

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL****WEDNESDAY, 31ST JULY, 1946.**

The Council met at 2 p.m., His Excellency the Officer Administering the Government, W. L. Heape, C.M.G., President, in the Chair.

**PRESENT:**

The President, His Excellency the Officer Administering the Government, Mr. W. L. Heape, C.M.G.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Mr. D. J. Parkinson (acting).

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

The Hon. the Colonial Treasurer, Mr. W. O. Fraser (acting).

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

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

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

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

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

The Hon. Percy C. Wight, O.B.E. (Georgetown Central).

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. A. G. King (Demerara River).

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 25th July, 1946, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS****DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

The PRESIDENT: I am circulating to Members a short memorandum on the important question of the appointment of a Development Committee under the chairmanship of Colonel Spencer. Members will recollect that Sir Gordon Lethem had said he proposed to appoint this Committee under the chairmanship of the Economic Adviser to prepare for Government a plan of development and welfare within the resources available, and Sir Gordon gave Members of this Council an indication of what those resources would be, when he addressed this Council before he left for England. It is a very important question and, I hope, Members will agree when they study my short memorandum that we might adjourn and discuss the whole question informally so that we could have, I hope, unanimity on general principles. Then the work will get on all the quicker. The memorandum may come around to you this afternoon, but we will see how we get on with the Order of the Day. We may adjourn tomorrow towards 4 o'clock or on Friday if we meet, or need we wait until next week to see how we get on? But I want the memorandum to be read by Members first and, I hope, when we have a fuller Council we will consider whether we should adjourn and discuss it.

**ROAD TRAFFIC CONTROL**

There is another point I would like to bring out. On the Order of the Day there is the first reading of a Bill to amend the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Ordinance. I have seen it suggested that this is really a tyrannical measure, and I hasten to correct that impression. This Bill is intended to introduce machinery by which the common carrier on the road may be brought under some form of control. Nearly every country nowadays has legislation to control what goes on the roads, and in this country it is particularly important. The idea is that competition with the railway should be controlled. Not that people who own trucks and buses should not be allowed to carry out their legitimate business but, I think Members will agree with me that the vast majority

of the people of this country want the railway to continue. It is your railway. It belongs to the people because it is not private interest. It is State-owned and, if it is to be continued, it cannot be permitted undue competition by buses or trucks as common carriers—mainly trucks. If you want your railway to die, then let us know; but I do not think you do.

The other point is that the roads in this country are not suitable for a sudden rush of very heavy traffic. The ordinary citizen should, therefore, understand it is not only in the interest of the railway which he owns but it is also in the interest of the roads which he owns that there should be some measure of control possible. That is what this Bill intends to provide. No one wants to interfere with legitimate business where it can be run for the benefit of the community, but where it is obviously uneconomical to have two forms of traffic then there should be some control, and that control should be administered by an appointed body of people who have no vested interest either way. That is what this Bill, subject to what the hon. the Attorney-General will tell you, intends to provide. Don't be under the illusion that this is a new thing. It is not. Every country has to have legislation of some kind or another to control the common carrier. This is the beginning of such legislation. When we have had some experience and have seen how things work, we should have a statutory Transport Authority just the same as they have in Jamaica and in Trinidad. That is a complete authority to regulate these things. At the moment this Bill puts that power in the hands of the Executive Council, because we are only "cutting our teeth", but when we have had experience we will advance further.

I see the hon. Member for North-Western District is shaking his head. The hon. Member is suspicious of the intelligence of Government, but I can tell the hon. Member that what we are endeavouring to do and hope to do here has been done nearly everywhere. I hope the hon. Member would agree with me in saying that the railway and steamer services of ours must be continued. Actually I believe this railway can be made into a very good railway. I believe, if this Council

supports Government, that this railway will soon be wiping out its deficit. However we shall see. I hope Members will not jump to false conclusions and will not attack the Bill on the principle that Government is always wrong, but will give it their very careful consideration before coming to any conclusion.

#### PAPERS LAID

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Mr. Parkinson, Acting) laid on the table the following document:—

Report of the Forest Department for the year 1945 (M.P. 46/4 III).

The COLONIAL TREASURER (Mr. Fraser, Acting) laid on the table the following document:—

The Schedule of Additional Provision for the month of July, 1946.

#### GOVERNMENT NOTICES

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE—  
JULY 1946

The COLONIAL TREASURER gave notice of the following motion:—

"That, this Council approves of the Schedule of Additional Provision for July, 1946, which has been laid on the table."

#### ORDER OF THE DAY

##### LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

Mr. JACOB: I beg to move the following motion:—

WHEREAS certain provisions under Legislative Council (Elections) Ordinance No. 13 of 1945, as hereinafter detailed are not in the best interests of the inhabitants of the Colony of British Guiana;

AND WHEREAS certain Regulations made under the Legislative Council (Elections) Ordinance, 1945, as hereinafter detailed, are also not in the best interests of the inhabitants of the Colony of British Guiana;

#### BE IT RESOLVED:

(a) that the words "during the qualifying period" regarding qualification of voters be deleted in section 3, wherever they occur, and that subsection 8 of section 3 be also deleted;



(b) that provision be made in the Ordinance to enable a legally constituted attorney of any eligible person to be empowered to register that person as a voter, if he or she is temporarily absent from the Colony;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

(a) that Regulation 6 regarding declarations in support of Claim be deleted;

(b) that Regulation 3 (1) be amended by substituting the words "15th day of August" in place of "15th day of June;"

(c) that Regulation 9 (1) be amended by substituting the words "31st day of October, 1946" for "31st day of August, 1946;"

(d) that all other dates for the publication, preparation by Revising Officer, and final publication of the list of voters under Part one of the Regulations be extended for a period of two months.

Your Excellency, I am a little disappointed at the attendance at this Council meeting today. Here we have, what I consider, a very important question touching the very root of this Assembly; that is, that all persons duly qualified to be registered as voters should find their names on the Voters' List. But here we see nearly all the Elected Representatives of the people absent when this matter is to be either put through or put aside. This simply shows that during the last five or six years so little interest has been evinced in the welfare of the people. It makes one feel—and it has been repeated here from time to time—that this is a moribund Legislative Council and it ought to be changed.

The PRESIDENT: Not including the President?

Mr. JACOB: Yes, sir.

The PRESIDENT: I am not moribund!

Mr. JACOB: There is a feeling in Government circles, and I think the present holders of the principal offices in this Council have the belief, that the Elections must be held as early as possible at all cost, I credit the present Executive Head for a good many things that have been done

recently to expedite the Elections, but I want to ask in the interest of the people of this country that this thing be not rushed too fast. I am most anxious to assist in every possible way to let us have a properly constituted Council of Members who will be elected in the future by the largest number of persons qualified to vote. That is what the world has been asking for these last few years. Since the termination of the Great War there has been an awakening of thought with the result that people are asking for an opportunity to vote at the appropriate time so that they have proper Councils throughout the world, British Guiana being no exception.

My object in giving notice of this motion and moving it today is to remove irregularities, to get a properly constituted Council, and if we have to wait for two more months, I think, it will be time well spent and whatever may be the result we will have to abide by it. Let me make it perfectly clear. I am placing no blame on the present Executive Head. He has done all that he possibly can, but I want a little more tolerance so as to give every man who has a right to vote the opportunity to get his name on the Voters' List for the Elections, which may take place in January or February next, and which will constitute this Council for a period of five years. If, therefore, a man does not vote at the forthcoming Elections he will not have the opportunity to exercise the right to vote for Members of this Council for another five years. It is true that the List will be revised from time to time, but no one will have the right to vote during the next five years unless there are by-elections. So I say, let us hasten slowly and do all we can to enable all qualified persons—I am laying emphasis on the word "qualified"—to vote.

According to the Regulations the time for the next Elections is January next. The Budget will have been prepared and passed in November or December of this year. What is the harm in putting off the Elections to March instead of holding them in January, when the Budget will have been passed already? What difference will it make to have the Elections two months later? I see no difference at all. I see no difference even if the Elections



are held in June. It is not that we want the Elections delayed, but we want a properly constituted Council; we want to give every citizen the right to vote at the Elections. He has not had that opportunity for eleven or possibly twelve years to select his representative in this Council, and if he does not get a chance to do so next year he will not have it for the next five years. Whatever is the intention of Government, I think, this motion should be accepted and we should have the Elections held either in March or April next year. You may be able to have the Elections in February, but I do not think so. Let me say this: Whether this motion is accepted or not, I am very doubtful as to whether the Elections will be held in January, 1947. This Government is not capable for several physical reasons of holding the Elections in January, 1947. I am going to give certain particulars later on, but at the moment before I go into the various resolve clauses of the motion I say it is impractical to hold the Elections in January, 1947.

I have given this matter considerable thought. On the 4th April I wrote the hon. the Colonial Secretary pointing out that as the Regulations are framed it is not practicable to have registered all eligible persons within two weeks. As a matter of fact the hon. Member for Essequibo River (Mr. Lee) and myself interviewed the hon. the Attorney-General on the 6th March and pointed out to him that the Regulations were one-sided. I think it was agreed that a larger number of people will be given the right to vote. The extension of the qualification of voters gave a large number of people the right to vote. Prior to this year the time for the registration of voters was four weeks. That time was not found too convenient; it was found to be somewhat short, but with the extension of the qualification of voters, with a larger number of people having the right to be registered, with travelling facilities and communications with the interior as they are, it is undoubtedly an inappropriate time to reduce the time for registration from four weeks to two weeks. We stressed the point then that the time should be extended to at least six weeks and that we did not mind two months, but nothing was done until June,

after we had that interview with the hon. the Attorney-General and he had promised to go into the matter.

As I was leaving the Colony some time in April I decided I should put the facts in writing. I did so on the 4th April and left the Colony on the 30th April, but nothing practically was done. On my return from Canada I wrote another letter to the hon. the Colonial Secretary in July pointing out certain difficulties. The letter of the 4th April pointed out that the Forms were not made available, not even in April nor in May, though these Forms for the registration of voters had to be sent all all over the Colony. The result was that when the time came for the registration of voters, from the 1st to the 15th June, the Forms were not actually available at many places. They were available in Georgetown and in the nearby areas, but at several places those Forms were not available. The result was that steps had to be taken and everything possible was done to have those Forms sent to all parts of the Colony and, I believe, 115,000 or 120,000 Forms were sent out. Let me stress that the sending out of the Forms did not mean the Forms went to the particular places and were distributed, as after the Forms had been actually sent and received at certain places they were not properly distributed. The result was that Government found it necessary to extend the time from the 15th June to the 15th July. That was because Government found it was not practicable to have the people registered within that short period of time, from the 1st to the 15th of June. As we had recommended in the first instance a period of six weeks, some people might say "You should be glad your representations have been successful". But I say again that it has been my most unfortunate experience with this Government that the right thing is done at the wrong time.

After the Forms were sent out and preparations were being made for registration it was discovered that there were not sufficient Commissioners of Oaths to assist the people in the preparation of their Forms and the filing of them with the Registering Officers. What Government did? Government hurriedly had printed



and published in an *Official Gazette* dated 21st June the appointment of a number of persons to be Commissioners of Oaths. That again was the right thing being done at the wrong time and in the wrong manner. I actually arranged to visit my constituency and carry that *Gazette* with me. I asked and was facilitated with a large number of Forms—I think 500. When I arrived in my constituency I went to the N.C.O. in charge of the Police Station there, who was a Commissioner of Oaths for the purposes of registration in that outlying district, to find that he did not know he had been appointed a Commissioner of Oaths. This is another point I wish to stress. These people who have been appointed Commissioners of Oaths do not really know their duties. They do not know what to do and how to do it. Here is this Government endeavouring to do certain things but doing them in the wrong way. Government issued an *Official Gazette* dated 21st June on page 1110 of which are given the persons appointed as Commissioners of Oaths. The Notice reads as follows:—

“3. The Principal Regulations are hereby amended by the insertion, after Regulation 28 of the following new Regulation—

28A. The persons for the time being holding any of the offices hereunder designated are hereby appointed, with effect as from the 1st June, 1946, to be commissioners of oaths for the purpose of receiving any statutory declaration which is required to be made under this Part of these Regulations—

- (a) any registering officer or any of his clerks;
- (b) any revising officer;
- (c) any returning officer;
- (d) any justice of the peace;
- (e) any district or assistant district commissioner;
- (f) any magistrate;
- (g) any clerk of a magistrate's court;
- (h) any county or assistant superintendent of police, any warrant officer, or any non-commissioned officer in charge of a police station;
- (i) any Government medical officer or Government dispenser;
- (j) any postmaster;

- (k) any warden or sub-warden of a mining district;
- (l) any chairman or deputy chairman of a village council, or any chairman of a country authority;
- (m) the publicity officer, and the assistant publicity officers of the Bureau of Publicity and Information;
- n) any manager, and any deputy manager, of a sugar estate;
- (o) any headteacher of a Government or of a Government-aided school; or
- (p) any person appointed by the Governor by notice published in the *Gazette*.”

All these people were appointed. Let me tell you of my experience when I arrived at Morawhanna in the North-West District on the 24th June to assist the people there in their registration. I went to the N.C.O. in charge of the Police Station who was authorised by this *Gazette* to function as a Commissioner of Oaths. He did not actually open the *Gazette* as yet; it was lying on his table and I drew his attention to it. I also went to the Headteacher of the School and asked him if he had done anything in the matter. He said to me “I promised you I would, but I have done nothing.” I then asked him “Have you been able to get Forms?” He replied: “No”. No one at Morawhanna, except the Police Station which had a few, had got the forms and no one knew he had the right to take the declaration of persons to be registered as voters. This was on the 24th of June.

The principal Regulations state definitely that the List must be closed on June 15, but on June 24 not a single new person had been registered. I got the Sergeant in charge of the Station and the Headteacher of the school to do certain work—I accompanied them—and we were able to do some forms that day and later. Your Excellency visited Morawhanna and saw the condition of the roads and the whole place, and you can imagine why one cannot get these people to go for the forms and sign them and to be registered. I ask Your Excellency to think what it means to get these people to do all these things when their living conditions are of such. The people are all demoralised and are wondering what all this is about. They say that



they have not seen any material improvement their way and do not know why they should take all this trouble. As a matter of fact, that is the temper of a large number of people in this Colony. They can see nothing in all these things we are talking about—nothing whatever in this set-up.

Therefore, I say that while His Excellency the Governor and the Executive Council have been good enough to appoint all these people as Commissioners of Oaths, the population as a whole do not appreciate the situation. They do not know their duty and, I think, it is within knowledge that grave irregularities are going on. A declaration in regard to this matter of the registration of voters is worth nothing. I want Government to realise that fact and to rectify the situation as soon as possible. The declaration looks well on paper and on the Statute Book, but I repeat that it is worth practically nothing. The great majority of Commissioners do not know their duty and, I am certain, it is within the knowledge of the principal Officers of this Government that the whole thing is a farce and that the sooner these declarations are abolished the better it would be for all concerned. If we want to give the people the right to vote—to choose their representatives and have the best form of Government—let us make this thing as simple as possible and as smooth as possible.

It is within the knowledge of Government, I repeat, that this system of getting people registered as voters is a howling farce. Only a week ago the *Official Gazette* published the appointment of certain people in the Mazaruni district to be Commissioners of Oaths. I ask in all seriousness whether these people have been communicated with and told that they have been appointed and that the closing date is today. I certainly think not. The mere publication of their names in the *Gazette* is not enough; further particulars should have been sent up there. How will these people know that they have been appointed, and how will the people in the interior know that they can go to these people. I tried to give a radio broadcast for the benefit of those people, but only a few of them are financial enough to own radios.

This registration business has cost me some \$600 or \$700 already. The British Guiana Labour Party held a meeting in the district also, but I regret to say that the Press gave it absolutely no publicity. As a matter of fact, certain sections of the Press refuse to recognize certain things done by certain people. We have not got the machinery to do this business, and while some of us have tried to do our best others have tried to do the opposite. I say again that the Press has done very little to get the people in the outlying districts registered as voters. I wrote a letter on July 10 to the Attorney-General suggesting certain improvements in this system of registration of voters and I trust that it will be given careful consideration.

Now, sir, I had several conversations with the hon. the Attorney-General about this matter, and I am not in a position even now to say how many forms have been received up to any particular date, or even the Election Officer whose business it is to keep in constant touch with the Registering Officer and see that he is doing his work so as to be able to report the position at a particular date. I ask whether this Government is in a position to say how many forms have been received up to last week.

The PRESIDENT: Do you wish the information now?

Mr. JACOB: I shall be glad because it will help me in my speech.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I am in a position to give details of the claims received up to July 24, 1946, and they are as follows:—

Eastern Berbice—6,280; New Amsterdam—1,643; Berbice River—1,500; Western Berbice—1,934; Eastern Demerara—5,050; Central Demerara—5,000; Georgetown North—1,918; Georgetown Central—2,950; Georgetown South—3,457; Demerara River—3,900; Demerara-Essequibo—1,575; Essequibo River—1,592; Western Essequibo—1,900; and North Western District—350, making a total of 39,049.

I may add, sir, that with regard to Georgetown Central more recent figures to hand indicate that up to yesterday the



total was 3,600 and, if I may be permitted to use these figures—of course there are others to come in because there was a lull after the publication of the extension on the last occasion—the final figures will be 39,699 and if you add to these figures the 5,000 claims estimated to have been received between July 24 and July 31—they may be more than 5,000 because it is believed that a good many people are waiting until the last moment to register—you will get a total of 44,699 and when this is added to the list in force—a list of about 10,000—it will give an estimated grand total of 54,700. I understand from the Election Officer that, judging from the number of persons seeking registration up to yesterday, the final total is likely to be within 56,000 and 58,000 voters. These figures, however, are only approximate.

Mr. JACOB: I thank the hon. the Attorney-General very much for these figures and I think that if the Election Officer really wanted to co-operate with a large number of people including myself, he would have had a much larger list from the various districts throughout the Colony. It is not at all satisfactory that only 40,000 people registered up to July 24. There are various reasons why these figures are not satisfactory. Several hon. Members of this Council who are probably tired and have no interest in the future of the Colony and will not seek re-election, have done absolutely nothing while there are others who have done all they can but have not been facilitated at all. The Registering Officers had an idea that if "A" represents a district, then "B" should not go and ask for any forms in that district. I have definite evidence that in some cases they refused to give forms while in others they gave only a small number although they had more. In my own case, I asked for 200 forms and I asked the messenger to make a note of the reply given to him. The Registering Officer said:—"Why does Mr. Jacob want 200 forms; I have not got them—I have to get them printed."

These remarks may not be quite correct, but the fact remains that I sent for 200 forms and only got 100. I have evidence from other persons who sent for forms and did not get them, therefore the Officers who were appointed to assist in

every possible way have not been doing their duty. It is quite an easy matter, however, for the Election Officer—if he has any interest in his work—to issue instructions to all the Registering Officers that they should send in returns showing the number of forms they have received from day to day. He could have done that on July 15 or the week after, but he declined. I spoke to the BPI and asked them to get the information I wanted, but they could not get it. The result is that we are going to have an election according to Government's planning with a list of possibly 55,000 voters, but that is not at all satisfactory.

I think this Government ought to assume the responsibility and extend this time, and issue fresh instructions that every possible facility be granted to everyone who wants these forms, and so get 75,000 or 100,000 persons registered. If we are to do this thing, as it is being done in other parts of the world, why shouldn't 50 or 60 per cent. of the people be registered? Doesn't this Government want to tell the people that they have the opportunity and should make use of it? I do not think this Government wants to stand in their way and so I say as a gesture:—"Extend the time for two weeks or, if possible, a month." What if the elections are delayed for a month or two? I want to point out another irregularity. The time has been extended from July 15 to July 31, but I have not seen any regulation extending the time. Nothing has been printed and laid on the table in this Council up to the present time.

I know it will not be practicable to have the list of voters printed by the Revising Officer according to Regulation No. 91, and it will not be practicable for the Registering Officer to have the Regulations printed by August 31, 1946. This is July 31 and in my own constituency the Registering Officer will not have the forms in his office before August 7. He has to prepare a list and send it to Georgetown to be printed. The steamer leaves there—the North-West District—on August 8 and will arrive in Georgetown on August 9. When the list comes down—if it does—it has to be printed and returned to the district, but that cannot be done before August 21. Then, the lists of voters will



have to be published so as to conform to the Regulations with regard to objections and so on. Let us face the facts as they are and not make mistakes; let us amend the Regulations and give the people more time to put in their claims and get properly registered.

I have information about one or two electoral districts. Let us take District No. 6—Central Demerara. I see, according to the figures just given, that 5,000 claims have been received from persons residing in this district, but I question the accuracy of those figures. That is a mere estimate. Is it practicable for this gentleman—the Returning Officer—to arrive at the figures so accurately when forms are coming in all the time, or does he want to mislead somebody? Does he take these forms and compare them with the previous list which has 884 names? Taking the figures for granted, the list for this district will be one of roughly 6,000 names and is it practicable for these 6,000 names to be typed and put in alphabetical order and sent to Georgetown and then printed and sent back by August 31? It is impossible.

I have given two instances to show that conditions in the North-West District and the Essequibo River District are practically the same, and I have also referred to conditions in Central Demerara, and so I say let us face the facts and let us extend the time so that we will have a proper voters' list at the elections and nobody will be ashamed and be able to say that everything possible has not been done.

I want now to deal with the various resolve clauses in the motion. Let us take pars. (d), (e), (f), and (g) of Section 3 (1) of the Ordinance and we find that if a person does not live within the electoral district in which he wants to be a voter for a period of six months before registration, he cannot be registered as a voter. Now, sir, I want to cite a case affecting an hon. Member of this Council—and a prominent Member at that. Let us take the Deputy President who lives in Georgetown Central—and I think he does not live in his own property but he lives under a tenancy or possibly a lease. If he happens to remove from Georgetown Central to Georgetown North—say to Kingston which is a residential district—he will not be

able to register his name in Georgetown under these provisions.

Immediately after the list is published, I or any other voter in Georgetown Central will be able to object to the name of the Deputy President and have it removed because he will not have possessed qualification by residence in that constituency. There is no machinery whereby he can put his name on the list for Georgetown Central and as a Member of this Council his seat will *ipso facto* become vacant. That is one of the reasons why several people always take the precaution to have their names registered in more than one constituency. In my own case, I took the precaution of having myself registered in three constituencies—Georgetown North, Georgetown Central and Central Demerara—but I am asking that these provisions be amended because they may jeopardise certain Members of this Council and place them in very difficult positions.

Let us take one or two other aspects of the situation. If names are removed by objection to the list as printed, what would be the position? I say that that anomaly should be rectified. I am going to be told that it is not practicable, but I say it is. Let me quote another case. Mr. Churchill's name was excluded from the voters' list and when he went to vote he did not find it, but that did not debar him from becoming a Member of Parliament. All that happened was that he did not get to exercise his vote, but in this Colony of British Guiana he would not have been able to take his seat. If the law is not amended in this Colony I do not know what would happen. In another instance, the late Hon. J. P. Santos was nominated and returned for Eastern Berbice, but after the elections it was discovered that his name was not on the voters' list and therefore he could not take his seat. The bye-election which followed put the Government to expense and another Member was elected to succeed him. So I say that a similar thing can happen in six or eight months' time, but I will ask this Government to prevent that by doing the right thing. I think that is all I will say on that resolve clause.

I can give further reasons as to why



the amendment should be made. Section 3 (8) of the Ordinance reads :—

“(8) For the purpose of this section, residence in an electoral district during the qualifying period shall not be deemed to be interrupted —

- (a) by any removal to another place of residence within the electoral district, or
- (b) by temporary absence from the electoral district, or
- (c) by reason only of notice to quit being served and possession being demanded by the landlord of the house.

Steps should be taken to obviate the possibility of one having his name removed from the list. I cannot see any objection to having this done. An amendment was put through on June 21 whereby members of His Majesty's Forces were given the right to be registered as voters whether they have been residing in the Colony for a period of six months or not. The provision is to be found in Ordinance No. 15 of 1946, and Section 4 (3) thereof reads :—

“(3) For the purposes of subsection (1) of this section, subsection (8) of section three of the Principal Ordinance shall have effect as if the words “during the qualifying period” were omitted therefrom, and section four of the Principal Ordinance shall have effect as if paragraph (a) were omitted therefrom.”

It is obvious that a member of His Majesty's Forces can get his name registered as a voter whether he has been residing in this Colony for a period of six months or not, but I find that a member of His Majesty's Civil Service in this Colony cannot do the same thing. In my own constituency the Clerk of Court there had been transferred from Bartica—in District No. 12—and is now in District No. 14. When I saw him on June 14, he said to me :— “I cannot put my name on any list; I left my District on June 12.” I told him that he had to thank the Executive Council and the Legislative Council for putting him in that false position. So we find that even a senior Officer in the Civil Service cannot have a vote. All these things, I regret to say, I pointed out when Ordinance No. 13 of 1945 was being prepared, but Government simply took no heed. Maybe

Government had iron-bound instructions from the Secretary of State to do these things and these alone. When I put up a case the President said : “If that is to be passed, I would have to hold up the whole thing and refer it to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.” That was repeated here on quite a few occasions. But the Secretary of State's instructions have to be obeyed. What are we here for? Are we here to do as we are told, or to let reason prevail? I have good cases to show there is no earthly argument, I submit with all respect to you, against these things that I have said. It is up to the Government. That is in respect of section 3. Subsection (8) of section 3 can be amended as stated in the first resolve clause. The next resolve clause reads :

“(b) that provision be made in the Ordinance to enable a legally constituted attorney of any eligible person to be empowered to register that person as a voter if he or she is temporarily absent from the Colony.”

Your Excellency would recall that after the people were only given two weeks to register, some wise gentlemen or a body of men told this Government that the old Voters' Lists are all cancelled and those 13,000 names on them will have to be re-registered. We have not been able to register more than 40,000 persons up to now, and rather than having those 13,000 names to swell the new List some wiseacres think two weeks quite sufficient for registration and they must re-register. The result was that while I was away from the Colony—I was on my way to England—I had to travel back from Canada to this Colony, which took me seven days and caused me very great inconvenience and the loss of a lot of money, merely to see that my name appeared on the Voters' List of this Colony. I submit the Regulation under the Ordinance as it stands does not give anyone the right to ask people, whose names are already on the old List, to re-register. I have drawn attention to this before. Perhaps it would be the best thing if my name was left out from the Voters' List, but I just want to assure those who think so that my name will never be left out of the List unless I am dead—not only my own name but the name of Jacob will remain on the List for a considerable period. Let all those who think



otherwise realise that the name of Jacob will take a prominent place in the affairs of this Colony. I feel hurt, and I think that in respect of a man, who has been long in this Colony, who has property in this Colony and who is temporarily absent from the Colony, some provision should be made in the law to have his name placed on the List by anyone who wants to do so for him.

Your Excellency knows what I am referring to. I have had a personal chat with you about it, and I think that everything should be done to facilitate the people who are really trying to help themselves. It is the duty of this Government, I submit with all confidence, to see that all eligible persons' names are on the Voters' List. I remember when the hon. Member for Demerara River (Mr. King) was aspiring to become a Member of this Council. He made preparation to stand for election in 1935 and then suddenly found that through some error his name was not on the Voters' List and so he could not seek election during that year. He had to wait for another occasion to stand election when he became a Member of this Council and a very good Member too. He had been precluded from standing for election because by some error his name was not on the Voters' List. Those are facts no one can dispute. It is because there exist obsolete provisions; it is because of the fact that we in this country are to be bossed, everything to give us extended rights must be reviewed by somebody. The Secretary of State's name is always used, whether correctly or not I do not know, in connection with those things. I cannot imagine a responsible Minister in His Majesty's Government trying to do these things. All these things that I have pointed out were raised before and have never been put right. I raise them again and trust they will be put right. Now I come to the Regulations.

The PRESIDENT : I will just point out to the hon. Member that he is under the misapprehension that the Register of Voters for 1944-45 shall have effect as if it were deemed to be the Register of Voters in force. That is the Member's comment. I do want to point out that by a vote of this Council speeches on introducing mo-

tions are only supposed to last three-quarters of an hour. The hon. Member should not go on, because he will be actually acting contrary to the wishes of his colleagues. I have no intention, however, of stopping the hon. Member, but the fact is he has had his three-quarters of an hour and more.

Mr. JACOB : I was hoping Your Excellency would not raise it. I consider this matter of such paramount importance that at the moment I disregard entirely that resolution, although I supported it. At a later stage I shall have something to say about that, and possibly to have it rescinded. I am not bothering about it, but these things cannot continue always, Your Excellency, only for a certain period.

The PRESIDENT : It is the democratic wish of the people.

Mr. JACOB : As I said in my opening remarks, this Legislature is not representative of the people.

The PRESIDENT : And you want to prolong it !

Mr. JACOB : For a few months so as to have the best constituted Council. Whether it is prolonged or not, we are not having the Elections here as planned by Government. Subclause (4) of the second resolve clause of the resolution reads :

“(a) that Regulation 6 regarding declarations in support of claim be deleted.”

I laid emphasis on the fact that most of the Commissioners of Oaths who have been appointed for the purpose of registration are not aware of their duties. They were not told what those duties were and, I think, a good many of them are not doing their duty. I am reliably informed that the principal Officers of Government are aware of this fact. I ask then, since that is so, that the declarations be removed from the Registration Forms in future. I would like to be advised in what part of the Colonial Empire we have these declarations for the registration of voters. We have only had them here because of the pique of certain people, because the Legislature was constituted as it was then. Prior to



1928 there was no such declaration. Because a certain Party was able to get into the Legislature that was done. I see the hon. the Deputy President (Mr. Woolford) is shaking his head. He has been an excellent and particularly most useful Member but, I think, he has out-served his usefulness.

Mr. WOOLFORD : I do not wish any encomiums from the hon. Member for North-Western District, and I cannot sit here and listen to a general statement being made about a matter on which I am peculiarly informed without saying something. I have stated in this Council before, and I rise now to a point of correction to state again, that the statutory declaration was my own personal idea. I was a member of the B.G. Constitution Commission which sat in 1927, and I suggested to the other members that in order to avoid the Registering Officer rejecting the claims of people, who were duly qualified and who were not allowed some of the liberties that they enjoy today, there should be that statutory declaration. A man earning \$300 a year was not given any facility to prove his qualification; he could not get certification as to his actual salary, and having these objections raised by the Registering Officer the simplest form was to get a certificate from his employer or some authorized person, or in the absence of that a statutory declaration. The Commission accepted that.

There are many reasons in favour of the continuance of the declaration. The employers of those days, who had said that the Legislature of those days was not a representative one or that the people took no interest in the affairs of the Colony, are now the persons who object to give the certificates. It should be obligatory on them to do so. They should be penalised for not doing it. If anyone is to accept responsibility for the idea, which was in the public interest, it is myself. It had been accepted by the Commission and, I know, has been put to very good use by the people who are now able to get on the Voters' Register because of that certificate. I would just like to stress that, so as to prevent the hon. Member making that error which he has done twice in two weeks. It is a very helpful thing to such people

as servants and persons of that class to be able today to get a certificate from their employer and so get their names on the Register.

Mr. JACOB : The certificate is quite a different thing from a declaration. The hon. the Deputy President is so clever. Of course he thinks he is clever.

Mr. WOOLFORD : I have already dealt with both questions. I am responsible for the idea being in the clause the hon. Member is thinking of.

Mr. JACOB : The hon. the Deputy President thinks himself very clever. As I said, his interference has not been appreciated by me at all. Why should we embarrass people to give certificates to servants? Why should we ask them to do so? Why should servants not get their names registered without having to do what the hon. Member has imposed upon them? I am saying that the whole thing is most farcical, and this Legislature is encouraging declarations to be made that are absolutely of no value. The people are not concerned. Let me say what is happening. Several of these Forms are written out, signed and then taken to a Commissioner of Oaths who signs them. I understand that responsible persons are doing it. Last night I asked at the B.G. Labour Party meeting if this thing is known, and several members said they knew all about it. It is being done wholesale. I say it is not necessary. I would like to be informed in which other Colony a voter has to declare that he is 21 years of age, that he is earning \$10 a month, and so on. I say, the easiest thing is to leave the prospective voter on his own honour and not to embarrass and hinder him and to worry other people about giving certificates, making declarations and appointing Commissioners of Oaths. It is the most unwise thing to do. But the hon. the Deputy President has said he is responsible for it. My suggestion is that he certainly did insist in the Franchise Commission of 1941 that it should be done and, getting a majority with him, it was done. I am pointing out how the whole thing is farcical. It should not be perpetuated in this Legislative Council. We do not want to perpetuate something which is known to be farcical.



The Government has admitted that the qualification now of \$10 per month is practically universal franchise. It is admitted on all sides that no one can live on less than \$7.20 per month. That person has to wear clothes, live in a house. Every male person 21 years of age must necessarily earn \$10 per month in some form, except he is on public funds in which case he is excluded from being a voter. When you go into the matter carefully what is it all about? If there had been universal adult suffrage there would have been no necessity to have this declaration. What is the necessity for having this declaration? I cannot see it. You are making a declaration look so farcical. We have to make declarations about other things. For instance, when Customs Duties are to be paid the Customs clerk of a firm makes a declaration, but he has not to go and take an oath. Surely that same principle should prevail in regard to the registration of voters as is done in the case of jurors and Municipal voters. There is no necessity for a Municipal voter in Georgetown or New Amsterdam to take an oath, though his qualification is very much higher. There is no necessity for a voter in any of the Village or Country Districts to take an oath, but for this Legislature Government has gone one step further than the Municipalities. It has reduced the qualification to such a low level that certain reactionary persons like the hon. the Deputy President have the temerity to get up here and say it is right that certificates should be given and the requirement should be continued. That is what we find.

Can this Colony make progress under such conditions? It cannot, and I invoke the aid of the law. As long as we have men like those sitting here and on the Executive Council, it will not. I do not know if the hon. the Deputy President or other Members of Council know about the conditions in the North-West District, but this Government ought to be thoroughly ashamed of itself about that. I heard, by the way, the Venezuelan President made some comment about British Guiana. I do not know what Brazil is going to say. The Government must take warning. No one is more loyal than your humble servant. We have to face facts and see that the people get what they deserve. We ought

not to put any obstacles in their way. There are 7,000 people in the North-West District but only 350 are registered as voters. Is this Government proud of that fact? Whose responsibility it is? Members of Parliament came here to investigate conditions and, when I told them I represented a division of 50 odd voters, they smiled. I say, remove these Regulations. Let this Government take courage in its hands and leave the people free to defend their honour and to depend on their honour. It is not fair, it is not proper, to ask a man to go and make a declaration and then to go to some responsible person for a certificate. Let us have a simple form. Let us get rid of this business. The next subclause of the second resolve clause reads:

"that Regulation 3 (1) be amended by substituting the words "15th day of August, 1946" in place of "15th day of June, 1946;"

I have pointed out that the registering date has been extended to the 31st July. There is no Regulation permitting it, and so I ask that the date be further extended.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I do not think the hon. Member is correct in his statement as to the 31st July. There is Regulation 15 of 1946 which was published in an *Extraordinary Gazette* of 11th July, 1946, and laid in the Legislative Council on the 18th July, 1946, along with the Wortmanville Housing Scheme Bill. Copies were circulated to Members on the day the Regulations were laid in this Council.

Mr. JACOB: I am sorry, sir, I did not see it. I withdraw that. I insist, however, that in view of all that I have said further amending Regulations be made extending the date to the 15th August. I have very little more to say. Subclause (c) of the resolve clause reads:

"(c) that Regulation 9 (1) be amended by substituting the words "31st day of October, 1946" for "31st day of August, 1946."

I have commented on this already. I have made reference to my own constituency and to Central Demerara. It will not be practicable for Government to go into that carefully, so I am perfectly correct it



ought to be done. The last subclause reads :

“(d) that all other dates for the publication, preparation by the Revising Officer, and final publication of the list of voters under Part One of the Regulations be extended for a period of two months.

These Regulations are—10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18. I will read a portion of Regulation 18—

“(1) When the revising officer has completed the revision of the List of Voters as hereintofore provided, he shall,

- (a) on or before the 9th day of November, 1946, in the case of the first Register of Voters under this Ordinance, and
- (b) on or before the 30th day of June in any year after the year 1946—make out the Register of Voters.

Regulation 23 reads as follows :—

“23. The register in force at the date of the commencement of the Ordinance of the persons entitled to vote at the election of Members of the Council for an electoral district shall continue to be in force until the first Register of Voters to be prepared under the Ordinance comes into force, and shall, during that period, be a Register of Voters for the purposes of the Ordinance.

It is clear from this Regulation that if no new List of Voters is prepared the old List shall be regarded in the Deeds Registry as the List of Voters that shall be used in the event it is necessary to use a Voters' List. How then this Government should have been advised that the old List was cancelled and legislation had to be passed to rectify this mistake in the Ordinance and Regulations? It is clear from Regulation 23 that so long as a new List is not published any old List stands. So I say—at some stage during this debate I stated that I felt very hurt about the fact that I had to come back to the Colony to see that my name is on the Voters' List—if it happens that this new List is not published as prescribed in these Regulations or some mistake is made, what happens? The old Register remains. I have nothing more to say except to ask this Council as constituted at present to agree to this motion and carry it, so that at the next

General Elections we will have a proper Voters' List and a properly constituted Council as the result of giving all persons the right to vote who are qualified. Let us do nothing in the interim to keep these persons off the List. Let the List be properly prepared, so that all those persons who remove from one place to another in the Colony will have their names on the List. Let us be clear in our consciences that we have done our best. Whether 40,000 or 70,000 names are on the List, let us be satisfied that we did not exclude anybody, as is being suggested in certain quarters, for instance the case of housewives. Let this Council in this last year of its existence do all it can in the matter, and let everyone be satisfied that the Council has done so. For my part, my conscience is clear that I have done all I can. I have sacrificed my leisure time and hard-earned money to do some of these things, and when you find that you are being hindered and obstructed you must feel bitter, and you must feel that some unseen hand is working against this very necessary reformation for the betterment of British Guiana.

Mr. EDUN : I beg to second the motion which has been so ably moved by the hon. Mover.

Dr. SINGH : I should have seconded this motion which is before the Council, but on reading its text I observed that there were certain points definitely against my views and against the views of the Party of which I happen to be a member. Therefore in those circumstances I could not second the motion. At a large gathering of citizens in the Town Hall a resolution was moved, seconded and unanimously carried asking Government to extend the closing date of registration of voters to the 31st July. Government kindly consented. At that time we felt that the machinery of Government was not working in unison and in order to make up for this lapse we thought of asking for an extension of time to July 31. In those circumstances I cannot support the motion asking Government to extend the time further—to August 31—and have the elections further delayed. I am in sympathy with the motion, sir, but in the circumstances those two points clash against my



interest and I cannot support it. I would like my hon. friend to know that.

The PRESIDENT: Does any other Member wish to speak on the motion?

Mr. ROTH: I am very much in favour of the motion, and particularly with the part which deals with domicile and where the hon. Mover spoke about the anomaly in giving facilities to members of the Military Forces and not to members of the Civil Service. There are many officers in the Civil Service who have been transferred from one part of the Colony to another and have been disfranchised as a result. The same thing also applies to civilians. After all, what does the domicile clause really mean? It is to make certain that the person being registered is a resident of the Colony and not merely an *in transit* person. It was not intended to apply to cases where persons have removed or have been merely transferred. There is one particular case where the acting Head of a Government Department has gone to live in quarters provided for him and it has been found that that place is, strangely enough, not included in any electoral district at all.

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member is wrong; that has been corrected.

Mr. ROTH: That is news to me; I am hearing it for the first time. I desire to repeat, however, that I am supporting this motion.

Mr. PEER BACCHUS: I am also supporting the motion in so far as the qualifying period is concerned. Further, I am supporting the suggestion that an attorney should be given the right to register his principal as a voter if that principal happens to be temporarily absent from the Colony. I think the question of qualifying period carries another point besides that stated by the hon. Member on my left (Mr. Jacob), and that other point refers particularly to the City of Georgetown. I brought it up during a debate in this Council some time ago and that is, income qualification carries residence also. We have the City of Georgetown divided into three electoral districts, and

I am certain there are Members of this Council who live in one electoral district and derive their income from another. Those persons, sir, would not have any income qualification in the City of Georgetown because the condition required is that their income should carry with it the question of residence.

The point in the second resolve clause of the motion is, I think, obvious. If an eligible person is temporarily out of the Colony an attorney should be given the right to register his or her name. It will not affect one whose name is already on the register, but one whose name has not been on the register before. I do not think that because one has to sign his application himself before he can be registered that that should prevent him from leaving the Colony on urgent business. If the qualifying period is 12 months and carries residence in the Colony instead of residence in a particular district, I think that should meet the point.

As regards the third resolve clause—suggesting the abolition of the statutory declaration—to my mind the statutory declaration was put in the Ordinance as a deterrent measure. It has been stated by the hon. Member for New Amsterdam that there is no obligation on the part of an employer to give a declaration and, therefore, I say it is farcical to have this statutory declaration attached to the application form. I would have preferred to see another query in the application form and that is, whether the applicant is maintaining himself or herself or is in receipt of charity from any organisation. The qualification is so low—\$10 per month—that I doubt whether any Registering Officer would be so bold as to reject a claim if the claimant is in receipt of charity from any organisation and not maintaining himself and family, if any. In the present circumstances I think the declaration serves no useful purpose whatever, but I can quite see its usefulness when the income qualification is \$300 per annum. As regards the suggestion of extending the time for registration, I must admit that I am reluctant to support it. We have had one or two postponements already and I do not think there should be any more.



The PRESIDENT : If the hon. Member is really sincere in his reluctance to support any further postponement, then he should not spend much time on that point.

Mr. PEER BACCHUS : Yes, sir; I think it is only fair for me to express my views on the whole resolution and say what I am prepared to support. Maybe a measure of that kind could be considered at a later stage, but I think we would be tinkering too much with the question of postponement if we were to adopt it now. I think those are all the observations I have to make on the motion before the Council, but I would ask once more that consideration be given to some of the resolve clauses and that if the motion does not succeed there should be an amendment of the election laws, so that in future there would be better facilities at the disposal of those persons who are eligible to be registered as voters.

Mr. EDUN : You will notice, sir, that I have reserved my observations on this motion for a late stage of the debate. I am thankful to Your Excellency for having put into my hands this document representing a 10-year Development Plan—an ideal which confirms the stand I take now in order to see that the full democratic rights of the people in this Colony be exercised at the next general elections. I recollect very well indeed that I approached His Excellency, Sir Gordon Lethem, on the broad question of teaching the people to register their names as voters, and I referred to the case of Jamaica where Mr. Pellitier was appointed to do work of that nature. From reports to hand that officer went there and did an excellent job and, subsequently, he was asked by the Trinidad Government to go there and advise them. That was done, and I suggested to the Governor that this Colony should do likewise since there have been no election in British Guiana for the last 11 years and this Government and the people have lost touch with the machinery.

It would have been the best thing, therefore, to get such a man as Mr. Pellitier who would have helped us to educate the people in this Colony as to how they should enfranchise themselves. My sug-

gestion was not accepted, however, and things have come to such a pass that Government has bungled the whole thing and up to now finality has not been reached. The point is—and a very important one it is indeed—that Government itself has blundered so seriously that it is unable to reach all the people in the Colony. When the announcement was made in the Press that the old lists will not be considered and will become obsolete, confusion became worse confounded. As a matter of fact, a kind of coma entered the minds of certain people and they became very uncertain as to what they would do. Subsequently, an announcement was made to the effect that registration will only be carried on up to the end of June, so that there was a panic among the officers dealing with the elections and that panic has lasted among the people in this Colony for not less than 20 days.

I threshed out this matter with the hon. the Attorney-General who showed every sympathy with the points I made to him. Time and again we suggested to Government that in order to accelerate registration more Commissioners of Oaths would have to be appointed. Government took the cue but did not go far enough, and I am going to lay a charge against this Government and against Members of the Executive Council who never attempted to give sufficient facilities to the sugar estate workers so that they may register as voters. That is one of the chief reasons why I want to ask that the time be extended—in order that the workers on the sugar estates should have equal facilities as those of the City and the villages or even the Mazaruni district. I should like to know what was the reason and the motive behind the Members of the Executive Council in advising this Government to refuse to appoint fifty more persons as Commissioners of Oaths in order to facilitate registration on the sugar estates. Perhaps the motive is quite obvious. The Members of the Executive Council were not concerned about a large electoral roll.

Mr. JACOB : Hear, hear !

Mr. EDUN : Perhaps, also, Government does not think the best facilities should be given to the sugar estate workers, but standing here as I do—as a representative



of theirs—I am going to ask Government to make an explanation of its attitude. Perhaps it would be well for me to point out to this Council that I have had to do with elections since the year 1910—when I was 17 years of age—and since then I have had the privilege of acting as a canvassing agent or a polling agent for many a candidate. I therefore know much of the history of elections in this Colony, but I have never seen two sugar estate workers going into the polling booths to exercise the vote. Now that the time has come for these people to exercise the franchise, however, this Government which has been living on their substance—for who can doubt that sugar has been the economic structure of this Colony—stands washing its hands on the question of giving them proper facilities for registration as voters. It is a painful thing—an ungrateful thing—and I say that even now the right thing has not been done. I for one will not countenance any delay of the elections at all. I would rather have them tomorrow and see what the results would be.

I want to ask Government whether it is satisfied with the results of registration in the City. Fancy that there are 70,000 people living in this City and only 8,000 of them are registered up to now. Am I to understand that they are not concerned with their own welfare? Let us take the Corentyne district; it has a population of 46,000 people according to the last census and only 6,000 of them are registered up to now. I am sure that if proper facilities were provided on the sugar estates in that district we would have had another 5,000 voters there. I have been preaching to and pleading with Government in this matter—pointing out how the sugar estates are situated and how difficult it would be for the workers to go to the manager and get their declarations signed—but my efforts have been in vain. This difficulty relating to the signing of declarations is one of the potent reasons why the idea of statutory declarations should be abolished—an idea which emanated from the mind of the Deputy President some years ago. There is another reason why these statutory declarations should be abolished. The hon. the Second Nominated Member (Mr. Critch-

low) told this Council in no uncertain terms that employers were reluctant to sign the declarations, and in my experience I have found the same conditions existing on the sugar estates.

I therefore pleaded with Government that an additional fifty men—dispensers, book-keepers and others—should be appointed Commissioners of Oaths so as to provide better facilities for registration on the sugar estates, but I regret to say that my plea has been in vain. I am also sorry that the letter turning it down has been sent to me in the name of the Officer Administering the Government. I am sure that if he was told the truth—if he knew the conditions existing on the sugar estates—he would have influenced the Members of the Executive Council not to act against the request. It shall be my duty to tell every sugar worker who those Members are—the Members of the present Executive Council of this Government—and it shall be my bounden duty to expose them to the general public. They know better than the Officer Administering the Government and should have advised him accordingly. Those are the things that give one the impression that instead of granting facilities to the workers—the people producing sugar and rice—and those whom we should foster in order to get more production, every effort is being made to put obstacles in their way. Nevertheless, I plead with Government even at this late juncture to extend the time and let us see how many more of these workers will be registered.

I feel that if I were to take this matter further—this matter of the obstruction against the sugar workers in this Colony—it would show up this Government in a very bad light indeed, because if anyone should examine the economic structure of this Colony—take up the Estimates and see how much revenue comes from sugar and the amount of money that is being circulated through the sugar industry—I believe he would see what injustice and inequity has been done to these workers and agree that they should be given better facilities to exercise the vote. Apart from that, I wonder whether it has ever occurred to hon. Members that the majority of these sugar workers are illiterate and that because of their illiteracy



they are not entitled to exercise the franchise. We have accepted that in good grace; we fought the issue to the bitter end and even the Labour Government went against us. That is putting a double obstruction on these people—the fact that they have not got the right to vote because of illiteracy. They do not get the facility to register their names because a sufficient number of Commissioners of Oaths has not been appointed on the sugar estates.

I do not see how any Member can get away from this argument at all, except he is very blind. Anything may be made justifiable if one wants it to be so. But in this case I think the hon. Mover of the motion is timely indeed—timely in the sense that Government is given an opportunity to rectify a wrong. We have had the experience of rushing the pace to register. I think, personally, I have done more than all the Members of the Legislative Council combined in putting forth to the public that it is their duty to register. The machinery of the Man-Power Citizens Association and Political Party was useful in putting before the public what is their duty, but in every case we found that the workers on the sugar estates had to go to the Manager or the Deputy Manager over a half a dozen times and yet could not get anyone to sign their declaration. Therefore they had to go to the neighbouring villages and get the schoolmaster to sign their declaration. Would you believe me if I tell you that as the result of the appointment of Commissioners of Oaths there were registered 5,050 persons in Eastern Demerara and 5,000 in Central Demerara? Do you know how that was achieved? The Commissioners of Oaths were taken in cars from house to house and so got the people to register as voters. I see nothing wrong in that, but if you go through the List and analyse it you will find that in the case of the sugar estates in those electoral districts the registered voters are in the minority. It could have been three or four times more but for the lack of the facilities I have called attention to. In the case of Pln. Uitvlugt, an estate which is nearly one mile from the nearest Police Station and half a mile from the nearest Post Office where there is not a Postmaster but a Postal Agent, you will

find these difficulties cannot be surmounted for the reason that the workers have to go to work early in the morning and on returning home late in the afternoon can find no schoolmaster to go to, while the Manager and Deputy Manager are not concerned.

Apart from all these blunders on the sugar estates, I want to point out that it would be no concern of Government if the Elections were postponed for another fifteen days. Why should Government worry about it, when the people through their Representatives demand an extension of the time? It is the right of the people. Why deny them it? Therefore I do not think any argument can be put forward for denying this extension of the time, as in every case it will be found that Government has been fully cognizant of the fact that the public are clamouring for a general election. The public see that in this moribund Legislative Council the Members are not in a position to carry out a mandate from the people, and because of that are clamouring for a general election. Consequently Government feels there should be an early general election. It is the obvious thing, the most reasonable thing, to do but now it has come to this, that the Government thinks a thousand times about the volume of the printing it will entail. If Members of this Legislature want to facilitate Government by saying "Take another two weeks and put your printing in order," what harm can be done? So I say, sir, that I agree with the hon. Mover that the facility of another two weeks should be given, provided the names we have sent in to Government are accepted as appointees for Commissioners of Oaths, otherwise I will not agree to the extension.

I think this debate will do some good indeed, because it will put Government in the safe position of being able to tell the public "We have done everything possible, although we have blundered, and in the last two weeks we have given more facilities to register by appointing fifty more persons on the sugar estates as Commissioners of Oaths so as to accelerate the registration of voters." What harm can be done in that, except Government is not concerned about having a large electorate? I think hon. Members will be



justified in supporting this motion, as no one can dare tell them they are trying to sit here two weeks longer. In the case of Georgetown, look at the List. It is a painful story of inability, and it reflects greatly against the leaders of Georgetown. What have they been doing? In nearly every home in Georgetown there is a radio, and practically everybody buys a newspaper while the BPI *communiques* are read by all, yet the Voters' List is as it is. I think the time has come for Georgetown to awake. But, sir, this carries my mind back to another story. This is however not the place for it. I think I have made all the points I want to make in order to bring to the attention of Government how I feel about this matter. If we did not put all the facts before Government in so far as the sugar estates are concerned, then it would have been a different matter altogether. I and the Secretary of the Man-Power Citizens' Association and the Secretary of the Political Party interviewed the hon. the Attorney-General and put all the facts before him, but strange enough, as the irony of fate would have it and though the sugar workers expect justice and equity, they were turned down. It is a sad story.

What I want to put before the hon. the Attorney-General is this: Supposing there is a by-election within a week from now, what will be the position? The old Voters' List will have to be used. It therefore stands as a matter of course that it is necessary that the List should not be obsolete. I think the hon. the Deputy President would agree with me that we are looking forward in the year 1951 to something like one Legislative Chamber, an Assembly with about thirty-six Members representing 36 constituencies, and that stands as a very cogent reason why we should have a full-fledged electorate in order to elect in a democratic way our Representatives. There ought not to be any fear in the minds of the minority interests at all when it comes to the question of a large electorate. If peasants, workers and one or two middle class persons are returned, why, sugar interests can get two nominated representatives, Commerce can get two, general interests can get two, interior can get one, and even the women can get a representative be-

cause the idea of nomination is to balance the representation. Labour only got a nominated representative because Government wanted a balance of representation in the present Council. So in the case of a large labour and peasant electorate returning Labour Members, the minority interests need have no fear at all. Government in duty bound will have to nominate representatives of those interests in order to balance the Council. I am sure if the hon. the Deputy President does not want to seek re-election to this Council this Government would bring him back and put him on the Executive Council for his experience. I think Government should take advice and extend the time for two weeks more so as to give the sugar estate workers a greater chance to register. Ask the hon. Member for Western Essequibo (Mr. C. V. Wight) to run down to Essequibo and the hon. Member for Demerara River (Mr. King) to go down to that area and do some work among the people in so far as registration is concerned.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT: May I rise to a point of explanation? I have left that to the hon. Member's minions.

Mr. EDUN: I know the hon. Member will say that. I do not think I will continue any longer. The points I have raised I feel very strongly. I feel, as Representative of the sugar workers, if there is to be any extension of the time at all it must be dependent on more Commissioners of Oaths being appointed on the sugar estates, otherwise I will not agree to the motion.

Mr. CRITCHLOW: As a member of the British Guiana Labour Party and a Member of the Executive Council I notice it is very easy to blame the Executive Council for everything. I can assure you, sir, I am among the people and they are saying that Government is keeping back the elections. I had made it perfectly clear on the first occasion that I was not in agreement with any postponement of the time for registration, but after I found out that the time was really short for the outlying districts I agreed to the postponement. The time was extended, and then some people again complained that the time was too short. We discussed it at a Labour Party meeting, and it was decided



to have a public meeting to ask for an extension of the time to the 31st July. After that we approached Government and we were told that Government would grant the postponement, provided our Party accepted responsibility if the election had to be postponed as a result. I discussed it with the Party and the Party agreed that the time should be extended to the 31st July.

It is true that the hon. Member, who moved the motion for an extension of the time, must have seen that in his district the people were unable to register as he would have liked. The question is whether we should stick to the decision of the extension to the 31st July. I cannot see how we can go back on it. Our people are a hard lot to please. Perhaps in the next few weeks another Member will come forward with a motion for another postponement. The people were invited to register. We went to certain districts, but many persons are still asking why they should register, if they are to register to vote for people so as to be taxed more. My advice is that we cannot go back on our word and postpone the date further. I do agree that something should be done in respect of those who were living in a certain street in the City and having removed to another street their names will be taken off the Register. I do not think that is fair. I think they should be allowed to vote in any part of the City. I hope that will be changed some day. It was our desire and at our request the date was postponed to the 31st July, and I hope it will not be further changed now.

Mr. GONSALVES : As I rise to speak now, the thought has occurred to me whether I cannot make the comparison that we are like someone on polling day endeavouring to vote after the close of the ballot. Today is the 31st July and registration ceases at 4 o'clock, and here we are asking at 4 o'clock for a concession when the provisions of the law are practically spent. If it is seriously intended that this extension is to be applied in connection with this election that is coming, then I think the hon. Mover of the motion, assuming that his motion is carried this afternoon, must allow some time in order to get the law amended so as to give the right

to any Registering Officer to accept any registration forms after today. When that amended law comes into operation the legal question will arise as to what is the position in regard to those registration forms sent in after today. The Registering Officer cannot accept those forms after today as the people are deprived of the right of sending in any forms on the 1st August, because there is no law permitting it.

Mr. JACOB : May I rise to a point of correction? Will the hon. Member explain how the time was extended from the 15th June to the 15th July by Regulations made on the 21st June by the Executive Council? Six days had elapsed then, and so it would not be irregular to do it again.

Mr. GONSALVES : The point raised by the hon. Member, I have no doubt, will be answered by the hon. the Attorney-General. He is legal adviser to the Government and will say what advice he can give us. I will not undertake to advance any reason, as the hon. the Attorney-General will explain in answer to the query by the hon. Member for North-Western District, but I do say that I am glad that the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Critchlow, has spoken because he did so as representing his Party, Labour, and the hon. Mover of the motion and the hon. Seconder also represent Labour. They are apparently at variance. Therefore, as far as I can see, Labour is not unitedly represented in so far as the Elections are concerned. The hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Critchlow, is a Labour leader; he is the General Secretary of the B.G. Labour Union, and the other two Members are associated with a party or association that represents and strongly fights the cause of Labour. As I see it, they have different views on this particular issue.

With regard to the indifference shown in the registration of voters, first of all there is the reference of the hon. Mover of the motion to the North-West District, that out of 7,000 residents only 300 are registered. I assume those figures relate to before this day. It is interesting to know, having regard to the remarks made by the hon. Mover of the motion as to the interest shown by the people's Representatives in this Council, that he was only



able to secure the registration of 300 persons on the List in his constituency. I have to bear in mind, however, that the hon. Member had been out of the Colony for a while, but had he taken that interest himself he would have made ample and good arrangements in the hope of his constituents being well looked after in his absence, so that any deficiencies occurring while he was away could have been quickly remedied or put right on his return to the Colony.

So far as Georgetown is concerned, I am only responsible for Georgetown South which I represent in this Council. I would like to say that my delay in arriving here this afternoon nearly one hour late was due to the fact that a good many persons came to me with registration forms in order to have them signed by me as a Commissioner of Oaths. In addition to that, on my own I have gone into the Lodge-Wortmanville Districts, where I understood someone who was a person representing the Man-Power Citizens Association had been before in an endeavour to get as many people of Georgetown South as possible registered, and I myself, assisted in getting the registration through. If the number is not larger it is hardly my fault. We were told when the franchise question was being discussed here "Let us have the law passed immediately; the people are anxious to have it." We have the law now and if that attitude was genuine, why this claim to be given more time? I have signed declarations for what some hon. Members may probably describe as "friends to vote," but I have told them "You are registering your names; you are not voting now; you will make your selection when voting-time comes."

One thing has been mentioned which is going to influence me in voting against this motion, and that is the observation of the hon. Seconder of the motion—"We have requested that a certain number of persons on the sugar estates be appointed as Commissioners of Oaths to do these declarations, and if we are not going to get them I say there should be no extension". That is what he said and, if I am wrong, other Members here will correct me. If that is going to be the position

and if that is the support which he has offered and intends to give in order to get my support, I say he has lost it because it is obvious from the remarks such as "I want you to appoint," "I warned His Excellency," and "if you do not do this thing," he does not need any support from me.

When it comes to the question of registering a voter by an attorney, he has my sympathy to some extent because there might be cases where persons are actually on their way to the Colony but would be a day or two out for registration and having attorneys here they would be able to get registered as voters. We know of a case where one gentleman was nominated and, I think, actually elected as a Member of this Council but could not take his seat because he was not present and could not give his consent. He subsequently came into this Council, however. The registration of a person only means getting his name on the register, but he will have to make his declaration in the usual way unless his attorney is given the power which the declaration calls for. He (the attorney) will have to say whether the person is 21 years of age, whether he owns property, and whether his income is over \$10 per month.

The only point that may arise is whether absence in that case should include residence of the person in the Colony, because I think the form stipulates that the person must be in the Colony during the period. All these things, to my mind, are amendments which might be made on future occasions. We cannot stop to get them done at the moment. As the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Critchlow, has stated, we should get through this matter as early as possible and we can look after amendments later. If we want the elections to be held early we should not delay with matters of this kind. I remember that when the main Bill was being considered here, I pointed out that there were a lot of difficulties in it and that it might not be possible to get the elections through this year, but I was told that we could not deal with those things then and should get it through. The Ordinance was passed, however, and it was found that there should be certain changes. The motion has my sympathy to some extent, but I would suggest to the hon. Mover that it be with-



drawn and brought later. I would not like to know that he has moved a motion which has been defeated, and so I leave my suggestion with him.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT : I did not intend to say anything, but the hon. the Fourth Nominated Member has suggested that I should have gone down to my constituency and engaged in some activity to study the question of lethargic registration in that district. I think, however, that the hon. Member is too well seized of the facts relating to the constituency to make that suggestion. I am going to treat his seconding of the motion in a very light spirit—just as I think it should be treated. I say that because he knows fully well that his whole theme was : “Educate the sugar estate workers; and lack of facilities on the part of Government and the Executive Council for the registration of these sugar estate workers.” He does not say anything about rice estate workers—that they have been given facilities and the fact that he and his associates are supporting and have already “won” the election in favour of a certain rice estate proprietor who directed his activities down there. The hon. Member is no doubt putting in all those persons who can support him and help him to win the election that may take place in 1947. How could he say that this move in one particular constituency did not give him and his associates full opportunity to see that everybody was registered there ?

The hon. Member for Georgetown South anticipated exactly what I had in mind when I heard the hon. the Fourth Nominated Member (Mr. Edun) speak. The hon. Member is full of these “democratic principles”—full of the “swing and the roundabout”—and yet he is the one who is always taking Government and everyone else in this Council to task just like a dictator. His attitude has been fully explained by the hon. Member for Georgetown South who recalled his use of such words as “You would not appoint these people”; “I told you to appoint these people and I am finished with you”, and things like that. In other words, the hon. Member was suggesting that the only facilities the Members of the Executive Council should have provided were those

he suggested and that he should have been allowed to submit a list of the persons to be appointed as Commissioners of Oaths and it should have been passed without comment—with one stroke of the pen. Didn't this Council at the instance of certain hon. Members—the Fourth Nominated Member and others—agree to an extension of the time for registration ?

Has the hon. Member really submitted the names of the 100 persons he desires to have appointed as Commissioners of Oaths and added to the list ? If he did so and no one took any notice of it then, one could say that his argument holds a little water, but to use his own words, he is merely on the “swing and the roundabout.”

Mr. EDUN : To a point of correction: I do not think the hon. Member understood what I said. I said that the matter was discussed with the Attorney-General and that he had forgotten, perhaps, that I represent the sugar estate workers.

Mr. WIGHT : I am glad to hear about this representation of sugar estate workers, but today certain hon. Members speak about Conservatism and I am glad to think that we must be a little conservative. After all, this is not a quarrel and if conservatism would help this country to tide over the next five years it should be adopted, otherwise it would be quite easy to see what a chaotic condition we would find ourselves in. The hon. Member went on to say that the Members of the Executive Council had done “this and that,” and he even proceeded to point a pistol at the head of the President by stating that he was sorry the name of the Officer Administering the Government should have been attached to the letter he had received. He seemed to think that by bringing in His Excellency's name he would just get his own way and to infer that he, as a member of the M.P.C.A., and no one else should be nominated. We must do these things on a sound and logical basis. We are not children; admitting that we are in our infancy as far as politics go, we are not children in age and must not confuse these issues. We have not heard from the hon. Member what facilities he had expected from the Members of the



Executive Council or from the Executive Government.

The only facility that appeals to one's mind, perhaps, is that we might have had a railway connecting the voters to the registration booths or a gyroscope to drop them there. The Mover and the Seconder of this motion have been the two most drastic critics of this Government, and they have been accusing the Members of the Executive Council also of delaying the elections. It seems as though they must always have something to accuse Government of, and they keep on throwing that something not only at the head of Government but also at the Members of the Executive Council. They went further and they actually named the Deputy President, alleging that he had outlived his day and his usefulness—that he is only sitting here to warm his seat and is therefore in support of delaying the elections. Obviously, those hon. Members have been hoisted with their own petards, because they went further and said it is a disgrace—it is damnable—to think that in a country with a population of over 300,000 people only 46,000 should be registered. They further declared that “we should have 297,000 out of the 300,000 registered; we want universal adult suffrage.” Those are some of the grave allegations made against Government from morning till night, until it became *ad nauseam*.

There were only three Members of this Council who desired “earnestly and sincerely” to have early elections, but when Government took them in earnest and thought they really were sincere in getting things started we have had nothing but brakes being applied and a slowing down of the process. I do not blame the hon. Members for having found themselves in the depths they are in. I do not know if they have ever read Edgar Allan Poe on that point, if not I would suggest that they read him. They are in confusion with the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads and they cannot move. They have been saying that they are the only two Members of this Council who will be returned at the general elections and that all the others will be expelled. I have noticed, however, that only one-sixth of the population was registered up to July 31, and

I submit that hon. Members should not view this motion in the serious light in which it has been moved and urged by the hon. Mover.

Can it be said that this Government has not made a serious effort to get things done quickly? If there has been delay who is to be blamed? We had the hon. the Fourth Nominated Member saying that the Members of the Executive Council will be exposed and things like that. Some of us can be exposed, but some of us have no fear of being exposed. On the other hand, others might fear exposure in the days to come. It appears that the hon. Fourth Nominated Member was getting at the hon. Member for Demerara River (Mr. King) and the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Critchlow, in this respect also, because it was on the representation of those two Members that the time for registration was extended to July 31. From the very outset it was well known that we were forcing the pace of things, and I was in favour of the extension to July 31. I even thought that we might have extended it further, but never thought when we fixed August 15 that we would have got another motion asking for an extension to August 31. If we do that we would get another asking that it be fixed for September, and so it will go on and on.

I suggest that this motion, if adopted—whether in an amended form or not—is bound to delay the elections. I am not quite so optimistic as the hon. the Attorney-General and, I think, if we extend the time again for a fortnight, the day will come when we will be faced with a situation which will prevent the elections from taking place before the middle of next year.

Mr. LEE: I am sorry the hon. Member for Western Essequibo has referred to me in the way he has done, because he knows my views. I am going to express them again, however, in order that Government should understand how I am thinking. It is my intention and it has been my policy to pursue such measures whereby this Colony will in the near future be able to tell the Imperial Government that we want more power in our hands — more administrative as well as



reserve power. We want self-government in this Colony, and if we are going to apply for it the people must first be given every opportunity to see how they can manage their own affairs.

On many occasions I have had to send telegrams to the District Commissioner or the Election Officer, calling attention to delay in the distribution of registration forms and, secondly, to the fact that some of the persons appointed to be Commissioners of Oaths did not know of their appointment. If we do apply to the Imperial Government at any time for self-government, they would say that the people are so lethargic that when they were given the opportunity to register as voters they did not seize it. I would say, however, that they have been given an opportunity in the extension of the franchise, but they have not been given proper facilities to register themselves as voters for the general elections. I desire to bring that point to the notice of every Member of this Council in order that they may enquire into it.

I know that the hon. Member for Western Essequibo has taken certain steps in the matter, because some representations were made to him. If other hon. Members go into the matter, however, they would find that nearly 25 per cent. of the people who should be registered have not done so, because they did not have the knowledge or the opportunity. In some instances, when persons went with their registration forms they were questioned in such a manner by the Registering Officer that they said they would not register any longer.

That brings me to the point where I intend to urge that the declaration should be sufficient and that people should not be questioned. Further, will the people in the Mazaruni District where a Commissioner has been appointed at such a late hour have proper opportunity to register their names? If Government thinks so, the time would come when the matter would be gone into and the people would be able to see that Government was at fault. I am a member of the Executive of the British Guiana Labour Party and I would like to say that it was never brought to my notice that blame would be

attached to that party if the elections are delayed. I would like it to be distinctly understood that I never knew that. If Government felt they should not have extended the time, then they should admit that responsibility.

The PRESIDENT: May I ask you a question? Are you in favour of an extension or are you not?

Mr. LEE: If Government is satisfied that it should give facilities to every person in the Colony who is eligible for registration, then there should be an extension.

The PRESIDENT: Therefore, you think it is necessary to postpone the elections?

Mr. LEE: If on enquiry it is found that many persons have not had an opportunity to register, I think it would be only right for them to be given it. I do not want to assume any blame, but at the same time I do not want Government to be blamed by the people. That is my position as an Elected Member. I would like to protect Government by saying that every opportunity has been given to the people to register, but from my heart of hearts I cannot say that. Therefore, when I make the statement that the people have not been given every opportunity, I would like it to be recorded why I have said so.

The PRESIDENT: I would like to know what you want. If you are asking for these facilities, you are asking for a postponement of the date of the elections. You will be asking for two things.

Mr. LEE: That is where I differ from Your Excellency. I think that if this motion is carried and the extension is granted, everything could still be completed within the period and we could have the elections in January or February, next year.

The PRESIDENT: That is quite impossible.

Mr. LEE: I have never known the English people to think that anything is impossible. Can it be said in all serious-



ness that if the 14 days extension is given and proper clerks are employed—not clerks who will only draw money from Government, but people who will put in good work—the job can not be finished in time? The only way I would say it could not be finished is if the printing could not be done in time, but if the printing can be done it is quite possible to get through. When the Argosy Coy's. premises were destroyed by fire and Government wanted to get their printing done urgently, they said: "Let us send it to Trinidad." I want to encourage the people to register their votes and I have had to telegraph the District Commissioner and tell him that some of the people who had sent in their claims had not received their receipts although more than two weeks had elapsed. I further understood that the clerk who had received those claims said he had not time to issue the receipts. If those facts are true, it cannot be said that Government has made every effort to give the people a chance to register.

The hon. Member for Georgetown South, fortunately, is a Commissioner of Oaths and therefore he is in a position to sign declarations for persons claiming to be voters, but many others of us who are Members of this Council are not Commissioners of Oaths. I know as a fact that I asked the Chairman of a certain country district to come along with me and sign some declarations and he replied that he could not do so because he was not being paid. That is the kind of thing that prevents many people from registering their names or even asking for application forms. I would like to have it put on record so that Government would not be able to say it was never brought to their notice that everybody was not given an opportunity to register.

As regards the question of permitting an attorney to swear to a declaration on behalf of a candidate for election or a person who wants to be registered as a voter, I think the Ordinance should be amended in that respect. Further, I do not think it is fair to the residents of Georgetown where there is a rental qualification that if a person lives in one district and works in another he or she would be deprived of the right to vote. If Govern-

ment feels that that is constitutionally right and just, then I would not complain. I would say, however, that it is not in keeping with British constitutional methods. The Labour Government has asked that the fullest possible opportunity be given to everyone to enroll themselves, but I say that is not being done in British Guiana.

Mr. JACOB: I move that the Council be now adjourned.

The PRESIDENT: Do you wish to reply?

Mr. JACOB: Yes, sir.

The PRESIDENT: Well, will the hon. Member (Mr. Lee) finish his speech?

Mr. LEE: I will not be long. The hon. Member for Western Essequibo has asked that we should decide this matter on a sound and logical basis, but has he found out whether every eligible person has been registered? Does he not know that many persons who should have been registered have been prevented from doing so? I do not want to put it in strong language, otherwise I will say that they are being prevented by sinister means from registering. Government, I repeat, should be in a position to say that they have given every eligible person an opportunity to register.

The PRESIDENT: I think the hon. Member for North-Western District would wish to reply and I know that the hon. Attorney-General would also wish to make some observations, therefore we will adjourn until 2 o'clock tomorrow. I would just like to say, however, that you may bring a horse to the water but you cannot make it drink. Therefore, when certain hon. Members keep on saying "extend the time," that will not make a man register as a voter if he does not want to do so. It is well to see that there is provision of facilities, but in my own view, surely a man should be prepared to walk a little way in order to register. Finally, I would say that as Officer Administering the Government it is my duty to appoint as Commissioners of Oaths persons who are not partisan. It will not be the best thing to appoint Commissioners of Oaths who will canvass for any one party at all. We will now adjourn until 2 p.m., tomorrow.