

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

(Constituted under the British Guiana
(Constitution) (Temporary Provisions)
Order in Council, 1953.

THURSDAY, 8TH NOVEMBER, 1956

The Council met at 2 p.m.

PRESENT:

The Deputy Speaker,
Mr. W. A. Macnie, C.M.G. O.B.E.—
in the Chair.

Ex-Officio Members:

The Hon. the Chief Secretary,
Mr. F. D. Jakeway, C.M.G., O.B.E.

The Hon. the Attorney General,
Mr. G. M. Farnum (Ag.)

The Hon. the Financial Secretary,
Mr. F. W. Essex.

Nominated Members of Executive Council:

The Hon. Sir Frank McDavid,
C.M.G., C.B.E., (Member for Agriculture,
Forests, Lands and Mines).

The Hon. W. O. R. Kendall (Member
for Communications and Works).

The Hon. G. A. C. Farnum, O.B.E.
(Member for Local Government, Social
Welfare and Co-operative Develop-
ment).

Nominated Officials:

Mr. J. I. Ramphal

Nominated Unofficial

Mr. T. Lee

Mr. W. A. Phang

Mr. C. A. Carter

Mr. E. F. Correia

Mr. H. Rahaman

Miss Gertie H. Collins

Mrs. Esther E. Dey

Mr. R. B. Jailal

Mr. Sugrim Singh

Mr. W. T. Lord, I.S.O.

Clerk of the Legislature—

Mr. I. Crum Ewing

Assistant Clerk of the Legislature

Mr. B. M. Viapree (Ag.)

Absent:

His Honour the Speaker,
Sir Eustace Gordon Woolford,
O.B.E., Q.C.—on leave.

The Hon. P. A. Cummings (Mem-
ber for Labour, Health and Housing)

The Hon. R. B. Gajraj—on leave

The Hon. R. C. Tello. —on leave.

The Hon. L. A. Luckhoo, Q.C.

Rev. D. C. J. Bobb

Dr. H. A. Fraser

The Deputy Speaker read prayers.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

The Oath of Allegiance was admin-
istered to Mr. Wellesley Trevelyan Lord,
I.S.O., all Members standing.

Mr. Lord who was appointed as a Nominated Unofficial Member with effect from 8th November, 1956, was welcomed by the Deputy Speaker.

MINUTES AMENDED

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Friday, 2nd November, 1956, as printed and circulated, were confirmed with the following amendment, at the instance of the Attorney General (Mr. Farnum):

by the substitution of the word "moved" for the word "made" in the fourteenth line of the Minute on item 1 on page 2.

Death of Dr. J. B. Singh, O.B.E.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, you, like myself, will have heard with profound regret of the death of Dr. J. B. Singh, who was for very many years a Member of former Legislative Councils and Executive Councils of this country. I feel sure that hon. Members who were associated with and knew Dr. Singh would wish an opportunity to pay tribute to him and record their regret at the loss the country has suffered.

I understand that the hon. Member, Sir Frank McDavid, who was associated in this Chamber with Dr. Singh for a longer time than all of us, will move a motion touching on his death. I will propose that as the funeral is not far off in time from this moment, we adjourn after dealing with the motion until tomorrow.

Sir Frank McDavid: I beg to move the suspension of relevant Standing Orders in order to enable me to move a motion of sympathy to the relatives of Dr. Singh.

Mr. Lee: I beg to second the motion.

Question put, and agreed to.

Relevant Standing Orders suspended.

Sir Frank McDavid: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you have just announced, Dr. Singh died yesterday, and his funeral obsequies are due to take place within the hour. I believe, sir, that if His Honour the Speaker, Sir Eustace Woolford were in the Chair, he would have wished to lead us himself in paying tribute to the memory of one who was so intimately associated with him personally in many important events and moments in the history of this Legislature. I believe that Sir Eustace would have spoken with deep feeling and emotion over the severance of yet another strong link between the past and the present.

Apart from His Honour, Sir Eustace Woolford, I think there are only four members of this present Legislative Council who were Members of the Council when Dr. Singh served as a Member of the Legislative Council and the Executive Council, in a period dating from 1930. Those Members are, I think, Mr. Lee, Mr. Phang, you Mr. Deputy Speaker, and myself.

I myself had the honour of taking my seat here as a provisional Member away back in 1930, and on that occasion Dr. Singh was present in the Chamber. I think Mr. Lee took his seat in 1936 and Mr. Phang in 1937; and I think you, sir, joined the Chamber as a Nominated Member in 1939, becoming a permanent Member in 1951. It has come to my mind that Mr. Kendall must also have been a Member during part of Dr. Singh's service, and I hope Mr. Kendall will confirm this if he speaks.

The late Dr. Singh was elected in 1930 at the first General Election to be held under the 1928 Constitution. He was elected the Member for Demerara-Essequibo, and was re-elected for that constituency at the General Election held

in 1935 and again in 1947. He therefore served continuously as a Member of the Legislative Council for a period of 23 years, that is, from October 1930 to April, 1953, when the new Constitution was established. He also served continuously as a Member of the Executive Council from October, 1945 to April, 1953. He served on several Government Boards and Committees, including the Central Board of Health and the Advisory Committee Development Trust Fund and as Chairman of the Legislative Council Advisory Committee for the Medical Department. He was among other things the Colony's delegate at the Caribbean Federation Conference at Montego Bay, Jamaica, in 1947—I and Sir Eustace Woolford had the honour of being present with Dr. Singh on that occasion. Dr. Singh also attended the opening of the Legislative Council of Trinidad and Tobago in 1950 as this Colony's representative and he was present at Her Majesty's Coronation in 1953 as a representative of this Colony.

Speaking of his work and service I recall that when trade unionism was in its infancy in this Colony Dr. Singh almost took charge. He certainly did all he could to see that the sugar industry workers got guidance and good counsel, and I think hon. Members who remember events of the past will agree with me that it was through his personal mediation on several occasions that many strikes on sugar estates were averted. He devoted a good deal of his time, energy and his money in the interest of the East Indian community as a whole. He was a skilled and distinguished physician, and I am sure that a very large number of people owe their recovery from illness to his kind and careful ministrations.

Dr. Singh was undoubtedly a good man. He was a perfect gentleman and a fine example of humility, charity,

kindness and moderation. Dr. Singh was awarded the honour of an Officer of the British Empire by His Majesty in 1945, and an honour his own community awarded him was the title of *Vickrama* of which I know he was proud and which, as far as I know, no other member of the community of his people has become entitled to.

I know that other speakers who are familiar with him outside the realm of this Chamber would have much more to say about his life and his character. I will suffice myself with saying that Dr. Singh will long be remembered both inside of this Chamber and outside of it by the people of this Colony. May he rest in peace. I beg to move:

"That this Council records its profound regret at the death of Dr. J. B. Singh, O.B.E., and pays tribute to the long and devoted service rendered by him to the Colony as a Member of the Legislature for twenty-three years; and directs that an expression of its sympathy be conveyed to his widow and children."

Mr. Lee: Seconding this motion, I would like to pay tribute to Dr. Singh not only in words generally but personally. I may say, through his kindness and medical attendance to me I am here on my legs today. I am proud to be a friend of his, and anyone he calls his friend can truly endorse the remarks I now make. He was always a gentleman. I knew him since he was a Government Medical Officer on the West Coast, Demerara. He never turned away anyone from his door, whether the person went to him as a patient or was seeking alms. I know that through my intimate association with him when he was a Government Medical Officer, he wanted to serve the people and so gave up his Government appointment. As a public man he served the people honestly, sincerely and to the best of his ability. Words cannot adequately express in terms of gratitude of the people for

[Mr. Lee]

what I know he did for them. Serving with him in this Council as an associate of his, I can give praise to the work he has done. Many days we have stood together in the Executive Council for the benefit of the people. He has never swerved in his loyalty to them, and it was a great surprise to me when at the last General Elections in 1953 the people did not see fit to be grateful to him and return him to this Council. They were short sighted in their views and realizing it immediately after, they regretted they did not return the good doctor, as they called him.

My family has been closely associated with his family and I cannot express in words what he has done for my people and other people I know, except to say that he was a gentleman and practised his profession as all medical students do. I very much regret his passing. It was only some days before he went to hospital that I saw him, and he said to me "Bob, I have to be checked up by these doctors and I am going to have it done." To my surprise and astonishment subsequently when I was crossing the river his son, Hardutt, told me he was seriously ill. No one can regret his passing more than I do. He has been a brother to me in many instances, giving me sound advice. Sometimes when I went a little beyond the restraint that I should exercise, he would say to me "Bob, you must try and restrain yourself in order not to show Government what you would do."

He is one of the finest sons that British Guiana has produced, and I desire to have it placed on record that this Colony of ours would not find for many years to come another man like Dr. J. B. Singh, who has served this country loyally, sincerely and to the best of his ability, and has done all that a man

can do for his fellow countryman. While I pay tribute to him, I desire to pay tribute also to his family who love the people as he himself had loved them.

Mr. Phang: I would like to associate myself with the previous speakers' tributes to Dr. Singh. I have known Dr. Singh for a little over five years in this Council and a similar time outside this Chamber. During the long years that I have known him I have found him always kind and good, a very understandable man with every good intention. I know something of his history on the West Coast, Demerara. Politically, professionally and socially the people on the West Coast, have benefitted tremendously from his administrations. I also would like to offer my profound sympathy to his family.

The Chief Secretary: Speaking on behalf of my official colleagues in this Council, and also on behalf of the Civil Service, I should like to associate myself with the Resolution and to endorse the high tributes that have been paid to Dr. J. B. Singh. Although I have not had the privilege of knowing him well or of working with him, I can claim his acquaintance, and from my own observations and the very many kind things I have heard said about him on all sides I know of the high regard in which he was held by the community and of the sense of service and sacrifice which characterized the whole of his life. I am sure that he has set a fine example to Guianese in all kinds of work on behalf of the community, and I can only hope there are many who will profit from the example he has set.

Mr. Kendall: I, too, would like to join in paying tribute to the late Dr. Singh. As Chairman of the Medical Advisory Committee I sat under him around six years, and I can testify that at all times he expressed that humility that is so uncommon in public service

today. I have known him all these years in this Council prior to 1953, and I can always say of Dr. Singh that he was a real gentleman. My sympathy goes out to his relatives and those nearest to him, and I am certain that his passing is a great blow to the Indian community in which he was respected and honoured. Again I join in paying my humble tribute to the passing of this great man.

Mr. Ramphal: On occasions like this it is very difficult to speak. Metaphorically speaking, a cedar has fallen in Lebanon, and all Guiana laments the passing of a great and good man, a fine gentleman.

Speaking personally, the death of Dr. Singh is a sad event, a break from the past. It has unsoldered a goodly fellowship which had been forged well nigh 40 years ago. As I look around today and reflect on those who had worked together, planned and striven together, I see but few remaining to tell the story and to finish the job.

It is said that every age produces its man. Dr. Singh was a product of his time. Born of very humble parentage he strove upwards and with the urge and inspiration of his able wife he educated himself and finally qualified in medicine. He was thus a professional man in the early days, in the days when very few of his kind reached anything like those starry heights. And he could have, if he had so desired, amassed great wealth. but he chose another path, the rough road of service—service to his countrymen—and to that task he dedicated himself to the very end. Of him, sir, it may be said—if the Council would permit me recalling line written many centuries ago—“*O lux Dardandae, spes o fidissima Teuerum.*” He was the light and trusted hope of his people.

He came at a time when the Indian community was at the cross-roads. It

was the interval when the paternalism of Crosbyism was on its way out and individualism and liberation and integration into Guianese citizenship were about to take place. He filled that vacuum. It was to him, as Sir Frank has already said, the people took their troubles; and he heeded them. To him also Government and the industrialists turned in their hour of need, and he did not fail them. When the history of his period comes to be written and when assessment is made of his contribution to life during his time, historians will give him a high place as a peacemaker. And if the Beatitudes are true—and they cannot be false—he will be called “Blessed” and “a child of God.”

Much has been spoken about his services in this Council, and I shall not attempt to repeat them. But there is one other service he has rendered to my country to which I shall refer. Dr. Singh loved his race and its culture too, and he strove to his utmost to maintain and preserve it. But in spite of this, there is not any other home that has been more responsible for the dissemination of Western culture among the Indian people of this country than the home of Dr. and Mrs. J. B. Singh. And there is no other home that has done so much to integrate the Indian community into Guianese life than Dr. Singh's. For that, I think, the Indian community in particular and the rest of the community in general will remain forever indebted to him.

I do not think any reference can be made of Dr. Singh at any time but that something must be said of his humility and his generosity. As a doctor and as a man he was generous even to a fault. The poor and needy, the lame and the halt, the blind and even the wastrel and the prodigal found solace in his surgery and a ready welcome there. It was because of this a grateful

[Mr. Ramphal]

people bestowed on him the title to which my hon. friend has already referred—the title of “Vickrama,” the humble and benevolent. It will be a long day when we shall see such another. And now that the time has come for his name to be written on the scroll of time, I see it at the top of the list—because he loved his fellowmen.

He lived an exemplary family life. He and his wife have been a pattern of family life not only for his community but for the entire Guianese community. They lived a happy life, and he has left an example of marital rectitude and family affection, that is difficult to emulate.

Dr. Singh was a Hindoo and believed in the law of transmigration of souls. He would not therefore like us to mourn him as dead. I think he would wish us to consider him as still living but translated into another sphere for the exercise of his benevolence and services. He has retired to fresh fields and new pastures in the series of evolution which would finally — according to his belief—bring him into Nirvana. Let us in our thoughts send him garlands of good wishes and a prayer that his new path would be strewn with lotus lilies and thornless flowers. Sir, I support the motion.

Mr. Sugrim Singh: Like the hon. Members who have spoken before, I would like in supporting this Resolution to pay tribute to the late Dr. J. B. Singh. I see him first as a true and loyal Guianese. He has always put before everything the welfare of this country which gave him birth, and he has seized every opportunity to make his contribution to the best of his ability to the advancement of this country.

I have been closely associated with him, outside of this Council

for the past twenty years. In the good old days when Indian immigration was at its height, there were very many problems affecting the Indian community which he adjusted. As immigrants came here from India with strange customs and strange ways of life, Dr. Singh along with others seized every opportunity to assist. They pinned their faith to this country and then, by way of Constitutional representation, they adjusted the things which stood in the way of those Indians. Dr. Singh has been connected with the repatriation of Indians for many years and he made several trips to India in the meanwhile. He has always taken a fatherly interest in immigrants throughout this Colony. He looked upon every one in this Colony as children of God—Guianese or otherwise—and as a result of my long association with him I can say that he dealt with everyone in a most humane manner.

In Dr. Singh's vocabulary there is one word that did not exist, and that is the word “no”. In my 20 years' experience with him I have never heard him use the word “no”. Even in the most trying circumstances when he would have been fully justified in saying “no”, he never turned anyone away. He lived a full life and has made a worthy contribution to the achievements of this country. Recently, his brand of politics did not find favour with the rising generation. He had the courage of his conviction; he “stuck to his guns” and although he did not find a seat in the Legislature of the country I am convinced that he is one who has proved himself true. I must say that as an Indian, Dr. Singh, in spite of his University education and other cultural advantages, stuck to the customs of his Motherland—India. He not only stuck to his culture, but he did everything possible to promulgate that culture for the benefit of his race up to the time of his death.

The Grim Reaper has taken a pillar from one of the bulwarks of this country. He has gone, but his name and his contribution will certainly remain fragrant in the memory of every true Guianese. He lived for his people and I remember that on many occasions when travelling across the river with him—I was Secretary of the B.G. East Indian Association at the time—he went from one sugar estate to another in an effort to settle the strikes that were then taking place.

Dr. Singh was also the founder of the Indian Organisation known as the Sanatan Dharma Maha Saba—an institution which was devoted to East Indians and their interests in this Colony. He was a father to his people, he was a Hindu and a religious teacher and, as will be witnessed this afternoon, he asked one last request of his people and that is, that his body be cremated. He and I were able to pilot the Cremation Bill through the Legislative Council some time ago and we were also able to pilot the Regulations made in connection therewith, but the final arrangements to have a proper crematorium erected in this Colony are still to be made. He will be the first Hindu to be cremated in this Colony. The name of Dr. Singh will stand for us as a beacon light in this country, and I desire to quote the following words from Longfellow which are now passing through my mind, in connection with the death of this great man:—

“Dead I am not, no asleep,
But to your seeing
Lifted to that land of Being
Lying on life's other shore,
Wakeful now for ever more.
Looking thence I still will be,
So that you forget not me.”

Mr. Rahaman: On behalf of the people on the Corentyne I wish to join all the Members here who have paid tribute to the late Dr. Singh. He was a Member of the Legislature for a num-

ber of years and he was once a Member of the Executive Council also. I have sat with him on many occasions at meetings of the Legislature and I found that he was never afraid to speak against what he considered wrong. He has, indeed, given great service to his people and to the Colony as a whole. He was not only one of the greatest leaders the East Indian community has produced in this Colony, but was indeed a “father” to the people as a whole. I desire sincerely to join in asking that our condolence be conveyed to his sorrowing wife and children.

Mrs. Dey: I rise to add my small bit to what has gone before—with respect to the death of the late Dr. J. B. Singh. In doing so I wish to state that I was associated with him for many years, since we played together as children across the Demerara river where we lived at one time. There it was he got what was to be his first appointment, and it has been said of man that: “By the sweat of thy brow ye shall eat bread.” His parents gave their sweat to this country, and so did mine. I have had the good fortune to be a friend and visitor of Dr. Singh's home for many years and I can testify to the fact that he was very much concerned with the progress and the upliftment of his people. It was within those walls that our Indian women learnt to dress by wearing their saris and not to be ashamed, all through his charming and devoted wife. It was indeed a credit to his people and to his country, and I think nothing better can be said by way of tribute to this great man than these words of (Shakespeare):

“To thine own self be true
And it must follow as the night,
the day,
Thou can't not then be false to
any man.”

That is the tribute I should like to pay to the late Dr. J. B. Singh.

Miss Collins: I wish to associate myself with the other speakers and express my warm and sincerest sympathy to the relatives of the late Dr. J. B. Singh. I have known Dr. Singh for many years as a Legislator and can testify to the fact that he gave long and valuable service in the interest of the masses in particular. I do hope that God will give to his wife and children that faith and courage which will enable them to bear their loss.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, before I put the motion that has been so ably moved by Sir Frank McDavid and supported very sincerely by those who have spoken, you will forgive me for asking your permission to say a few words of my own. Firstly, I feel sure, like the hon. Mover, that if the Speaker of this Council, Sir Eustace Woolford, were present here today—he wrote to say he would be here in three or four days from now—he would, in his almost unique way and use of words, have paid high tribute to Dr. Singh with whom he was associated for a longer period, I think, than any of us in this Chamber here today. For myself, it has been my privilege and honour to know Dr. Singh and, to some extent, to work with him from the early “1920’s” when I was an officer in the Police Force, and later as a District Commissioner. I personally, can say—from my own knowledge and actual experience—that I wish to pay high tribute to Dr. Singh for the

work he has done since those early days when trade unionism was not developed as it is today. I can also speak of the valuable work which he did on behalf of the workers on sugar estates in the Colony—in bringing their grievances to the notice of the authorities and in doing his best for those people.

As I have said, I have personal knowledge of that. I first had the privilege of being associated with him in this Chamber in 1939 when he held an acting seat as a Nominated Member, and subsequently, from 1951-1953, as a Nominated Member of the Legislature. It could be said of Dr. Singh—very truthfully in my opinion—that he was not only a great man but a good man, and that he served all the people of this country throughout his life as such. Let us hope that others would be found to follow in his footsteps—others who would give the same kind of unselfish service which he so freely gave. I now put the motion and will ask hon. Members to confirm it by standing for a few moments.

Motion put and carried, Members standing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: For the reason which I stated earlier—in order that we should be able to attend the funeral of our departed friend—I now adjourn Council until 2 p.m. tomorrow.