

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 9th OCTOBER, 1947

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

PRESENT.

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

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

The Hon. the Attorney General, Mr. E. M. Duke (Acting).

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

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

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

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

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

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. M. Edun (Nominated):

The Hon. V. Roth (Nominated).

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

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

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

The Clerk read prayers.

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 3rd October, 1947, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS.

CONTINUANCE OF TONNAGE AND LIGHT DUES SURTAX.

The COLONIAL TREASURER (Mr. McDavid) communicated the following Governor's Message:—

Honourable Members of the Legislative Council,

I have the honour to invite the Council to approve of the continuance during 1948 of the surtax of fifteen per centum levied during the year 1947 on the amount of tonnage and light dues collected under section 18 of the Transport and Harbours Ordinance, 1931. This surtax is not levied in respect of any vessel which lands and takes away cargo not exceeding in the aggregate 500 tons, or in respect of any sailing vessel of not more than 300 tons net register.

2. The enactment of the Transport and Harbours (Temporary Surtax) Ordinance, 1932 (No. 1 of 1932) provided for the collection of the surtax for the first time in the year 1932, and subsequent to that year resolutions have been passed, under the provisions of section 18 of the Transport and Harbours Ordinance (No. 30 of 1931), authorising the continuance of the levy of this temporary surtax.

3. Government does not see its way to discontinue the surtax levied during 1947, and I accordingly invite the Council to approve of the collection of this surtax being continued during 1948.

C. C. WOOLLEY,
Governor.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE,
British Guiana,
9th October, 1947.

PAPERS LAID.

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

Report of the Georgetown Planning Commissioners on the administration of the re-planning scheme for the period, 1st February to 31st July, 1947 made in pursuance of the provisions of section 31 (1) of the Town Planning (Georgetown Fire Area) Ordinance, No. 18 of 1945.

The COLONIAL TREASURER laid on the table—

The Supplementary Estimates for the quarter ending 30th September, 1947.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Mr. Duke, Acting) gave notice of the introduction and first reading of the following Bills intituled :—

An Ordinance further to amend the Summary Jurisdiction (Procedure) Ordinance by conferring upon a Court of Summary Jurisdiction the power to impose a fine in lieu of imprisonment.

An Ordinance further to amend the Firearms Ordinance, 1940, with respect to the grant of free licences for firearms to Aboriginal Indians and to provide for the grant of free licences for firearms to certain Government Officers and employees.

Notice was also given of his intention to move the suspension of the Standing Rules and Orders to enable those Bills to be proceeded with through all their stages.

3RD QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1947.

The COLONIAL TREASURER gave notice of the following motions :—

That, this Council approves of the Supplementary Estimates for the quarter ending 30th September, 1947, (embodying Schedules of Additional Provision approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council during the quarter.)

CONTINUANCE OF TONNAGE AND LIGHT DUES SURTAX.

That, with reference to the Governor's Message No. 23 of the 9th of October, 1947, this Council approves of a surtax of fifteen per centum being levied on the amount of tonnage and light dues which shall be collected during 1948 under section 18 of the Transport and Harbours Ordinance, 1931.

NOTICE OF QUESTIONS.

WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION (AMENDMENT) ORDINANCE.

Mr. CRITCHLOW gave notice of the following question :—

Will Your Excellency be good enough to say when you propose to give your assent to the amendments to the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance ?

ORDER OF THE DAY.

FARMERS' GRIEVANCES.

Mr. FARNUM asked and the COLONIAL SECRETARY replied to the following questions :—

Q 1—Whether Government is aware that a large number of farmers are dissatisfied with the one-year guaranteed prices fixed by the Government.

A —The Government is aware that some farmers in certain areas are dissatisfied with the one-year guaranteed prices. These prices have been fixed with due regard to the estimated costs of production. Government also proposes to adopt the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Marketing Committee to extend the three-year guarantee of a minimum price for a further period.

Q 2—Is Government aware that as a result of the present level of the guaranteed prices and the high wages demanded by labour, farmers have reduced their acreage under cultivation ?

Q 3—In view of the world shortage of food, the restriction on imports of essential foodstuffs from "dollar countries", and the need for maximum production of local foodstuffs, will the Government—

(a) cause an investigation to be made into the grievance of the farmers as outlined in (1),

(b) revive the "Grow More Food" Committees and give them ample funds to assist the farmers in such directions as the Committees may think fit, with the object of getting farmers to undertake maximum cultivation.

(c) appoint a committee to investigate and report as to what steps can be taken to assist farmers to acquire mechanical ploughs etc., on a co-operative basis with the object of enabling the farmers to extend their cultivation at a low cost.

A —It is a fact that the census figures show a reduction in the

acreage of ground provisions cultivated in 1946 as compared with the years 1944 and 1945 when Sugar Estates took an active part in the Grow More Food Campaign. On the other hand, the acreage under cultivation by farmers is higher than it was before the Campaign started, but more efficient utilization of the land, and improved methods of husbandry are required. The question of further increasing the production of food crops generally, in the light of proposals made in the Report of the Agriculture and Fisheries Development Sub Committee is being carefully examined. Steps will also be taken to expand immediately local production in view of existing economic conditions by various means (including the use of suitable Agricultural machinery when such machinery is available), and special representations have been made to the Secretary of State for the procurement of machinery. These and other proposals now under consideration will be placed before the Legislative Council Food Production Committee in the first instance as soon as possible.

SUBSIDISATION.

Mr. JACOB: Sir, I crave Your Excellency's indulgence before the Order of the Day is further proceeded with to refer to a matter of grave public concern at the moment. I refer to the question of Subsidisation. As Your Excellency is aware, a notice appeared in an extraordinary issue of the *Official Gazette* on Monday removing the subsidies that have been paid on pickled beef, cooking butter, margarine, condensed milk and salt fish. The only subsidy that will now be paid is that on flour. The working people were assisted very greatly by these very generous acts of this Government on the advice of the Imperial Government up to Monday last, but when this announcement came forward and those subsidies were withdrawn the selling prices of those articles rose—just to mention one item, condensed milk from 16 cents to 24 cents per tin—and they felt that something had gone seriously wrong. What I am most concerned about is this! This Council is supposed to represent the people of this Colony. This Council is supposed

to be represented in Your Excellency's Council by Representatives from this Council. I do not know whether those Representatives of this Council were consulted in this matter; perhaps they were. I do not know whether the Finance Committee was even consulted. I think it should have been the proper thing to do, for the Executive Council to have advised Your Excellency in a matter of such supreme importance to the working people, and that it should have been considered by the Legislative Council or by the Finance Committee before a decision was taken. I am strengthened in my argument in this respect as this Council had approved of Subsidisation going on to the end of the year and the money was voted. From what appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* I see that Government through this measure will save \$235,000. I understand this measure is going to effect a saving to the Government, but that is a saving at the expense of the very poor people. Perhaps, every Member of this Council can afford to pay the increases, but when it is considered that Government pays certain employees 64 cents per day plus a bonus to maintain themselves and their families, those people are definitely unable to pay 24 cents for a tin of condensed milk as against 16 cents last week. And so I say, I am certain if the majority of Members of this Council had considered the matter they would definitely have decided against the removal of those subsidies.

Perhaps, I would agree to it if Government comes forward and promises to do something in regard to wages. Representations were made here from time to time—and I have made representations for a period of ten years—and those representations have fallen on deaf ears. I feel very strongly that I, as a humble Member of this Council, should have been consulted. My opposition is to your bringing forward this measure at this time. I feel that Government has blundered, I feel very strongly that if this Colony is to go forward this Council must be taken into the confidence of the Government at all times. Perhaps, a majority decision can carry any measure the Government or the Governor in Council wishes to carry. It is almost useless, as this Council is almost dying, doing anything about it, but the principle is there.

Your Excellency has the right and the power to do as you please, but, I think, that right and power should be exercised very carefully and cautiously in the future. Your Excellency will probably hear more about this matter. The people are definitely in a very grave position. They cannot eke out an ordinary existence and, I suggest, since this has been done Government begins at once to make definite arrangements to increase the wages of the working man by 50 per cent.

The PRESIDENT : I suggest to the hon. Member that a more appropriate time to bring this matter up will be when the Government comes to this Council, as it must at the next meeting, to ask this Council to approve of a supplementary provision of no less a sum than \$850,000 for Subsidization, which has not yet been voted by this Council. That is quite apart from the action which has recently been taken in respect of subsidies, which I regard myself as a very distasteful and disagreeable necessity. Apart from this \$850,000, we shall come to this Council still again for another \$150,000 or maybe quarter million dollars. I hope that these figures which I have mentioned to the hon. Member will help him to realize the gravity of the position. The step which has been taken was not taken lightly, and despite that, as I have stated, at the next meeting of the Council this Council has still to approve of a supplementary expenditure of not less a figure than \$850,000. I suggest the hon. Member will have an opportunity then to express his views more fully if he so desires then. I would like to add that from the remarks which fell from the hon. Member, I imagine Government can be assured of his support at least for the supplementary provision which is being brought forward.

GAMBLING PREVENTION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1947.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL : The report of the Select Committee on the Gambling Prevention (Amendment) Bill has been circulated to Members of the Council and I shall now move that the Council resolve itself into Committee to resume consideration of the Bill which is fully set out as Item 2 on the Order Paper.

Mr. de AGUIAR : I have risen to ask whether the debate on the motion of the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Edun, cannot be taken first. Unfortunately I have to be away early this afternoon and, as I believe that will be somewhat controversial, if we can finish the Rice Debate it would not only be in the interest of the Council to have it completed but, I think, it would be in the interest of the community. If I can say so, the debate on that motion should be given precedence over the other matters, as I would like to be present.

The PRESIDENT : I am in the hands of the Council in the matter. If the hon. the Attorney-General agrees to defer his motion I have no objection to the hon. Nominated Member's motion being taken at once.

Consideration of the Bill deferred.

INCREASED PRICES FOR RICE INDUSTRY.

The Council resumed the debate on the following motion by the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. A. M. Edun, following the suspension of Standing Rule and Order No. 9 :—

Whereas the cost of living index has risen from point 161 to 182 from December 1946 and at which point it has taken a steady stand to this date;

And Whereas the cost of labour has risen considerably in the Rice Industry;

Be It Resolved that this Honourable House strongly recommends that the Rice Marketing Board increase the price of rice on all grades to be paid to padi growers and rice producers, by one and a half cent per pound, to take effect from 1st January, 1947.

And Be It Further Resolved that this Honourable House strongly recommends that the aforesaid Rice Marketing Board open negotiations immediately with West Indian purchasers of rice requesting an increase of two cents per pound on all grades of rice to meet with the high cost of labour and the cost of living of the padi growers and rice producers of British Guiana.

Mr. de AGUIAR : It would appear as though Members would like to hear the other side of the picture, and for that reason I have risen, at this stage to add

my quota to the debate. The hon. Mover of the motion asks that "*this Council recommends that the Rice Marketing Board increase the price of rice on all grades to be paid to padi growers and rice producers by one and a half cent per pound and that the Board open negotiations immediately with West Indian purchasers of rice requesting an increase of two cents per pound on all grades of rice.*" Before dealing with the substance of the motion I would like to make a few preliminary remarks merely for the purpose of record and, perhaps, for the information of certain hon. Members. In doing so I must necessarily take the minds of Members back to what transpired in the rice industry, and even in doing so I may find it necessary to go back over a period of possibly ten years or more. At that time the whole position in regard to the rice industry, and more particularly the export trade of rice, was in a state of chaos. I do not think there is any person in this Chamber today who will say that the grower or producer, as you may call him, has come into his own. As a matter of fact, Sir, I think every Member of this Council will agree that the plight of the producer in those days was a very sad one. He was not only in the hands of the moneylenders, he was not only in the hands of the landlords and millers, but he was also in the hands of a certain type of person or persons who exported rice from this country to the West Indies and other places abroad.

As I said earlier, the whole position was in a state of chaos. The industry was not suffering only from uneconomic prices as the result of competition from the East, but it was also suffering along the lines I have just indicated. It became obvious at the time that something had to be done if the rice industry of this Colony had to be saved and, Sir, there were some of us—I am happy to say I was associated with them—who felt at that time that if the rice industry had to be saved some organization had to be set up. We were thinking in terms of a Board at that time, but we had all agreed that some sort of organization had to be set up, and that organization was described in those days as a single selling organization. Some attempts were made to bring that about, and it is regrettable that those and earlier ones

failed. I will not go into the details as to the reason why those attempts failed, suffice it to say that most of the opposition came from certain persons, who at that time not only made a living but made handsome profits out of the export trade. To give you an illustration as to how profitable it must have been, one exporter in those days traded under three names. And so I shall pass on from that phase to indicate what developed.

The organization came into being merely to try and protect the export trade. Government gave it its blessing. The Department of Agriculture assisted it by setting up a system of rice-grading for export markets, as consignments were being rejected because some of the exporters to whom I had referred were in the habit of selling one sample of rice and delivering another. All those things went on in those days. This Government set up that organization and rice-grading for export was introduced, and that was as far as we could go in those days. We had not the opportunity of going further. It is needless to say that system, although it did a fairly good job, was not entirely satisfactory and was not entirely in the interest of the industry as a whole. We pass on to another phase where the exporters were then being licensed to export rice. One of the Members of this Council, who is in this Chamber today, held three export licences because he traded under three different names.

Mr. JACOB : May I rise to a point of correction? I think the hon. Member is referring to the three export licences held by R. E. Brassington & Co., of which the second partner was a Member of this Council, the Colonial Rice Growers and Millers and Marketers of Rice, of which I was one of the principal owners, and C. R. Jacob & Sons Ltd., a company engaged in general trade.

Mr. de AGUIAR : We now know who the hon. Member I referred to is. I did not say it. I was very careful not to do so, but the hon. Member has exposed himself.

Mr. JACOB : What I wanted to say was that the hon. Member's suggestion is utterly baseless.

Mr. de AGUIAR : I leave it to hon. Members of the Council to draw their own deductions. I am only making what I regard as a statement of fact. I just mention that in passing. That state of affairs continued until World War No. 2 broke out. It then became quite necessary if the rice industry of this Colony was to survive, if we had to increase our production, for something to be done, and a Rice Marketing Board along the same lines as the present Marketing Board was created under the Defence Regulations. In that way a single selling organization came into being. When we are talking about the success or failure of any particular industry, we must look upon results, and I say without fear of contradiction that it was only since the introduction of the single selling organization under the Defence Regulations that we began to see any development of any kind in the rice industry. It was only from then onwards we began to see pleasant faces on our rice producers and to observe some of our millers taking an active interest in improvements and so on. The Board, as it then existed under the Defence Regulations, continued throughout the entire period of the war.

When the war was over it became quite obvious to those people who had quite a few years' experience—about seven years—in the operation of the Board, that such an organization should continue in the interest of the industry as a whole. I must admit that even Government at the time was a bit sceptical as to whether such an organization would find favour with all concerned, although I must say that Government itself was perfectly satisfied that it was the best thing that should be done. And so, Sir, things were being said by the various rice interests. We had during that same period a body of men called the Central Rice Committee, and on that Committee, Sir, there were represented the millers, landowners, growers, etc., and so Government had every opportunity of sounding out what were the wishes of the people who were engaged in this industry. I think there were several meetings of that Committee, and on one occasion the hon. the Colonial Treasurer, who was then Chairman of the Rice Marketing Board under the Defence Regulations, was present

and took the Chair. The records are all there. They had a full, free and frank discussion as to whether or not the Rice Marketing Board should be permanently established as a single selling organization. Although there were arguments on both sides and there was earlier disagreement, I think I would be right in saying, the various meetings terminated in a unanimous request that the Rice Marketing Board should be permanently established. That is how the present Rice Marketing Board was formed. The necessary legislation was introduced into this Council and received some opposition. I believe, chiefly from the hon. Member for North Western District (Mr. Jacob). Nevertheless, the fact remains that this Council accepted the Bill and the present Board came into being on the 1st April, 1946.

There is one important point I should like to mention, which is, that obviously the present Board was created on different lines altogether from the Board which functioned under the Defence Regulations. The members of that Board—and they were not many—were appointed by the Governor alone, but it is true that in making the several appointments the Governor endeavoured to obtain the services of men who were interested in shipping etc. Under the present set-up of the Board—and I am going to ask Members whether in their opinion it was not the right step to take—there are representatives of this Council, landlord-millers, producers, and Government representatives, including the Director of Agriculture, and I venture to suggest that such a democratic body is in the best interests of the industry, despite what any individual Member of this Council, or for that matter any individual member of the public, may think. I know that some Members are very fond of hurling at Government the personnel of various Boards which have been set up, and they probably will on this occasion refer to this Board as a packed Board, but before that is done probably I may explain that point away.

It is quite obvious that before we could get the organization in proper form the Governor had to make the appointments himself, but simultaneously with the passing of that Bill there was another Ordin-

ance which came into being—the Rice Producers Ordinance. If the two Ordinances are examined it will be found, that when that Association begins to function properly in due course representatives of that Association will be selected for seats on the Board. As the Association was not in existence at the time, the Governor had to select representatives of producers and millers from the various districts. The actual position at the moment is that on the producers' side of the Board there are representatives from every district in the Colony. I ask Members, and particularly the hon. Mover of the motion, whether they do not think that such a body is truly and fully representative of the industry?

Of course hon. Members would be quite right, when the occasion arises, to inquire into the activities of the Board. I hope that nothing I have said will be interpreted to mean that I think that such a right should be denied Members of this Council. They are entitled to inquire into the activities of the Board, and for that reason alone I welcome the motion moved by the hon. Nominated Member. What I do not welcome is Members speaking on the motion, knowingly or not introduce or make remarks which are entirely outside of the question under discussion or make reference to matters of which they obviously know very little, or nothing at all. It may be that the last statement of accounts of the Board is not yet in the hands of Members. I think the hon. Mr. Edun said he had not seen the accounts of the Board for some time. I did not quite appreciate the length of time he had in mind, but for the information of the Council I will say that when the present Board took over from the old Board that Board had not sent in its statement of accounts to the 31st March in order to close off its transactions and show the position at that date. Only one statement of accounts has been issued by the present Board since then, and that was at the end of September last year. It may well be that Members are in the habit of seeing half-yearly accounts from the old Board, but the existing Ordinance provides that the accounts of the Board shall be submitted annually. The Board having submitted accounts in respect of the period ending September, 1946, the next state-

ment of accounts was not due until the 30th September last. I do not know to what accounts the hon. Member referred, but I would like to assure him that the accounts to the end of September, 1946, have already been submitted. I do not know if the statement has been printed. I mention that because I would like Members to be aware that under the Ordinance they should not expect these accounts from the Board, other than annually.

In the course of his remarks the hon. Nominated Member said he thought the interests of the Board were not being looked after properly. He went on to say that, in his opinion, there was no danger of competition from any part of the world. I would like to take the hon. Member's mind back a year ago—to 1946. The war ended in 1945; we had V-E Day and V-J Day, and after that conditions in the world appeared entirely different from what they were during the war. At that time it certainly looked as if industry as a whole, having stood up to the rigours of war, had now to settle down and stabilize itself, looking for security. At that time we heard quite a lot about the future security of the sugar industry. We heard a lot about the coal and steel industries, but everybody was in agreement on one point—what does the future hold for us? We in this Colony, who were thinking along the same lines, felt that something should be done in so far as our rice industry was concerned. Those who were at the head of affairs—and I include the Government—felt that it was a good thing to think of stability, but at the same time they should consult those who were vitally interested in the industry and obtain their views. In the discussion by the Central Committee to which I have referred, that point was mentioned, and I do not remember hearing a single dissenting voice against the proposal that steps should be taken to stabilize the industry as a whole. They went further, and they were quite right. They said—and I repeat their words—“We have done a good job of work in the West Indies during the war. We fed them during the economic crisis, and the least they can do for us is to give us some security for the future.”

The discussions did not even end there. Further discussions took place at

the Rice Marketing Board where there was another cross-section of the rice community considering the matter, and in no uncertain terms they decided that something should be done to secure the West Indian markets. The people who said that, and even the members of the Board, realized that it was quite an easy thing to do—that all that was required was to go to the West Indies and say: "Well, we have fed you during the war crisis; here is a contract, sign on the dotted line." But it was not quite as simple as all that. When we began to examine the position carefully we found ourselves up against a number of difficulties. International treaties and political discussions of one kind and another were going on. There was a conflict of opinion as to what should be done and, as one of the principal persons faced with those difficulties, I would like to say that even on the day before I left this Colony as leader of that deputation I was not too sure whether I had got rid of the international difficulties involved. I think it was the very morning, or the evening, before we left that a certain ray of light came through from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, with whom this Government was in constant communication on the question of entering into an agreement with the West Indian Governments. But that was not the end of it. I went to Trinidad with my colleagues. I went to Barbados and returned to this Colony, and within a few months later I went back to Trinidad again with my colleagues and the details of a contract which had been worked out and agreed upon. I think, I will be excused for saying that it was one of the hardest and most difficult jobs I had personally ever undertaken. I do not think I should allow my modesty to restrain me from making that remark. It was one of the most difficult jobs I had ever undertaken.

Nevertheless, we went there, and after a good deal of bargaining on both sides we finally came back with a contract for a period of five years at a fixed price, which was a half-cent per lb. more than we were then obtaining in those markets, and an extension of the contract for a further period of three years at prices to be negotiated at the end of the five-year period. So far as quantities were concerned, we

were asked to guarantee 80 per cent. of their minimum requirements. On their part they undertook, provided supplies were available, to take their full minimum requirements in the first instance over that period. There was also an undertaking that if supplies were available they could obtain them up to their maximum requirements. I would like to ask any person, who has even a smattering knowledge of commercial dealing or commercial transactions, whether in the circumstances that existed at that time that was not a good contract, a fair contract both for the sellers of rice in this country and the buyers of rice in the West Indies? I emphasize "at that time."

But the delegation only went over there to negotiate; the matter did not end there. After the negotiations were completed and the details worked out and put in proper form, we came back to this Colony and there was a full, free and frank discussion at the Rice Marketing Board again. The terms of the agreement were carefully examined, and the next step was to prepare the legal documents in connection with that agreement. When the legal documents were prepared, the Board examined them, and after they were completely vetted they were forwarded to the various Governments in the West Indies or signatures. I experienced one of the joys of my life when I reported to the Board the completion of those negotiations and the terms of the proposed contract. The records of the proceedings of the Board are there, and it was gratifying to me, as a humble individual, to sit there and listen to the words of praise accorded the members of the delegation for what they regarded, and what I still regard, as a successful contract for the rice industry. Those words of praise did not come from the Government members of the Board; they came from the millers, the landowners, and the producer—members of the Board. If there was anything that gave me great joy was to sit there on several occasions, and particularly on the first occasion, to listen to the words of praise offered to myself, as leader of the deputation, and to my colleagues. That is something I shall never forget; it is a memory I shall always cherish.

All that took place in 1946, and we are now in another year, a year that has brought a turn of events in the world which, I think, is unparalleled, and people all over the world are being called upon to tighten their belts. Conditions are severe. In the United Kingdom there is no coal and no food sometimes, and the pirates have come into their own again. I would like to remind hon. Members of what happened in the U.S.A. towards the close of last year when price control was removed, when the racketeers and everybody came into the picture and bought up the available supplies, resulting in the scaring of prices of all classes of merchandise. We hear now that we can get \$50 for a bag of rice; we can probably get \$100, and I venture to suggest that if you meet a hungry man in the street, who has \$1,000 in his pocket but cannot get something to eat, he would probably pay that for a bag of rice, but I ask whether that would be human, or the correct thing to do, or whether it would afford us any security? When Members say that we can get \$20 for a bag of rice it is perfectly true; they can probably get more.

Mr. JACOB : More than that !

Mr. deAguiar : The hon. Member may be right, but I ask the question whether that will give the stability we are looking for in our rice industry. You get \$20 for a bag of rice this morning, but the producer will not see 80 per cent of it unless the Board continues to function. Let us scrap the Board tomorrow and have free-for-all export, and we would see what the producer is likely to get out of the \$20 or \$30 per bag for rice sold in Venezuela. At the close of the first World War in 1918 those who know something about it will remember that permits to export rice changed hands at \$20 per bag, and when a stock was taken by Government it was found that there was no rice in the Colony at all. We all know the parlous state to which the industry was reduced as a result of those illegal transactions which took place in those days. As I see the position—and I think I am competent to judge—the rice growers in this country are quite happy about the situation which now exists. Several of them with whom I have spoken have always told me that what

they need is security and stability for the future. They want to know that when they plant their padi they will get so much for it, and that is precisely the aim and object of the Rice Marketing Board. Members talk about prices, but surely they have not forgotten. It is not longer than 10 years ago when all a grower got for his padi in certain districts of the Colony was three shillings per bag.

Mr. JACOB : May I interrupt to correct the hon. Member? Is that what Rashbeharry and Co. got, so that they became bankrupt?

Mr. de AGUIAR : The hon. Member wants to infer that Rashbeharry and Co., got three shillings per bag for their padi. The hon. Member is so ignorant. He ought to know that Rashbeharry and Co. do not plant padi. They are landowners, and therefore they could not get three shillings per bag for padi because they did not have any to sell. They are buyers of padi.

Mr. JACOB : Did Messrs. J. P. Santos and Co. pay them 72 cents per bag?

Mr. de AGUIAR : They are neither rice millers nor buyers of padi, as the hon. Member knows.

Mr. JACOB : But they were exporters of rice, and they used Rashbeharry and Co.'s licence too.

Mr. de AGUIAR : The hon. Member is wrong again. They were agents for millers not exporters of rice. The hon. Member in his desire to be personal to every hon. Member should familiarize himself with the facts. He makes astonishing and deliberate statements with the intention to deceive. I had no desire to refer to the hon. Member but I think I ought to. He indulges in personalities in this Council which are not becoming to the debates, but I may inform the hon. Member that I have no intention of indulging in any gutter-like discussion, such as he likes to do. I will pass on, and I challenge the hon. Member to say that I am wrong. The price of padi was 3/- per bag in certain districts in the Colony—it probably was between 2/8d. and 3/8d. In the Essequibo district where a better class of padi was produced—where it was threshed by hand

and as a result a higher quality rice was obtained — the price was between 4/- and 4/6d and, I think, in certain cases the farmers got as much as 5/- per bag. At present the minimum price of padi is \$2.50 per bag—three times the minimum price paid long ago — and from information which reached me yesterday the price of padi for the present crop will be \$3.00 and even \$3.25 per bag. It may even go higher because the rice business has turned out to be good business. Many persons want to own rice estates but, thank goodness, the only persons authorized to sell rice are the Rice Marketing Board and that has been the salvation of this Colony. I am going to admit that the cost of production has risen and that the cost of labour has also risen; and I am going to admit also that the producer has to pay for his land rent.

Mr. JACOB : What about bags ?

Mr. de AGUIAR : The price of bags has risen but, there again, not to the true extent. I do not think the hon. Member knows—if he does not I will enlighten him — that the Rice Marketing Board has a pegged price for bags and that the rice producers can get bags from the Board at that price. I do not know if he is interested in bags, but if he is he can come along and get bags from the Board at 30 cents each because that is the pegged price. The hon. Member is a student — he reads papers and other things though sometimes he reads them upside down — and, perhaps, he will be interested to know that every year there is a charge of about \$1,000, which represents the difference between the true cost of the bags and the price paid for them by the producer.

A great deal of discussion has been raised on account of the fact that on certain occasions there was no rice in certain districts. I think the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Edun, made that point. I thought he would have been fair or kind enough to say that the shortage was due to circumstances beyond the control of the Board. Had he said that, I do not think I would have referred to the matter at all. I do not know what particular district the hon. Member had in mind, but I have myself examined the situation relating to shortages in certain districts and found that in those districts the sale of rice by

the Board had been almost negligible but for some reason or other the demand became much greater and, like everything else, it came at the wrong time.

We have now begun to reap the Autumn crop in some places, and if there is any shortage in any particular district at the moment it would disappear in another week or another fortnight. Therefore, I do not think any grave charge can be levelled against the Rice Marketing Board in that matter. There are several other reasons which have brought about the shortage and, perhaps, the main one is that the millers are—naturally—interested in this debate and are waiting to see what will be the result of it. They have read in the newspapers that the motion has been moved and that the matter is still under discussion and, of course, the little bit of rice they have they will not sell because in case the hon. Member is successful in his motion they will make a few extra dollars.

That gives me the opportunity of saying — and I ask that it be carefully recorded—that as a result of the contracts entered into between the Rice Marketing Board and the Governments of the British West Indies the recent price changes introduced by the Board are the prices that will remain stationary and stable for the next five years, so that if the millers and other persons interested in the rice industry have the feeling that this debate would probably result in a rehash of the whole set-up they would find themselves sadly disappointed. My only advice to them will be to carry on their work as they have been doing; and I send out the hope that there will be no price changes for the period I have mentioned.

I think there is one last point that I should make and that is, I am not sure whether it emanated from the Mover of the motion or from the mind of the hon. Member for North Western District but, as I understand it, the suggestion was made that we should try and get a higher price for our rice in the export market so that we could pay a higher price to the producer and at the same time maintain a low price for the local consumer. When I heard the suggestion I could not restrain a smile. When we talk about developing

the rice industry, it is only then we will see great strides in production in this country. We will see the production of rice—unless it is not carefully watched—rise to about 500,000 tons per annum, and all it will mean is that the grower and the consumer will get it from the mills and give it to the Board and then get it back from the Board, thus passing it round and round. It will be the case of the tail chasing the dog, and it will mean that we will only be taking in our own washing. These things, however, do not last very long and I have only given that illustration to show that that is so.

An examination of the price structure of the Board will show that the present prices have been fixed at as near a figure as possible to the price which we are asking the local consumer to pay. Beyond that, Sir, it is impossible for the Board to go, otherwise the results which I have just outlined will immediately follow. The Board would have to buy back its own rice all the time and, surely, I do not think Members would like to see such a state of affairs turning up.

I think it was the hon. Member for Essequibo River who made reference to Jamaica. He is not in his seat today, Sir, but I hope he will be given my reply to it. Personally, I would like to say that I am in sympathy with his remarks. I would have liked in the course of my discussion to include Jamaica in this matter of price arrangement on a contract for five years. In fact, I would like to tell the hon. Member for Essequibo River that at one of these discussions I happened to meet a member—I think he was a Labour member—from Jamaica, and when he heard that this delegation was in Barbados about rice I had the greatest difficulty to—well, to put it bluntly—get rid of him. He was interested—and quite rightly—but the cold fact was that we could not possibly enter into any arrangement with him. The cold fact really was that we had nothing at the time to offer Jamaica. While we were looking for security of markets we were not in a position to tell Jamaica that we could offer her supplies, and so that island was excluded from the negotiations. But, Sir, it may well be—and I think it

is the case—that the Jamaica market has not been definitely lost. If we continue to step up production as we are doing, I have every reason to believe that the time is not too far distant when we should be able to make some arrangement with that island. It is equally true, as the hon. Member has said, that having found herself outside of this arrangement, — Jamaica ought to pay more for her rice. But, Sir, I do not know whether the hon. Member for Essequibo River has ever heard the story about the man who fell between two stools. It may well be that Jamaica has found herself in that position, and if she has to pay more for her rice today it is because of her sins of omission or commission in the past. Nevertheless, in this matter, we were not dealing with individuals; we were dealing with Governments, and I would like to make it clear that the latter remark I made was not a remark against the Government of Jamaica, but rather against the importers in that island.

The hon. Member for the North Western District made some remarks about the industry not having expanded, but I do not intend to burden the Council with figures, which I have read here so many times before, to show that he is wrong. The industry is expanding, and there is no doubt about it. This Colony is producing more rice now than it has done in past years, and it is very obvious that the industry is developing in a variety of ways. We are getting the answer now to our various mechanical problems, and we have made considerable progress with our grading system. It is true, one hon. Member made reference to the quality of the rice being sold, but the fact remains that we are producing today a better quality of rice. The statistics are there and any hon. Member can see the various grades and quality of our rice, dating back from 1939. It is true that there was some little setback some time ago, but I am hoping in the course of the next few years to see some recovery.

Any hon. Member who says we have not made improvement in the rice industry is either ignorant of the subject or stifling his conscience. I would also

like to say that the foundation for further improvement has been so solidly laid, that I see no reason why progress in that industry should not continue. We are getting on with the problem of mechanical cultivation and more lands are being made available for cultivation. It seems rather strange that the rice economy is reported to be so bad, and yet wherever one can find anything like 100 acres of rice land they are being taken up very quickly indeed. I was one of those who felt that the irrigation scheme on the Courantyne Coast was likely to prove a failure, but it is not so, and so far as I am aware every acre of land that is available for cultivation there has been taken up.

I am very grateful to the hon. Mover of this motion for stating in his opening remarks that this is not a political motion and that it has no connection with the forthcoming general elections. I have accepted his word for it, and in doing so I hope he will give me credit for speaking so fully and frankly as I have done this afternoon. If, however, there is any point which I have not covered, I hope I will be given the opportunity of doing so later. Finally, I would like to advise that however much value the hon. Mover of this motion may have placed on it, in view of all the circumstances I have explained this Council should not accept it.

Mr. THOMPSON: I have listened with patience to the beautiful word-picture painted by the hon. Member for Central Demerara, but I can assure him that that picture is not as roseate as he makes it. I can take him now to parts of the country where he will find faces carrying the greatest gloom because of their sad lot in the rice industry. I go around the districts—and I can assure you, Sir, that I go around and cover a lot more ground than the hon. Member for Central Demerara—and I have had the opportunity of seeing from the inception what has happened. I know that there is one hon. Member of this Council who is worthy of bouquets for what he has done for the rice industry. He may be too modest to accept them and I am not going to embarrass him by calling his name, but he has done his very best to put the rice industry on a firm footing.

I may say at the outset that some of the people in my district have decided in view of the difficult position in which they have found themselves, to make store-houses and keep their padi at home. They have been suffering very much in order to get food—they could not get supplies from the Rice Marketing Board during recent months and sometimes for two weeks the shops are without any rice. I have seen telegrams to Government making representations on behalf of the people in this matter, and it is peculiar that the Rice Marketing Board has to sit and examine the situation—a procedure which takes some time—before anything can be done. I admit that there may be shortages once in a while, but these things are happening far too often. Then again, the worse samples are passed down to the people who send their rice in, and the others are exported.

The situation is a grave one, and I am not going to sit quietly and allow the remarks made by the hon. Member for Central Demerara to pass unchallenged. I have actually told some of the growers to store up their padi and to take two bags to the Board and get one bag of rice to eat. If the growers store up their padi and the price goes down below what it is now, that would be their dead. I am mostly concerned with the padi growers because they are the ones who are suffering, and I am sure, Sir, that the price they are being paid for padi does not cover the cost of production. I will give an idea of the situation from a list of expenditure which has been supplied to me by a producer. He has to pay \$6 for ploughing an acre of rice land, then he has to pay \$3 for harrowing, \$1.25 for seed, levelling and shying—80 cents, reaping—\$8.50, transportation to corial—\$1, threshing—\$2.75, transportation to mill—\$3; and bags—\$4.80, making a total of \$31.10. He would get approximately 15 bags of padi to the acre and when these are sold at \$2.50 per bag the total returns would be \$37.50.

It should be noted that there is nothing included in the expenditure for land rent, or for the grower's own labour, and I leave it to hon. Members to say whether this is a profitable industry so far as the grower is concerned. I am told he gets

bags free from the miller, but he will have to take them back in such a case. Even if he gets the bags from the Rice Marketing Board, he has to sign two papers which demand immediate payment from him in case of loss otherwise the cost will be taken out in instalments. On the figures I have given, Sir, it is not easy to see where this great profit is coming from for the producers in this industry. Within an area of several miles on the West Coast, Berbice, and also on the Courantyne, the industry is in a very bad state, and there is a very hard time ahead for the producer. One man has planted some 200 acres of land—he has sown 30 bags of seeds—but will not get a single acre of rice because he cannot get water. Where then are these great prospects and the rosy picture that have been put before the Council this afternoon?

Mr. PEER BACCHUS: If the hon. Member does not mind it he should mention where no crop would be got on the Courantyne.

Mr. THOMPSON: If you go to the Bloomfield-Letter Kenny area you would find those conditions, or if you get on to the Secretary of the Rice Association there he would tell you all about it. You know fully well what is the condition around Lichfield. What I am saying is authoritative. I am glad for the stabilizing of the industry. I do agree with it, but do not put it out that the lot of the farmer is fine whereas it is not. Let Government know the true picture. In the Hopetown District you will get a very good crop, at Foulis a good crop, at Cotton Tree a poor crop, at No. 11 a poor crop and so on. Those places have been examined and we know the conditions thoroughly.

I say the price of padi should be increased. I do not think padi should be sold at less than \$3.00 a bag, because on the figures I have given it is quite impossible for a man to clear his way on the present rate at which padi is being sold. I will do anything certainly to assist the industry further. When padi was selling at 3/- per bag, what was the cost of production and the cost of living? It was cheaper commensurately. You cannot take what existed sixteen or twenty years

ago to deal with present conditions. Then the prices were agreeably less, but the poor farmer could have paid his way. Let them have a decent living. Let them feel encouraged from the results they get, so that they can go back to the farm with contentment. In most of the villages on the West Coast Berbice the farmers have not to rent lands from the estates. They are owners; most of them have their own houses and have obligations in the payment of drainage and other rates to meet. If all these things are taken into consideration and that after they have planted the lands they cannot get an appreciable turnover to keep them in a decent state of living, you must agree they will not continue with the industry. I am prepared to encourage the industry to the best of my ability, but at the same time I say let the farmers obtain a decent living from the industry.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT: Now that the hon. Member has spoken I beg leave to move an amendment to the motion. That amendment is along the same lines the hon. Member has in mind. I had drafted it this morning. The amendment reads as follows, with your permission:—

"Whereas the cost of living index has risen from point 161 to 182 from December, 1946, and at which point it has taken a steady stand to this date;

"And whereas the cost of labour has risen considerably in the Rice Industry;

"Be it resolved that this Honourable Council strongly recommends that the Rice Marketing Board increases the price of padi of all grades to be paid to padi growers by fifty cents per bag, to take effect from 1st October, 1947."

That, I think is in accordance with the speech I made and, therefore, I am not going to reiterate what I said and that is, I level a charge against the Mover of the motion that the motion as worded is only in the interest of the miller or purchaser of padi. The amendment which I move is in accordance with the speech made by the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Thompson. It will take into consideration the interest of the padi grower. I beg leave to lay this amendment over and, I hope, the hon. Member who has taken his seat or some other Member will second it.

Mr. THOMPSON : I beg to second that.

Mr. FARNUM : Your Excellency, I cannot say that I know very much about the rice industry, but I have observed that the rice grower, as the hon. Member for Western Essequibo (Mr. C. V. Wight), has said, is the economic slave of the miller, and he does require a lot of protection. It has been brought to my notice, Sir, that the rice grower takes his padi to the miller. He contends that his padi is of a very high standard because the Agricultural Department has been distributing pure line seed padi for many years. The miller tells him that his padi is of a very poor quality, and the grower insists that the quality is good and refuses to accept the minimum price offered by the miller. He then asks that his padi be milled and returns a few days after for his rice to find that it would have been better if he had accepted the low price offered for his padi than to obtain the rice given him, as the rice is of a very poor quality. The result is, the grower takes any price the miller offers for his padi the next time rather than to have it milled. He is entirely at the mercy of the miller. To my mind the grower is in need of protection, because there is no one to whom he can refer when a price is offered him by the miller. I think it would be a very good thing if Government ask the Rice Marketing Board to consider the appointment of some officer attached to the Agricultural Department in the villages to whom the rice grower can refer as a referee. The rice grower is the person who requires protection, and I have great pleasure in supporting the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Western Essequibo, because I think the rice grower is the person who wants protection.

Mr. de AGUIAR : As regards that statement may I be permitted to make one observation ? The main difficulty in accepting an amendment of that kind is this: It is exceedingly difficult to grade padi. Padi, as everybody knows, is rice in the husk, and it is exceedingly difficult to grade padi as such and not padi as rice. The answer, of course, is a Central Mill, and, Sir, with the experience we are now gaining at Mahaicony I have no doubt that in time we

will get that. But the immediate difficulty in accepting the suggestion of the hon. Member for Western Essequibo is the fact that you cannot grade padi. In other words, there is nobody, whether he is a high technical officer of Government or an expert, who can come in and say this grade of padi should be bought at the minimum price of \$2.50 per bag or at a higher rate.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT : To a point of order ! The hon. Member is not aware of the fact that attempts are being made at the present moment to grade padi at the Central Factory at Anna Regina. Padi is graded there into four classes, and if that is not within the knowledge of the Chairman of the Rice Marketing Board, perhaps, he would investigate that. That is why I allow the words "of all grades" to be in the amendment. It is on the information which I obtained that there is grading or an attempt to grade at the Central Factory at Anna Regina, and if the hon. Member thinks it is not so he can eliminate those grades and leave it at 50 cents per bag.

Mr. de AGUIAR : I am aware of the system to which the hon. Member refers. At Anna Regina they buy padi on what they call A, B, C grades, but in truth and in fact it is not grading. It is a question of whether the padi as received is properly dried and winnowed. If it is not so dry and clean, then it falls into the second category. When I refer to padi grading, I mean one sample of padi with 100 per cent. accuracy that it will turn out a super grade of rice, because there is a number of things to be taken into consideration. I will mention a simple one—faulty milling will convert what is a lovely sample of padi, which in all probability will turn out a super grade rice, into a No. 1, or No. 2, or possibly a No. 3 grade rice. As I said, I am familiar with that system. The answer is a question of central mills, and I am looking forward and hoping that will be very soon after this experience at Mahaicony. I may urge Government later on to consider seriously the question of putting up central mills about the Colony. We can probably do with three or four more. That is of course a tall order.

What I would like to explain is this :

The price of padi, \$2.50 minimum, is based on a reasonable average price of rice after allowing for milling charges, etc., but we know as a fact that where there is competition among the millers a higher price than \$2.50 is offered. I may take this opportunity to state that the Board's price is put to remedy the complaint to which the hon. Member referred. The Board keeps a very vigilant eye on the situation, and in districts where it is found that any landlord or miller is taking an undue advantage of the grower in so far as the price is concerned the Board steps in and makes itself the buyer. Hon. Members will undoubtedly agree that is not the proper function of the Board. It should encourage private enterprise, but such steps are only taken when the Board is satisfied that an undue advantage is being taken of the grower.

The hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Thompson, will remember what happened in the Autumn crop of 1946 when, as the result of certain reports reaching the Board of what was going on in a certain district, the Board immediately sent a man into that district to try and purchase the growers' padi. After remaining there for about eight weeks or some period the quantity purchased was negligible. I understood afterwards there were certain difficulties—empty bags, transport—which the Board did not envisage. Those are difficulties which the Board may be able to overcome if the necessity arises for the Board to do so again. We had a similar experience at the end of the Autumn crop in Essequibo, I may remind the hon. Member. Again the Board stepped in there and the result was grand. The millers there had forced the minimum price down to \$2.10. As a matter of fact I was told it went down to \$2.00.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT : I happen to know that while the price is \$2.80 and probably more than \$3.00, there is going to be an attempt by the landlord-miller to reduce that below \$2.40.

Mr. de AGUIAR : That will be illegal, and I can assure the hon. Member that if such a thing takes place the Board will take very drastic measures against the miller concerned. I can promise the hon. Member that if any miller attempts to

purchase padi below the minimum price and there is sufficient evidence to prove that, the Board would take immediate and drastic steps against that miller. That is an assurance I would like to give hon. Members of Council without any regard to who the person may be. In Essequibo they did in fact succeed in bringing the price down to \$2.10, and the Board immediately took the same steps as it did on the West Coast Berbice, and automatically within three days the price went back to the normal figure of \$2.40. I want to tell the hon. Member this : The time is not yet ripe, as I do not think the Essequibo crop will be in for the next fortnight. But the position is being carefully watched and even the minimum price of padi in Essequibo will not stand, as the Board will enter and pay a price that is reasonable because in Essequibo, as I have said before, the quality of padi has been fairly well maintained. It is true that it has gone back a little bit in threshing methods, but still it is producing a fairly satisfactory quality of rice. I do not think the Board would be running any risk if it enters there and pays more than the minimum price. If the millers there attempt to carry out the same thing they did last year, the Board would immediately step in and take steps. In those circumstances I would suggest to the hon. Member for Western Essequibo to allow the original motion to stand on its merit.

Mr. THOMPSON : I do not understand why the hon. Member is opposed to this amendment. What the millers do is this : The people take their padi to the mill and dump it there as the millers cannot weigh on delivery of the padi, and when they do weigh there are several bags short in weight. Sometimes they weigh the padi without the producers being present, and they have to accept what is given. There can be no difficulty in getting in dry clean padi. As regards the case the hon. Member referred to on the West Coast Berbice, I may state it was not the fault of the people that the officer of the Board could not get padi. It was due to how it was arranged. He just sat at one factory and expected the people to find him out. He got about 500 bags of padi.

Mr. JACOB : I think I can speak on the amendment. I rise to support the

I know that the crop on the Courantyne Coast was threatened with a shortage of water, especially the area mentioned by the hon. Nominated Member, but I think that if he had been in close touch with that area he would have known that it was being supplied with water by Pin. Port Mourant. That area would have had water two weeks earlier, but the growers would not take the advice of the Manager of that estate. However, they have adopted his suggestion and are now getting a supply of water from the estate.

There is nothing to prevent a grower from getting \$3 per bag for his padi if it can make a higher grade than No. 2, and I feel sure that with Government officers going around the districts most of the growers will get more than the minimum price of \$2.50 per bag, because I happen to know that the quality of the padi being grown throughout the Colony has greatly improved. I was informed in one district last week-end that the growers are under the impression that \$2.50 per bag is the price fixed for any quality of padi delivered to the mill. I hope hon. Members, and particularly the Press, will make it quite clear that \$2.50 per bag is for the minimum grade of padi produced by the grower, and for anything above the minimum grade they should get a proportionate increase in price.

That, I think, is all I have to contribute to this debate. The points raised have been fully answered by the hon. Member for Central Demerara (Mr. de Aguiar). The hon. Member on my left (Mr. Jacob) has suggested that different prices might be fixed for different districts and, of course, he placed Essequibo on top. The hon. Member has been out of the rice industry for a fairly long time, and I wish to inform him—and I suppose he would be pleased to learn—that Super rice is being produced in every district today. Therefore it is not a question of fixing one price for Essequibo, another for Berbice, and another for Demerara. It is not an easy matter to fix prices for different districts as suggested.

With regard to the suggestion made by the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Farnum, that an officer or an organization should be set up to settle disputes between grow-

ers and millers as regards the grade of padi and to fix the price according to the grade, I think he will appreciate that it is a matter of detail for negotiation between the parties concerned.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I think I should say a few words from the Government's point of view. This is, I think, your first experience, Sir, of a debate on rice which has always been what we call a full-dress affair, and this particular debate has been no exception to the rule. It has always generated a certain amount of heat and frayed tempers among Members. What is unusual about this debate is that it has taken place under the shadow of the forthcoming elections. Nevertheless, I have always given full credit to the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Edun, for extreme sincerity of motive in all he has done in this Council, and I think on this occasion he has the interests of the rice producers in mind when he seeks to bring this motion before the Council.

The hon. Member for Central Demerara (Mr. de Aguiar), who is now the Chairman of the Rice Marketing Board, has made what I consider to be a very statesmanlike speech, and if he were present I would have liked to offer him publicly my congratulations on it. He has given a full and complete explanation which, I think, should be accepted by this Council, but I want to confirm an important point which he made in connection with this contract, or the series of contracts, which is really the subject of this motion. The hon. Member for Central Demerara referred to the fact that before the Rice Marketing Ordinance was placed before this Council several meetings were held between representatives of the industry, the Board, and the Government. I was present myself at practically all the meetings, and in most cases I was Chairman of the meeting. I have been looking at my notes of those meetings, and I find that in September, 1945, I reported to the Governor on a meeting that had just been held, and these were the words I included in that report:

"At the outset Mr. Gajraj and certain others stated that they were prepared to listen to my explanation of the Bill. They also wanted to have some firm statement as to guaranteed

prices for the future, as they claimed that the Committee's concurrence in the decision to introduce legislation to continue the Rice Marketing Board under a new constitution was conditional on the obtaining of such guaranteed prices."

Throughout those meetings the emphasis was on the great desire of those who were then representing the industry, the Government, and the Board to do what they could to obtain some guarantee of future prices from the export markets. I could not at the time give an undertaking on behalf of the Government that such guaranteed prices could be obtained. As the hon. Member for Central Demerara said, we foresaw immense difficulties in obtaining such guarantees, but what we did see was that as soon as the new Board was constituted their first duty would be to tackle that particular problem to see what could be done to obtain guaranteed prices from our West Indian markets, and very shortly after the Board was formed (I was still a member although not the Chairman) they started to tackle that particular problem. The difficulties were immense. What one has to remember is that in making contracts of that nature we have to make them with some authoritative body capable of making a contract for a long period. Consequently the contracts had to be made either with the Governments of the West Indian Islands themselves, or with some body acting with Government responsibility and authority. That was the first primary difficulty. We could not make long-term contracts with merchants.

As the hon. Member has said, he and his colleagues went to those Islands and succeeded—let me say beyond our wildest expectations—in securing an extremely good contract, because the Board has the right to supply our West Indian markets for five years with their minimum requirements, with an undertaking that they will supply such other quantities beyond that minimum as the West Indian markets want, and at the expiration of five years the contract can be renewed, but with a review of the prices. What is even better is that they did not secure the prices then prevailing, but an increase of those prices. When they came back from those visits I can confirm that they were wel-

comed with open arms and congratulated on what they had done. Doesn't it look rather curious that now that the world has suddenly got itself into this appalling state with food shortages we should now wish to re-open those contracts merely on the ground that we should get higher prices in these straitened circumstances? I did not gather from the speech of the hon. Mr. Edun that that is the ground on which we should do it, but I certainly infer from the other speeches that the suggestion is that we should force our markets to pay more. That would be most unfair and inequitable, and furthermore, I do not think it could be done. We have made a contract, and unless serious circumstances arise which can give the Board some reasonable excuse for going back on it, it will be outside the bounds of possibility for them to re-open the matter now.

What has surprised me more than anything else in this debate is that it has taken place at all. The fact of the matter is, that prior to the passing of the 1946 Rice Marketing Ordinance, the Board was a creature of the Government. It was constituted under the Defence Regulations. Let me be the first to admit that when it was started it was a bureaucracy pure and simple, composed of members appointed by the Governor who had no interest in the rice industry. As a matter of fact that was the criterion for their appointment—that they should be independent people. That lasted throughout the period of the war. Latterly, a more democratic form was instituted; members were appointed who were interested in rice, and then came the time when Government gave effect to its promise that a Board will be constituted on a democratic basis—a body that will look after itself and make its own arrangements without direct and complete guidance from Government.

In the debates which took place during the war recommendations were made that Government should do this and that, and I can understand that Members felt they had the right to make such recommendations. Like the hon. Member for Central Demerara, I am not denying that this Council has the right to discuss this very important industry, but what I am suggesting is that this Council having enacted a

law which created a democratic body on which the industry itself is represented by eight members, I think, it is going a little too far when this Council seeks to almost direct what the Board, which is really representative of the industry, should do. Under the law the Board has full power to make contracts in the export markets; it is not a matter for Government or the Governor to direct. Of course this particular contract did have the full examination and concurrence of the Government, but inherently it was a matter for the Rice Marketing Board to deal with, and they did it openly and, I think, they stand by it. I do suggest that it is almost an attack on the democratic constitution of the Board for this Council to make this recommendation which the motion and the amendment seek to do.

As regards the first part of the motion, which recommends an increase in the price of rice, I want it to be quite clear to Members that if the price which is being paid to producers of rice is increased there is absolutely no alternative but also to increase the domestic price of rice. The consumer would be bound to pay more for rice. There is no possibility of our increasing the price of rice in the export market and distributing that increase among the producers without at the same time increasing the price to the local consumer. Hon. Members know that quite recently the price has been put up by half a cent both to the producer and to the local consumer. Those two things took place concurrently. If, therefore, there is to be any increase to the producer it would follow automatically that there must be an increase to the consumer. I hope I am answering the hon. Member for Georgetown South, because his curry and rice will cost him more. I am not going to explain the technical reasons why that is so; I think the hon. Member for Central Demerara explained it. I can explain it even further, but Members can take it for granted that that is so.

On the question of the suggested amendment of the price which the Board is authorized by law to fix as the minimum price, if that suggestion were acted upon by the Board and the minimum price were increased from \$2.50 to \$3 per bag

of padi, it would upset the economy of the industry unless the price of rice is also increased.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT: Surely the hon. the Colonial Treasurer is not saying that the price of padi cannot be increased and the profit made by millers cannot be reduced? After all the fees charged for milling, etc., are not controlled.

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I say quite categorically that if you increase the price of \$2.50 per bag for padi, which is related to the price which the Rice Marketing Board pays to the producers for rice, you would automatically have to increase the price which is paid to the producers for rice. And if you increase the price paid to the producers for rice you would also have to increase the domestic price of rice to the consumer.

Mr. JACOB: I rise to a point of explanation! Suppose we produce another 10,000 tons of rice and sell it in the export market at double the present price, we will not compensate for any loss that may be suffered by not increasing the price of rice to the local consumer? In other words, will not the increased export value compensate for any loss suffered by not raising the price to the local consumer?

The COLONIAL TREASURER: That is perfectly true, but I am not going into the technical reasons. I thought the hon. Member had understood the position. If we sold another 10,000 tons in the export market we would get more money, but how could we pass it over to the producer unless we increased his price, and the moment we increase his price we must increase the price of rice to the consumer. The point has been well explained by the hon. Member for Central Demerara—that we will simply be buying back what we have sold. We have thought of the subject for years and we know that that is so.

There was one other point raised in the debate on which I would like to touch. I think it has been suggested that in some way or other an increase in the price of rice will stimulate production immensely, and that the fact that the price is where it is now is one of the factors which is keeping the industry back. I am sorry I

cannot possibly accept that. The factors which are required to increase production today are not increased prices but more land—more drained and irrigated land—or improvements to land which is already in use; more labour, or in the alternative mechanization. We have almost reached saturation point in this industry, and that is why Government is paying so much attention to mechanization. Without more land and mechanization we cannot get much further even with double the price today. That is, I think, the accepted view by those who ought to know.

I am sorry to hear my friend, the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Thompson, paint such a gloomy and terrible picture of the unfortunate producer of padi. Listening to his figures I can only come to the conclusion that if they are correct then every producer of padi is doing so at a loss. In other words, he must be giving his services completely for nothing. The hon. Member must realize from the general situation of the industry that that is not so. If it were so no padi would be produced, or there would be very little produced, except what the producer wants for his own consumption. The people are eager to produce more.

I do not want to take up the time of the Council any more, but I must say that Government cannot accept either the motion or the amendment. Of course, I must point out that even if the motion or the amendment were passed it would merely mean that it would have to go as a recommendation to the Rice Marketing Board which is the constitutional body to fix prices. It is not a matter in which, if this Council decides to make a recommendation, it would automatically be given effect to. Naturally, where a law is passed giving the Board statutory authority to decide such matters, that is the body to do it. This Council's recommendation is therefore only a recommendation.

Lastly, I just want to say a word regarding the Rice Producers Association. When the Bill for the establishment of that Association was before this Council the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Edun, was very much concerned about it. He

thought we were moving in the wrong direction; that we had begun in the wrong way. Well, I am disappointed myself that further progress has not been made. What has happened is that a Central Council has been appointed by Government — a nominated body — and that body has divided the Colony up into districts, as the law provides. In consequence of that Act we have constituted these districts into separate district associations, and committees of these associations have been appointed by nomination. The present position is that Regulations are now being drafted to enable elections to be held in each district so that properly elected committees can take the place of the nominated committees, and after that a new Council on an elected basis will be formed. I do hope that further progress will be made in that matter because it is necessary that we should have a democratic body working hand in hand with the Rice Marketing Board, from which body members of the Board will be drawn.

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Mover will now reply.

Mr. EDUN: Sir, the speeches delivered by various Members have disclosed certain aspects of the administration of the Rice Marketing Board and what the Board is doing in order to make distribution adequate. Although I took the opportunity to listen to all the arguments adduced up to the present, I have not been convinced by anyone that the cost of production of rice is lower than mentioned, or that it is possible to produce it at the price being offered by the Board. That aspect of the motion was very definitely ignored by the Chairman of the Rice Marketing Board—the hon. Member for Central Demerara—and for what reason I do not know. He simply glossed over it and complacently said: "I know that the cost of labour has risen too." I repeat that the hon. Member just simply glossed over that important and fundamental aspect of the whole issue, and I was certainly disappointed when the hon. the Colonial Treasurer said he did not believe there would be greater production of rice if the price is increased. That is such a fallacy that I cannot believe

myself to be listening to it from the hon. the Colonial Treasurer, because I have in my hand here a booklet entitled "Final Act of the United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture," and Act XV — "Long-Term Production Policy"—states:—

"3. It is recognized that in order to secure this result producers should receive a fair return for their products."

That is an edict from the United Nations Conference, if I may call it so, and these Acts were accepted by the Caribbean Labour Conference. I think the hon. the Colonial Treasurer himself was a party to the acceptance of those provisions at the Conference. No so long ago, in this very Council Chamber, he pleaded the case of the Civil Servants with great zest and fervour—enough to convince all of us that the Civil Servants needed assistance—but I do not find the same zest in him this afternoon for the producers of rice in this country—those who are feeding all of us. Here is a spokesman of this Government putting forward the argument that it pays to produce rice at the present time. I had expected the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Raatgever, to say something on this question of the rising cost of living, but everybody in this Council—every hon. Member—has glossed over it. Why? I have also received opposition from the Chairman of the Rice Marketing Board, and have also received opposition from the hon. Member for Western Essequibo—a man who should have initiated this motion but who has definitely opposed it.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT: To a point of order! I would like to know on what ground the hon. Member can say that I have opposed his motion. I opposed the motion as regards an increase in the price of rice; I want an increase in the price of padi but I do not see how the price of padi can be increased without increasing the price of rice.

Mr. EDUN: It is not in my nature to interrupt hon. Members when they are addressing this Council and, I think, hon. Members should sit in their seats and not interrupt others. They should learn procedure because there is always this tendency to rise and interrupt. I do not in-

terrupt anyone at all; I sit in my chair and listen to all that is being said. I say again that I am disappointed in Government—in the spokesmen of Government. If anyone tells me that the rice producers are making money and that they can do that in the face of the present cost of living, I would say "Certainly not." Since Government has accepted the principle that the cost of living has risen, it must accept the statement that the rise has seriously affected the rice producers in this Colony.

What I cannot understand also is this question of the contract for the supply of rice to certain islands of the West Indies. The hon. the Colonial Treasurer objected to my interpretation when I said that it is nothing more than a millstone hanging around the necks of the producers in this Colony. Am I to understand that such a contract excludes equity and that negotiations can be opened only if grave circumstances arise? That is what the spokesmen of this Government want me to accept. No grave circumstances had arisen when several hundred thousand dollars of this Colony's money were given to Civil Servants—when the Colonial Treasurer was their spokesman—but in this case no such circumstances have arisen and the rice producers must continue to produce rice and sell, perhaps, at the whims and caprices of the Rice Marketing Board.

That is the law which, perhaps, even the supreme authority of the land cannot examine, but that kind of thing is reactionary to my mind. I feel that by glossing over this question of the cost of living and the cost of labour in producing rice the Chairman of the Rice Marketing Board did a service to the Board. I listened carefully to what I would call a rambling history of rice production and the functioning of the Rice Marketing Board for the last few years. I think, however, that I know all the history of the Board from its inception to the present time. The hon. Member who is the Chairman of the Board thinks that because he and others made a contract which is binding on the Board the rice producers have absolutely no right to question that

contract. Where is the democracy in the whole set-up?

When I see in the Ordinance that the Governor in Council has the right to fix the price of rice, then I suspect that the whole set-up of this Rice Marketing Board is to keep down the industry in order to serve some other interests, and whatever those interests are it is a matter for Members to find out. It is not accidental, Sir, that certain Members like the Chairman of the Rice Marketing Board and others do not want the rice producer to get a better price. Here we have it that the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Thompson, has given figures apart from those I quoted on the cost of rice production and the cost of labour. He told this Council in no uncertain terms that it does not pay to produce rice at the present price, and I should like to know why there is this lack of willingness on the part of certain people to examine the cost of living. We heard the hon. Member for North Western District speaking this morning about the withdrawal of subsidization from certain items of food and what the result will be, but perhaps Government is not thinking at all about this spiral of inflation that is going up. It might have to do so very soon, however.

I warned Government when the plea was being made by the hon. the Colonial Treasurer for the Civil Servants that the same figures he was using will be used by the producers, but now Government is trying to refute those figures. The principle is one based on democracy, however, and we cannot reject it. This Council has a right to say what Government should do in a matter of policy, and I do not see why Government should get certain Members to try and twist that policy. What I am asking for is that negotiations be opened with the purchasers of rice outside of this Colony on a basis which will result in an increased price of 2 cents per pound more. I am also asking that 1½ cents of that increase be given to the rice producers, and I do not see why the consumers in this Colony should bear that increase, because if rice is being sold at a higher price abroad every effort should be made to get the best price.

I have not suggested that we should scrap the contract made with the West Indian Islands, but I say there is evidence to prove that grave circumstances have arisen and therefore steps should be taken to review it. If anyone says that the circumstances are not grave, then that statement cannot be based on the cost of living in this Colony. I think Your Excellency and hon. Members would remember that in the case of sugar the situation was re-examined, although contracts had been made with the British Government for a certain fixed price. Those contracts were varied year by year because of certain grave circumstances. Is this Government trying to say that nothing can be done in the case of this rice contract?

The COLONIAL TREASURER: I do not want to interrupt, but I desire to say that the sugar producers would like to get a long-term contract for five years instead of an increased price.

Mr. JACOB: Nonsense — absolute nonsense!

Mr. EDUN: I know that the sugar producers have had their contract reviewed, but in the case of rice the contract has been put down in the archives and nothing is to be said about it. If that is to be the attitude of the Rice Marketing Board, then I would ask every producer of rice not to co-operate with the Board, and it would be a sorry day if they did not co-operate because many people would starve.

The hon. Member for Western Essequibo has suggested an amendment to this motion and I am willing to accept it, but we have these excuses—admissions of defeatism—on the part of Government. This suggestion that people will buy rice from the Rice Marketing Board and then sell it back to them is absolute nonsense. It has been stated here this afternoon that there are shortages in certain districts, and I consider that to be due to nothing but maladministration on the part of the Board, because we have given a monopoly to the Board to sell and distribute rice wherever it likes. The hon. Member for Western Berbice exploded the whole myth when he said that the Board did not make adequate provision for local consumption. If that is not evidence of incompetence then what is?

I believe that the Board can do good work, but if it hinges itself on to the cost of living index and says that the price of rice should be a prerogative of the Governor in Council, then it would be making a retrograde step to my mind. The hon. Member for Central Demerara states that a man who has \$1,000 would be willing to pay it for a bag of rice if he is starving, but if he is exploited it would be a crime of inhumanity. I agree; but isn't it inhumanity also for rice growers to be working in the mud all these years without being able to get proper returns for their labour?

Mr. PEER BACCHUS : I must admit that I do not follow the contention of the hon. Member, but I understand him to say that no provision was made for local consumption. He attributed that remark to me, but what I said was that provision was not made for this increased local consumption.

Mr. EDUN : What the hon. Member actually said was that "adequate provision was not made for local consumption."

Mr. PEER BACCHUS : No, Sir!

Mr. EDUN : In Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice there is a universal cry for more rice for local consumption. We also heard the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Thompson, telling us about the bad quality of rice being consumed in his district. It is well known that although we produce the best kind of rice sold outside we eat the worst kind here, and that is why I have said there must be planning on the part of the Board. This Council has the right to ask Government to re-examine the planning and the general programme of the Board and rectify all these things. I want some humane consideration for all these people who are producing rice but are not getting sufficient money to make two ends meet. That is why they are always in debt except, perhaps, in one or two districts.

Some people say these rice producers are always happy, but I would like to take them around to see conditions in some of the districts. I would ask Government

to take the estimate given of the cost of producing rice and see whether my contention is not right—that the present price is too low and that unless there is an incentive to the growers production will go down. I have seen a definite tendency to increase the production of sugar rather than increase the production of rice. Rice is a staple food and I do not see why there should not be more production. It is for such purposes that Government adopted a policy of planned economy, but I do not know whether it has been abandoned. The spokesmen of Government have not given us any indication of it today.

I do want to examine closely one or two statements made by certain hon. Members in order to give this Council an idea of what is passing through my mind. We heard very much from the hon. Member for Western Essequibo and the whole tenor of his speech showed that he was suffering from a kind of complex. While this Council may not know anything about millers, if he says that the padi growers will not benefit from a motion like this, then I would say that he has not tried to understand it. The hon. Member for Western Essequibo is also proprietor of a rice estate from which I have also had several complaints about iniquities happening there and —

Mr. C. V. WIGHT : Again I do not like to interfere with the hon. Member, but he does not take the trouble to find out things properly before he comes here and makes statements about them. I would like to point out that I am not part proprietor of any estate; I happen to be trustee and guardian for two young East Indian children. That is all.

Mr. EDUN : That is why the hon. Member should not do anything to interfere with the cost of padi being increased.

The PRESIDENT : I think the hon. Member should go on.

Mr. EDUN : It is now 5 o'clock. Sir, and I want to go on for some time yet.

The PRESIDENT : Council will therefore adjourn until Thursday, October 23.