

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FRIDAY, 11th JULY, 1947.

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

PRESENT :

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hon. Peer Bacchus (Western Berbice).

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

The Hon. T. Lee (Essequibo River).

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

The Hon. V. Roth (Nominated).

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

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

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

The Clerk read prayers.

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 10th July, 1947, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

PAPERS LAID

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Mr. W. L. Heape) laid on the table the following documents :—

The Report of the Joint Colonial Fund for the year 1946.

The Report of the Bureau of Publicity and information for the year 1946.

GOVERNMENT NOTICE

TAX (AMENDMENT NO. 2) BILL, 1947.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Mr. F. W. Holder) : I beg to give notice of my intention to move the suspension of the Standing Rules and Orders to enable me to deal with item 3 on the Order Paper—A Bill intituled

“An Ordinance further to amend the Tax Ordinance, 1939.”

ORDER OF THE DAY

TAX (AMENDMENT NO. 2) BILL, 1947.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL : I beg to move that the following Bill intituled

“An Ordinance further to amend the Tax Ordinance, 1939”.

be now read the first time.

Sir EUSTACE WOOLFORD seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL : I now move that the Standing Rules and Orders be suspended to enable me to take this Bill through the remaining stages.

Sir EUSTACE WOOLFORD seconded.

Motion put, and agreed to.

Standing Rules and Orders suspended.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL : In moving the second reading of this Bill I would point out that the Guiana Match Factory, Ltd., the only manufacturers of matches in the Colony, have for some time past been carrying on their business at a loss, owing to the great increase in the cost of materials and labour and the compulsory maintenance of the selling price of matches

at one cent per box. It is felt that this industry should be given encouragement to continue in business and, as some measure of relief, it is sought by this Bill to empower the Governor in Council to reduce the excise duty payable on matches, now fixed at 25 cents per gross boxes, for such time as he thinks fit. I will refer hon. Members to clause 2 of this Bill which provides an amendment to section 6 (1) of the Principal Ordinance—(a) by the substitution of a “colon” for the “full stop” at the end thereof; and (b), by the addition of the following proviso thereto—

“Provided that the Governor in Council may, with effect from the first day of January, nineteen hundred and forty-seven, from time to time and for such period as he thinks fit, by order reduce the rates of duty to amounts which shall not be less than one-fifth of those rates.”

As a result of representations which were made on behalf of the British Guiana Match Factory, Ltd., a conference was called in April, last, by the Colonial Treasurer who considered the matter along with representatives of the Match Factory, the Comptroller of Customs and the Commissioner of Labour. The problem was fully discussed and the solution agreed upon is now being put before hon. Members in the form of this legislation. It was contended by the Company that it could no longer manufacture its product for sale locally at the existing controlled price, and that contention appeared to have been justified. A detailed comparative statement was also submitted by the Company which showed that very little profit was made from 1938 to 1946, and that statement was prepared by Messrs. Fitzpatrick Graham and Coy., who are the Company's Auditors.

At the conference to which I have already referred, the Colonial Treasurer put forward a proposal that he would recommend that the current rate of excise duty be reduced by four-fifths. On the basis of production and the local sales figures for 1946, this proposal will result in a loss of Government revenue of approximately \$24,000 which will accrue to the Company for disposal in the manner suggested—to meet the great increase in the cost of materials and labour. As a result of the meeting and the proposal put forward by

the Colonial Treasurer, this legislation now comes before hon. Members for their approval. I do not think there is any necessity for me to add anything further, except to say that the matter has been fully and carefully examined and that this measure of relief is considered the best course to be adopted rather than having an increase in the price of matches which are a commodity used by everybody, since this course will increase the cost of living at the present time. I now beg to move that this Bill be read a second time.

Sir EUSTACE WOOLFORD seconded.

Mr. LEE: I should just like to find out whether Government is satisfied that an increase in wages has been given to the workers by this Company.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: An assurance has been given to Government that an increase will be given to the workers, as approved by the Commissioner of Labour and with effect from January 1, 1947.

Mr. LEE: I want to know whether it has been actually granted.

The COLONIAL TREASURER (Mr. E. F. McDavid): Yes, Sir, I can give that assurance. At the time when this matter was discussed, we agreed on the proportion of the additional yield which should go to wages. The Commissioner of Labour is fully satisfied that the increase has been granted and that the workers are satisfied.

Mr. EDUN: I am always in favour of supporting local industry and in this case I will say that the Guiana Match Factory has done very good work especially in supplying us with matches during the War and, I think, we ought to give them all the assistance we can. I am satisfied, however, that steps should be taken to see that the product does not deteriorate. There is a tendency in this Colony for industries to begin nicely, only to make one find in the course of years that the product has begun to deteriorate. I do not want it to appear that we are protecting matches of an inferior quality against others of superior quality coming from abroad. It is all well and good for us to pass this measure, but I would prefer to be told exactly how much is involved—how much money will go to

the Company, how much to labour, how much for materials, and so on. I must, however, take for granted what the hon. the Colonial Treasurer has said and that is, the Commissioner of Labour is satisfied as regards the increase for the workers.

But, Sir, I am not always happy about satisfaction from the Labour Department. They might be satisfied in this case, but I would like to know whether the Trade Union concerned is satisfied. A Trade Union official should have been there to say how much the labourers should get. In the case of the sugar industry we know how much labour will get the next time an increase is given. I am supporting this measure because I do not want to do anything at all that will operate against a local industry, but I want to warn this Company to keep up the quality of its product. We are using local wood, water and manpower in this industry; the chemicals come from abroad, and it is a long hope that we would be able to produce the chemicals ourselves. I think the day is coming when we will be able to manufacture matches with chemicals produced in British Guiana. I am supporting this measure but, as I have already stated, I would like to know how much money will go to labour and in the other directions.

The PRESIDENT: As regards the point made by the last speaker about the quality of the matches, I should like to say that I fully support what he has said. Quite recently I had an inquiry made about the quality of the matches produced by this Company, because I do think that if we are going to support this local industry, as proposed in this Bill, the Company should understand that they must give us the very best quality that can be given in their product. Our matches suffer badly by comparison particularly during the wet season, as I have no doubt every hon. Member knows. One has to use three or four instead of one for the purpose for which a match is lighted. I am aware that the Company have had difficulties in procuring some of the materials necessary for making a good match. I think they use a French gum without which the heads are likely to come off—and they do come off, as hon. Members know. I do agree that if we are to support the local industries they must

produce good stuff—something which, if not better than the imported product, must be as good, and if it is not as good there must be some good reason.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I have got the information for which the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Edun, asked, but before I give it I should like to go on record as saying that this Company gave very good service during the War and that they must be complimented for the work they did. Apart from what Your Excellency has said, I notice that I ended my report with a little critical remark relating to the quality of this product. On the score of the figures submitted by the Company this motion, as already mentioned, proposes to give relief to the extent of \$24,000—an average of \$1 per case. At the time of the discussion with the Commissioner of Labour and the representatives of the Company, we agreed that there should be at least a 20 per cent. rise in the wages then being paid, and from my notes I see that that would absorb about 26 cents per case out of the \$1 being granted by way of relief. Additional materials would cost another 14 cents per case, so that 40 cents in the dollar would be absorbed in charges for labour and additional materials leaving 60 cents to cover additional depreciation for which the Company could not provide and some profit.

I say "some profit" because the manufacturing cost stated by the auditors was \$6.49 per case and the selling price \$6.50 so that the Company was practically working at a loss at that time without providing for the necessary depreciation, and but for the fact that they were getting a slightly increased price with the small amount of export sales they were making they, obviously, could not carry on. Therefore, they need to have this 60 cents for depreciation and something for profit. Those are the figures.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

COUNCIL IN COMMITTEE.

Council resolved itself into Committee to consider the Bill clause by clause.

Clause 1—Short Title.

Mr. JACOB : I think I can raise what I want to say under this clause. The hon. the Colonial Treasurer said just now that the figures for production were \$6.49 and the selling price \$6.50 per case—showing a profit of one cent. I see that the hon. Member for Central Demerara (Mr. de Aguiar) who should know something about this matter, is not in his seat. I want to know if these figures can be true, because I thought this Company was paying some dividends up to recently. I will repeat that statement now that the hon. Member for Central Demerara is in his seat. (*Statement repeated*). I understand that the Company paid dividends up to a year ago. Another point which I got up to speak on is the fact that there is a definite scarcity of matches throughout the Colony. Supplies are strictly limited to wholesalers and they in turn give to retailers. I trust now that this measure is being introduced the Company will do all it can to meet local requirements.

Mr. de AGUIAR : I think the hon. Member addressed those remarks particularly to me through the Chair and, although I had no desire to enter this debate, Your Excellency will permit me to reply. The answer to the question as regards the accuracy of the figures is that, unlike the hon. Member, the Company prefers to submit figures here or furnish them to Government on accounts duly certified by a competent auditor in the Colony. They do not produce them from hearsay. But, whether figures are submitted from accounts certified by chartered accountants or from any other source the hon. Member will always challenge them. As regards the question of scarcity of matches, I will ask the hon. Member whether in so far as his own business is concerned he is receiving a lesser quantity of matches now than he was receiving before. I make that challenge to him personally because I presume when he made the statement he was probably referring to his own business. If that is so, I challenge him to say whether in his own case he is receiving less than before. Apart from that, I would like to tell the hon. Member that as the result of the improvement that has taken place now in regard to the supply of match-making materials—chemicals, matchwood, etc.—

the Company is endeavouring to meet the full demand of the Colony. As far as I know—I speak with a certain amount of authority—within the last month no person applying to the agent for matches has been refused.

Clause 2—Amendment of subsection (1) of section 6 of the Principal Ordinance.

Mr. JACOB : I would like to take this opportunity to say quite clearly that there is a definite shortage of matches. The hon. Member for Central Demerara (Mr. de Aguiar) never admits anything. I think every hon. Member around this table who is in business will agree that there is a shortage. The hon. Member referred to my business. I do not speak for myself, but I can say for his information that my business can dispose of five times the amount of cases we do get. Every day when I am on the business premises people grumble about the supply of matches. When they want five cases I can only give them one. There is a definite shortage, and steps should be taken to meet that shortage. I am going to approach the hon. Member to treble the quantity of matches he gives to my business.

The CHAIRMAN : I think that business might be discussed outside !

Mr. ROTH : I would like to support every word of the last speaker. I do not deal in cases. For the last three weeks I have been unable to buy a pack of matches and have had to be satisfied with a penny's worth.

The CHAIRMAN : During the wet weather it takes three matches to do the work of one.

Mr. de AGUIAR : The hon. Member said he had to be satisfied with a penny box, but there is no such thing as a penny box.

VOICES : A penny's worth !

Mr. de AGUIAR : Then he means two boxes.

Mr. ROTH : Two boxes, and the hon. Member knows very well what I mean but he tries to be funny.

The Council resumed

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL : I beg to move that the Bill be now read a third time and passed.

Sir EUSTACE WOOLFORD seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a third time and passed.

REVISED COST OF LIVING BONUS RATES.

The Council resumed the debate on the following motion :—

“That, with reference to Resolution No. XXII of the 10th of January, 1947, this Council approves of the payment of temporary war bonus to Government employees in respect of the year 1947 in accordance with the following revised rates :—

30% on the first \$720 per annum;
10% on the next \$720 per annum;

Flat rate of \$24 per month on all salaries over \$1,440 per annum.”

Mr. PEER BACCHUS : Sir, I for one do not think it is fair to this Council that at this time of the year Government should introduce in this Council a supplementary estimate of such a substantial figure. This matter has not arisen overnight. It was under Government's consideration, as I understand from the hon. the Colonial Treasurer, over the past year and, I say, it is very unfair at this time of the year that a supplementary estimate should be introduced in the Council for an amount to the extent of \$600,000. I do not believe that two wrongs make a right, and for that reason I am going to support the motion but, as I say, it is very unfair especially as the hon. the Colonial Treasurer has made out—no doubt in anticipation of queries—that it is the state in which our revenue stand today that influenced the Civil Service Association to make such a demand, but he denies that. But can he deny that that influenced Government's decision to bring this matter into the Council today ? As I say, it has not arisen overnight and, if it was not for the unexpected collection of revenue, I doubt Government would have thought of bringing this motion today. We all know that the situation in the collection of revenue may not continue, I am certain, in this proportion to the end of the year. If we were to collect \$500,000 over and above our estimated revenue, then the entire increase in our revenue would be

more than swallowed up by this single item of “Bonus”.

I do know that the cost of living has risen in these post-war years more than in the war period and, therefore, I think it is a misnomer to call this bonus a “War Bonus”. I would much prefer it to be called “Cost of Living Bonus”. I take it that the hon. the Colonial Secretary has practically given an undertaking in Finance Committee that immediately the Cost of Living drops the payment of this bonus will cease. I, Sir, would like, so as to have it placed on record, that undertaking to be given in this Council. It is clear, Sir, that it is because of the increased cost of living that this bonus has been given, and if it happens that the cost of living goes downwards, I think it is only fair to the taxpayer of this Colony that the cost of living bonus should cease. Notwithstanding that provision might be made in the current estimates, I would like to get that undertaking given. Subject to that undertaking by Government I will support this motion. I do feel that the relief given to the lower income group on this proposed schedule is not sufficient, and I intend to move an amendment by which, I think, the lower income group will be adequately benefited. On the present proposal, if we take the Public Works employees for instance, the basic wage is 64 cents a day.—

The COLONIAL SECRETARY : To a point of correction ! The basic wage for a labourer, casual or otherwise, in Georgetown is 80 cents per day, and the basic wage in the country is 72 cents a day. If you add the proposed war bonus which is 30 per cent. on to that, the Georgetown unskilled labourer would get \$1.04 a day under these proposals and the unskilled labourer in the country would get 93 cents per day. It is quite untrue to say that the basic wage is 64 cents. I do not know where that idea has come from. It was incorrectly stated yesterday and was reported in the Press. It should be corrected. The basic rate of wages paid by the Public Works or any Government Department for unskilled labour in Georgetown is at present 80 cents per day for an eight-hour working day, and in the country it is 72 cents per day. I hope that will be clearly reported in the Press and that the error, which had been

reported in the Press as the result of the error in the speeches made by Members, will be clearly corrected. By the war bonus as proposed by Government now, the Georgetown labourer will get \$1.04 a day and the country labourer 93 cents a day.

Mr. PEER BACCHUS: The statement was made yesterday and was unchallenged and, therefore, I took it to be a correct statement. Notwithstanding the correction, I am still to be convinced that \$1.04 a day including war bonus is an adequate wage for the under group. I agree with the hon. Member on my left (Mr. Jacob) that \$1.20 per day should be the wage that these wage-earners should get including war bonus, and I make bold to say that the Public Works Department is in the fortunate position of having the cheapest labour to be employed. I do not know if that is responsible for so many things happening in the Public Works Department, that the cost of the works jumps from one stage to another. Scarcely have any works been done under the original estimates. When labour is dissatisfied and discontented, one can scarcely expect to have the best from such labour. I think it is only fair that this group should be put in a position whereby they would be able to earn a living wage also. I do not know if I can in another way bring it more forcibly to this Council. Under the present rates of bonus an Officer who is drawing \$200 a month will be receiving as bonus the entire earnings of one of these poor labourers in the Public Works Department who is supposed with that earning to maintain himself and a family and to school and clothe them. I think that is the most forcible way that I can put the matter before this Council for it to realize how hard and difficult it is for these poor labourers in the districts to live.

In supporting this motion I do not intend to use as a yardstick those Officers in the Service who are not pulling their full weight and who lag behind, because I feel certain it is unjust to those Officers who are pulling their full weight and some of whom are pulling more than their own weight. I think the remedy lies with the Heads of the Departments. Officers who

are not pulling their full weight, the Heads of Departments should be strong enough to take executive action against by refusing to recommend their increments. I feel sure that if every Head of Department takes such strong executive action we will be able to get a Civil Service in this Colony of which this Colony can be proud. Though this is not the proper time, I wish to give intimation that I favour Government giving consideration to an increase of the Old Age Pension and also of the pension of the lower income group of retired civil servants. That will also receive my support. Those people are in no different position to make two ends meet than those who are in the Government Service today.

There is just one other suggestion I would like to make. When the first war bonus was being granted it was also made retrospective for some months before, but payment in the Public Works Department was made in a very loose form. I hope that the Chairman of the Advisory Committee of that Department who is here will see that some better measure be taken in paying out this bonus. I know, Sir, at one time one Officer—I do not like to mention his name and I do not think he is in the Service today—travelled right up to Berbice and was only paying bonus which was retrospective for some months. Many of those people who were entitled to bonus did not receive it and many that received got only a portion of the amount due them. It was difficult for them to calculate how much bonus they were entitled to on their past earnings. I hope that great care will be taken in paying this bonus.

I heard from the Chairman of the Advisory Committee of the Public Works Department, and I also heard it outside, that the position in which we find ourselves in so far as the roads are concerned is due to this Council not giving that Department the money it wanted. My recollection is that this Council has not taken a half-penny off the Public Works vote, and I would like to make an open statement here, because all over the country it is being said that this Council is responsible for it. I looked at the Estimates this morning and found that the Draft Estimate for the Public Works Department and the Estimate which was passed are

practically the same, and I do not think that this Council ever reduced the vote by a half-penny. With those few observations I now intend to move an amendment to the motion —

“That before “30 per cent.” the following be inserted: “50 per cent. on the salaries or wages which do not exceed \$240 per annum; 30 per cent. on the next \$480 per annum to \$720; 10 per cent. on the next \$720, and a flat rate of \$24 per month on all salaries over \$1,440 per annum.”

The PRESIDENT : Are you in order in moving that ? You can put it to the Government as a suggestion !

Mr. PEER BACCHUS : I will suggest that the Government give careful and sympathetic consideration to it especially in so far as the lower income groups are concerned, as I think, Sir, it will be to the best interest of the Colony because, if we do not give the people a living wage, especially manual labour, we may have to increase both our Hospital vote and Prison vote.

Mr. THOMPSON : I am accustomed to consistency. Having promised in Finance Committee to support this motion I remain in the same position. But what is passing through my mind is, whether we are discussing the payment of bonus or the behaviour of the men at their work. I am inclined to think, if hon. Members feel that Officers are not pulling their weight, that the correct attitude is to make direct charges and have those misbehaviours improved. I am wondering whether the cost of living has gone up or not. But, I say, it has because the Authority appointed to look into that matter, be they efficient or otherwise I respect them since they are so appointed, reported that the cost of living has mounted up considerably. I have always felt that Officers occupying a certain position should live up to the dignity of their office. We have heard it said that the behaviour of some Officers has been anything but satisfactory. We want them to live up and not to be partial in the exercise of their duty, and it behoves us to make their position such financially that they can be rid of such temptations.

We have heard a lot of slating of one Department or another. I do not know

that there is perfection in any one Department. As I have said before, these things should be brought forward for adjustment. Time and again I have had complaints made to me, and my attitude has always been to enquire into the *pros* and *cons*, and from that angle I meet the Head of Department concerned to know whether his knowledge of the conditions and that supplied me are one and the same. I have never turned away without getting a satisfactory answer. I have one duty before me, and that is to adjust such situation as far as possible. If, then, I feel that an Officer is not pulling his weight, my duty is to see to it that the necessary steps are taken and successfully.

I want to say, Sir, that I strongly feel that pensioners should be assisted, and the Old Age pensioners also should be assisted. I am relying on Government to adjust that situation so as to give them natural relief. In supporting the civil servants I am sure that Government will in turn see that these poor people are assisted too. As I have said before, we look forward to proper support for our men. The poor housewife has to be racking her brains to make the coppers stretch. One is afraid to draw one's salary today, because the cost of supplies is more than what the salary can meet. Even if you have the money, you cannot get, in some instances, the goods from the shop. We do not want to go in for blackmarketing, and consequently we are asking Government to do the necessary. These civil servants have nowhere else to get anything but the salaries given them. In some cases the farmer is able to get a little provision and along with what he gets otherwise can stretch his earnings, but you cannot expect a man who is dependent on a salary to get everything. He has to educate his children; he has to meet his rent; he has to do everything along those lines. Now that you are to give him a few cents further to meet the cost of living there need not be such quibbling. Again I say, I am supporting this motion wholeheartedly, and I sincerely hope that where there have been lapses the bonus will be an incentive for them to do much better.

I happen to be a member of the Advisory Committee of the Public Works Department. I do not always sub-

scribe to their estimates. That has always been my objection. They prepare estimates that do not go through as they should, but when it comes to the payments if there is necessity, and I do feel there is, to increase the basic salary, whether or not a cost of living bonus should be given the employees, let us face that and face it squarely so that by the end of the month these Officers who are looking forward eagerly to some assistance will be benefited. The estimate of the Public Works Department, as in the case of other Departments, has been reduced. The original estimate was sent back and an amount taken out. I cannot see how it can be said that what has been passed is the whole vote. Before the vote was considered the Department was called upon to make certain reductions, and those reductions were made. Consequently it cannot be expected that the necessary works can all be done. The kind of material which has to be used on the roads is too inferior for the roads to stand up well to vehicular traffic. It cannot be said that with the amount put in the hands of the Public Works Department they have neglected to do the necessary. I stand in defence of that Department. I do say they have been all the time carrying through as best they could. In many cases you have supplementaries which do not measure up. That does not mean the basic salaries are not given. A man gets 72c. a day in the country and 80¢ a day in town. That is given, but as to whether that is a saving or living wage is another question. Again I say I am supporting this motion wholeheartedly.

Mr. FARNUM : Your Excellency, I am voting in favour of this motion, and I do so because I consider that the civil servants are entitled. I do not think anyone will deny that the cost of living has risen and is rising all the time, despite the figures that have been quoted in certain directions. We have been told that there are large stocks in Water Street and, as the result of that, competition is created and in turn prices will go down. That is left to be seen, but the experience is that prices are rising all the time. It must be remembered, too, that a civil servant cannot engage in trade and things of that kind to augment his salary. He must therefore find it very difficult to meet the cost of

living, the high rentals and things of that kind. Therefore I will vote in favour of the motion, especially in view of the statement by the hon. the Colonial Secretary that the matter would be reviewed in respect of 1948.

With regard to Government pensioners and old age pensioners, I join with the other Speakers in asking that some consideration be given them. When I refer to pensioners I do not include those who have been re-employed by Government, some of whom are now getting as salary and pension more than what they earned while in the Service. I refer to those pensioners in the lower income group, from \$60 per month downwards.

As regards the labourers, I am also in sympathy with them, and I would ask Government to see whether it could not award sufficient bonus to make the pay of the labourers in the country \$1 per day, and those in the City \$1.20 per day. I leave that to the consideration of Government.

Mr. SEAFORD : The hon. Mover of the motion has stated his case so very clearly and impartially that I really did not think this debate would have lasted half the time it has taken. The motion before this Council is quite clear. We are asked to vote an increase in war bonus for civil servants to meet the increased cost of living. I am not going to waste time in arguing whether it is a war bonus or a cost of living bonus; we know exactly what is meant and we can call it anything we like, but I think I prefer to call it a cost of living bonus.

I am not going to debate the point as to whether Civil Servants are working as long hours as they should, or whether they are giving efficient service or not. I do not think that comes under this head. I think the proper time for such a discussion is when we are considering the Estimates. Nor is this the time to consider the question of old age pensions. I am sure that Government will consider that under its own head. We know that the civil servants, or the majority of them, are giving every efficient service to the Colony. I have come across those who have been always willing to work long hours when necessary, and to give of their very

best. In all walks of life we find certain delinquents. We have never paid our civil servants very handsome salaries, in my opinion, and we all know that the cost of living has gone up very considerably. Therefore, I feel that it is only right and proper that we should give civil servants some relief. The hon. Mover has told us that this cost of living bonus will be tied to the cost of living index. I do not think there is any Member of this Council who disagrees with that. Mr. Critchlow put it very succinctly when he said that when the cost of living goes up they should be given a bonus, and when the cost of living comes down it should be taken off. I entirely agree with that. He also said that Government gives with one hand and takes with the other. I think it is the reverse in this case.

I am not altogether happy that the Colony's revenue is going to continue to be as buoyant as it is today. At the end of this year we may not be in quite such a happy position. I hope I am entirely wrong in that view. I should like to see it doubled, but I am not optimistic at the moment. I think we are asked to vote this increase for this year only, and that the matter will naturally come up for review at the end of the year. If it is felt at that time that this Council is not in a position to grant any further bonus, or that the present rates require reduction, every Member of the new Council will have an opportunity to express his or her opinion.

The hon. Member for Western Berbice (Mr. Peer Bacchus) attempted to move an amendment to increase the rate of bonus to 50 per cent. on wages and salaries up to \$20 per month. Knowing the hon. Member as I do I was surprised that he did not give us some idea of what was likely to be the cost if his amendment was accepted. In view of the figures given by the hon. the Colonial Treasurer I would not be surprised if it cost Government more than half a million dollars. The point Government and this Council will have to consider very carefully is where the money is to come from.

The hon. Member for Georgetown South (Mr. Gonsalves) charged the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Raatgever, with having expressed a contrary opinion to

that expressed by him in Finance Committee. I think one of the greatest assets of that hon. Member is his ability to change his opinion when he finds out that he is mistaken. (laughter). It takes a strong man to come out in the open and do that, and I think the hon. Member for Georgetown South would be the first to admit that.

We all feel that the civil servants deserve an increase in their cost of living bonus, especially those in the middle rung of the ladder who are feeling the pinch very hard. The hon. Member for Georgetown Central (Mr. Percy C. Wight) suggested that the bonus should not be paid to officers receiving over £1,000 per annum. I have been thinking about it, but I find it very difficult to decide where to draw the line. As the cost of the bonus in respect of salaries over £1,000 will only be \$5,000 a year, and as about 25 per cent. of that sum will come back to Government in the shape of income tax, and the rest spent in other ways, I do not think we need grudge that \$5,000 when most of it will come back to Government. I have great pleasure, therefore, in supporting the motion.

Dr. SINGH : I came here yesterday to support the motion, but after listening to the several speakers I am more in sympathy with an increase of the basic wages, plus war bonus, paid to Government's employees working on the sea defences and the roads of the Colony. It is our duty to improve their standard of living so that they might be contented. As far as I know, they have no one to champion their cause like the civil servants, who have stalwarts to defend them. I also sympathize with Government pensioners and old age pensioners, and join in asking Government to give some consideration to their case.

Mr. LEE : I have considered this matter very carefully and I appreciate the hardships suffered by civil servants during the early years of the war when, at the Budget sessions, the Colony's financial position was a hazard. The hon. the Colonial Treasurer could not guarantee what the revenue would be during those years, and the civil servants bore the burden. They are still suffering some hardship. If, therefore, Government feels that there will

be a surplus of revenue, out of which it could compensate the civil servants for the hardships they bore during the war, I think this Council should be happy to support this motion. I quite realize the fears of the commercial interests, because it means that the moment Government increases the bonus to Government employees they will have to consider the position of their employees. At least I hope they will. I would suggest to them that instead of paying so much income tax, they should increase the bonus paid to their employees. I know that several firms have treated their employees very liberally in this respect, and that many of them are quite satisfied.

I would like Government to bear in mind that if its employees are not satisfied with their basic salaries and wages they would naturally reach a stage when they would not be able to give of their best. I feel that the lower income group of civil servants, the subordinate employees, are deserving of consideration. Many of them live in the country because they cannot pay the high rents charged in the City, and even in the country the rents are higher than before the war. I feel that at the present moment a working man cannot live on less than \$1.50 per day, and if Government went into the matter minutely it would find that \$1.50 per day would be just enough for rent, clothing and food, but not food up to the standard required for a healthy population. Most of the lower income group of Government employees are married men, or men with families, and should not be expected to live on less than \$1.50 per day.

I suggest that before the end of the year Government should revise its subsidization policy with a view to further reducing the cost of living as regards certain essentials, in order that people with low incomes may be able to live up to the standard required to keep them healthy. On the other hand I desire to warn civil servants that if there is a fall in revenue they must expect a reduction in the bonus rates, and perhaps, a cut in salaries, as occurred after the first world war. I sincerely hope that that will not be necessary on this occasion. I therefore plead with Government to take particular care to avoid

such a necessity. I heartily support the motion.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: I do not think so important a motion should be passed without some reference by myself. The history of the matter has been very accurately and clearly stated by the Mover, but I would just like to add one point. The hon. Member for Western Berbice (Mr. Peer Bacchus) has complained that Government was then resisting the claims of the Civil Service Association for a revision of the war bonus. I was in charge and I wrote to the Association pointing out that Government could not entertain their demands. That was in 1946, but I stated that I agreed that the question which was in dispute could be put to the Whitley Council. The Whitley Council considered it, and in January, 1947, they submitted for the favourable consideration of Government (not more than that) that the cost of living allowance should be revised, and that the problem should be tackled also by a reduction of the cost of living. I took that second step and appointed an *ad hoc* Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. Heald, and I waited to see the Committee's recommendations, but in the meantime the Civil Service Association felt that they had asked for a revision in August, 1946, and that it was then April, 1947, and nothing had occurred. Then, Sir, you arrived, and it was one of the first problems I brought to Your Excellency's notice. After Your Excellency's most careful consideration it was decided that not only should Government try to maintain the wall against the increased cost of living but that it should put to the Legislative Council a fair proposition for a revision of the bonus. That is how this motion has come before the Council now.

The hon. Member for Western Berbice remarked that if the Civil Service Association were not thinking of the increase in the revenue perhaps Government took that into consideration. Well, my answer to that is: of course Government was thinking of that. One of the first considerations in putting forward a proposal of this nature is: is it a fair proposal, and can the Government afford it? Those are the two principal factors. Government does not put a proposal before the Council

in any form and hope that the Council will accept it. Government puts a proposal which it thinks is fair, and of which it can say openly to the Council it can afford to meet the increased cost involved. Well, Government thinks this proposal is fair. After the most careful consideration and a full and frank discussion with the Executive Committee of the Civil Service Association, the Treasurer has advised that Government can afford it. The hon. Member asked: Did Government consider the increased revenue and then come forward with the proposal? My answer to him is, quite frankly, "Yes, we did."

On the subject of a revision of basic wages and salaries the Civil Service Association has pressed very strongly for a general revision. Government has equally strongly resisted it. I think I remarked that Government should not revise basic salaries and wages at a time when the economy of the Colony is so uncertain. At no time can it be more uncertain than it is now.

The hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Raatgever, indicated in Finance Committee that we could look forward to a very substantial reduction in the cost of living. He gave two reasons—one was the result of the recommendations of the *ad hoc* Committee under Mr. Heald, and (2) the very large importation of consumer goods. I sincerely trust that the hon. Member's prediction will prove correct. Government feels that the sensible thing to do is to meet the variation in the cost of living by a temporary cost of living allowance. That cost of living allowance is not intended to cover, absolutely, the increase in the cost of living, but is intended to assist members of the Civil Service and other employees of Government to hold their own against the increased cost of living.

Again I must refer to the hon. Member for Western Berbice. He said that I, as Colonial Secretary, had given an undertaking in Finance Committee that if the cost of living went down the cost of living allowance would go down. What I really said in Finance Committee was that if the cost of living goes down substantially—and what Government means by substantial is a decrease of between 10

and 20 points in the cost of living index—Government would review the cost of living allowance in November. I think that is what I said. I should like hon. Members to know that not only have I told the Civil Service Association that verbally, but I have written them officially, pointing out that the cost of living allowance is temporary—that it is intended to meet the increase in the cost of living. If the cost of living goes up very substantially we shall have to come to the Council again. If it goes down substantially there would be a reduction in the allowance. There is no shadow of doubt about that. It is a temporary allowance.

I listened attentively to the speech of the hon. Member for Central Demerara (Mr. de Aguiar) because he told me before he made it that he was going to change the opinion of this Council. Well, I listened to his speech, but I cannot tell which way he thought at the end of it. What he did say was that, in his opinion, Government was offering no solution to the problem. Well, I do not think we are offering a solution to the problem; I do not think any Government could offer a solution, but what the hon. Member did not say was what he proposed to do. I know he is going to support the motion.

There was another point which the hon. Member and others raised, which I think I should comment on. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Georgetown North (Mr. Seaford) for his staunch support of the Civil Service, and I am also grateful to the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Thompson, who said that if Members have complaints against civil servants they should bring forth facts. On the whole I think it is only proper that I should express some opinion about the work of the Civil Service, and my own very straightforward opinion is that Government should seriously consider tightening it up. I am not by any means satisfied myself; I do not think any Government is entirely satisfied. From my experience in the West Indies I think this is a country of extremes. I have been Head of the Civil Service in the Windward Islands, in Grenada, and the Bahamas. and I am now Head of the Civil Service here. I would like to say that I have met better civil servants

in British Guiana than anywhere else, and I have met worse. I think that some of the Heads of Departments carry far too heavy a burden because of the mediocrity of some of the civil servants in their Departments, and I think that there are a great many clock watchers in the Civil Service. I think that sometimes they are so anxious to leave at 4 o'clock that they cannot get out of the door, and I am not going to mince any words about it. I think we should do something about it, and I think Your Excellency is going to do something about it. That is one point.

As regards labourers' wages and the revision of the basic rates, the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Edun, said that they were getting 64 cents per day —

MR. EDUN: When was the rate of 64 cents per day increased to 80 cents in the country districts?

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: I cannot give you the date. As regards the basic rates I remember the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Edun, moving a motion on the iniquities of the Public Works Department, and asking for an increase in the basic rates of pay, but the motion was lost. I think the hon. the Deputy President was in the Chair at the time. Several Members spoke at length and the hon. Nominated Member (Mr. Edun) has asked us to refer to the debate, but he has not referred to what I said then. What I then said was, that it was extremely difficult for Government to revise the basic rates of wages now without grading the unskilled labourers. The hon. Member for Western Essequibo (Mr. C. V. Wight) has explained what steps Government is going to take in order to get grading done in the Public Works Department. I stated during the debate, to which the hon. Mr. Edun has referred, that the Trade Unions were not helping Government in this matter. If hon. Members look at Hansard they would see that I referred to the complete failure on the part of the Trade Unions to appoint a Trades Joint Council, so it is not only Government that has to go into this question but the Trade Unions as well. The Commissioner of Labour has completely failed in requesting the Trade Unions Council to get a Trades Joint Council appointed, and I take this

opportunity to urge on the Trade Unions to give every assistance to Government by way of appointing a Trades Joint Council. I would also appeal to the Press to get those words right, for they report me sometimes as saying "Trades Union Council." I am talking about a Trades Joint Council which is specially appointed to deal with this very question—the grading of unskilled and semi-skilled labourers.

As regards the question of increased war bonus for Government pensioners, I think it is a difficult one to answer. Perhaps the hon. the Colonial Treasurer may be better able to answer it because he deals with finance, but it must not be forgotten that as regards the Government pensioners their pension is not supposed to be a living wage. They get a war bonus or a cost of living allowance, but if they are re-employed—and that is very seldom in spite of what the hon. Mr. Edun says—they lose their cost of living allowance. I think all that Government can properly say is that their case will be reconsidered. Also I think, it will be very wrong for Government to lead hon. Members to believe that if they give their votes in favour of this motion Government would give increased war bonus to their pensioners also. I think that is extremely unlikely.

As regards the old-age pensioners, I think their case will be gone into. I think that Barbados, Trinidad and British Guiana are the only Colonies in these parts with old-age pensioners. I do not think an increase of 30 per cent. will be too much to give our old-age pensioners but, there again, I leave it to the hon. the Colonial Treasurer to say. The hon. Member (Mr. Edun) asked whether this cost of living allowance will also be paid to officers on the Civil List and to the Judges and, I think, the answer is "Yes"; but it is not going to be paid to Your Excellency also, not without the permission of the Secretary of State. I hope, and I believe from what I have heard, that all the Members of this Council are really going to support this motion. I think it has been most extremely well put by the hon. the Colonial Treasurer, and I am sure he will be able to deal very fully in winding up with the other points made by hon. Members in the course of their speeches.

The COLONIAL TREASURER : Sir, it is always extremely difficult to reply to a debate which has ranged over so wide a field as this one, and even moreso when the reply has been more or less made for me by a colleague. But, there are probably some points to which I can direct attention more fully. As I have stated, Sir, the debate ranged over a wide field and the proposal has met with a somewhat mixed reception, so I will try to sum up what hon. Members have said under just three or four heads. So far as I can see, I can cover the speeches made by hon. Members in roughly three points. Firstly, there is the plea for the introduction of a higher basic rate; that seems to have been the text of the speeches made by the majority of the Members of this Council. Secondly, there is the criticism of the quality of the Public Service and, thirdly, there is the plea for Government pensioners and old-age pensioners. Lastly, there is the speech by the hon. Member for Central Demerara which I class by itself, because I am quite unable to sum it up at all. (Laughter). As regards the plea for a higher basic wage, the hon. the Colonial Secretary has dealt with it very fully and I do not propose to mention it at all, but I want to say I am very glad we have now got on record the correct minimum wages which are being paid, and we have also got it quite clearly on record that the minimum wage rates of this scale will apply to all those workers in the Public Works and other labour-employing Departments of Government.

Now, as regards Government pensioners, I think hon. Members would remember that that was a very controversial subject in the early days—1943. Actually, before the pensioners got any war bonus at all a Committee was appointed to go into the question under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Georgetown North, and it made certain recommendations to this Council which were eventually accepted, although not quite in the form that the Committee recommended. But, before I refer to that, Sir, may I say again that this question of giving war bonus to pensioners is not really sound theoretically, for the very simple reason that a pension is really related to a man's service and his wage or salary on retiring. It is never intended to

be in any way a living wage, and consequently, to grant a cost of living bonus to a pensioner will be completely illogical. Indeed, that point was strongly stressed by the Secretary of State in the early days of the War. However, different counsels prevailed in the United Kingdom and the United Kingdom itself allowed a war bonus to pensioners, and we in this Colony followed suit. But, while it is theoretically unsound, it allowed some relief. A resolution was passed with the whole scale in this Council, and it is known as Resolution No. 24 of November 10, 1944. Under it all pensioners receiving \$720 per annum or less got 15 per cent. on the first \$240; 10 per cent. on the next \$240, and 5 per cent. on the next \$240, with a minimum bonus of \$3 per month. That cost the Colony about \$42,000, and it is quite obvious that if we fix a minimum of 30 per cent. rate now, it is likely that the expenditure would be doubled because the present scale starts at 15 per cent. As the hon. the Colonial Secretary has stated, we will have to reconsider the question. If it is decided to grant the increase, we would come back to this Council with the proposal. Hon. Members should bear in mind, however, that it would involve another \$40,000 if the limit of \$720 pension per annum is observed. If we go higher the cost would be more.

As regards the question of old-age pension, I do not think any one should pretend that the small amounts being granted to these people are in any sense of the word something they should live on. In the country districts the amount is ten shillings (\$2.40), while in the City it is \$3.60 per month. When this Council first introduced this scheme it was clearly stated that it was nothing but a relief. It was nothing but a payment to these people which would make them feel that they were no longer completely dependent upon the charity of the State and the charity of other people. It was something to which they could look forward, but it is quite obvious that if you try to apply the bonus to them you are really being ridiculous. If you fix 30 per cent. on \$2.40 per month, you would be giving them 3/- per month more, but that will not convert their present rates to anything that can be

called a living allowance. If we can afford to increase these allowances later on, let us do so; let us fix some higher amount than \$3.60 per month and give it to these people. At the moment the cost of the Old Age Pension Scheme is very much higher than was anticipated when it was first introduced. We have been spending over \$270,000 per annum on it, so if you take this \$3.60 per month and increase it slightly again you can see where you are going to be with the total bill.

There is one feature of the scheme, however, which I, personally, think should be reconsidered, and that is the question of the limitation of means. I think it is a very, very harsh proviso which precludes the recipient from getting the amount allowed, if through the kindness of somebody else he gets an amount either equal to or in excess of the pension. I think that is going too far, but I am expressing a personal view—it is not the law. I feel it is hard that if an old-age pensioner is given a room to live in, or an allowance by some relative or friend, the value of that room should be taken into account and perhaps serve to do away with the pension. That is the feature I would like to see reconsidered, and it would certainly cause some relief if a change is made.

As regards the speech by the hon. Member for Central Demerara (Mr. de Aguiar), the hon. the Colonial Secretary said precisely what I intended to say. The hon. Member posed a number of questions and the most important one was: "Is this a solution to the problem?" There is nothing in any words of mine to show that I intended it to be a solution. I said it was a temporary relief in a temporary emergency. No one can find a solution. The other question asked by the hon. Member was: What would be the yardstick by which we would measure the reduction or the increase next year if there is a change in the cost of living? I cannot see that this question is particularly relevant to what we are doing now.

I do not want to detain the Council too long, but there was a point mentioned by the hon. Mr. Edun today that I always object to very strongly. He referred to the civil servants as non-producers, and on a previous occasion he was very severe on

businessmen like the hon. Mr. Raatgever, referring to merchants as non-producers and parasites. I got up and explained that we are all producers in the sense that we serve. I also said that the merchants provide the goods for the workers to buy when they want and that they were entitled to the hon. Member's respect. That is how they serve the community. Similarly, the civil servants are all helping to keep the wheels of production moving, and I do hope the hon. Member will not continue to refer to those persons who do not perform actual manual labour as non-producers. If we do not perform this work I do not think those people whom the hon. Member describes as producers would get very far. In British Guiana everybody tries to do some work and to do something to help the production of the Colony. I do not think I need say anything more. The principal point is that this is a temporary expedient and that it would not continue if the cost of living goes down. This Council will have the opportunity of going into the whole matter again.

Mr. GONSALVES: As one of those who supported the claim for increased bonus to pensioners, I did so on the principle as stated by the hon. the Colonial Treasurer that pensioners should be given bonuses and, therefore, whether they are in the same class as civil servants or not, I do not see why some consideration should not be given to them. The next point made by the hon. the Colonial Treasurer is that this increase is of a temporary nature. I would like to point out that if it is so as regards the civil servants, it should be equally so as regards the pensioners.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: The hon. Member who has just spoken made a suggestion that the words "war bonus" should be replaced by the words "cost of living allowance", and if that is the feeling of the Council I would have no objection. I will therefore move that the words "war bonus" in the third line of the motion be made to read "cost of living allowance". The motion will then read:

"That, with reference to Resolution No. XXII of the 10th of January, 1947, this Council approves of the payment of temporary cost of living allowance to Government employees in respect of the year 1947 in accordance with the following revised rates:—

30% on the first \$720 per annum.
10% on the next \$720 per annum.
Flat rate of \$24 per month on all
salaries over \$1,440 per annum."

Mr. CRITCHLOW : I heartily support the amendment.

Motion as amended put, and agreed to.

MINING CONCESSION TO ANACONDA COMPANY.

Mr. EDUN : May I at this juncture, Sir, make mention of my motion relating to the question of a mining concession to the Anaconda Company ? The motion is down for consideration now, but in view of its importance as regards interior development I am asking that it be deferred until the Advisory Committee, which is dealing with the Bauxite Company Labour dispute, has submitted its report.

The PRESIDENT : I agree, if the hon. Member so desires, that the motion might not be proceeded with until that Committee has submitted its report.

Mr. EDUN : Thank you, Sir !

Motion deferred.

SPECIALIST OFFICERS (CONSULTATION). REGULATIONS, 1947.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL : I beg to move the suspension of the Standing Rules and Orders to enable me to move the motion standing in my name as item 5 on the Order Paper.

The COLONIAL TREASURER seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Rules and Orders suspended.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL : The motion which I propose to move reads as follows :—

"That, this Council approves of —

(a) the Specialist Officers (Consultation) Regulations, 1947.

(b) the repayment by Government of 50% of fees paid into the Treasury by Specialist Officers under the Specialist Officers (Consultation) Regulations, 1947, with effect from the 1st of January, 1947."

In putting this motion before hon. Members I suggest that the Regulations, which they have before them, are sufficiently self-explanatory and require no comment from me. They are made under the Colonial Medical Service (Consolidation) Ordinance, Chapter 186, and they refer to fees to be charged for services outside the Hospital as distinct from fees charged for services inside the hospital and which are governed by the Hospital Charges Regulations. I hope hon. Members appreciate that point. Part of the fees payable in respect of services performed inside the Hospital goes to Government under the Hospital Charges Regulations made under the Public Hospitals Ordinance, Chapter 187. Any fees which a Specialist charges for services outside the Hospital will have to be charged under another Ordinance and the Regulations thereunder—the Colonial Medical Service (Consolidation) Ordinance, Chapter 186. I wish to emphasize the point that this Ordinance says "*outside the officer's official hours of duty*". In other words, if it is outside the officer's official hours of duty he can render the service and charge a fee. The schedule to the Regulations gives the list of the Specialist Officers now under appointment, and Regulation 4 reads :—

"4. The fee for a consultation shall not, except with the approval of the Director of Medical Services, exceed ten dollars and shall be paid into the Treasury by the Specialist officer."

In other words, there is a limit of \$10 for his charge; if he goes beyond that it has to be with the approval of the Director of Medical Services. It is also to be pointed out that this Regulation 4 "*shall not apply to the specialist officers who, at the commencement of these Regulations, hold the posts of Surgeon Specialist, Public Hospital, Georgetown, and of Medical Superintendent, Mental Hospital.*" As hon. Members are aware, during 1944 when the question of the re-arrangement of the salaries of Medical Officers was dealt with, these specialist officers did not accept the new arrangement and, as hon. Members of this Council were informed, the specialist officers were then allowed to receive 25 per cent. of the fees which were charged in respect of private practice. Now the whole question has been reviewed with the result that it has been decided by arrangement that

the amount be increased from 25 to 50 per cent. In other words, the specialists enumerated in the schedule, with the exception of the two specialists referred to in Regulation 5 (1), will receive 50 per cent. of the fees charged and paid into the Treasury.

That brings me to the second part of the motion—the repayment of 50 per cent. of the fees to the specialist officers. I wish to point out that the two officers mentioned in Regulation 5 (1) are free to charge the fees they wish, not that they have the right according to the existing arrangement to retain the full fee. I do not think there is anything further for me to do except to say that if hon. Members approve of the Regulations I would amend the second part of the motion to make it perfectly clear. The amendment will relate to the words "*from the 1st of January, 1947.*" In view of the fact that the Regulations will only come into operation when approved and published in the *Gazette*, and as we have now linked all these Regulations, I think it is logical to amend that. I think, I have made that clear to hon. Members. The repayment will be from the 1st of January, 1947. I do not propose that it be placed in the resolution on account of the fact that it is linked up with the Regulations which become operative on publication of the *Gazette*. I move —

That, this Council approves of —

- (a) the Specialist Officers (Consultation) Regulations, 1947.
- (b) the repayment by Government of 50% of fees paid into the Treasury by Specialist Officers other than the present holders etc., under the Specialist Officers (Consultation) Regulations, 1947, with effect from the 1st of January, 1947.

The COLONIAL TREASURER seconded.

Mr. GONSALVES : The hon. Mover referred to official rates. I do not know whether he will tell us, what those rates are and whether if the two Specialist Officers, the one in Georgetown and the other in New Amsterdam, want to come under the present proposals that can be done without an amendment of the Regulations.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL : In 1945 they were given the option and they

came to their decision and declined to come under the new arrangements. Consequently Government is proceeding on the grounds of their decision. I do not think we can anticipate doing that because of the particular circumstances. Hon. Members will appreciate the fact that they have no limit so far as fees are concerned in respect of consulting practice outside of the Hospital and outside official hours. In other words, if those Officers came outside for consultation by request they may charge 50 guineas or \$300, and there is no control over that. It is to their advantage, if I might say so, so far as they are concerned to remain under the old Regulations.

Mr. GONSALVES : They are not likely to ask to be relieved of that.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT : There is only one point which may receive a little consideration, and that is the Schedule. I see reference is made there to "Assistant Surgeon, Public Hospital, Georgetown." It is very difficult, and, I suggest, it needs a lot of careful consideration when we come to Assistant and Deputy. There is a tendency here to go from Assistant to Deputy and then Assistant Deputy. If you start with Assistant Surgeon we may find ourselves some day having difficulty with an Assistant in one of the other specialist branches.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY : An Assistant Specialist Surgeon is a specialist appointment and he holds the Specialist degree. It is provided in the Estimates. The hon. Member for Demerara-Essequibo, Dr. Singh, can tell you that, when it comes to the post of Surgeon or Assistant Surgeon, those are specialist posts and no ordinary doctor can come in as Assistant Surgeon. The post is in effect Assistant Specialist Surgeon.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT : I would have thought—I do not know if the hon. Member who is Chairman of the Medical Advisory Committee is rooted to his seat—Members would have been given a clear exposition. Most of these appointments are specialist jobs. I cannot see why a Surgeon should be a Specialist above a Specialist. I take it the Radiologist is a Specialist. What is going to happen if you have an Assistant Radiologist ?

Dr. SINGH : I think the hon. the Attorney-General explained the matter at

length. When it comes to the question of Specialists, as the hon. the Colonial Secretary has told you, the Assistant Resident Surgeon, Public Hospital, Georgetown, is a Specialist and is entitled according to the Regulations to charge fees on consultation. It was done in the past by the late Assistant Resident Surgeon who resigned and, I believe, that privilege ought to be extended to his successor. Similarly, the other Specialists are entitled to charge fees for consultation on the scales fixed, with the exception of Mr. Grierson, Surgeon Specialist, who is not under this scheme but is under the old scheme and can charge what he likes for his services outside of official hours.

The PRESIDENT: We cannot change the names appearing in the Schedule as, if we do, when they appear in the Estimates there may be no such persons.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: This Council knows and acknowledges as Specialists those appointed as Specialists and are paid a specialist's remuneration. Otherwise it will be very difficult to give a definition of what is a Specialist. If there is to be an additional change in the Schedule it would be necessary to come to the Council, because it is very difficult to put in terms a Specialist, as we understand it.

Motion as amended put, and agreed to.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE FOR 1947.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I beg to move—

"That this Council approves of the Supplementary Estimate for the quarter ended 30th June, 1947, embodying Schedules of Additional Provision approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council during the quarter."

The Schedule has been circulated to Members, and as you see it has quite a substantial total — \$577,668.17. Of that amount \$514,227.60 represents Colony expenditure and \$63,440.57 expenditure under Colonial Development and Welfare Schemes. Quite a substantial amount also represents revotes of unexpended balances of the previous year of not less than \$156,131. We have had many of those items and many new items. I would like

to recall Members' mind to a few of them — Excess Provision of \$76,000 for Public Works Roads Vote; Loans to Local Authorities, \$40,000; Assistance to Ex-Servicemen, \$10,000; Replacement of equipment of Temporary General Post Office destroyed in 1947 Fire, \$10,000; Public Hospital, Georgetown, Sanitary Improvements, \$18,400. Hon. Members will remember they approved of that at a meeting at which Miss MacManus was present. Mental Hospital Buildings, \$17,500; Erection of new X-Ray Therapy Department, Public Hospital, Georgetown, \$25,000. Those are all new items involved and, I think, in some cases new assets.

As the motion indicates, these items have been fully and carefully considered by Finance Committee. I have no particular point to bring to the Council on this occasion. There is one small item on page 7 — provision for the expenses of a visit of a Fish Farming Expert, \$1,280. I am very pleased to say, Sir, information is now received that a grant is being made from the Central Allocation Funds under the Development and Welfare Act which will cover the cost of the visit of this particular gentleman. So this vote as appearing on the Estimate will lapse. I do not propose to move it out actually. If any Member has any question to ask he may do so. I beg to move the motion.

Mr. CRITCHLOW seconded.

Motion put, and unanimously carried.

SUPPLEMENTARY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES ETC.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I beg to move the following motion:—

"That, this Council approves of the Supplementary Schedule of Services and Works to be met from Loan Funds under Loan Ordinance No. 5 of 1945 which has been laid on the table on the 10th July, 1947."

There are only two items on this Schedule and both were considered in Finance Committee. If Members look at the Schedule they would see that the two items in question are excess on the Wortmanville Housing Scheme of \$8,156.20, and the anticipated excess on the construction of the new General Post Office building, \$300,000, which was considered and ap-

proved by the Finance Committee. The last item has been put in order for us to know precisely where we will stand when we come to consider Development Works. I formally move that this Supplementary Schedule be approved.

Mr. CRITCHLOW seconded.

Motion put, and agreed to.

FARMERS' MINIMUM GUARANTEED PRICES.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY : I would have liked to have present the hon. Member for Central Demerara, Mr. de Aguiar, who is Chairman of the Food Production Committee and is the Member directly concerned. Consequently I would like this motion to be held over. I can, however, move it, but the only thing is, if hon. Members wish further information it would have to be held over until Mr. deAguiar comes.

The PRESIDENT : Let us proceed with the motion.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY : I beg to move the following motion :—

"That, with reference to the Governor's Message No. 17 of the 17th of June, 1947, this Council concurs with the recommendation of the *ad hoc* Marketing Committee that the Government Produce Depot minimum prices guarantee, as set out in the Message, should be extended for a further year from July 15th, 1947, to July 14th, 1948."

This Message of Your Excellency, No. 17, sets out the position quite clearly. The prices in question are the minimum guaranteed prices to be paid by the Government Produce Depot to farmers. Those prices for plantains, sweet potatoes eddoes, tannias, etc., are identically the same as the prices fixed in all previous motions passed in 1946, 1945 and in 1944. The Legislative Council Food Production Committee, most of the Members of which are present, is in full support of this motion. I do not think anybody can deny that at the present time it is absolutely essential to produce as much agricultural products as we can. I therefore need only to ask Members to pass this motion this afternoon in order that the Marketing Committee can be assured of permission to pay these minimum prices. Your Excellency will see that

the Council is warned, that this may cost Government \$20,000. Actually this warning is always given, but on some occasions, for instance last year, the minimum guaranteed prices only cost us \$1,000. I have no idea about it, but I can tell you on that point it is not going to cost you more than \$20,000. I move formally that this motion be adopted.

The COLONIAL TREASURER seconded.

Mr. LEE : I do not know if I can move an amendment for an increase so that the farmers can be guaranteed up to 1949. I think if Government does that it would be a great fillip to increased production. If a man plants this year and knows that prices are guaranteed for two years, he would plant more as he would feel more secure. I do not know whether Government will accept that amendment.

Mr. JACOB : I think the farmers have come to realize that this guarantee is very necessary from year to year and, as suggested by the hon. Member on my left (Mr. Lee), it may be possible to make it for two years. But I would like to stress this point, whether the *ad hoc* Marketing Committee is satisfied that this expedient is bringing the desired result. I do not think it is. The difficulties are drainage, irrigation, finance and one or two other matters. I have received complaints recently from nearly everywhere, that people have not got the land and when they get the land there are all kinds of hindrances—some because there is too much water, others because there is too little water, and some because there is no security for the land at all. They plant this year but do not know whether they will have the land next year. They are not able to prepare the land properly, to drain it properly, because they are not certain what is going to happen later on. This is an expediency which has proved very successful, and I suggest to Government that something better be adopted in future.

Mr. FARNUM : Your Excellency, I must say that this will be very heartening to the farmers to find these guaranteed prices are being carried on for another year. I would like to explain that there are really two scales of guaranteed prices, one is a yearly one and the other a three years' minimum guaranteed prices scale.

That three year one expires sometime during this year. It is for Government to say whether it will continue that. There is this much, however. Somehow a rumour has got around among the farmers that Government does not intend to guarantee the three year minimum prices and there is a possibility of abandonment of the Marketing Depot. It has had this effect : The farmers are hesitating to plant as extensively as they can and, I think, if Government would give some indication of its policy it would do a great deal of good amongst the farmers. I think, Sir, if these guaranteed prices are removed and the Marketing Depot is abandoned, it would just force the farmers back into the hands of what we know here as Farmers' Agents, and in that respect the experience of the farmer in the old days was not a happy one by any means. The agents are supposed to be merciless, and the farmers rather than find themselves in their hands go and work on the sugar estates as labourers. We want the farmers to produce as much as they possibly can and, therefore, if it is possible for Government to make a statement that these prices will be carried on and the Depot will also be carried on, it would do a great deal of good and Government can be assured of getting large quantities of produce.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT : I think the hon. Member's remarks can be supported. In so far as parts of the district which I represent are concerned the position is, there apparently exists a type of agent who goes around trying to stir up these people by telling them that Government is going to abandon the Marketing Depot, no doubt to serve their own purpose and own ends. The whole idea of the inauguration of the Marketing Depot was that these agents had the farmers in their hands as economic slaves, and it was to obviate that. They are still endeavouring to keep them as economic slaves. I think, perhaps, Government may at this stage or at an early stage as possible give some pronouncement, as requested by the hon. Member, to allay this wicked remark which is being circulated in the districts. I think, Your Excellency, you heard while on a visit to Charity remarks on similar lines, and also the farmers requested Government to keep this Marketing Depot.

We have had very strenuous opposition to the Depot from several hon. Members in this Council, but I do not think it can be gainsaid that both the fixing of the prices and the Depot are material to the farmers and are with the object of stabilizing prices. As long as the farmers support the Marketing Depot, I think, so long Government should keep the Marketing Depot. It is up to the farmer if he is prepared to support the Depot, and if he does, I think, Government should keep it going not only as a stabilizing influence on prices but as a definite guarantee to the farmers that they will not be at the mercy of people, who are merely commission agents and are out to make as much money as they can. We had a similar situation in the Rice industry, but that has been totally eliminated. As we know, we had there people drawing 10 per cent. commission on every bag of rice. It is the middleman who is to be eliminated in any industry, and if we can eliminate the middleman we will go somewhere towards giving the farmer a better return.

Mr. SEAFORD : May I suggest in order to stop a long discussion that this Government make a pronouncement about the Marketing Depot ?

Mr. EDUN : I happen to be a member of the Legislative Council Food Production Committee. I was on leave, and I have not attended a meeting of the Committee since I have returned. But I can remember very well indeed that the policy of that Committee was to encourage the growing of pulses. We made special emphasis on that, but I see in this Message here that the question of prices for pulses has been abandoned, which goes to prove that that policy has failed. You see, Sir, I would have liked this item to be something nearer the sum of \$10,000. I am interested in local production, but we are here making emphasis on the production of carbo-hydrates—cassava, tannias, potatoes, etc. I can go further and say this much, that the sugar estates took up the cue to supply pulses in the time of need. They too have failed. It just gives me the idea that the Agriculture Department is not lending its full force in this matter. I shall be attending a meeting of this Committee on Monday and I shall raise

the question there of the abandonment of this policy of growing pulses.

I am afraid, Sir, that we are abandoning a very good policy indeed. We were thinking of a balanced economy. Is it expected that we shall live all the time importing foodstuffs? Is there any possibility of our using these carbo-hydrates for local consumption rather than depending on Canada all the time for flour? Those are the things, we thought in the Committee, should be investigated and experimented upon. I have learnt there that we were taking the cassava to make cattle feed. I want to know how far we have gone into that. Whether we have made a success of that and reported on that phase of it, I would like to be enlightened.

I am supporting this motion. I am still of the opinion, however, that we could have gone a little further. We all remember the hon. the Colonial Treasurer telling us of the increase of the prices of imported foodstuffs. These farmers have to live; they will have to buy those very goods that are imported here at enhanced prices. But we continue to give them the same rates as last year. We are making fish of one section of the community and fowl of the other. We hear that the civil servants need more money in order to live, but in the case of the farmers you are still sticking to the guaranteed prices of 1946. It is not good enough.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY : On a point of correction! These are the minimum prices. The Marketing Depot gives more. It is not the actual price.

Mr. EDUN : Whatever price is paid by the Marketing Depot will be on the same basis of that of last year. That is why I was thinking that \$20,000 is not good enough for the experimentation. I support the motion.

Dr. SINGH : The Legislative Council Food Production Committee started its campaign during the war to encourage people to grow more food. Some time after the people enquired and were given the assurance by Government that it was not a war measure but would be continued. Minimum prices were guaranteed the farmers, and that is the reason why the Council is being asked today to guarantee

prices for certain produce for another year. The hon. Member for Essequibo River (Mr. Lee) has suggested a 3-year guarantee. That was considered by the Committee but it was decided that it would be better to guarantee prices for one year and see what happened. I ask hon. Members to support the motion.

Mr. THOMPSON : I agree with the hon. Member for Essequibo River that Government should guarantee these prices for three years. I supported the prices fixed, but since then I have been asked to request an increase in the price of cassava. I told the farmers that, having accepted the price of 1¼ cents per lb., I could not ask for an increase.

There is some talk about abandoning the Marketing Committee, and I expect that a deputation will shortly approach Your Excellency with a view to having the whole matter gone into to see what improvements can be made. There is some dissatisfaction on the part of the farmers, and after Your Excellency has heard them you will be able to understand the position. They are asking for a guarantee for two years.

Mr. PEER BACCHUS : I agree with the hon. Member for Georgetown North (Mr. Seaford) that Government should make a pronouncement as to whether the 3-year guarantee of prices can be extended.

Mr. SEAFORD : I did not ask for that. I asked about the future of the Marketing Committee.

Mr. PEER BACCHUS : I do not know whether Government is in a position to make a pronouncement now as to whether it would consider extending these guaranteed minimum prices for three years. It is more convenient to fix these prices for one year, because we are better able to gauge the market. In fact it is in the interest of the producers to do so.

The COLONIAL TREASURER : As regards the question of the Marketing Organization, I would say that Government feels that it should continue. I am very glad indeed that the Colonial Treasurer has heard the views expressed by hon. Members, because I expect when he comes before the Finance Committee and asks

permission to put the Marketing Officer on the Fixed Establishment they will support the proposal. Government can say now that we are going to continue the Marketing Board as a permanent branch of the Department of Agriculture. I think we should say so. In so far as anyone can make a pronouncement suddenly like that, as regards Government policy, I think I can say that Government policy should be that.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY : With regard to the other point raised by the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Farnum, and the hon. Member for Western Berbice (Mr. Peer Bacchus) I would like to point out that there are two guaranteed prices at the moment. There is a 3-year guarantee of minimum prices for certain items, which expires in August this year. Of course those prices were a little lower than those guaranteed at the Produce Depot. I cannot give a definite answer to the hon. Members' questions. I do not know the wishes of the Marketing Officer or the Legislative Council Food Production Committee in this matter. I can only say that the question of continuing the lower prices over a longer period should be considered. The present guarantee does not end until August, and I shall ask the hon. Member

for Central Demerara (Mr. deAguiar) to consider the matter in view of the opinions expressed this afternoon. I cannot do more than that.

The PRESIDENT : Government will refer the question of a longer period for consideration by the Marketing Organization.

Mr. LEE : The difficulty would be this : that Government may decide to continue the Marketing Organization, but if the farmers are not given guaranteed prices, and the Depot desires to show a profit, the farmers would be handicapped. If the farmers are guaranteed prices for two years they would be able to budget accordingly.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY : The motion before Council fixes certain minimum prices. I would suggest that the Council pass this annual guarantee and let the Marketing Committee consider the question of a longer guarantee at their first meeting, possibly on Monday.

Motion put, and agreed to.

The PRESIDENT : The Council is adjourned.