

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Friday, 10th November, 1944.

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

PRESENT:

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary (Acting), Mr. M. B. Laing, O.B.E.

The Hon. the Attorney-General, Mr. E. O. Pretheroe, M.C., K.C.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hon. F. Dias, O.B.E. (Nominated).

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

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

The Hon. Peer Bacchus (Western Berbice)

The Hon. H. C. Humphrys, K.C. (Eastern Demerara).

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

The Hon. A. G. King (Demerara River).

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

The Hon. T. Lee (Essequibo River).

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

The Hon. V. Roth (Nominated).

The Clerk read prayers.

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Tuesday, 7th November, 1944, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

MEMBERS' CARS HELD UP.

Mr. PERCY C. WIGHT: Sir, before we proceed to the Order of the Day I have a complaint to bring to your notice. I do not consider it fair that a young police constable, who does not know the Members of this Council, should be posted at the approaches to the Public Buildings. Members arriving by car are frequently stopped and told to go around the other way, and not in a polite manner at all. I resent it very much indeed. I think those young policemen should be taken around and made acquainted with Members of this Council and their cars. I cannot always get gasoline to drive in my own car, and often have to hire a car. I think something should be done to prevent the annoyance to Members.

The PRESIDENT: Is that something new?

Mr. WIGHT: It has happened to me three times running.

The PRESIDENT: I will mention the matter to the Commissioner of Police.

Mr. WIGHT: I do not expect you to do that, sir. The Colonial Secretary might bring the matter to the attention of the Commissioner.

Mr. JACOB: One can understand it if a Member is in a hired car, but I have been stopped even in my own car even though I had just passed near to the policeman. Policemen who are put on such duty should know Members of the Council and their cars.

Mr. ROTH: At the Annual Session I was stopped in the middle of the street.

The PRESIDENT: That was probably on account of the guard-of-honour.

Mr. ROTH: No, they had already gone.

The PRESIDENT: I will have the matter brought to the notice of the Commissioner of Police.

PAPERS LAID.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY (Mr. M. B. Laing, O.B.E., acting) laid on the table the following documents:—

Report of the British Guiana Rice Marketing Board for the period 1st October, 1943, to 31st March, 1944.

Report of the Commissioners of Currency for the year 1943.

TEMPORARY WAR BONUS TO PENSIONERS.

The Council resumed consideration of the following motion by the Colonial Treasurer;—

THAT with reference to the Officer Administering the Government's Message No. 17 dated 19th October, 1944, this Council approves of the payment of temporary war bonus to all pensioners of this Government wherever resident (including Widows and Orphans' Fund Pensioners) whose pensions do not exceed \$720 per annum, on the scale set out below with effect from 1st January, 1944:—

- 15% on the first \$240 per annum.
- 10% on the next \$240 per annum.
- 5% on the next \$240 per annum.

The PRESIDENT: If hon. Members are agreeable I will ask the Colonial Treasurer to recapitulate what he said in moving the motion last Tuesday, for the benefit of those Members who were not present on that occasion. It may be slightly out of order but I think it would be helpful.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I rather hoped that it would be out of order. However, when I introduced the motion I reminded the Council that the action arose from the resolution of the Council which was passed on the 30th July, 1943, as a result of which a Committee was appointed to examine this question of the payment of war bonuses to pensioners. I pointed out that Government had been guided in its consideration of the question by certain principles which were communicated to all Colonial Governments by the Secretary of State. That was in May, 1943. I went on to say that in May, 1944, the Secretary of State informed this and other Governments that there had been a change of policy in the United Kingdom itself, and that the Government therefore proposed to put before Parliament a proposal that bonuses should be paid to Government pensioners of the United Kingdom. I also stated that the Secretary of State had invited this Government and all other Colonial Governments to consider, if we did award bonuses to our own pensioners, the granting of bonuses to pensioners of this Colony resident in the United Kingdom. That is the specific request of the Secretary of State.

Then I went back to the Committee which had been sitting for a long time and eventually submitted their report on the 30th May, 1944, to the Governor. I admitted that the report had not been laid on the table but I pointed out that it contained certain recommendations which were at variance with the instructions to which I have referred. For example, the Committee specifically stated that they recommend that if a bonus were granted it should apply only to pensioners resident in British Guiana. The Committee also recommended a scale which was somewhat generous inasmuch as the first percentage of that scale was 50 per cent. on pensions up to \$240 per annum. It was also generous inasmuch as it applied to pensions as high as \$200 per month. I also pointed out that Government had given the matter very careful consideration and had decided, with the approval of the Secretary of State, to put forward to this Council the scale of bonus which is shown in Message No. 17 and in the motion before the Council. That scale is 15% on the first \$240 per annum, 10% on the next \$240 per annum, and 5% on the next \$240 per annum, the limit of its application being pensions of \$60 per month. I also pointed out that this scale of bonus was not very generous as the maximum payment to anybody would not exceed \$6 per month, and that we did not intend to provide any other limitations. That is to say, the bonus would be payable wherever the pensioner was resident, and irrespective of whether he received a bonus from any other source, or whether he was employed.

I then pointed out that the total cost was \$32,300 for the year 1944, and that it was intended that it should apply from the beginning of the year. That, I think, summarises what I said, and at the time when the debate on the motion was adjourned I think the hon. Mr. Austin had spoken and asked certain questions to which I intend to reply when replying gener-

ally to the debate on the motion. The last stage was that the hon. Mr. Roth having spoken you, sir, arranged for the report of the Committee to be circulated, and that has been done. I think that is where the matter now stands.

Mr. WOOLFORD: Sir, will you please allow me to point out what the hon. Mr. Roth does not feel inclined at the moment to do himself? In the typed copies of the report circulated to Members, after the words "Amount per annum" in the analysis attached to the report the words "Average monthly pensions" should be the heading against each item. Those words have been omitted.

There is also a verbal alteration to be made on page 2 of the report, paragraph (e) which reads:—

(e) That in the case of re-employed pensioners, whose salaries are within the scale referred to in (c), bonuses should only be paid on the actual bonuses received by such pensioners.

The word "bonuses" mentioned in the second instance should read "pensions." I hope that in view of what has happened you will not preclude my hon. friend from speaking again. He would, of course, be out of order.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I found that phrase "bonuses should only be paid on the actual pensions received" to be quite unintelligible, but that is exactly how it appears in the original document, and even with the explanation just given I am not quite clear what it means.

Mr. WOOLFORD: I think the idea is that bonuses should be paid only on the actual pensions received and not on the salaries of the re-employed pensioners.

The PRESIDENT: This is all rather informal. I would like to give the Treasurer an opportunity to speak again, and if the hon. the Seventh Nominated Member (Mr. Roth) wishes to speak again he should be allowed to do so.

Mr. ROTH: Although I have not heard my friend the Colonial Treasurer make the remark this afternoon, he has certainly made it on previous occasions in and out of this Council, and that is that in his opinion a pension is not meant as a living wage. I trust the Colonial Treasurer will bear with me if I take the liberty to disagree with him. I looked up Webster's Dictionary and found that "pension" is "a fixed allowance or stipend made by a Government or business organization in consideration of past services to one retired from service, especially a regular stipend paid by a Government to retired public officers, disabled soldiers, families of soldiers killed in service." I also found that "stipend" means "settled pay, or compensation for services, whether paid daily, monthly, or annually." If a pension is a regular stipend paid by a Government to disabled soldiers or the families of soldiers killed on service surely in those cases it is meant as a living wage, and if it is so in one case it must be also a living wage for retired public officers. Hon. Members, I think, will admit that perhaps 90 per cent. of local pensioners do consider their pensions as a living wage; they have no other means of sustenance.

The next point is that Government has now admitted the necessity for giving bonuses to pensioners, but only from the first January, 1944 Government admitted the necessity of civil servants in active employment being given bonuses on their salaries at least more than a year previous to that date. Surely, if an active civil servant with his higher salary was in need of a bonus how much more so was the unfortunate pensioner receiving, at the most, two-thirds of that salary?

There are several points on which Government has not agreed with the recommendations of the Committee which the Colonial Treasurer described as very generous. As I had occasion to remark at the commencement of the debate, there are over 510 pensioners resident in the Colony, and the average pension among those in receipt of pensions not exceeding \$20 is \$10.49. What is 50 per cent. on an average pension of \$10? I am asking hon. Members to give this matter their serious consideration. At least this Council can make its recommendations heard. It is neither just nor fair. I personally do not require a bonus. I am thankful and fortunate enough to be able to say it, and I can say that more than one other pensioner in a similar position to myself has told me he is prepared to forego any bonus to himself provided the smaller man got a better bonus than that suggested.

I say that in all sincerity for the special benefit of the hon. the Sixth Nominated Member (Mr. Edun) who some time ago saw fit publicly to attack me in his newspaper on this subject, when he said in words to the effect that I was not sincere because I had no sooner put my foot on the threshold of this Chamber than I brought forward a motion for the payment of war bonuses to pensioners. Had that hon. Member in all fairness to himself and his paper taken the trouble to read the words of my original motion, and also to look at the Pensions List which is available to all members of the public, he would have seen at once that I personally did not come into the matter at all. I am appealing to the Council to request Government to be a little more generous to those unfortunate pensioners who are in receipt of not more than \$20 per month, and if Government cannot see its way to give them a 50 per cent. bonus it should at least give them 40, 30 or even 25 per cent.

Mr. EDUN: Is the whole debate re-opened? In view of the fact that

this report has been circulated to Members I think the complexion of the matter has changed considerably. Reading Your Excellency's Message with this report it has a different bearing altogether. Reading the report of the Committee I find that it can be handled in a better way than the Colonial Treasurer has suggested. Now that the report is before the Council I think the discussion should be based on it.

The PRESIDENT: Yes, you can speak again, certainly.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: May I suggest, for the sake of propriety, that the hon. Member move the suspension of Rule 21 so that he may speak again?

Mr. LEE: I move the suspension of the Standing Rule.

Question put, and agreed to.

Mr. EDUN: Sir, I think you will remember that I had risen to second the motion because I felt the time was ripe for us to give the pensioners some consideration. I know many of them, and that the majority of them are suffering at the present time. That is why I thought it my duty to second the motion, but the hon. Mr. Austin took precedence. I now feel that we should be more generous. We should go a little further because, comparing the recommendations in the Committee's report with the suggestions contained in Your Excellency's Message, my first reaction would be to accept your Message because I find that it would entail less expenditure. But I wish to be just and equitable. The Message says that if war bonus is to be granted to pensioners it should be given to every pensioner, whereas the report of the Committee recommends that pensioners in the United Kingdom should not be given any bonus at all.

Mr. ROTH: I rise to a point of explanation. As explained by the Deputy President (Mr. Woolford), that was put in the report because it appeared to be the general opinion of the Council when the matter first came up, that pensioners resident outside the Colony should not participate.

Mr. WOOLFORD: Not only pensioners resident in the United Kingdom it applies to anybody outside the Colony.

Mr. EDUN: I see an excellent proviso in the report of the Committee which should be accepted by every Member. Par. 3 (b) reads:—

(b) That no bonuses should be paid either to those officers whose pensions exceed the sum of \$200 monthly—which is the highest amount on which bonuses are now being paid to Government servants—or to those who have been re-employed by Government, and are still in the employment of Government.

It is a fact that several pensioners are at the moment in the employment of Government, and to grant them a bonus would simply be multiplying their benefits as against those who have not had the opportunity to secure any employment at all. It would be creating a gross anomaly in the administration of this benefit. If the Council would eliminate those pensioners who are in employment then I would be inclined to agree entirely with the Message, because the scale of bonuses is equivalent to that applied to Government employees. I was thinking, however, whether the scale should not start from 20 per cent. instead of 15 per cent. which should be the second scale, and 10 per cent. the lowest so as to be a little more generous. What will 15 per cent. bonus mean to a pensioner getting \$20 per month? It will not be of much benefit to him. The principal advocate

in the Committee's report is that those at the bottom should be moved up a little, but those getting from \$100 to \$200 per month should not be given too much.

Mr. EDUN: I think, if we can as human beings view the whole thing we can reach a very good working basis, in order to satisfy all the pensioners, between the excepted principle in Your Excellency's Message and the principle in this report. Something can be done for everybody. I did not want to say here that one or two pensioners have approached me and shown me that it would mean nothing to those at the bottom. For that reason I want to plead with this Council whether or not something better cannot be hammered out. It will mean a little bit more, maybe another \$10,000. With the report before me that is my view of the whole matter.

The PRESIDENT: I just want one point made clear. Do you say you agree with the Message as to those pensioners whose pensions do not exceed \$720, or do you agree with the report as to pensions exceeding \$720? Which one do you agree with, the Message or the report? I am not quite clear whether you are supporting the Message or the report.

Mr. EDUN: I am supporting the Message in the principle.

The PRESIDENT: As to the time from which the bonus is to be given?

Mr. EDUN: Yes.

Mr. LEE: If I remember rightly, when the original motion was put to this Council asking that bonus be given to pensioners I supported it, and I now heartily support the principle of bonus being given to pensioners, but I cannot agree to the rates as mentioned in this motion which Government has put before this Council to-day. I do request that Government see its way

to increase that percentage of 15 per cent. on the first \$240 per annum. If you look at the appendix to the report you will find that pensioners with pensions not exceeding \$20 per month who are in the Colony number only 510. If I am wrong correct me. Of those pensioners who are receiving less than \$20 per month, the highest amount is \$12.91, received by 101 and those are teachers. When you look at the principle Government has adopted towards the teachers—Government says the teachers were not adequately paid in the past and their salaries should be increased—then those 101 teachers, who are receiving a pension of \$12.91 and who have given this Colony service, should be paid for the service they had rendered to this Colony.

I was not a Member of this Council during the last war, but there are Members here who were—Mr. Dias, Mr. Percy C. Wight, I think, Mr. Luckhoo and a few others. They passed a resolution here in which they said pensioners should not be paid less than \$10 per month. If we look at it narrowly a pensioner who gets \$10 per month can hardly feed himself with it and he may have a family. I think hon. Members would agree that after 510 persons in this Colony have given service to this Government—they are all Civil Servants, Policemen, Teachers, Militiamen—this Council should not grudge the increase that is asked for them in the report. I feel that if you amend the motion to meet the recommendations of the report in respect of those 510 persons and also increase certain percentages in respect of the others—191 receiving pensions between \$20 and \$40 and 51 receiving between \$40 and \$60 per month—this Council would not object to bonus being paid to those pensioners who are resident outside the Colony, because we feel that they are also deserving of some increase. But if the motion is to be passed as it stands here, I certainly do not agree to the rates nor to the payment of any bonus to pensioners

resident abroad. If Government amends the motion on those lines suggested I would certainly support it. I agree in principle with the motion but not with the percentage proposed by Government nor to the payment, if at all, to those pensioners resident out of British Guiana.

Mr. de AGUIAR: It seems to me that those hon. Members who have spoken so fluently are not approaching this matter from the angle I think they may have done. It seems to me that what we are considering today is not whether a pension payable to a retiring officer is adequate or inadequate. That is not what we are considering at all. What we are considering is whether in view of the changed circumstances war bonus should be paid to these pensioners. I have read very carefully the report that was submitted by the Committee. It is true I am not a pensioner, but if I were I certainly would not have liked to accept the bonus on some of the conditions attached to the recommendations of the Committee. I notice that those hon. Members who have spoken and made reference to the report studiously avoided that. I use the term advisedly. Paragraph (d) of the recommendations states:

"That all pensioners who claim to be entitled to bonuses should, if required to do so, furnish a Statutory Declaration of their total emoluments in which should appear both their pensionable allowances and other emoluments, if any, and specifying therein the source of their said emoluments."

Paragraph (e) states:

"That in the case of re-employed pensioners, whose salaries are within the scale referred to in (c) bonuses should only be paid on the actual pensions received by such pensioners."

These, to my mind are very strong strings to be attached to any recommendations, and it seems to me that to administer this matter afterwards, if these recommendations are accepted,

would be a very big task apart from anything else, and I am not sure that a pensioner himself would like to be called upon because he wants to qualify for war bonus to make a statutory declaration as to whether he is working and how much he is getting before he is qualified for war bonus. I personally do not think any pensioner would want to do that. To my mind the suggestion put forward by Government is one that is most reasonable. That has no strings attached to it. I quite agree, perhaps, we would like to see certain pensioners receive a higher rate of bonus, especially those of the lower grade. I quite agree there are going to be hard cases, but if we agree on the premises I began with, that we are not considering whether the pensions are adequate or inadequate, then it seems late in the day to consider whether the bonuses are adequate or inadequate. The question is, are we going to pay bonuses to pensioners and, if so, how much.

The position, as I understand it, is that pensioners who receive pensions up to \$720 but not exceeding that amount per annum shall receive a bonus at the rate stated in the Message. That has no string attached to it. If "Mr. A" is a pensioner in that category, he would receive the rate of bonus stated there. There are bound to be hard cases in everything we do in this world. Unless we are going to get away from the principle attached to the proposal, I do not see how we can really refuse, or rather reject, the proposal put by Government. As far as I am concerned, it seems the only reasonable thing to do. I would not like to suggest anything that has any strings attached to it. If a higher rate of war bonus is paid to pensioners it would be reasonable for the working man to come in and say he should be given a higher rate. I do ask hon. Members to accept the principle involved. There is a big principle involved. There are hard

cases but we cannot help them. There is nothing more we can do but just try to meet the situation as best we can. It seems that Government's proposal is the one we may accept. If it is found practical to increase the rates without endangering the principle I have referred to, as far as I am concerned, such increase would receive my support, but nothing I have heard so far convinces me that the rates can be increased without endangering the principle involved.

Mr. J. A. LUCKHOO: We have had many divergent views on this matter. It seems that we ought to come to some common understanding in this matter, and the question ought to be approached in this way: I think we should agree that certain pensioners are not at the present time receiving sufficient in order to carry on their daily life. I am not saying that a pension is a living wage, but in some cases it may be and in others it may not be. Therefore the desire of Government is to supplement those who are not receiving sufficient in order to carry on life. It seems that we ought to decide first of all upon the class of people who should qualify. Should we include those who are out of the Colony, those who receive up to \$60 per month according to the Message? I think it is only fair to those outside the Colony that they should be included because they are feeling the cost of living more so than those in the Colony. Those who are living in the United Kingdom and are receiving a small pension find it harder to live than those resident here. So we have to determine the classes of pensioners. Secondly, should those who are re-employed in the Service participate in this scheme, those who are receiving a pension of \$60 per month and are also working for another \$60 per month? Should they get a bonus on their pension in addition to their salary of \$60. Those are the two points we ought to consider in this matter.

The next thing is, are we to adopt the Committee's recommendations to have those in receipt of a pension up to \$200 a month entitled to a bonus, or should we have a limit of \$60? It depends on the amount we have in hand to expend in this connection. Lastly we have to decide the percentage rate. These, I think, are the ways in which this matter ought to be approached, and if we are in earnest to do something for the pensioners then we ought to come to some common understanding this afternoon.

Mr. JACOB: I am inclined to agree always with the last hon. Member who spoke except in this instance. The hon. Member said "It depends on the amount we have in hand to spend in this direction." I do not think that ought to be brought into the picture at all. I think we have to consider the pensioners' case equitably and give them what is reasonable. I think that these people are entitled to consideration. Whatever may be the cost, they ought to be given the necessary consideration that they deserve. I have listened with attention to the hon. Member for Central Demerara, and I am afraid I cannot agree with him. To my mind the rate proposed by Government is definitely far too low.—15% on the first \$240 per annum, 10% on the next \$240 and 5% on the next \$240 per annum. These grades are definitely too low. I look upon the matter in this way: The majority of pensioners who had been earning up to \$100 per month had not been able to put by a respectable sum of money so that when they retired at the age of sixty they could live on that. Those people are finding it exceedingly difficult at this time to live on the pensions they are getting, and it is necessary that Government should come in and say "We understand very well you cannot live on what you are getting owing to circumstances beyond everybody's control, and we are willing to give you something to live on comfortably." That is the method of approach Government should adopt.

I refuse to believe that pensioners have no right to expect consideration after they have retired and after they have given faithful service to Government. If you were to take the trend of events in England particularly, and I refer to the Beveridge Scheme, you would see what the world is thinking, particularly the British people. And let me add, we are very late in this new method of thinking. In that light I say the pensioners deserve consideration and better consideration than that suggested. I recommend, therefore, that 15% should be increased to 25%, 10% to 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ % and 5% to 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ %. That would bring the bonus approximately to what is being enjoyed by Civil Servants at the present time. If these percentages are not quite in line, I recommend that the bonuses paid to Civil Servants up to \$60 per month be paid to pensioners so that they will be able to obtain something respectable to augment their small pension. I am inclined to agree with the report of the Committee as read out by the hon. Member for Central Demerara. I can quite understand the disinclination of Government to do this thing in such a way as to have little trouble about it. This is a world problem and you cannot expect everything to run smoothly. I do urge on this Government not to adopt this measure. It has been the policy of Government to put forward measures and not consider what hardship may be created thereby. That is definitely wrong.

I suggest that those pensioners who are employed not only by Government but by others also should give a declaration as to what their total income is and, if their total income does not exceed \$60 per month, they should be given the equivalent to make it \$60 including bonus. In the case of a pensioner who is employed at \$40 per month and gets a pension of \$40 per month he is not entitled to any consideration at all under the scheme: If he

wishes to come under the scheme he must give up that employment. I have precedent for that. The Old Age Pension is on similar lines; a pensioner either accepts what is given by Government or what is given by the various organizations. While I agree that a pensioner should get something adequate to live on, he must not use his bonus to augment his pension and his income from the present employment he has with Government or outside Government. Therefore I think proviso (b) of paragraph 3 of the Committee's report is a wise one and should be accepted and adopted by Government. The idea is to mitigate hardship, and it is not asking Government too much. The onus must be on the pensioner; he must give a declaration that he is not in receipt of anything but his pension or that in respect of his pension, or interest on investments or rent from his property, or salary from employment his total income at the present time is so much. If his total income is over \$60 per month plus the suggested bonus, he should get nothing more from Government. I think that would be the best method of approach and it would create better feelings among the pensioners who have served this Government and in most cases very well. If it is necessary for me to move an amendment to give effect to what I have stated, if it finds favour, I would certainly do so, but I do urge on Government to be a little more liberal even if what I suggest is not accepted. The proposed rates are far too low, and Government can afford to pay something more than is suggested.

Dr. SINGH: I also rise to support the recommendations of the Committee. The cost of living to pensioners is just as high as to other people living in the Colony who are in employment, and I believe that a war bonus should apply to pensioners who are in the Colony and also those

outside the Colony. But there is one point. It should not be given to pensioners who are employed in any walk of life or in any Government Department. The bonus should not apply to those people. That applies to pensioners in the United Kingdom also. As regards the scale suggested by the Committee, I am in agreement with that, and I do hope this Council will support the recommendations of the Committee.

Mr. PEER BACCHUS: The proposal of Government and the proposal of hon. Members who have spoken in favour of an increase of Government's rates have my fullest sympathy, but I am afraid, sir, I do not agree with the hon. Member for North-Western District that we should not consider how much money we have to spend on any proposal. That, I think, is the foundation of consideration of any proposal whatever. I remember just two days ago because there is a deficit in the working of a certain Government Department Government increased the revenue so as to make up that deficit. Though I am in sympathy with the pensioners, I am also in sympathy with the taxpayers of the Colony. We know that pension is never intended to be a living wage. In fact even in pre-war days I doubt very much that the pension a good many got was adequate to enable them to maintain themselves. It is a consideration that Government has given to the case of pensioners because of the increased cost of living. I think that this Council will be well advised to accept the proposal of Government so that we may keep within certain bounds of our Budget. This appeal I will make to Government and I hope it may be sympathetically considered, and it is whether the time of payment cannot be extended and instead of it being from the 1st January, 1944, it be from the second half of 1943, as Government has by this motion admitted that consideration should have been given

to pensioners long before now. If Government has delayed in considering the matter—

The PRESIDENT: I must interrupt the hon. Member on a point of order. I did not say that at this meeting nor did the hon. the Colonial Treasurer. What both of us said was this: When the Committee was appointed it was on representations made locally, but by the time the Committee's report was received by Government a change of policy had come about in the House of Commons. I think that was it.

Mr. PEER BACCHUS: The point is still made that Government admitted the justification of considering the giving of a bonus to pensioners. Not because Government had delayed consideration of these pensioners, however, they should be made to suffer in respect of the time they should have received such benefits. I think Government should consider giving them as from the time Government gave a bonus to Civil Servants of this Colony. The time stated in the motion should be deleted and the payment made retrospective accordingly. I ask that the motion be amended in so far as the said paragraph is concerned, and if that is done the rates would receive my full support. I therefore ask that the motion be amended to include the date at which bonus was given to Civil Servants.

Mr. WOOLFORD: Sir, you invited me to speak earlier in the debate and I declined to do so at the moment, but in view of the remarks made by hon. Members it is perfectly clear that there is a very sharp division of opinion among Members as to the way in which they should vote in this matter, and having regard to the comprehensive way in which the Message has been put to us, it is very difficult to be able to vote one way or the other. There are several principles involved in this matter. The first is: are these

pensioners, who were formerly civil servants, not entitled to the same privileges that civil servants enjoyed when they were granted war bonuses? Is it our duty to remind those who are responsible for advising the Government, that at a similar period during the last war civil servants who were pensioners were given a war bonus and at the same time the Civil Service got it? What possible objection can there be to endorsing the principle to give effect to war bonuses when the basis upon which it is given is the living condition of the particular person? Therefore I say we should and we can only arrive at a decision in this matter not by moving one amendment but by moving several, and that is why I suggested to the Attorney-General that the Council should have gone into Committee and made several amendments.

There appears to me to be no objection in principle to effect being given to war bonus, whatever we may settle it to be, as from the date when it was given to the Civil Service—the 1st January, 1942—and with great respect to those who think otherwise it does not seem to me to affect the matter at all what the decision of the British House of Commons or the U.K. authorities was, because we have the precedent of our own decision which we should have followed. If we did it during the last war what possible objection can there be to our doing it now? We should not be influenced by the decision of the British House of Commons at all, and in my opinion Government is responsible for the delay in not giving effect to it.

The other point of principle is: should it be given on the basis of those whose incomes or pensions do not exceed £500 a year? Is it contended that a person who is getting £500 a year is more entitled to a war bonus than one who is getting £150 a year? I have heard a great deal about

principle, but what is the reason behind the Executive's decision to limit it to \$60 per month? Is it supposed that a pensioner is better off after having left the Service?

The hon. Member for Central Demerara (Mr. de Aguiar) has questioned whether a person who wishes to avail himself of this privilege should come forward and make a declaration? After all it is a question of income. Doesn't the hon. Member have to make a declaration about his income tax? Is Government in a position to know what has happened to a man's financial position after he has left the Service? Why shouldn't public money be restricted to those who are entitled to enjoy it? Therefore the Committee has recommended, with some reason, that the position of a person who has left the Service, and who when he was in the Service was under an obligation to disclose to Government whether he owned private property or not, should be known to Government and the taxpayers. It seems to me only just that if a person has to disclose his income and to be assessed thereon a pensioner should also be in the same position.

I think the attitude of Government is like a person having a painful corn pared. He tries one thing and another and pares it down until it hurts. That appears to me to be the position of pensioners' corns at the present moment. Government is getting a storm of protests. I think the Council should go into Committee and after whatever deliberations may ensue the question should be put in several forms. I suggest, sir, that you should take the decision of the Council as to whether the bonus should take effect as from the 1st January, 1942, or not. Then we should be invited to say whether it should be based on £500 or not. That is the only way you can get a decision because, with all the varying views, those like myself who

are not in favour of the Message will vote against it. That is likely to be the effect of the motion. If you put the motion as a whole you are going to deny pensioners the benefit of any bonus. With very great respect I submit that the Council should go into Committee and the several questions put *seriatim*.

The PRESIDENT: I think that perhaps I might try to clarify the position which is not easy, because we all want to do something, but we have different ideas as to how far we should go or what we should actually do. There are objections to the last speaker's suggestion that we should go into Committee. I do not think we can allow a Committee of this Council to commit Government to a substantial increase of expenditure. It is the duty of the Government to introduce to the Council the spending of funds. It seems to me that we have to make up our minds this afternoon quite simply in this way: Government will put the motion and the mover has certain suggestions to make when he winds up the debate which will go somewhere to meet those Members who want better proposals so far as pensioners are concerned. Then I will put the motion as amended by the Colonial Treasurer for your consideration, and if you do not agree with it and throw it out I will appoint immediately a Committee of this Council with an urgent request to submit new proposals immediately.

I cannot very well approve of a substantial increase of expenditure without going back to the Secretary of State. If you approve of Government's motion as amended by the Colonial Treasurer, when you have heard what he has to say, then so far as it goes a decision will have been reached and pensioners will get their bonus. If you do not approve then I will appoint immediately a strong Committee of this Council, a large Committee of this Council, and ask them to go immediately into the whole question again, and

telegraph their recommendations to London when they are received. Pensioners would then not get their bonus immediately, but they would probably get it with affect from the 1st January, 1944, or whatever date is finally decided on. I do not think we can go into Committee. The Council should either accept the Government's proposals as amended by the Colonial Treasurer, or I will appoint a strong and large Committee of this Council to make new ones.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I do not want to be drawn into an argument with the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Roth, on the very academic question as to whether or not a pension should be regarded as a living wage. I think it is quite clear what I meant when I said to the contrary on another occasion. I meant this: that a pension is awarded by the Government or by an employer in consideration of services actually rendered. That pension is normally based on salary coupled with length of service. The recipient might have been getting a small salary and/or might have served a very short or a long period. All those factors are taken into account in awarding a pension. Secondly, the pension awarded may be very small having regard to those factors, and merely because it is a small pension the pensioner has no right to claim that he should be given something to live on after he retires, and to urge that that pension is too small to live on.

Most of the arguments have been based on the fact that many of our pensions are small, but they have not taken into account the factors by which those pensions have been computed and awarded. If we are to accept the suggestion that a bonus must be given because the cost of living has gone up, and because a pension is inadequate to meet that cost of living then we must first amend our Pensions Ordinance and say that nobody should retire from the

public service without something in the form of a living remuneration. Of course we cannot do that.

The hon. Mr. Austin spoke first and asked me to compare what we propose to do now with what Trinidad has done. Trinidad got itself in a very strange position. The first communication which we got from Trinidad told us that they had introduced a very strange scale. It began with 7½ per cent. on the first \$240. It went up to \$2,400 right enough but it ended with 1½ per cent. I was alarmed at that scale myself but I felt that it did justify us to some extent in what we proposed, even though, as I have said, it is not very generous. Apparently Trinidad repented, and a few weeks ago I got instructions from the Treasurer of Trinidad that they have just introduced a scale beginning with 30 per cent. on the first \$240, 15 per cent. on the next \$240, and 10 per cent. on the next \$480. That is much more generous and, of course, more generous than what we propose to do, but they have added a very valuable proviso. There is a minimum grant of \$60 per annum. That is to say no pensioner, however small his pension may be, gets less than \$60 per annum, which is, of course, 30 per cent. on the first \$200.

I will return to that just now, but in the meantime I would like to refer to one or two points made by hon. Members. The hon. Member for North Western District (Mr. Jacob) referred rather briefly to the Beveridge plan, and suggested that some sort of similar principle should govern our consideration of this matter. Of course the answer to that is quite simple. The Beveridge plan and all such plans refer to the general public; it does not refer to Government employees alone. What we are trying to do here, and what is really one of the principal objections to what we are trying to do, is to pay a bonus to a certain class of people who have retired, when we know that there

are other people in the community who have not been employed in the public service, and who may have saved their own pensions and have fixed incomes, and cannot get such a bonus. That is essentially the difference between a bonus for Government pensioners and the Beveridge plan which applies to all persons irrespective of whether they are employed in the public service or elsewhere.

I come back to the minimum which Trinidad has put in, because that, sir, is the suggestion which I wish to throw out to this Council. Most of the hon. Members have pleaded the cause of those pensioners who are getting very small pensions. Although I again repeat that nothing we can do can convert that small pension into something which the recipient can live on altogether, they are no doubt the people whom we should try to help most, and so I would put forward to Members of the Council that they accept this scale as set out in the motion, but that we attach to it a minimum, that minimum being the first category of the scale—15 per cent. on the first \$240. The effect of that would be that everybody who gets a pension under \$240 would get the same bonus as if his pension was \$240 per annum. In other words, everybody would get a minimum of \$3 per month whether his pension is \$10, \$5 or \$15 per month. I think that would be very useful because some pensions are much smaller than \$20 per month, and the effect would be that the cost would be something like \$10,000. That shows how widely it applies, and I feel that Government can put it forward because it is really something attached to the scheme which the Secretary of State has approved. It is also something which has been done in another Colony and has been approved, and I think we are justified in putting it to the Council and asking Members to accept it as an amendment to this motion.

The other proviso which I think Government might ask the Council to accept is one that was referred to by the hon. Mr. Edun and other Members—that relating to re-employment. Quite obviously, if a pensioner is re-employed by the Government itself it seems curious that we should pay a bonus on his pension and hand him out a salary which is larger than the war bonus itself. I do not think there would be any chance, such as the hon. Member for North Western District (Mr. Jacob) suggested, of a pensioner giving up his salary on re-employment so as to secure his bonus. That would mean that Government is paying very small salaries indeed to re-employed pensioners. I think I can assure him that no pensioner who is re-employed would give up his employment. We might add a proviso that the bonus shall not apply to pensioners re-employed by Government. I do not take it further than that because, although the hon. Member for North Western District thinks that the administrative machinery should undertake all necessary burdens, I cannot conceive of its enquiring into all the petty means which small pensioners may adopt to re-employ themselves. It would mean that all those poor pensioners would have to satisfy some authority—probably the unfortunate Treasury—that they have not employed themselves at all during the year in which that pension is being earned. If we took it further and put a limit of salary we would have to satisfy ourselves that the unfortunate pensioner did not earn that amount. It is not worth it. That is why I suggest that it should only apply to pensioners re-employed by the Government itself. I do not know how those two suggestions are going to be received. I hope they will be received because, if they are not, I cannot see any other course but a complete re-inquiry into this question which would cause further delay.

The only other point I wish to refer to is the question of the date. Why the 1st January, 1943 and not the 1st January, 1942? We are being pressed to make it retrospective. We already propose to make it retrospective to 1st January, 1944, and I cannot for the life of me see why it should be 1st January, 1943. I have said that the instructions under which Government has been acting with regard to pensions were strongly against the payment of bonuses on pensions. The whole policy of the United Kingdom and the Empire was against the payment of bonuses on pensions, for reasons which I have already given, but in view of the change of policy which took place in the United Kingdom, and the change whereby they felt that they should mitigate to some extent the hardship of pensioners, we in the Colonies were invited to accept the same change. In the United Kingdom I do not think that bonuses to pensioners were payable earlier than the 1st May, 1944. We, like Trinidad and other West Indian Colonies, are all proposing to go back to the 1st January, 1944, and I do hope Government will not be pressed to date it back a year further and thereby put another \$40,000 on the expenditure this year. The amendment is that there should be added to the motion a proviso that there shall be a minimum bonus of \$3 per month and, secondly, that there should be a proviso that the bonus shall not apply in the case of any pensioner who has been re-employed by Government.

Mr. AUSTIN: The Treasurer has not answered the question I asked about Government officials who were at one time in this Colony and were transferred to other Colonies from which they are receiving pensions. According to the list at the back of the Estimates there are 22 of them receiving pensions under \$720 per annum from this Colony. Are they to get a further \$3 per month from this Colony.

The PRESIDENT: Yes.

Mr. AUSTIN: I think it is unnecessary to ask a retired Governor, a Chief Justice, or an Inspector-General of Police to accept a bonus of \$3 per month.

The PRESIDENT: I expect the Treasurer's answer will be that it would be very difficult to single them out and take it away from them.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: We do not intend a limitation of the nature referred to by the hon. Member, but I can assure him that people like Chief Justices and so on will very rarely, if at all, come under this scheme which, as he knows, is limited to pensions up to \$60 per month, and it is very unlikely that you will find any individual of that rank getting a pension as low as \$720 per annum. The other Colonies are doing it in the same way. For example we have instructions from Trinidad to pay someone in this Colony who is a pensioner of Trinidad and also a pensioner of British Guiana, who happens to be employed in this Colony as well, so that he certainly is going to get a bonus from Trinidad and may get a bonus from this Colony if his pension is under \$720 per annum.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT: He may refuse this small bonus as suggested by Mr. Austin. The hon. Member suggested that it would be rather *infra dig* to offer those gentlemen a small bonus of \$3, and that they are not likely to accept it.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I do not think he would refuse it, and I do not think Mr. Austin meant it as *infra dig*. I think he meant to suggest that it was negligible and not worth while.

Mr. LEE: If the Council accepts the suggestion that the payment of war bonus to pensioners should be dated

from the 1st January, 1943, will it be necessary to refer the matter back to the Secretary of State for his approval?

The PRESIDENT: I say most definitely "Yes," because I told him that it was proposed to submit these proposals to the Council with effect from 1st January, 1944. I think the Treasurer has not made it clear that if the proposals of the Committee had come before the Governor-in-Council in January, 1944 they would probably have been opposed because, although the Select Committee was considering the matter, Government was not in favour. There has been no delay by Government, but around May, 1944 a telegram was received stating that all over the British Commonwealth individual Colonies were being asked whether they would pay bonuses to pensioners. In view of the change of policy we have introduced this motion.

Mr. LEE: I am asking whether the instructions from the Secretary of State preclude this Council post-dating it from the 1st January, 1943?

The PRESIDENT: There are no instructions from the Secretary of State whatever. The fact is, we have told the Secretary of State that we propose to introduce in the Legislative Council this motion to take effect from the 1st January, 1944. We asked "Do you agree?" and the Secretary of State replied. "Yes, go ahead." If we vary it in principle to a substantial degree like giving it another year, I am bound to telegraph him again.

I do not wish to rush this Council at all. I am only anxious to reach a conclusion one way or another. Either we go into the matter again or pay the war bonus now. I cannot this afternoon amend this motion with all your different ideas. You either have to reconsider it again or agree to it now. It is not that I want to rush you. Do

exactly as you deem fit. The pensioners will undoubtedly get a bonus whichever way, but they have been waiting a long time.

Motion as amended by the hon. the Colonial Treasurer put, and the Council divided, the voting being as follows:—

For: Messrs. Roth, Edun, Lee, the Colonial Treasurer put, and the Singh, Austin, Critchlow, de Aguiar. C. V. Wight, Luckhoo, the Colonial Treasurer, the Attorney-General, the Colonial Secretary—15.

Against: Messrs. Percy C. Wight, Dias, Woolford—3.

Did not vote: Mr. Jackson.—1.

Motion passed.

The PRESIDENT: I am expecting His Excellency, Sir Gordon, back on Monday, although that is not certain yet, I think therefore, we had better adjourn *sine die*, and you will no doubt be notified later as soon as His Excellency arrives when we shall have another meeting. Thank you.

The Council adjourned *sine die*.