking too great a leap from the present Constitution to what we might call the ideal thing to have, but time will tell. Let us try out the main recommendations made by the Commission, and as we go along we would be able to enlarge upon what we have already done, and finally reach that stage. There is no doubt that the ideal thing is as the hon. the Sixth Nominated Member (Mr. Edun) said, that every person who pays taxes should have a voice in the representation of the people in this Council, and the time will come—if not within our time, in the future—when we will have universal adult suffrage in this Colony. But to suggest that now and say that it should not be based on a literacy test is, to my mind, only playing with the situation. If we are going to ask the Secretary of State for the Colonies to allow us to introduce legislation whereby we can enlarge upon our

electoral roll and give greater facilities to those who may be prepared to come to this Council to represent the people, I think, there would be no chance of getting that done if we are going to make a recommendation which I feel sure the Secretary of State would not advise to be done in this Colony.

There remains one point which I would like to touch upon, and that is whether this Council is competent to introduce legislation of this kind. I have given the matter some consideration and I have been able to delve into certain books on Constitutional Law and Reform, but I have not been able to find any Parliamentary case, at least in so far as the Colonies and Dominions are concerned. Had it been that this Council was even in its last year I might have favoured the opinion that it would be proper for this Council to pass legislation of this nature. With the exception of one or two points I have mentioned, the idea is an enlargement upon the rights of the people, not the taking away of their rights. I do not think it would be proper for what I may term a moribund Council in its tenth year to undertake such important constitutional changes as this Report desires us to do. My view is that upon Your Excellency's arrival in England you will consult the Secretary of State for the Colonies and his legal advisers. It is an important constitutional change, and it seems to me that a Council in its tenth year, or almost in its moribund state, is not competent to undertake legislation of that kind. Other than that my own view—it may not be the correct constitutional view—is that the issue whether there should be this change is one which should be decided by the people. At one time I thought that this Council should be dissolved and let the electorate decide what changes should take place on the recommendations made by the Commission after which the new Council could pass the legislation required. That is only a suggestion of mine. I have

no authority, no support for it, and I think the most prudent thing to do would be for Your Excellency to consult those at Home and get the opinions of those who are competent to advise in that direction.

Those, Your Excellency, are my views, and I desire to compliment the Commissioners upon the work they have done, and my hon. friend on my right (Mr. Woolford) on the able manner in which he presented his motion yesterday.

Mr. E. A. LUCKHOO: I would like first of all to pay tribute to the Chairman of the Commission who has dealt with this complicated question in a very able manner. I would also like to congratulate him on the statesman-like speech he made yesterday. I have known the hon. Member for a number of years, and he has always impressed me as one who never spoke on a subject unless he was certain of his facts and there was logic in his argument. I have been associated with him in his professional work, and the time and energy he has expended in the preparation of this Report bear testimony to his agile mind and skill.

I have signed the majority report. It is true that I did not attend many meetings, but that does not mean that I did not take an interest in this question which is agitating the minds of the community as a whole. I have had the views of responsible citizens in Berbice on this question, and I made up my mind as to certain action I should take. I crave nobody's indulgence for having signed the majority report, because I can honestly state that the terms in which it is worded appeal to me. In a matter of this sort the utmost consideration should be given to the views of the responsible citizens of this Colony, and in arriving at the decisions we have made we did so more or less on the views expressed by

those who were competent to give their opinion on this complicated question.

It is not my desire to enter into any conflict between race and race. I deprecate any attempt by any Member of this Council to set up one race against another. It does not make for harmony and good feeling in this cosmopolitan community. Such action should be deprecated by every intelligent Member of this Council so that any Member who attempted that kind of thing would realize his position and would not try to stir up ill-feeling and discontent among the uneducated classes in this community. ("Hear, hear"). I say that because I feel that if statements of that kind are allowed to go unchallenged they would certainly create a very bad impression on people outside. We may know the individual here, but when such statements are put into cold print they go abroad and may be regarded as a reflection of the views of Members of this Council and intelligent members of the East Indian community. That is not so. I deprecate such statements and I make no apology to anybody on that particular point.

The terms of reference of the Commission were quite clear and distinct. We were empowered to consider and advise—

"(a) on the qualification of electors and members of the Legislative Council.

(b) as to whether any alteration of the boundaries of the Electoral Districts, as at present defined, is desirable."

I do not think it was our duty to embark on anything outside those terms of reference. Members were given a good deal of indulgence by the Chair but my own view is that we were confined to our terms of reference. I will deal first with the question of the qualifications of electors. At the present time it does appear to me extremely hard that unless a man earns \$300 he is not qualified to exercise the vote. That matter was fully

debated by the Commission and it was decided that there should be a reduction of that income qualification from \$25 per month to \$10 per month. That is a step in the right direction and a substantial reduction of the present income qualification. Who in this Colony is not in a position to earn \$10 a month? The labourer, the artisan, the carpenter and anyone of that sort we find earning much more than \$10 per month, but probably some do not obtain the figure of \$25 and so are deprived of the right to be enrolled under the present requirement. Surely if steps are taken, as we intend, to enlarge the electoral roll by reducing the income qualification that will be a means of inviting persons who are not at present on the register to become registered.

As regards the other question of the tenancy and occupation of land it was a very fine suggestion on the part of the Commission to reduce the area under cultivation from six acres to three acres so as to entitle persons to have the vote. Your Excellency's policy now is to improve the economic condition of the people of this country, and while it is true that a good many of our ills are not politically economical, still at the same time Your Excellency by your advice and by your practical sympathy has done a great deal for the development of the coastal areas as well as the interior of this Colony. I feel, sir, that is a step in the right direction and that will be the means of putting under cultivation a larger area of land occupied by these people for the past forty or fifty years. If these people can be assured of drainage and irrigation, as we hope they will get in some areas, it may be of some economic value. It is clear that when you have a number of labourers settled on certain areas which will in itself entitle them to be registered, a matter of three acres is not so much after all, it will be an incentive to farmers to put their land under cultivation

so as to be able to earn a voter's qualification under this head. These recommendations should be of real benefit to the people as a whole and certainly will be the means of encouraging a good many persons to obtain this property qualification and so be able to have a voice in the administration of this Colony.

With respect to adult suffrage it appears to me that has been a thorny question in the minds of some individuals. Before I pass on to that, may I be permitted to refer to the point made by a previous speaker relative to paragraph 17. The paragraph says:

"The present disqualifications under the Order-in-Council prohibit the registration of any person—(a) Cannot read and write some language....."

That has been altered to read "who has some slight knowledge of the English language and is able to read and sign his name." That is not my original idea on this particular question. If you look through the records you will find I made a note that I still maintain that a person who can read and write some language ought to be on the register in himself and should not be disfranchised because he cannot read and write the English language. I see, sir, from the paragraph that probably I did not make myself clear in that respect, but I can still give my views on the matter. Paragraph 77 of the Report says:

"In this connection we recommend that all persons whose names now appear on the register of voters should be allowed to re-register without being compelled to satisfy the Registering Officer as to their qualifications or their ability to pass the literacy test in English recommended by us as an amendment to the present disqualification contained in Article (a) of the existing Order-in-Council. There does not appear to some of us to be any valid reason for disfranchising such persons or depriving them of a privilege they have enjoyed for many years past."

The idea underlying this paragraph is really that those who have

been put on the register by virtue of being able to read some language, or whatever you may call it, still maintain the qualification which will entitle them to be on the register, while those who are claiming now to be on the register will have to go through a literacy test as to being able to read and write a simple sentence in English. There is a great deal to be said on this point. Quite a number of East Indians have come to this Colony and made good, rising from a humble position to one of prominence in this community. They have been educated in their own language and, I think, on reconsideration of this matter the present disqualification should remain. That may raise very big questions—the whole question of adult suffrage and that of being required to read and write in the English language only. That may be a point to be reconsidered so as to get over that difficulty, because it is not confined to East Indians only, but affects Chinese as well. Although they cannot read and write in the English language a good many East Indians are registered under this those who are enjoying that right to qualification. There seems to be a safeguard in paragraph 77 to give be registered the concession of continuing to do so without being put to the necessity of having to go through the usual form of a literacy test.

Mr. WOOLFORD: May I be allowed to intervene at this particular point? If hon. Members look at paragraphs 76 and 77 together they will find there is some inconsistency in the recommendations as they appear, and for the purpose of understanding the whole situation you will see a footnote subscribed to by the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Jackson, and myself. The position is this. In the original draft of the Commission's Report we had all agreed, as I thought at the time, and it was expressed in this way in paragraph 77:

"In this connection we recommend that all persons whose names now appear

on the register of voters should be allowed to re-register without being compelled to satisfy the Registering Officer as to their qualifications or their ability to pass the literacy test in English...."

It is apparent from this paragraph that those words referred to—"every person now on the register should re-register, and again be required to prove his claim to be placed on the new lists"—should not now appear in paragraph 76. In the sub-editing those words ought to have been deleted because the final decision of the Commission was that those on the register should not be subject to a literacy test. That was the original intention of the Commission. We did not know at the time the decision was made what was done in other parts of the world, especially India. Mr. Jackson, and I made the footnote at the bottom of the page that there should be re-registration, but the majority of the Commission thought otherwise. The findings of the Commission are really those set out in paragraph 77 and, therefore, I ask permission to explain to hon. Members that they need not take those words appearing in paragraph 76 as the views of the majority of the Commission.

Mr. E. A. LUCKHOO: That position is clarified by the Chairman of the Commission. I now turn to the question of adult suffrage. So much has been said on that point that I need hardly add my contribution, but some question has arisen on what has been referred to as the Swettenham Circular and which was brought into prominence by certain Members of this Council. The Chairman of the Commission had taken particular pains to explain that Circular, the reason for it and the opposition which took place by respectable citizens in respect of that particular matter, and it is hardly necessary for me to refer to it again, but as some charge has been made against the Government and the Planters for being responsible for the illiteracy of some of these

people, I think it is only right for me to repeat the views I have expressed on a former occasion. I think it was in 1933 when a conference was held by prominent men of the East Indian community and it was insisted that the Circular be withdrawn. At that time there was what was known as free and compulsory education provided for by Ordinance, but for some reason or other a circular was issued by the Executive Government asking the Magistrates not to carry out the penalty under the law. The people looked upon that as a way of getting out of a difficulty, and so they thought of keeping their children at home and making use of them in a certain manner in order to supplement their meagre earnings at the time. I want this to be distinctly understood; there was no restriction placed on the admission of East Indians in any school in the Colony. It was due to economic need on the part of the family that the services of the children were used inside or outside the plantation to supplement the family earnings. Whose fault was it if they did not take advantage of the education facilities offered them at that time? It cannot be placed at the door of Government or the Planters, as being responsible for the children not being educated. When the matter came up for discussion in 1933 and pronounced views were given by the East Indian section of the community of which I happen to be one, I took up the matter with Government. A conference was held and I contributed to the discussion, and it was agreed that the Circular be withdrawn. As a result of that, the attendance of the children in the schools increased because the people were then under a penalty for not carrying out their obligation under the law in sending their children to school. If this Colony, peopled as it is and for the through their parents not sending them to school at the proper time. But there has been a change in all this, since the Circular's withdrawal.

Your Excellency has noticed during your visit on the Corentyne Coast the number of East Indian children taking advantage of the education facilities granted by the Colony. The estates provided houses and school-buildings for the carrying out of primary education within their own compounds. We find today that secondary schools have been established in various parts of the Colony—one is to be opened shortly by one hon. Nominated Member, the Tagore Memorial High School. That shows that the people are quite alive to the necessity of having their children educated in the proper way so as to fit them for the practical battle of life. Under the old indenture system you must make some allowances. They were brought as indentured people and served the estates quite well. They had certain views. In these enlightened days you cannot say that those people are illiterate. They are not. The object of this Report is more or less to give those not yet qualified a probationary period to be able to acquire the necessary knowledge, a matter of five years. At a later date the question can be reviewed by Government or a special commission appointed to go into it. To say that blame should be attached to Government is quite unwarranted. Why did these people who are now clamouring agitate in 1933 for the withdrawal of that circular? From the records it will be seen that on the 15th July the then acting Director of Education with the authority of the Governor issued a circular to all proprietors, attorneys and managers of estates in the Colony in which *inter alia* he referred to the Swettenham Circular and stated that representation was made to the Government by prominent members of the East Indian community on the necessity of withdrawing that circular as the result of a widely attended conference having been held. When an attempt is made to bring class against class it does not tend to secure that harmony and goodwill among the classes in the community which should be.

I stand here as an Elected representative. I was not pitchforked into this position by my East Indian brethren only. The other members of the community—Europeans, Blacks, Portuguese, Chinese—all contributed towards my success in being placed at the head of the poll. Why this question of race should come into this discussion? That is where it may be the downfall of the people of this Colony unless we take a broad view of things, a wide vision of things, and the various races work together and pull together for the common good of this community. After the withdrawal of the Swettenham Circular it will be grossly misleading to say that the East Indian community did not comply with the direction given by the Education Department and Government to send their children to school. I admit there are still cases appearing before the Courts in which for some reason or other the parents have not complied with the law, but there are very few children of school age who are not attending school. It is hoped at least by those leaders of the race who take a real and genuine interest in the people that the rising generation will be equipped for the practical battle of life. There have been now and then bickerings and disputes over wages by labour, but we have now a Labour Adviser who will look after that. Mischievous talks which are so often made spell ruin for this Colony, and that is why I am emphasizing this point with the full sense of my responsibility as a Member of this Council and a member of the race of which I am proud to belong.

In paragraph 43 of the majority report it is stated:

"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. . . ."

At some time or other there may be universal adult suffrage but surely, as one hon. Member said, let us proceed by a progressive stage. Let us not leap in the dark; it might have disastrous consequences. I would prefer, in this transition period, an effort be made to go step by step with the ultimate idea of attaining the goal which we are all clamouring for—self-government. Are we going to get self-government with the advocacy we are trying to employ? Will we ever be able to achieve such a thing? I say, no; it may have the effect, as stated in the Report, of being one of the surest ways of postponing and defeating its attainment—paragraph 48 of the Report. Caution should be exercised in this matter, and it is no use trying to focus attention on this question when there are certain improvements of a substantial nature in the Report of the majority of the Commission. Your Excellency, some recommendations have been made as to getting people on the electoral roll. There has been some disappointment at one time or another in not having sufficient registration forms made out and circulated among those who are eligible to be enrolled as electors of the several divisions, and the recommendation contained in the Report as to supplying the several Police Stations and Magistrates' Offices with forms of claims to be voters seems to be a desirable one and should be carried out in its entirety, also that with respect to the question of providing candidates with transportation expenses. Paragraph 80 of the Report states:

"We think that the limitation which is now imposed on a candidate's expenditure, which must not exceed a sum of \$500.00, subject to the exceptions allowed under the Regulations—is a sufficient guarantee in itself against any abuse on the part of a candidate by using such methods as commandeering all available hired carriages and conveyances, and so hindering his opponent from obtaining any means of conveying his supporters to the polls. . . ."

I am glad that point has been stressed in this Report, because on account of the inconveniences of travelling a good many voters have been unable from time to time to reach the polling booth. I would like to see more booths placed at convenient places in order to facilitate people to go and register their votes. Under the present law no one is allowed to hire a vehicle in order to convey voters to the polling booth, yet some of these booths are several miles away and people have to travel seven or eight miles to get to the booths in some places. I think arrangements should be made to have more booths so that people would not have to walk far or hire a car to get to the booths, which would mean a great deal of expense, especially in these days when it is so difficult to get from one place to another.

With respect to the qualification of candidates that point was gone into. We have been very generous in our report by making it \$1,000 so as to give everyone with reasonable means an opportunity, if he so desires, to come forward and seek the suffrage of the people. That will also enable retired Government Officials to take part in politics; they will have a sufficient qualification, those getting \$100 per month pension, to come forward and contest seats in the Legislature. Why I lay stress on that point is in view of the fact that a good many Government Officials, who may retire and can give some service the community in this Council, will be eligible for election to represent any particular constituency in this Colony in which they had served Government in some department or other. With the present qualification they are actually debarred in view of the high fixture. Having been accustomed to discipline for some years in the different departments of Government they will be very useful to their colleagues in this Council in elucidating points and making valuable contributions to the debates of this

Council. Certainly some of the most able debaters we have had in this Council have been among those who represented Government. We want by the introduction of that element to raise the tone of the debates and the dignity of this Council. I do say that, because I feel the time has come when we should hold out seats in this Council to these gentlemen so that the new Legislative Council can get the benefit of their valuable services and experience. We will never get these men I speak of unless we make it possible for them to serve. There are a good many of them with the income qualification. That has also been reduced, giving an opportunity to men with brains and some interest in the people to take part in the shaping of the destiny of this Colony. We have been granted a very great privilege under the present Constitution. We have been given an elected majority, and through the B.P.I Government is now giving information to the public on important questions. Government may be criticized, but every opportunity is given to the general public to express their views on important questions that arise.

Your Excellency has just announced the appointment of a Committee with a view to the examination of the resources of the hinterland. Motions have been passed in the past but nothing has been done. I think this is a real serious attempt on your part to do something. We want expansion, but we want population too. There is some fear that if certain works are undertaken they may interfere with existing industries. One has to look at the question from all angles to see what is best to be done. If the interior is made accessible to people living in Georgetown there might be a tendency for them to go there to make a livelihood rather than remain in the City to earn a few shillings per week. Your Excellency is now carrying out what was urged by us some years ago, that we should have as Administrators men who take a long-range view of things,

farsighted men who would not only administer the Government around the precincts of Georgetown and New Amsterdam but would take a wider view of conditions in the Colony. I believe there is a great deal in the hinterland which can make this Colony, and attention should be directed towards opening that part of the country. I am not in a position to say how it should be carried out, but I see there is a tendency on the part of your Government to do something to open up the interior for the development and expansion of the industries of the Colony. I think I have taken up a great deal of time, but the subject is of such importance to this community that one might be pardoned for exceeding the time-limit.

The legal aspect of the question will have to be submitted to those competent to advise in such matters. All we are concerned about is to transmit this Report with any observations this Council might make on it. The Franchise Commissioners were asked to take evidence and advise, but the final decision rests with the Authorities at Home. They are responsible for the amendment of the Constitution, and are the proper authority to instruct this Government to introduce legislation in order to carry out these recommendations. I suppose that equal attention will be paid to the minority report. I feel that there is no necessity at this time for a dissolution of the Council. Those of us who will seek election to the new Council will be asked: "Are you in favour of universal adult suffrage?" In that way we will get the views of the electors. It is not for us to determine that point. It is for the Secretary of State assisted by the Legal Advisers of the Crown. Our views may not be accepted at all. We cannot pronounce judgement on that point; we may be on trial ourselves. If the suggestion of a new electoral roll is carried into effect it is going to take some time. It will be a huge task. I suppose the number of

voters on the new register will be in the vicinity of 60,000. I may state that it is the intention of a great many people to become registered voters. There are very few ladies on the voters' list in my constituency, but some of them have given me their views on this question. Many of them were unaware of the provision in the law which gives them the right to be registered as voters. This debate will have the effect of arousing public interest in the question.

I wish to support the view of the Chairman of the Commission that there is a lamentable lack of public interest in the community. It was not until certain organizations had presented their views to the Commission that some bodies came forward. Why they did not hold meetings I do not know, but I think in one or two cases it was not until the eleventh hour that they forwarded their recommendations to the Commission. A good many people say that they were looking at the economic side of things. Those people will have to be educated along proper lines, and it needs proper leadership of all classes to enable them to take part in the administration of the affairs of the Colony. A good many of them are budding politicians. Meetings will probably be held after the report of this debate is published to ascertain their views on the question. It will arouse an intelligent interest among the young people. On the question of universal adult suffrage I say that we must consider it very carefully before a decision is arrived at. I thank Your Excellency for the patience you have shown in listening to me at least.

Mr. LEE: This question should be put before the Imperial Government as the people of the Colony see it, and not as Members of this Council see it. Your Excellency asked whether this Council has the right to or should pass legislation with respect to the recommendations of the Commission. On that point it is necessary to quote

the British Guiana Constitution Order-in-Council, 1928, Chapter II, section 69, which reads:—

“69. The Governor shall dissolve the Council whenever he shall consider it expedient that the first general election of Members of the Council shall be held, but not later than two years after the Council shall have been first constituted as herein-before provided, and the Governor shall dissolve the Council at the expiration of five years from the date of the publication in the *Gazette* of the return of the first Member elected at the first general election held under the Order, if it shall not have been sooner dissolved; and thereafter shall dissolve the Council at the expiration of five years from the date of the publication in the said *Gazette* of the return of the first Member elected at the last preceding general election, if it shall not have been sooner dissolved.”

I am a law student and I say it is definite from this section that the Council should have been dissolved at the end of five years after the first Member's name was published in the *Gazette*. In view of the war the Imperial Government in its wisdom, and on the advice of Your Excellency and the Executive Council, decided to carry on this Council. I may state here that the majority of the public is not quite satisfied with its continuance. On the other hand the Trade Unions of the Colony desire that no General Election shall take place until the new electoral rolls have been compiled under the new franchise. Your Excellency says that there are two opinions with regard to the dissolution of the Council at the present time. In my humble opinion, if the Council as at present constituted is only a nominated Council in view of the exigences of the war, and if the Trade Unions in this Colony represent public opinion even in the minority, I heartily concur that this Council should not pass legislation to give effect to the recommendations of the Franchise Commission. I would prefer to leave the matter in the hands of yourself and the Secretary of State. I feel that the public would be more satisfied

with any decision arrived at by the Imperial Government on your advice and that of the Secretary of State.

In paragraph 28 (d) of the recommendation of the Royal Commission it is stated:—

“28. (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.”

What do we find? Members of this Council who are Elected Members are supposed to represent the electors, but do not represent the majority of the people taking into account the percentage of the population. They have, however, not deemed it their duty to ask the electors or the public whether they agree with the recommendations of the Commission. They, however, stand in this Council and say they represent and speak on behalf of the majority of the people. It should be forcefully brought to the notice of the Imperial Government and the Secretary of State that the opinion they express in respect of the recommendations of the Franchise Commission are only their opinions formed in their narrow surroundings, and the opinions of their associates. They have tried to convince this Council that they express the opinions of the majority of the people. I respectfully submit that that is not so. It will be found that the various representations made by the Trade Unions, who have held public meetings in several districts, express the views of the majority of their members on

the question of the franchise. They all agree that there should be universal adult suffrage, but some of the Unions suggest that there should be a literacy test while others say there should not be. The hon. Member for North Western District (Mr. Jacob) and I held meetings throughout the Colony, except in the constituency of Georgetown, and that was the opinion expressed to us publicly. Some Members will belittle the work we have done, but at public meetings resolutions must be drafted in advance. We cannot go to the public without having drafted a resolution. Members cannot deny that the resolutions were put to the people in the correct manner by someone in the hall, seconded and put to the vote.

Mr. DeAGUIAR: Does the hon. Member suggest that a meeting of 30 persons in a district of 5,000 people represents the opinion of the majority of the people?

Mr. LEE: Is that a point of order?

Mr. DeAGUIAR: I would like the hon. Member to give the information.

Mr. LEE: The answer is that public meetings were held and the resolutions passed at those meetings were sent to each and every Member of the constituencies concerned who have not held public meetings to counteract those resolutions.

The PRESIDENT: Did you send copies of the resolution to each Member?

Mr. LEE: Yes sir. Copies of the resolutions were sent to each Elected Member of the districts, but they did not hold any public meetings, which it was their duty to do, to counteract those resolutions and show that they did not represent the opinions of their constituencies. That would have been an answer to what we have done. They may belittle it but they cannot get

past the fact that those resolutions were passed, whether by 10 or 15 persons. Let them say that at the meetings there were not sufficiently large gatherings to express an opinion. The Commission held sittings throughout the Colony. The people understood the question put to them and answered it. If they were illiterate they would not have understood the question, and they would not have been cross-examined so rigidly.

Mr. DeAGUIAR: To a point of correction. Does the hon. Member say that when he attended meetings in various parts of the Colony the decision was reached that there should be universal adult suffrage? If he does I challenge the statement and invite his attention to what occurred at a meeting held in his own constituency and the reply that was given to the Commission.

Mr. LEE: Perhaps my friend's conscience is troubling him. I have not said that there was a decision at a meeting of the Commission. I said that evidence was given before the Commission, and the weight of the evidence given is for the guidance of Your Excellency, the Secretary of State and the Imperial Government. The records are there for guidance. What I am submitting is that Members cannot deny that the evidence given under severe and rigid-examination points to the one fact, that the people were conscious of their political rights and privileges, and asked that there should be universal adult suffrage. Now they are saying that the people are not conscious of their political rights and never attended the meetings. Your Excellency has travelled all over this Colony and know the people. I leave you to judge whether, from the evidence taken by the Commission, you would be able to state that one, two or several Members of this Council have expressed the opinion of the majority of the people of the Colony. I am of the

opinion that the people would be quite satisfied with any representation you make on their behalf on this question.

In our minority report we make the following observations with respect to paragraph 42 of the majority report:—

“It is incorrect for the majority of the Members of the Commission to state thus regarding Universal Adult Suffrage.

—“No similar demand has, so far as we are aware, ever been made or evidenced in this Colony.” It should be well known to all the members of the Commission that evidence was received from the B.G. East Indian Association, the B.G. Trades Union Council, the B.G. Labour Union, the Man-Power Citizens' Association, the Guiana United Trade Union, the Islamic Association of British Guiana and others, that public meetings were held in all parts of the Colony in 1941 and 1942, and reported in all sections of the press, demanding Universal Adult Suffrage. The hon. C. R. Jacob and Theo. Lee held twenty-two regularly constituted and widely advertised public meetings throughout all the Constituencies in the Colony, except Georgetown, when the following Resolution was passed unanimously at all the meetings, except in a few instances when a few persons voted against:—

“Whereas the dissatisfaction felt by us and others has had no effect on the administration of the Colony under its present form of Government;

Be it Resolved, that the Official Members of the new Legislative Council, viz:—the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney-General and the Colonial Treasurer should remain as members of the new Council for two periods of the Council which shall not exceed ten years from the date of the constitution of the new Council, thereafter all the members of the Legislative Council should be elected by the people on the basis of Universal Adult Suffrage.”

The said Resolution was forwarded from time to time to the Colonial Secretariat after it was passed in each Constituency for the information and attention of the Government. Further it was widely reported in the Press from time to time and mention was made of it in the Legislative Council by Messrs. Jacob and Lee on several occasions.

It is unfortunate that in referring to Ceylon it was not considered advisable to mention that the “dissatisfaction that is said to exist” there, is in respect of Constitutional reform and Internal Civil Administration—questions outside the terms of reference of this Commission.

In the Journal of the Parliaments of the Empire, Vol. XXIV., No. 3 August 1943, pages 692/699 it is reported that the members of the State Council had decided to proceed to formulate a draft Constitution “to develop their own resources and determine their own way of life free from external control . . . the acquisition of complete control over the public service; the acquisition by the Legislature of full control over finance: and the abolition of all the special powers conferred on the Governor by the present Constitution.”

Further, the dissatisfaction in Ceylon was due to corrupt practices by members of the State Council, and at the request of the State Council the Governor appointed a Bribery Commission which found eight members to be guilty; three Elected Members resigned in order to uphold the dignity and honour of the Council as a whole but denied their guilt; three European Nominated Members resigned on being asked to do so by the Governor; one Member died; and the other decided to contest the findings against him, when an expulsion motion was moved, and after debate it was carried by 36 votes against 8, whereupon the Member left the Chamber.”

Your Excellency, apart from this fact I would like you personally to enquire of the Police about these meetings as there were Police Officers present taking notes. The Police can verify what took place. I am stating these facts so that Your Excellency can see and realize what are the feelings of the people in the matter. Why we did not hold meetings in Georgetown was because the Trade Unions in Georgetown had sent in their recommendations, and Your Excellency can determine whether they express the feelings of the people in Georgetown or not, but we had looked into one or two of those recommendations and found that they agreed with the

decisions of the public meetings held by us.

There is another thing I would like to bring to your attention. If we are to debate or take any active steps in this Council on the recommendations now, what will we say is the feeling of the public? I am positive that if the franchise is made universal adult suffrage many hon. Members will not be returned to this Council. Therefore, our decision will not be an expression of the majority of the public as required by the Royal Commission. This Government wants—and I take it the Imperial Government also wants—the opinion of the majority of the people of this Colony. Why is that so? It is because they contribute towards the administration of this Colony. If something were to happen to British Guiana, who would you call upon to meet the situation, the few Elected Members or the majority of the people? Therefore, are their opinions not to be taken into consideration? Can this Council at the present moment debate impartially the question of adult suffrage or pass any resolution in respect of it? I submit this Council cannot.

With respect to the majority recommendations of the Commission, one hon. Nominated Member has mentioned that several of the members who have signed the report did not attend the meetings of the Commission regularly. It is for Your Excellency and the Imperial Government to judge from the records whether their attendance can give true light and guidance as to the opinion of the majority of the people in British Guiana. But let us take what they say. These members say, "We are reducing the income qualification practically to a nullity—\$10 per month." That is a small recommendation and any adult can earn \$10 per month, but on the other hand you have the West Indian Royal Commission pleading for the fairer sex—that they should have a voice in the Constitution—

and you have it from the records of the Labour Department and the Public Works Department that the payments made to these people, literate or illiterate, are only 32 or 36 cents per day. Can they reconcile their argument that they are helping the people who the Royal Commission urged should have a majority voice? If \$10 per month is so small, then why not make it nothing by giving universal adult suffrage? They have forgotten that prior to this war-time rice was being sold at \$2.00 and \$2.40 per bag. They cannot say, therefore, by hard facts, reason and logic that \$10 per month is an equitable qualification. I respectfully submit that if you weigh their argument as to why they do not want to give the fairer sex the vote and compare it with that of the people, you must come to the conclusion that there should be universal adult suffrage. Your Excellency has seen that people of the servant class are paid \$2, \$2.50 and \$3 per month with fine. Can that amount to \$10 per month in normal times after the war? We, as public men, must bring it to the attention of the Imperial Government that the people want the fairer sex to have representation and, therefore, \$10 per month income qualification is too high and that they are demanding universal adult suffrage.

When it comes to the question of literacy, Your Excellency and the Imperial Government must be the judge as to whether these people should be given that freedom or not. I, however, respectfully submit that you should and it is your duty to do so. If you have compulsory education, whose lack of foresight and whose responsibility it is for restricting that compulsory education? Is it the people's fault that they did not educate their children? Is it Government's responsibility that they are not educated? Is it Government's fault that the people on the several estates are not provided with the reasonable means to be as they want and to be able to read a simple sentence in English? If you feel, and

this Government and the Secretary of State feel, that it is not their fault then you can say whether universal adult suffrage should be granted with a literacy test or otherwise. But Your Excellency and this Government say that you want the people to be interested in and to have knowledge and understanding of the Constitution of the country. You have set up a department—the Bureau of Publicity and Information—and also radio centres in the country districts. I believe that at some future date, which I hope is not far distant, Government will subsidize these radio centres in order to teach the people the simple sentences in English that the majority of members of the Commission desire. On the one hand you have provided that a man, although illiterate, can be a voter in the village districts on a property qualification, but must be literate to be a voter for the Legislative Council. Although you say he contributes towards village affairs, and therefore should have a voice in village affairs, yet he is not to be permitted to do so in Government affairs towards which he also contributes. Some of these people were brought into this country and had been granted the privilege of voting for several years prior to now, and it is now being sought to take away that privilege though they can read and write in their own language.

The PRESIDENT: I think that point has been disposed of. There is no question of taking away that privilege.

Mr. LEE: It is there in the recommendations and I am expressing the people's opinion in case any question is asked you about it. They say, "I have property and pay income tax; I am a worker and have no criminal record against me; I should be permitted to have a vote." You want to train the people as to a sense of their responsibility. Your Excellency, hon. Members of this Council know and have agreed that you have at all times a reserve power and the power to dis-

solve this Council. If illiterate men are returned to this Council—men who cannot stand up and defend their cause—you can put in the Constitution a clause whereby a certain percentage of the voters of a constituency can call upon the Member to resign his seat. If this Council and the public want protection it can be given. A law can be introduced whereby this can be done and no Member will be able to play with the people's rights in this Council. The public has not got that right now to call on them to resign except from a moral point of view. Members play with the public's rights and privileges here. I am not saying they have done that but that they may do that (laughter). When it is said that the public is not taking any political interest I would like to recall hon. Members' memory to the time of the Popular Party when each and every one of the constituencies of this Colony knew what was happening and who to support. The Popular Party came into this Council at a time when things were not well off. At the present moment we can have a united Elected representation and thereby this Colony and Your Excellency's work will progress by leaps and bounds. When some Members are asked to attend a meeting of the Electives what happens? Some attend and some do not. Where would some get a newspaper to put the people's views in print? Your Excellency knows what is the public's opinion and I ask that you convey it to His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The Village Districts meet annually in a Chairmen's Conference, but it was the intention of the Government to create County Councils from the several Village Districts and to assist the Country Districts to become Village Districts by educating the people as much as possible in village administration. Where is the freedom, the political advancement of those who say they express the political opinion of the

public? The idea was vetoed by certain people purposely because it does not serve certain people's ends. Are we going to allow the same thing to occur when we ask to be given an opportunity to advance our political rights and privileges? Several of us think we are good when we are bad. The fact remains that the people elected to this Council will be expressing the opinion of the majority of the people of the Colony, and that is what I humbly ask they be allowed to express by the election of their representatives. Your Excellency, you do not know why there are not more public spirited men sitting around this Council. It is because they are married to their jobs and cannot express their opinion freely. If they were able to obtain something for their upkeep from the public they would be here elected by the public and expressing the true and correct opinion of the majority of the inhabitants of the Colony. Certain people are willing to assist but in every direction they have been crushed.

I feel there should be no question of race in the political aspiration or view of any person who comes forward to serve the people, and the people are learning that. They are hoping that men will come forward to assist them—men whose integrity can be vouched for and who will put forward their opinions fearlessly in this Council. Your Excellency, I do appeal to you. They have personally expressed their views to you and also by correspondence; they are ready to come forward and assist this Government in the advancement which is being made now. Why should the other races feel or have any qualms against the East Indians because they form 42 per cent. of the population? I can tell you as a certainty that though the East Indians form 42 per cent. of the population, at voting time very few East Indians are found going to the polls. That is true wherever you go throughout this Colony.

On the other hand, you find the African women going to the polls and registering their votes. Why should the other nationalities have any qualms about the East Indians' 42 per cent.? If compulsory voting is introduced into the Colony that will deter many from registering because of the penalty attached to a voter not exercising his vote. He must exercise it when the time comes, and the Council and the public are protected from anyone seeking election as there is attached a penalty for not securing a certain number of votes at the poll. Do you think that anyone will attempt to seek nomination for election to this Council knowing that there are penalties attached? Your Excellency through your Grow More Food Campaign advocated that loans be granted on crops without any security, but there is a penalty attached. If they do not take that padi to a registered mill they will be punished. They have done nothing wrong in getting the loans, but it is what they have done with the loans that matters. If those things are done they would be educated, and as time goes on it could be taken off. If Members would be honest they would admit that when a man approaches them with a complaint they generally know whether he has a vote or not. If he is not a voter he is very often turned away and has to approach other people. That is not the right spirit.

I desire also to suggest that Government might find it convenient to provide polling stations at convenient spots and as many as possible. It is the duty of Government to provide conveniences for voters.

As regards the question of the identification of candidates by illiterate voters, provision has been made in other parts of the world. What is there to prevent an illiterate voter from publicly intimating to the Returning Officer in the presence of the agents of the candidates that he desires to vote for a certain candidate? It is

done in village elections. If the objection to that method is that there would be no secrecy of the ballot, why can't the photographs of the candidates be put up at the polling booths? Illiterates would be able to vote by means of photographs, colours and other methods. There could be no mistake because the agents would direct the voter how to identify his candidate. The question of identification cannot be urged as a ground for refusing illiterates the right to vote.

Paragraph 96 of the majority report states:—

"96. As an instance of the limited knowledge that prevails of the Constitution of the Colony, no less a body than the Chamber of Commerce of Georgetown in its memorandum has suggested that women should be allowed to register their votes. This right has been possessed by them since the change of the Constitution in the year 1928; and yet the enjoyment of this privilege by women does not appear to have become known to so important a section as the principal commercial body of the Colony, and even, generally speaking, to members of the sex themselves."

This memorandum by the Chamber of Commerce was sent in towards the close of the proceedings of the Commission. This is a red herring which has been drawn across the trail in order to divert attention from the true evidence given before the Commission. I cannot understand how an intelligent body like the Chamber of Commerce could submit a memorandum prepared by a Committee without having it approved by the whole Chamber. It is for Your Excellency to draw your own conclusion.

Mr. DeAGUIAR: Like many other memoranda submitted by several other organizations in the Colony which were prepared by one individual and not submitted to the rest.

Mr. LEE: My friend tries to belittle the idea, but I am submitting to Your Excellency for the information of

the Secretary of State and the Imperial Government that the Chamber of Commerce waited until the last moment when they knew that the case was strong against them, and tried by that means to divert attention. Can the public honestly believe that intelligent people like the members of the Chamber of Commerce did not know that women have the right to vote? Yet they are clamouring for representation in the Executive and Legislative Councils. I am submitting that this is only put here for the purpose of drawing a red herring across the trail in order to divert attention from what was given in evidence before the Commission.

I also wish to dissociate myself from the statement made by the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Edun, in paragraph 6 of his minority report in which he says—

"I do not wish to bring in recriminations against anybody as regards illiteracy among the East Indian population, which is unfortunate indeed, but having found that these same East Indians form the bulk—98 per cent.—of the producing element of the inhabitants of British Guiana, I consider that their claim to political rights cannot be refuted."

I do not think the hon. Member was serious in saying that East Indians form 98 per cent. of the producing element of the Colony. I think the percentage is wrong.

Mr. EDUN: To a point of explanation. In the absence of any other figures I maintain that my figures are correct.

Mr. LEE: The hon. Member can maintain that his figures are correct but I am expressing an opinion on what I know, and what I say is correct.

If the goal of the West Indies and British Guiana is federation—and I believe that opinion in England, the United States and Canada is towards that goal—the recommendations of the Royal Commission distinctly state:—

"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."

The point is that there should be closer connection between the Colonies with respect to the question of universal adult suffrage. If Jamaica, without a Franchise Commission, has been granted universal adult suffrage—and there is no doubt that at one time the percentage of illiteracy in Jamaica was greater than that of British Guiana—this Colony has a greater claim to it. In our minority report it is stated:—

"The following Resolution which reaffirms Resolutions previously passed was unanimously carried at the Georgetown Town Hall on Monday, 28th February, 1944, by the B.G. and West Indies Labour Conference:—

"That this Conference of Labour Organisations in the Caribbean, assembled this 28th day of February, 1944, at Georgetown, British Guiana, resolves that it is in favour and demands the establishment of a Political Federation of the West Indies (including British Guiana and British Honduras) with self-government based on recommendations made by each Colony to the Royal Commission, and that such establishment (without the literacy test)."

If we are going to join hands and work in harmony are we going to say that the people of one Colony are not as intelligent as those of another? I think that on the basis of universal adult suffrage we should lay the foundation for closer union. Jamaica did not request universal adult suffrage but got it. There is universal adult suffrage in Ceylon where it has worked well, and it can work well in British Guiana.

I would also like to dissociate myself from the view expressed by the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. J. A. Luckhoo, that Ministers of Religion

should not be eligible for election to this Council. Ministers of Religion know the needs and sufferings of the people of the Colony and in this Council they would be able to bring the needs of the people to the attention of Government more forcefully than in private. I think that privilege should be given to them. I agree that their work is more spiritual, but they also have to look after the material welfare of the people. We have advanced as far as that. Why shouldn't we give ministers that privilege?

With respect to the alterations of the boundaries of the Electoral Districts, Members know that I am totally in favour of an Elected Council. I am not in favour of the nomination of Members to this Council as Government has seen fit to do from time to time. I am totally in favour of an Elected Council with a Speaker. I go further: I think the Executive Council should be composed of Your Excellency as President, five Nominated Members from various sections of the community, and five Elected Members chosen by their colleagues in this Council, with the reservation that any Member of this Council can move for the removal of an Elected Member in the Executive Council, and if the motion is carried that Member should be removed. That would be a form of protection to this Council and the Elected Members, so that if any Elected Member in the Executive Council does not play the game he can be removed by a decision of his colleagues in this Council arrived at *in camera* or in public.

The PRESIDENT: This has not very much to do with franchise. It is more a matter of the Constitution.

Mr. LEE: I am coming to that. Your Excellency will observe from the list of the various Electoral Districts given in the minority report that the hon. Member for Eastern Berbice (Mr. E. A. Luckhoo) represents a district

with the huge population of 54,779 people with 930 registered voters. In my opinion, that constituency can be divided in the interest of the people, and as far as Mr. Jacob and I know, a division is requested by the people.

Your Excellency is thinking of the development of the interior. That is my pet subject, and I do not mind saying that if you press for a loan of £20,000,000 for the development of the interior it is possible that you will get the support of certain people in England. The development of the interior would certainly relieve the burden of taxation on the coastlands, and in that event the interior would require elected representation. I do not make any reflection on my friend the hon. Nominated Member on my right (Mr. Roth). I do not think that the interior should be separated from the coastlands of the Colony. If the Imperial Government decides to develop it and desires a guarantee that the large expenditure of money should be under Your Excellency's personal supervision, and in view of the fact that the development programme would have to be spread over a number of years, I think the people of the Colony would certainly agree to a separation of the interior from the rest of the Colony during that period. That is my humble opinion and not that of the public. The development of the interior would not only provide more employment for the people of the Colony but would result in an influx of population. There would be need for more than one constituency in the interior. At present it is left entirely to Your Excellency. I am asking that a Commission be set up immediately in order to decide whether there should be a wholly Elected Council with several constituencies all over the Colony. It is for the benefit of the public that I make these suggestions.

If adult suffrage is introduced in this Colony we will require an entirely new register of voters. I feel that the public is politically conscious and peo-

ple will be quite anxious to re-register. Some hon. Member referred to a census. I am in entire agreement, but are we going to postpone the General Elections for the purpose of taking a census? The last census took over a year, and although a census would give us the true information as regards illiteracy I do not think we should worry about a literacy test if the Imperial Government decides to grant us universal adult suffrage. We have the B.P.I. and we can use the methods adopted in other countries. A census is requisite in order to ascertain the density of population for the purpose of the distribution of elected seats. In that respect I agree that a census is necessary, but it should not delay the introduction of universal adult suffrage in this Colony.

I sincerely hope I have expressed the views of the public as far as I know them, and that Your Excellency will convey them to the Secretary of State who will have the final say in shaping the destiny of this Colony.

Mr. GONSALVES: A few days ago I availed myself of the opportunity of speaking over the radio with reference to the Legislative Council and its Members, and among the Members I referred to was the hon. Member for New Amsterdam (Mr. Woolford) of whose early days of electioneering I have some recollection. At his first election he was described as "The Colt." I termed him the "stylish Colt." Those of us who have known him all these years and have followed his political career know the style he possessed in those days. Although he may not have the same style, he is still an able and attractive speaker and I still regard him as a useful Member. He certainly has shown that he still maintains the style of speech which he possessed in those early days. Anyone who attended the political meetings he held will know that a good many of the votes he secured were influenced by

the speeches he made, not speeches for the purpose of catching votes but founded on good judgement and reasoning when delivered. That, I maintain, still exists today. Those of us who listened to him yesterday felt—at least I felt—that perhaps in those early days he would have employed a little more flowery language. There was, however, at least eighty per cent. of what he did in the early days. When he was chosen as Chairman of the Commission, it was done for a very good purpose and, I am sure, that purpose has been achieved. He stated in the course of his speech yesterday that there were certain questions which ought to be answered in connection with this report. I have made a note of them and I propose to answer them myself.

With regard to the speeches which have been made, I had started to make some notes of what I might deal with, but I must confess that after a time it was getting a little confusing and I thought it better to rely on my memory. I will begin by referring to some of the remarks made by the last speaker who has just taken his seat. He dealt with several matters in connection with the report. As regards the question of the constitution of the new Executive Council, I was wondering if it is to be five Nominated Members and five Elected Members when he favours the idea of no Nominated Members on the Legislative Council. It seems to me he should stand on one side or the other, definitely—a Legislative Council and an Executive Council of all Elected Members, or partly elected and partly nominated. When he was finished he left me no wiser as to the constitution of the Legislative Council or Executive Council he desired.

Mr. LEE: To a point of correction on that point!

The PRESIDENT: That has nothing to do with franchise, but you may proceed.

Mr. LEE: I was thinking of the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney-General and the Colonial Treasurer being on the Executive Council as advisers of Government and two other Members obtained by Government from other interests.

Mr. GONSALVES: I do not intend to pursue that subject, as I agree it is not a question of franchise. The hon. Member has not explained it himself. With regard to the question of voting, I always thought the hon. Member was a strong advocate of voting by ballot. Why should he quote the Village Councils where a man will go and say I want to vote for So-and-So. If his idea or his Party's idea is to press for a ballot it should be a ballot and not something else. If it is to vote by colours, I am curious to know how it is going to be done—whether there is going to be secrecy. The Returning Officer has to see the ballot paper and under the law each candidate has the right to have an agent at the station. Therefore, the agents are going to see what paper is placed in the box in the case of voting by colours and there will be no secrecy about it.

The PRESIDENT: What about photographs? I have seen some photographs of Members of Council by which they are completely unrecognizable.

Mr. GONSALVES: I had made a note here about that. The photograph which was published last Sunday of me could not give me one vote because no one would have thought it was I.

Mr. LEE: Perhaps the hon. Member has not read the Constitution of Ceylon.

Mr. GONSALVES: Not only my photograph but that of the hon. Member who advocated it. His electorate will not recognize him and will therefore vote for the other man who has a better presentation. I think it would

have been better if he had left photographs alone, as that would not help him. With regard to the question of meetings, he spoke about attending meetings in the different districts where resolutions were passed and he endeavoured with the hope of supporting what he was saying and justifying what happened at those meetings to show that they had the protection of the Police. He stated that the Police attended the meetings and took notes of what was said. In other words, the meetings were under the supervision and scrutiny of the Police. That rather suggests that there must be some reason for anticipating something, otherwise the Police would not have been sent there. On the face of it the meetings could not have been proper and evidently started off with the anticipation that something was going to happen.

Mr. LEE: Does not the hon. Member know that at any public meeting the Police is always in attendance?

The PRESIDENT: You did not ask for protection?

Mr. LEE: No.

Mr. GONSALVES: Speaking as a lawyer—and my friend claims to be a lawyer—it is hardly necessary to stress something that is not essential. There was no need to say the Police attended the meetings and made notes, because that was not relevant and necessary for the purpose of the point advanced. Therefore, when he introduced the question of the Police it showed there was something wrong with those meetings and they wanted the Police to be there.

Mr. LEE: I want to correct that. I said Your Excellency can verify from the Police notes what occurred at those meetings. What I was showing was that the Police had notes of the several meetings and Your Excellency could verify my statement.

Mr. GONSALVES: With regard to the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Edun, I was disappointed when he finished his speech and did not use the last two lines of his memorandum. If I am allowed I will quote them with the paraphrase which is appropriate.

The lines are—

"We—all of us—ought to take great care in this report not to be dubbed as "Old Fogies and Moribund Diehards"—who wish to retard the march to Excelsior of our good country."

I really thought he should have substituted the word "Council" for the word "report". I know those are his sentiments from his speeches made from time to time and I think it would have been a good finish to his speech had he used those lines. As to the report itself there are certain features I would like to refer to.

Paragraph 76 and 77: The point which had been raised in connection with paragraph 77 has been cleared. I did think it was inconsistent after reading it. The hon. Member for New Amsterdam has asked that paragraph 76 be regarded as not being part of the report. On the question of adult suffrage, I think the majority opinion as expressed here is not against adult suffrage, but that it should be at a postponed date. When hon. Members expressed strong feelings against the majority they were not justified in doing so because the majority did not say they were against adult suffrage; they agreed up to a point and differed as to the date when it should come into effect. On the question of qualifications I think the recommendations by the majority are not difficult and unreasonable. They are to my mind for the moment, until we can launch out into adult suffrage, reasonable. As regards the qualifications of Members of the Council, I find it difficult to follow certain Members because while they stress adult suffrage and advocate

that a literacy test be not enforced, I do not quite reconcile that with their examine the possibilities of teaching the recommendation when it comes to representation in the Legislative Council. They state that to be a Member of the Legislative Council you should have a certain qualification. The majority and minority agreed as regards the income and property qualifications. But what is not quite clear to me is this: At paragraph 58 of the report it is stated that the present qualification of Elected Members is regulated by Article 21, of the Order-in-Council, 1928, which provides that—

“No person shall be qualified to be elected a Member of the Council, or having been elected, to sit or vote in Council who—

- (1) is not of the male sex;
- (2) is not entitled to vote at an election of a Member of the Council;
- (3) is a Minister of Religion;
- (4) is the holder of an office of emolument under the Crown or under the Government of the Colony;

and who does not possess in the Colony one of the following qualifications, namely:—

- (a) Receipt of a clear annual income of not less than two thousand and four hundred dollars; or
- (b) Possession in his own right of immovable property of the value of not less than five thousand dollars over and above the amount of any mortgage; or
- (c) Ownership, under a lease for twenty-one years or upwards of any house or house and land the rental whereof is not less than twelve hundred dollars.”

They have adopted that but when we come to the question as to who will be entitled to exercise the vote, they say it must be a person who can read and write any language. I foresee some difficulty in having around this Council table a person who has been elected and who cannot speak English but can speak his own language, without there being an interpreter in this Council to translate what he has said for the bene-

fit of other Members. I do not think when the minority members subscribed to that they had in mind such a state of things. If their idea is that a voter should not necessarily be able to speak English but any other language, then for him to be entitled to be elected to the Council he must be a person able to speak English. They find themselves in difficulty to understand that, and there is nothing that the hon. Member has put forward to this Council to refute that.

Mr. JACOB: May I rise to a point of correction! Under the Constitution of Ceylon you have persons who can only read English, or Tamil, or Singhalese and who are all voters, and the colour test is used in voting.

Mr. EDUN: The minority report, as I see it, provides that one of the qualifications for membership of the Council is that he or she can read and write the English language.

Mr. GONSALVES: If any other part has no substance that part quoted has some substance. In regard to the interpolation of the hon. Member for North-Western District, I think the hon. Member for Essequibo River (Mr. Lee) referred to Paragraph 28 (d) of the Royal Commission's Recommendations which says:—

“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.”

It is therefore left to the people of the Colonies to decide what they feel they should have in regard to their own country. Consequently, what may have been done in Ceylon or anywhere else, which by the way has not been successful, must not necessarily be accepted by us. I cannot understand, and it seems so inconsistent to hear at one time "We want to think for ourselves, to speak for ourselves, to have our own views" and at another time "It is done in Ceylon and why not here," in spite of our reading of the non-success of these proposals in another place. On the question of the female sex having a voice in the Legislative Council, I am glad to find that the majority report—and I think the other reports agree too—recommends that the female sex should be allowed to be represented in this Council. I am glad to see once more that something which has been done and exists in the Town Council is being accepted by the Legislative Council. In the Town Council women are not only eligible as voters but to sit on that Body. Therefore, in making that recommendation here I am glad to find the Town Council being unconsciously used as an example for the purpose of this recommendation. On the question of franchise, I omitted to mention whether adult suffrage should be taken now or not. The hon. Member for Essequibo River made reference to Trade Unions, but I observed that this report is signed by a member who is President of the Trades Union Council and Vice-President of the British Guiana and West Indies Labour Union Congress.

Mr. JACOB: When the report was signed he was not President of the Council. It is a new body of which he is President now.

Mr. GONSALVES: I think the honourable Member would be correct in saying that when he signed this report he was a member of this Com-

mission, had attended the meetings, had heard the evidence of the different witnesses, had formed his own conclusion and was only waiting for the day to put his signature to the report. If that is so, the signature confirms the opinion of one who at that time was a member of the Trades Union Council and a representative of the Trade Unions in this Colony. He cannot get behind that.

Mr. JACOB: I would like to refer the honourable Member to Appendix A page 16 where he will see those who were the representatives of the Unions.

Mr. GONSALVES: I do not propose to bother with interjections made on points which carry the matter no further than what I have stated. I know that I have stated what is a true fact. With regard to the questions which have been put, to my mind if they had been answered by the individual Members who had spoken it might have shortened to some extent the debate which has taken place, because a good deal of it has come from not answering the real questions which had been put. I do not propose to take up too much time because so much has been said about franchise, and the report which is before us this afternoon is so full that I hardly think much more discussion is needed. Some of the members who signed the report did not attend the meetings of the Commission regularly. The questions given I have noted. They are—

- “1. What are the necessary steps to be taken?
2. Who are empowered by constitutional practice to take those steps or to determine what action should be taken?
3. Is this Council authorized to advise on the subjects?”

It seems that the answers to these questions ought to be given by the Law Officers of this Government or His Majesty's Government. I cannot see that this Council can advise on that matter.

"4. If not, should this Council be dissolved and a general election follow immediately?"

My answer is, "Following the recommendations in this report, whether by the majority altogether or amended by the minority, whatever is done that question should be settled first, and when the new Register has been prepared then an election may be held with the Legislature having a new Council under the new franchise."

"5. Would those not now on the register but who may be said to be tolerably certain to be affected be entitled to have a voice in making or shaping these decisions?"

My answer is "Yes, that ought to be."

"6. Does not this entail a new electoral register?"

My answer is "It necessarily follows that there must be a new register."

"7. Is this register to be compiled on the basis of the extended or widened franchise as recommended by the majority report?"

My answer is "Yes; it must be compiled on the basis of an extended and widened franchise such as has been suggested." Those are my answers to the questions put by the hon. mover. Your Excellency had intimated that Members who had spoken had not replied to those questions, and I rather gathered that you much preferred to have the views of Members on any particular point put to them. Those are my answers without any compromise.

The hon. Member wants to know whether the Legislative Council is qualified to make recommendations regarding the change of the Constitution. I think this Council is qualified to make any changes. At least if it cannot do so itself it can put

up recommendations for that purpose. I think that if the idea is to give the Council wider powers it should have some voice in regard to any change that may take place. As a matter of fact, the recent changes with regard to the removal of Official Members were made, if not directly by this Council, at least with the sanction of the Council.

The next question is the necessity of consulting the electors. My view is that I do not think it is necessary at this stage. The question of the franchise has been discussed for quite a long time—over two years—and the electors have had every opportunity to express their views. In fact, they have had representation on the Commission. Eleven Members of this Council were members of the Commission, and if the people in the districts which those Members represent have not given their representatives a direct mandate, or have not seen fit to hold meetings of their own in order to give them directions, I cannot see that at this stage it is necessary to consult them. I take it that the electors must have great confidence in their representatives in view of the fact that they left it to them to express their views and to come to decisions on this important matter.

The last question asked by the hon. Member was: If those factors were to be considered, was a new register to be prepared? My answer is "Yes." The question of time does not affect the matter very much, because in any case the law would have to be amended, and if there is this clamour for greater representation those people would have an opportunity to exercise the franchise, which it has been stressed they should have. Therefore, the time spent in preparing the new register would be justified. I cannot agree that it would be the correct thing to dissolve this Council now and let the present register be used for the purpose of deciding whether we should have a new franchise. What are we to go back to the electorate for? **To**

ask them whether they do not want the franchise changed any more? I would suggest to the hon. Members who are so very keen on the question of the franchise to accept the changes recommended. They are not unfavourable. They do not meet the wishes of the minority, but in my opinion they represent a gradual step towards what the minority hope to get eventually. If we get an adverse decision on the question it will mean that the question of changing the franchise will be postponed. Therefore, my view is that the changes recommended might well be accepted.

Those, sir, are my views on the questions which have been put by the hon. mover, and I feel that those are the views which should be put forward. If it were possible to get from Members answers *seriatim* to the questions put to us, I think it would be of great assistance to Your Excellency.

Mr. CRITCHLOW: I too join in congratulating the hon. Member for New Amsterdam (Mr. Woolford) on his excellent work as Chairman of the Franchise Commission. We all regret very much that when the hon. Member speaks we sometimes do not hear him. I do hope that Government will do something about that, as is done in other countries where it is made possible for even the spectators to hear the speeches of legislators. That is one reason why members of the public do not attend the meetings of this Council. Even the representatives of the Press do not hear the hon. Member sometimes. I hope that something will be done to remedy the situation. I would also suggest that a time-limit be put on speeches. (laughter).

With regard to the question of universal adult suffrage I would inform this Council that at the time of my visit to the British Commonwealth Labour Conference held in London 1925, the B.G. Labour Union, on behalf of the workers of this Colony, strongly advocated the introduction of universal

adult suffrage, but it was defeated. Our reason for advocating, universal adult suffrage at that time was because at elections in this Colony some of the candidates spent a lot of money on drinks and the bribing of voters. As the number of voters was small we advocated the introduction of universal adult suffrage with a view to preventing bribery of the small man as much as possible. At that time, it was thought that an extension of the franchise would increase the number of voters and help to reduce the practice of bribery and corruption. It was not a question of race. I mention that because at that time I felt that certain minorities should also be represented. At that Conference, I mentioned that at that time the Europeans had 563 votes, the Portuguese 482, the Chinese 96, the Blacks 3,396 and the East Indians 428, although they numbered 125,000 in a total population of 313,000 at that time. I also said that we had really no question of colour. Our complaint was not against either white or black but in regard to the qualification.

Since then, we have found out that many people believe that if we were granted universal adult suffrage the East Indians would out-vote us in this Council. Even in England I was asked if I was not afraid that some section of the population would out-vote the others and put in whom they liked. My reply to that at the time was "No," because it was not so much a colour question, which I do not like. I believe in human beings whether they are white, black or red. Therefore, I feel that if the Commission recommends that we should reach universal adult suffrage by stages, and that at present we should have a reduction of the franchise, I certainly agree with that, because we cannot get all we ask for at once. We must accept what we are given and come back again. For that reason I am supporting the report of the Commission. I see now that it is really a dangerous thing to allow certain people to exercise the franchise

and permit other people to tell them any kind of thing and fool them. ("Hear, hear.") We have some Members of this Council who say they represent Labour. Perhaps that is true, but I do not know how they agreed to a reduction of the franchise to \$10 per month for a voter while to become a Member of the Council a person must earn \$100 per month. How many of us, including myself, would be able to earn \$100 per month?

Mr. LEE: I take it that the views being expressed by the hon. Member are those submitted by his Union to the Commission. If not, he should certainly say whether they are in contradiction of those submitted by his Union.

Mr. CRITCHLOW: I think I have made it quite clear. If views are expressed by my Union or myself at any time and somebody can convince me that they are wrong, does the hon. Member suggest that I cannot change them? Here is one of my Labour comrades who I am quite sure made a mistake in his minority report. He was asked by the hon. Member to withdraw it, and if he had studied it he would have withdrawn it. Does he really mean to suggest that only 2 per cent. of the other races are producers in this Colony? At the Bauxite Co., for instance, the majority of the producers are of races other than East Indians. In the gold, balata, timber and other industries he will find that the position is the same. I am appealing to him to admit that it is a mistake. If he cannot change his views when he knows that he has made a mistake it would have been better if he was not born (laughter). I can go on a bit longer. I can prove that certain Nominated Members agreed that the workers should have representation. Now I am hearing that they do not like this and that. If I did not like to be a Nominated Member I would have told the Governor so plainly and I would not have accepted nomination.

I wish to quote a statement in the Report of the Fourth Congress of the Labour and Socialist International held at Vienna in 1931. It says:—

"The problems of the workers in British Guiana were discussed at the Third British Commonwealth Labour Conference which was held in London from the 21st to 25th July, 1930. H. Critchlow, Secretary of the British Guiana Labour Union, impressed upon the Conference the need for social services in British Guiana."

Mr. JACOB: To a point of order. May I enquire from what book the hon. Member is reading?

The PRESIDENT: He quoted the book.

Mr. CRITCHLOW: It is a note on the British Commonwealth Labour Conference held in 1930. It goes on to state:—

"They had attempted without success since 1921 to obtain a scheme of workmen's compensation. They also desired an eight-hour day, the prohibition of child labour, and non-contributory old age pensions. The British Government in 1926 categorically rejected all these proposals. He suggested that one of the first measures of reform should be the extension of the franchise."

"This was not the first time that this latter proposal had been brought up. At a meeting of the British Guiana Labour Union on the 11th December, 1929, a unanimous resolution was carried requesting the support of the British Labour Party and Trades Union Congress to secure Universal Suffrage for the Colony. Another resolution was also unanimously adopted drawing the attention of the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Lord Passfield) to the fact that not even one of the five Nominated Members of the Legislative Council was a person identified with Labour, and urging that Labour should be adequately represented."

That shows how long we have been fighting for these things. With regard to universal adult suffrage, if the majority of the Franchise Commission feel that we should not get it now I say rather than have nothing at all we

should take what we can get. My Union made the request before any of the others. I still feel that we should have universal adult suffrage, but if the Commission say that we cannot get it now, we must take what we can get. In conclusion, I hope that Your Excellency will do your best for this Colony on your visit to England.

Mr. EDUN: There may be some misapprehension about the 98 per cent. mentioned in my minority report. What is meant is 98 per cent. of the agricultural producers.

Mr. JACKSON: I have listened with very great interest and with very great patience to some of the speeches delivered here yesterday and today, and I am inclined to think that I should say very little this afternoon, because many of the points advanced by those who are in favour of the majority report of the Commission have been already disposed of. But I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without making reference, as I did on a previous occasion, to the disgusting allusion that is made with respect to the cause of illiteracy among the East Indian population. In this Council attempts are always made to blame the Government for that state of affairs, but it has been stated over and over again that the absence of a literary education among the elder East Indians in this Colony was due to the leaders of East Indian thought in those days. Africans who were brought from their country without their will and existed here in a state of bondage, when liberated decided, for reasons best known to themselves, to educate their children. They did their best to put their children on a firm footing educationally. They felt, from what they had experienced themselves, that to work in the fields was a disgrace, and they wanted to save their children from that. We cannot blame them for taking that view. The East Indians on the

other hand, coming from their country in a state of indenture, felt that they should secure wealth, and so father worked, mother worked and children worked. Perhaps that is the reason why on the side we have wealth, and on the African side we have education.

It has been stated here that the estate proprietors did not do their duty regarding the East Indians and education. While there may not have been schools on every sugar estate I know as a matter of fact—I am speaking from experience—that on some of the estates schools were provided for the benefit of the East Indian children. In the school with which I was connected, sandwiched as it was between two sugar estates, arrangements were made for the training of the East Indian children. While they worked in the creole gang to the satisfaction of their parents for what they brought in, they were given two hours' instruction from 8 to 10 in the morning, and the estate paid a sum of money for their education. It was my duty then to attend at 8 o'clock and teach those children, and after they had left I attended to my duties in respect of the rest of the children in the school. I know as a matter of fact that while the East Indians arranged to send their boys to school they kept the girls away for racial consideration, and it was on that account, after representations had been made by the East Indians themselves, that the Swettenham Circular was issued. Can we blame the Government or the estate authorities for what was done by the East Indians themselves at that time? Later on when the young East Indians began to take to education, and when their parents saw the necessity of sending them to school, the boys attended and did very good work, and today the East Indian population, so far as the young men are concerned, and a fair proportion of the women, have no cause for regret because they can hold their own with the other races in the Colony.

I deprecate the idea that has always prevailed among certain Members of this Council of attaching blame to the Government, and incidentally to the planters, for the state of affairs that obtains at the present time among the elder East Indians. If those people had adopted the policy of the other race to which I have referred, there would not have been such a great deal of illiteracy among the elder East Indians, but it was a matter of wealth on the one hand and education on the other. That is the reason, I presume, why the one race is rich and the other poor in everything except education.

With respect to the remarks made by the hon. Member on my right (Mr. Jacob) as to the need for adult suffrage I sympathise with him greatly. Perhaps he is honest in his intentions, but I challenge the assertion that the need is Colony wide. He took objection to the remark that some of the people who gave evidence before the Franchise Commission did not know really what adult suffrage meant. I am here to say that the remarks contained in the majority report are absolutely correct, and I defy any member of the Commission to say that so far as I was concerned I did not ask questions with respect to universal adult suffrage which were not answered correctly by some of the persons who gave evidence and some of the societies. So that the paragraph which refers to that is absolutely correct.

Reference was also made by the hon. Member to what he considered a necessity—that there should be no qualification for election to the Legislative Council. That, in my opinion, is one of the wildest statements that could be made in a Council of this kind at the present time. I take it that what he meant was that the most illiterate, the most unlearned, the most wicked of men and women should be admitted to this august Council. I was terribly surprised that such a remark should

come from him, but perhaps I am in a general way accepting the fact of those who got on the list without any

My hon. friend, the Member for Essequibo River (Mr. Lee) referred to the taking of photographs for the purpose of identifying individual candidates seeking election. It was then remarked that sometimes a man could not recognize his own photograph when seen in the Press and otherwise. Men are not only deceived by photographs but by objects before them, and in that connection may I refer to an incident which occurred on the West Coast of Demerara at a time when prisoners were made to walk?

Mr. EDUN: Photographs have been accepted in all civilized countries as the most accurate method of identification.

Mr. JACKSON: I prefer to take no notice of that remark. I was referring to an incident that occurred some years ago on the West Coast when convicted persons were being escorted to the Vreed-en-Hoop Police station, a distance of about 7 miles. A policeman was taking a Chinaman to the station when he expressed the desire to attend to a call of nature. The policeman allowed him to go aside and never saw the Chinaman again. The policeman was in a fix but on the way he met another Chinese and held him. The man protested but the policeman said "You have to go, a 'Chinee' is a 'Chinee,'" (Laughter). If we have to depend upon photographs I think we would go wrong. I myself have a grouse against a certain newspaper for presenting what they called my photograph, but in which I could hardly recognize myself. So far as that suggestion is concerned, we may let it go by.

At this stage the debate was adjourned until Tuesday, July 11, at 12 noon.