

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Wednesday, 14th December, 1932.

The Council met pursuant to adjournment, His Excellency the Governor, SIR EDWARD DENHAM, K.C.M.G., K.B.E., President, in the Chair.

PRESENT.

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary, Mr. C. Douglas-Jones, C.M.G.

The Hon. the Attorney General, Mr. Hector Josephs, K.C., B.A., LL.M. (Cantab.), LL.B. (Lond.).

The Hon. T. T. Smellie (Nominated Unofficial Member).

The Hon. T. Millard, C.M.G., Colonial Treasurer.

Major the Hon. W. Bain Gray, M.A., Ph. D. (Edin.), B. Litt. (Hon.), Director of Education.

The Hon. J. S. Dash, B.S.A., Director of Agriculture.

The Hon. R. E. Brassington (Western Essequibo).

The Hon. E. F. Fredericks, LL.B. (Essequibo River).

Major the Hon. J. C. Craig, D.S.O., M.E.I.C., Director of Public Works.

The Hon. W. A. D'Andrade, Comptroller of Customs.

The Hon. Q. B. de Freitas, M.R.C.S. (Eng.) L.R.C.P. (Lond.), Surgeon-General (Acting).

The Hon. J. Mullin, M.I.M.M., F.S.I., Commissioner of Lands and Mines.

The Hon. N. Cannon (Georgetown North).

The Hon. A. V. Crane, LL.B. (Lond.) (Demerara River).

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

The Hon. J. Gonsalves (Georgetown South).

The Hon. A. E. Seeram (Eastern Demerara).

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

The Hon. Jung Bahadur Singh (Demerara-Essequibo).

The Hon. G. E. Anderson (Nominated Unofficial Member).

The Hon. Peer Bacchus (Western Berbice).

MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 13th December, as printed and circulated, were confirmed.

GOVERNMENT NOTICE.

FAWCETT PENSION BILL.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY (Mr. C. Douglas-Jones) gave notice that when Order III. was reached he would move that Standing Order No. 11 (1) be suspended to enable "A Bill to repeal the A. Fawcett Pension Ordinance, 1932," to be read the second and third time.

PETITION.

Mr. FREDERICKS laid on the table a petition from cattle-owners in Leguan praying for certain concessions in regard to the passage of cattle over the public roads.

ORDER OF THE DAY.

THE RICE INDUSTRY.

Mr. SEERAM: I beg to move the motion standing in my name:—

WHEREAS the Rice Industry of the Colony is in a very parlous condition;

And whereas there is much room for improvement in the planting, threshing and milling of padi;

And whereas it is necessary in the best interest of the industry to regulate rice mills;

And whereas many rice-farmers who are tenants have no security of tenure in respect to rice lands they have prepared at considerable expense:

Be it Resolved,—That Government be respectfully asked to appoint a Committee to investigate all important matters affecting the industry with the view of reporting to Government the best measures that should be adopted to assist, improve and develop the industry.

There can be no doubt that the rice industry stands as a living monument of the initiative and industry of the East Indians of the Colony. From a very humble and small beginning, and without Government aid, as pioneers of that industry they have been responsible for building it up to what it is to-day. It has attained the importance of being the second industry in the Colony and contributes to the export trade to the extent of over one million dollars. There also can be no doubt that at the present time the industry is in a very parlous condition and deserves all assistance at the hands of Government. Government has been good enough to acknowledge that this industry needs assistance and has done a good deal to assist and stabilise it. Within the past few weeks Government has very rightly introduced legislation to secure a market, which is highly desirable for the development and betterment of the industry. But the Ordinance that has just been passed must not be considered the panacea for all the ills that affect the industry. There are many other important points which will help to stabilise the industry and place it on a footing that would develop it considerably. The industry is capable of great expansion. There are thousands of acres of land eminently suitable for rice cultivation. Had it not been for the innumerable vicissitudes from which it has suffered, the returns from the industry would have been doubled and more money contributed to the revenue of the Colony. Rice is the chief article of diet of the people of the country and it behoves Government to do all that lies in its power not only to maintain but to increase its production. There is every hope that the universal use of selected seed will improve returns. A Committee will consider the many points affecting the industry and make recommendations for improvement, including the manner of planting and the specific time when it should be done having regard to climatic conditions. There is no doubt that a great deal of the bad rice produced is largely due to the threshing of padi by oxen. If by some communal method threshing machines can be introduced it will improve the rice. It might be possible for Government to allocate a portion of the grant from Imperial funds towards the purchase of a few threshing

machines for use in important districts on payment of a small fee.

My opinion also is that there are too many rice mills that contribute to the production of bad rice. Many small mills exist to the detriment of the industry. I suggest that mills should be regulated and licensed, and only mills that comply with regulations should be licensed. An important point to be considered is the milling fees, which are a burden to rice-growers. If some millers find it remunerative to mill padi at 60 cents per bag, charges of 80 cents and \$1 are excessive and go to show that these fees can be reduced. Another point is that millers take two bags of padi varying from 150 to 175 lbs. each to mill a bag of rice. That should be regulated. My suggestion is that two bags of padi of 145 lbs. will produce 180 lbs. of rice. That is a direction in which the growers suffer materially. Some millers have themselves told me they would welcome legislation fixing the maximum weight of padi and milling fees. A Committee will be able to go fully into these matters and advise on them. I come now to the question of tenancy. Land rent varies in different districts. I would place rice tenants in two categories: those who lease broken land and those who take unprepared land and prepare it at their own expense at a cost of from \$25 to \$40 an acre. The greatest barrier that confronts the rice-growers and forms one of their chief grievance is in respect of the breaking down of land. Tenants prepare the land and in the event of the slightest dispute with the proprietors they are given notice to quit without compensation. That seems to be the general rule, but there are exceptions to that rule. There are some proprietors who compensate growers who desire to leave a district or with whom there is any dispute, or the grower is given the opportunity to transfer or sell his right in the land. The hon. Member for Essequibo River moved a motion on this subject, which was accepted by Government, and I ask that that motion be given immediate effect.

Mr. FREDERICKS: To a point of correction. Government has shown every willingness to give effect to the motion but I have been somewhat laggard, and it is due to me and not to Government that the matter has not proceeded further. I

don't want it to be thought that Government is in any way to be blamed for the delay. At the present time tenants are under notice to quit lands in Leguan and on the Essequibo Coast in fourteen days and a month and no compensation or any opportunity is given the people to sell the land prepared.

Mr. SEERAM: I appeal to Government to go into the matter as unless something is done, I am afraid, the yield for the coming year will fall below that of the present year. I find that the cultivation of rice has been increased 100 per cent. during the past seven years with a corresponding increase in production, and the industry has also shown development each year for the last ten years. It is estimated that 50,000 tons of rice will be produced this year, but I am sure that amount will be greatly exceeded. If the estates would give growers more land it would increase cultivation considerably, result in contentment of labourers on estates and ensure the labour supply of those estates. I know it is Government's desire to develop agricultural areas and every assistance given will extend cultivation. A Rice Association has been formed, but the preponderating interest in that Association is represented by the rice millers and landed proprietors. There is not sufficient representation of the growers and I am afraid that the Association will suffer in consequence. The Association will not be able to solve the innumerable problems that confront the industry. A Committee, on the other hand, would be able to investigate the matter from all directions and furnish Government with valuable information upon which action could be taken.

Mr. FREDERICKS: I rise to second the motion. The mover of the motion made appropriate reference to the initiative of the East Indians in the upbuilding of this important industry. I think it is most fitting that I should say that the Negro people are taking to the industry, and I am glad that they are doing so. There are parts of the Colony where the Negro is rather a living factor in rice growing, for example, on the Corntyne and West Coast, Berbice. It is a very good thing that they are going into the industry as they are doing because, it seems to me, before

long we will have in rice, arithmetically speaking, the East Indian the dividend and Negro the changing divisor, and with such we shall certainly have quotient which will be Negro and East Indian working together for the upbuilding of their land of adoption. The mover has included in the motion improvements, and so far as improvements go I am wholly with him. I do not think it is practicable, however, to have legislation to control threshing and planting. Those two things rest entirely with the growers themselves and I do not think it would ever be practical or necessary to have legislation in that respect. When it comes to milling it is a matter of great importance. Milling affects both the grower and the producer. Legislation is necessary to make millers keep proper books and give receipts to people on the delivery of padi to the mills. It is sometimes distressing to see a poor man who has laboured all the year and taken his padi to some mill involved in a lawsuit with a miller and unable to show, because he had got no receipt, what quantity of padi he had delivered to the miller and the miller also having no proper books to show the transaction. I think one of the greatest necessities is that every rice miller should be compelled by law to keep proper books and give proper receipts for the number of bags of padi brought to his mill. A point of most importance is the question of security of tenure. For some reason or other a good many owners of rice lands do not think it necessary to enter into written contracts with those who lease their lands. That is a matter where Government should come in. People do not know whether they are on the land for a year, a month or a week. In this regard there should be legislation. The hon. Member also referred to the breaking of land. That also needs legislation. The preparation of land costs a good many dollars and if a man has to leave the land he gets no compensation. There should be some legislation by which this expenditure on labour should be regulated. There should be some written contract describing the tenancy, something legal about breaking land and the interest therein after it is broken, and what should be done in case a grower has to go before his tenancy is terminated.

Mr. BRASSINGTON: I am in favour of the appointment of a Committee, but I

do not see how a Committee will not clash with the Board which has just received legislative sanction. I would suggest that the most satisfactory course to take is to add to the Bill to make provision for the establishment of a Board for the exportation of rice a few clauses to provide security of tenure to rice-growers. There is no doubt that in most instances the growers have not the security of tenure that they ought to have. There are good landlords and good tenants, but there are also bad landlords and bad tenants. The rice industry is a peasant industry, not a capitalistic industry, and there is plenty of room for improvement. It is not only insecurity of tenure but also the exorbitant charges in many parts of the Colony growers suffer from. Money is advanced to them at exorbitant rates of interest to grow their crops. Some of them are even charged for the carts which take their padi to the mill, and they do not in all instances get proper treatment in the milling of their padi. If Government can bring in legislation that will not unduly interfere with the liberty of the subject in the management of rice estates I think it will do a great deal to help forward an increased prosperity of the industry. The motion is timely to see whether something cannot be done to give the grower some security of tenure. The grower should be represented on the Marketing Board, which, as at present constituted, is a "show" for the millers and proprietors of rice estates, and it will be a failure if the grower is not represented on it. If no suitable person can be found then there ought to be somebody to represent him. The greatest difficulties of the industry at present are excessive rents and insecurity of tenure.

Mr. CRANE: The general object of the motion has my support. The means by which that object may be attained is a matter subject to a difference of opinion. I am not surprised at the hon. Member bringing forward this motion because he was a Member of the Small Farmers Committee which considered matters involved in it. I am at one with him in urging on Government that some steps should be taken to put the industry on a more secure and sure foundation. But legislation is not going to be the means of achieving that end. To get by means of legislation all that is suggested by the motion means that you will have to amend various

branches of the law. You will have to amend the law relating to money-lending in order to be able to secure the rice-growers from the oppression of the money-lenders. You will have to amend the law relating to landlord and tenant in order to prevent eviction without proper safeguards. You will have to amend the law of letting and hiring in so far as it relates to the relationship between the rice miller and the grower. Legislation would mean a revolution in these various branches of the law, and you will find people asking why should the rice-grower be placed in a different position as regards money-lending as distinguished from other sections of the public. Insecurity of tenure is a matter on which legislation would be justifiable. When the Deputy Director of Agriculture was to be appointed we were told that the object was to have an officer who would teach the small farmers modern methods of planting, harvesting and marketing their crops. We were even asked for a vote to pay the cost of a visit of the officer to Italy on his way to the Colony. I have had an opportunity of discussing this phase of the matter with the officer when Chairman of the Small Farmers Committee, and he showed me photographs of rice cultivation, harvesting, threshing and milling in Southern Italy. Those methods, which are a vast improvement on those which obtain here, should be tried out. If they are inapplicable to this country the public and Members of this Council ought to know the reason. We all thought that the appearance of that officer would have ushered in a new era of prosperity to the small farmer, but I have not yet seen any indication that the employment of the officer is going to lead to the great expectations which we had. The prosperity of the rice industry will be the salvation of this country, therefore the motion has my hearty support. It is my opinion that if the industry is given proper support in less than five years we shall be able to resuscitate the damaged finances of the country. I am confident that half of our financial troubles would disappear within the shortest possible time if we are able to develop the country into what from its situation it is entitled to be—the granary of not only the West Indies but also of Canada. The matter is so important as to justify the attention of yourself, sir. I do not think it is a matter

that should be dealt with by a Committee. It should be worked out by the Department of Agriculture and a comprehensive scheme put before Government for the improvement of production by the most modern methods.

Mr. PEER BACCHUS: I am supporting the motion, especially where landlords and tenants are concerned. A representative Committee should be formed to consider what should be done in that direction. I am not here to defend millers who extort money from the growers. There are no doubt millers who take from the growers more than their fair due, but the majority of growers take padi to mills that is unfit for milling. I do not think growers will get loans at a reasonable rate of interest until such time as Government thinks fit to make the rice crop the security. The rice crop at the present time is more or less a gamble. Those who advance money to growers take great risk whether the loans will be repaid. I know of many instances of loans not being repaid because the grower has lost the crop either through flood or drought. The first assistance the grower needs is by way of irrigation and drainage. When crops are secure from droughts and flood the grower can demand reasonable and fair conditions from anyone he has transactions with. Without the aid of millers who are on the spot the rice crop would drop by 50 per cent. A Committee should be appointed to consider the various phases of the matter.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Mr. Hector Josephs): Perhaps I might venture to make a remark on a part of the subject matter of this motion. The matter is undoubtedly of great importance to the general prosperity of the Colony and the welfare of the individuals who are engaged in the rice industry. One question raised is that of giving to tenants what has been described as some security of tenure. There is also the subsidiary question of regulating the price for padi at the mill and the further question of the amount of rent to be paid. Those are matters in respect of which the Legislature is asked to interfere with the ordinary freedom of contract and personal right and liberty of individuals in making arrangements one with another. The justification for legislation imposing restrictions in matters of this kind is determined by the interest of

the general community. The first thing we have to consider is what is the nature of the ordinary agricultural tenant's right and what further rights should be conferred on him. In some countries the ordinary tenant takes land on a yearly tenancy and you have to give him six months' notice of the termination of his tenancy at the end of a year. I do not know, I am sorry to say, whether that is the general rule that exists here. I am told that does exist here. That simplifies matters to a certain extent. But when you are going to deal with fixtures further considerations arise as to the extent you should go in giving him rights. It seems to me that you will have to get evidence and arrive at a conclusion as to what is the best thing to be done in regard to tenancies in the interest both of the rice-grower and of his landlord. It needs careful enquiry into the various conditions, which may differ in different parts of the Colony. It may be very difficult to regulate rent by statute, but it must be possible to fix a maximum rent if one can go so far. We shall have to ascertain what it is desirable to do in those respects, and it seems to me it is a matter which will require some investigation by a Committee, who would be able to put forward conclusions based on the investigation which they have made and also on their own knowledge as to what is best in the interest of both parties generally. The giving of security to persons who lend money to rice-growers may also depend on the nature of the tenancy. It is possible to grant what is known in some other Colonies as agricultural liens over crops to be grown. That works very well indeed with respect to both small estates and very large cultivators.

Professor DASH (Director of Agriculture): I think we are all very much in sympathy with what has been said, and I congratulate the mover of the motion on the knowledge he has shown of the difficulties of the rice industry. The increase of rice cultivation in this Colony is intimately wrapped up in the question of water supply, and that also is the case with the extension of other crops, even sugar. I do not think it is generally appreciated that any extension of agriculture depends almost wholly on an adequate water supply not only for irrigation and drainage but also for transportation. That is a phase we

shall have to give attention to very seriously in the near future if we are going to substantially increase our cultivation, especially of rice and sugar. The Department of Agriculture has collected a considerable amount of information already on the very points which have been raised by the mover of the motion. In so far as agricultural operations are concerned that is not a question of legislation so much as a question of education, and that is one of the lines of attack we have been pursuing during the last five years. The results we have had in the extension of the industry and improved method have been largely due to these educational measures by the Department and its officers throughout the Colony. There are no means of compelling the growers to plant at any time, but in due course with education he would be able to see and judge for himself the best time for planting. Planting depends on weather conditions. Rice is a low unit crop and it is not always happy to inflict it with heavy overhead charges. Under present conditions we get very high yields and it is a question whether we can improve them by the introduction of machinery in the field. General conditions do not lend themselves to that method.

The Council adjourned for the luncheon recess.

Professor DASH: When we adjourned I had reached the point where I was referring to the fact that rice was a low unit crop and to inflict it with heavy overhead charges in respect of implements and machinery, drainage and irrigation, would retard it to a great extent. Under present conditions we get large yields, much larger than in many cases where the industry may be said to be handled on modern lines of cultivation. Reference was made to Italy. Our conditions here are quite different to those in Italy. In connection with the visit of the Deputy Director of Agriculture there, we went very thoroughly into his report and discussed questions relating to the implements they use. As a result we have two implements under trial at the present time on which it has not yet been possible to make any definite pronouncement. Trials are still in hand and in due course will be reported on. It must be readily understood that these are matters upon which it is impossible to

say very much as the result of one or two seasons' trial. So far as the work of the Deputy Director himself is concerned, I think most hon. Members realise that the bulk of his time is taken up with the agriculture of the small holders, and it should also be realised that within the last few years the Department has made a very big effort in connection with pure seed work. It has taken a great deal of organisation and supervision to accomplish what has been accomplished, and in matters of this kind we have to consolidate all the ground before we make any step. I claim that we have accomplished quite a substantial amount of work in connection with the industry and can more and more proceed to strengthen the industry in other directions.

Coming to the question of milling, I think that is the great weakness now in our industry. We certainly have to do something to strengthen the milling, and I am glad to say that there are in draft provisions for the licensing of mills, which provisions include clauses relating to the keeping of books by the millers and other related matters. I hope something soon will come out of them. In respect of milling charges and related matters, I feel that the Association which has just been launched will do a great deal towards stabilising and regulating fees. An Association is something we have all been clamouring for, and now that it is in a fair way of becoming a live factor we should give it every chance of doing something and should not too early express any fear or apprehension that it is not going to do this or that. The Association perhaps, from every point of view, does not take care of the grower in the fullest sense. There is something to be said for that criticism, but, nevertheless, there is no reason to feel that the grower is going to be left out. When passing the resolution I mentioned that Government was anxious that the Marketing Board should have a representative of the actual growers.

Tenure has been regarded as one of the most important features of the motion. In my own view we cannot separate matters relating to tenure, credit and co-operation. I think they are too intimately bound up, and the moment you touch one you automatically touch the other. I do not think we can touch these matters in a

piecemeal fashion. They are too much inter-related. Rentals are on the high side but the tendency is for them to go down. The landlord has done a good deal for the industry in carrying the growers on his back from the point of view of advances, and while there might be extortion amongst landlords I am quite convinced that a very large number are anxious to meet the growers in every way. I think all landlords will welcome the question of tenure and security being put on a definite basis, and that is where I think again the Association will do a great deal to foster that spirit of co-operation amongst the growers and themselves. Finally, I think Government is inclined to the suggestion for the appointment of a Committee to consider this matter but would desire at present not to proceed with the appointment until it has had an opportunity of seeing the progress made by the Association and the Marketing Board, and I think that is fair and reasonable. I do not think much can be gained just at the moment by a Committee but that we should take every opportunity of discussing and investigating the matter by the Association before steps are taken. With that assurance I ask the hon. Member to withdraw his motion for the appointment of a Committee just at this particular moment.

Mr. DE AGUIAR: I support the motion mainly on the ground for the appointment of a Committee, particularly to investigate the relationship between the landlord, the miller and the grower. I think when that is done it will be found that there has been a good deal of misrepresentation on both sides. Conditions differ in one part of the country from another. It is proposed that every rice-grower should become a member of the sub-Association and also of the Association. Every effort will be made to encourage the growers to become members of either Association, and in forming the sub-Associations it has not been lost sight of that the growers do their planting practically on a very small scale. It is hoped that the growers will group themselves together and become members of either the Association or the sub-Association, and in that way I venture to think they will get all the representation they desire.

Mr. SEERAM: I think it is necessary

to get the particulars. The Association will be instrumental in getting them and therefore the Committee should be appointed now. It is because I realise that these matters are of great importance not only to the rice-growers but also to the proprietors that I urge that the Committee be now appointed. There are abuses and it is necessary that there should be an investigation of these abuses. Reference has been made to the exorbitant interest charged and to the necessity of amending the Money Lenders Ordinance. I hope the time is not far distant when there will be an Agricultural Aids Bank for this purpose.

THE PRESIDENT: I think the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara has performed a public service in bringing this matter forward in the way he has. The subject is one which the whole Council desires should be ventilated, but I do not think that a public service will be rendered by the appointment of a Committee at the present moment. There is no intention of postponing its appointment indefinitely and the hon. Member will be given an opportunity of bringing the matter up early if necessary. The immediate necessity is to have a strong Rice Association formed to which the growers can belong. To appoint a Committee at the present time would mean having two forces operating at the same time and growers will be appealing to the Committee and will not join the Rice Growers' Association. The hon. Member can render further service to the Colony by urging upon all East Indians and growers to join the Association. That is the first step they can take and then the questions of security of tenure and the position of landlord and tenant, which are very important, can be investigated. The appointment of a Committee would only be to drag a red herring across the trail. Government must consider the matter at an early date. It may be three months or more, and it will depend on the position of the Rice Association and the position of the Colony, but it will not be a long time hence.

Mr. SEERAM: In view of your assurance, sir, I withdraw the motion.

VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION.

Mr. WOOLFORD: I beg to move the motion which stands in my name:—

WHEREAS there exists at present a consider-

able amount of dissatisfaction over the management and control of village affairs generally throughout the Colony;

And whereas the maintenance of some of the provisions of the Local Government Board Ordinance (Chapter 84) in the said Ordinance very largely contribute to this undesirable condition of things;

And whereas it is expedient that this Council should take the necessary steps by legislation to remove any obstacles there may be to improvement in the methods of village administration.

Be it Resolved.—That section 34 (2) be amended and provision made in the Ordinance for the Chairman of every Village Council to be elected to that position by members of such Council from among their number.

That section 49 (e) be amended by providing that a person who owns more than one property in a village shall still be eligible for election to the Village Council, notwithstanding that that person has not paid his arrears of village rates or taxes in respect of one property or more than one property; but provided he is not in arrears in respect of all of his said properties.

That section 50 of the Ordinance be amended by deleting therefrom 50 (d).

That section 51 be amended—

(a) as to (1) by providing that all persons who are co-proprietors should be both eligible for election and be entitled to vote in respect of the land owned by them if qualified in other respects under the Ordinance.

(b) as to (3) by its deletion.

That section 53 be deleted and there be substituted therefor a provision whereby the Returning Officer shall be appointed by the Local Government Board, who shall, in making the appointment, not be empowered to appoint to such a position any voter in the Village District concerned in an election.

That provisions be inserted in the Ordinance allowing the representation of a candidate at the polling station by his duly authorised agent.

I am unaware how far this motion may be said to be reactionary, and I do not know how many public meetings have been held in relation to it, but I notice that interest is so keen in matters that affect self-government that few Members of country divisions are present. Apparently there is a lack of interest in anything that makes for the advancement of self-government, but I venture to submit the motion as a disinterested party interested in the self-government idea and interested in the development of the Colony as a whole. I have never had the honour of representing a country constituency, and I do not know how long I will be allowed to represent a town constituency, but so long as I am in this country I will do my duty regardless of what others may think is the best and most advantageous thing to promote the

interest of the Colony. By reference to the Local Government Ordinance, Chapter 84, section 34 (2), hon. Members will find this provision:—

A village council shall consist of such number of councillors (not less than four) as are in each case from time to time determined by the Board, and the Board shall appoint one of the number to be chairman of the Council.

I venture to think that if a body is going to be representative at all those who are elected to that body are the best persons to nominate and appoint the person who shall be their Chairman. There was a time perhaps when this provision might have been necessary, for instance, when they resented interference by the central authority; but I do not think that idea exists to-day, and if you allow a Council to be constituted by the election of men from the villages themselves, it follows as a corollary that the direction and control of the meetings and such functions as the Chairman exercises might very well be left to the choice of the Councillors. Section 49 (e) provides that a person shall be eligible for election as a Councillor if he “is not in arrear for any village rates or taxes.” A man may own three or more properties. He pays his village rates in respect of three but so long as he is in arrears for one it is provided for by law that he cannot vote. That is absurd on the face of it, and I would suggest that that provision be deleted. It invariably happens that the rates have been paid in respect of the most valuable property. Section 50 (d) also affects the qualification of voters. Section 49 relates to the qualification of a Councillor and disentitles a man who is in arrears of rates in respect of any property from election, while section 50 (d) concerns the same disability in regard to the qualifications of a voter. Section 51 creates an equally anomalous position. Sub-section (1) says:—

Where a lot in a village is jointly owned by more persons than one as proprietors, he whose name stands first in the transport or other instrument of title relating to that lot shall be eligible for election and be entitled to vote as hereinbefore provided in respect of the lot.

In other words, you have three or four persons owning a parcel of land in common but give the right to vote to the one whose name is mentioned first. For anyone to acquire a right of this kind because his name stands first is anomalous. My amendment of sub-section (3) aims at the abolition of plural voting, which this

section emphasises, and I think most of us recognise that the principle of one man one vote is good enough for all practical purposes. Section 53 provides that the Chairman of the Council, or some Councillor nominated by him in writing for that purpose, shall be the Returning Officer for the holding of the election of a Councillor. On reference to section 59, as to the mode of holding an election, it will be found that it provides that the Returning Officer shall attend and receive and record the votes of all those duly qualified to vote, and that the votes shall be taken in the manner and form the Returning Officer deems most convenient. What happens is that one presents himself at the polling booth—the candidate has no agent—and says “I am so and so and come to vote.” The Returning Officer, who is invariably the Village Chairman, records his name but does not know whether the voter has written his name or the name of some other person, and at the end of the election when you think somebody has got in you find it is somebody else. When the Chairman has the right to take the votes in the manner most convenient to himself it is not a matter of surprise that there are election surprises. I do not think we should place in the Village Chairman power such as that. This system discloses the person for whom you vote and you have no security that the person for whom you vote would receive your vote. I ask that this section be amended and all elections be by ballot. Government ought to see that no irregularities are committed, and every candidate should have the right to be represented during his absence at polling time by a duly authorised person, as Members of this Council have the privilege of doing at elections. I had hoped to see these amendments made before the present elections, but I was glad to see someone take the precaution on the East Coast to see that the Returning Officer was not the Village Chairman in the district where the election took place.

Mr. SEERAM: I second the motion. At the present time there is a good deal of dissatisfaction over the election of Village Chairmen. Government has been pretty lethargic in not carrying out some of the motions accepted or passed in this Council. A motion by the hon. Member for Western Essequibo on the question of

the election of Chairmen was passed by the Council and another by myself on the same subject was accepted. There is great necessity for this amendment and I ask Government to accept the motion and put it into execution at an early date. An important point is the mode of voting. I urge that section 59 also should be amended to substitute voting by ballot. I also suggest that in giving them the right to appoint their own Chairman you should also give them the right to appoint their own overseer.

Mr. BRASSINGTON: I am supporting this motion. I have always felt very strongly over the appointment of Village Chairmen. I moved a motion myself in the Combined Court on the subject. I am of opinion that the villagers ought to elect their Chairman. Shareholders of companies elect their Chairman and I think Government will be well advised to grant this privilege. It is a right that the people demand and should be given. With respect to proprietors, I think it is quite fair that if a man owns three or four properties and he is in arrears in respect of two he should be allowed to vote and be eligible for election. It will be very much appreciated if Councillors are allowed to elect their own Chairman, and they would be very careful as to whom they elect. If they are not fit to-day to elect their Chairman they never will be.

THE COLONIAL-SECRETARY (Mr. C. Douglas-Jones): I am very glad that the hon. Member for New Amsterdam has drawn attention to this matter by the motion. It has been quite obvious to Government for some years, even before any serious attempt was made to establish the District Administration Scheme, that changes in the Local Government Ordinance were necessary and the time long past when these should have been made. But in view of the possibility of the inauguration of the District Administration Scheme no definite steps had been made to deal with the matter piecemeal, and since the inauguration of the scheme this year I personally, the District Commissioners and the Local Government Board have given considerable thought and attention to the matter. The District Commissioners have been asked to suggest in what parts the Local Government Ordinance are no longer applicable and also what parts will be useful and could be

amended to meet the present situation. It is quite obvious that sooner or later we shall have to repeal that Ordinance and introduce new legislation dealing with District Administration. It is doubtful whether the Local Government Board will continue to exist, and I think it would be good for the villages and administration generally that the whole matter be brought into close touch with the central executive Government.

As regards the amendments proposed it is obvious, and Government is satisfied, that some amendments in the directions indicated are necessary, and the hon. Member has made out a good case for the suggested amendments with the one exception of plural voting. Plural voting is not unknown in municipal elections, although it does not obtain in this Colony. The difficulty of not having plural voting in smaller communities, such as villages, is that people who own the most valuable properties and subscribe the largest sums towards the revenues of the villages may be considerably outvoted by people who own very small properties and contribute a very small amount. That is a matter to be very carefully considered before plural voting is done away with, and it will be gone into and will receive very careful attention. I think the matter would be met if Government appoint a Committee to go into the whole question. A Committee can consider, first of all, the desirability of amending the Local Government Board Ordinance and in what directions. It will take some time to prepare that legislation. It is possible to amend the present Ordinance in such directions as is thought desirable and Government will appoint a Committee as soon as possible to go into the matter. That being so I ask the hon. Member if he is prepared, on Government giving that assurance, to withdraw the motion. As regards the election of Village Chairmen, departmental instructions have been given that the Village Councils are to elect the Chairman, and the person elected by the Village Council is appointed by the Local Government Board as the Chairman. That is being done and will continue to be done.

Mr. WOOLFORD : I have no objection to the matter being dealt with as a whole but wish to point out that all these grievances were brought to the notice of

Government by a motion in December, 1923. A Commission was then appointed to go into the questions. That Commission reported in June, 1925, and on a motion approving of the recommendations that motion was carried on the 25th June, 1926. Six-and-a-half years is too long an interval to give effect to the resolutions of this Council approving of various recommendations of a representative body. I suggest that the motion be accepted. It simply asks that certain amendments be given effect to. It would still be within the power of Government to hold the resolution up for six years, but as long as it is on the table it enables me to call the attention of Government to their not having performed their duty.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY : The difficulty of Government is in accepting the motion as a whole. The deletion of section 50 (d) Government is not prepared to accept right away. I ask the hon. Member to allow Government a little more time to consider the matter, and the best way would be by the appointment of a Committee. I assure the hon. Member that the matter will not be allowed to be hung up. When we come to deal with the matter it will be found that considerably more amendments can be made than those the hon. Member has suggested, and Government would prefer to deal with the matter as a whole instead of piecemeal.

THE PRESIDENT : A Committee can be appointed to-day and be given the terms of reference to report within a certain date. I think the hon. Member's anxiety is as to the time before effect would be given to the recommendations of the Committee.

Mr. WOOLFORD : In the event of that being done, if there is no difference of opinion among the Committee or with Government, the amendments can be given effect immediately without waiting for the contentious part to be determined.

THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL : I think the point that has arisen is with regard to the election of the Chairman and election by ballot. There is no doubt that the election of the Village Council does lend itself to abuses and is not satisfactory, and so far as that is concerned Government is willing to accept the position that the election should be by ballot and also

that the Council should elect the Chairman.

THE PRESIDENT: The undertaking by Government is that the whole question will be investigated, the Committee to be appointed as soon as possible. The proposal in respect of the election of the Chairman by members of the Council as well as the proposals with regard to election by ballot and the appointment of the Returning Officer by the Local Government Board will be accepted. The proposal with regard to election qualification will be given further consideration. I think on that undertaking the hon. Member should withdraw his motion.

Mr. WOOLFORD: On that undertaking I withdraw the motion.

FAWCETT PENSION BILL.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: I move that "A Bill to repeal the A. Fawcett Pension Ordinance, 1932" be read the first time.

Mr. SMELLIE seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read the first time.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: Pursuant to notice I move that Standing Order No. 11 (1) be suspended to enable the Bill to be read the second and third time.

Mr. SMELLIE seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: I move the second reading of the Bill. Hon. Members will remember that arrangements were made by which Captain Fawcett was to receive a pension and a reduced salary as Bandmaster. It was found afterwards that Captain Fawcett had been told when he accepted the engagement that his age would preclude him from the payment of a pension, and the payment of a pension has been disallowed by the Secretary of State. It is therefore necessary to repeal the Ordinance providing for the payment of a pension.

Mr. SMELLIE seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read the second time.

The Council resolved itself into Committee and considered the Bill clause by clause without discussion.

The Council resumed.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: I move that the Bill be read the third time.

Mr. SMELLIE seconded.

Question "That this Bill be now read a third time and passed" put, and agreed to.

Bill read the third time.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE.

The Council resolved itself into Committee to consider the Schedule of additional provision required to meet expenditure in excess of the Estimate for the year 1932, for the period 1st July, 1932, to 30th September, 1932.

The items were agreed to without discussion.

The Council resumed.

REVENUE DEFENCE FUND.

Mr. MILLARD (Colonial Treasurer): I beg to move:—

THAT, with reference to Governor's Message No. 6 of the 9th of December, 1932, this Council approves of the transfer to general revenue of the balance and credit of the Revenue Defence Fund at 31st December, 1932, and of the introduction of the necessary amending legislation to authorise the transfer and to provide that hereafter the total of all fines, penalties, etc., for breaches of the revenue laws shall be paid into revenue—provision to be made in the annual estimates for rewards to officers concerned in such cases.

Message No. 6 explains the circumstances and character of this proposal. The Revenue Defence Fund has existed from 1868. In 1914 legislation was passed to provide for the control of this Fund, and, amongst other things, it provides that if at any time the Fund exceeds

\$10,000 the excess shall be carried to revenue during the year the excess arises. It has been considered more satisfactory that the collection and disposal of fines and the proceeds of seizures should appear on the Budget and any compensation or reward shall appear on the expenditure side of the Budget. Not since 1928 has any credit been given to revenue in respect of any excess over \$10,000. To carry out the proposal approved by this Council legislation will be required, but the

proposal is laid before the Council at this moment for approval in order that the necessary entries may be made in the Budget for 1933 which is still before Council.

Professor DASH seconded.

Motion agreed to.

The Council adjourned until the following day at 11 o'clock.