

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FRIDAY, 22nd NOVEMBER, 1946.

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

PRESENT :

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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. T. Lee (Essequibo River).

The Hon. C. P. Ferreira (Berbice River).

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

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

The Hon. J. A. Veerasawmy (Nominated).

The Clerk read prayers.

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Thursday, the 21st November, 1946, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

ORDER OF THE DAY

GEORGETOWN TOWN COUNCIL
(AMENDMENT) BILL, 1946.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Your Excellency, this Bill intituled

“An Ordinance to amend the Georgetown Town Council Ordinance in certain particulars”.

which now comes before the Council for its second reading has been based upon the draft Bill which was submitted by the Mayor and Town Council of Georgetown to the Government towards the end of 1944. As will be seen from the “Objects and Reasons” which accompany the Bill, since the Georgetown (Valuation and Rating) Ordinance, 1942, (No. 30) came into full effect, the expression “appraised value” in the Georgetown Town Council Ordinance, Chapter 85, has ceased to have any practical meaning. Under Ordinance No. 30 of 1942 taxes and the rate are now assessed, levied and raised on the assessed value of the lots.

The Bill therefore seeks to substitute “assessed value” for “appraised value” wherever those words appear in Chapter 86, and to make consequential amendments thereto. Opportunity has been taken to re-draft sections 7, 8 and 9 of Chapter 86 relating to the qualification of elected councillors, disqualification for being elected or continuing as a councillor, and the qualification of voters.

The present qualification for a councillor is (1) ownership of immovable property of the appraised value of not less than \$1,500, or (2) tenancy of premises of the rental value of not less than \$30 a month such tenancy to include residence therein for 6 months immediately preceding the election. The Bill seeks to make the qualification (1) ownership of a lot of the assessed value of not less than \$200, or (2) tenancy of premises at a rent of not less than \$25 a month during the 12 months immediately preceding the day of nomination.

The present qualification for a voter is (1) ownership of immovable property of the appraised value of not less than

\$250, or (2) tenancy of premises of the rental value of not less than \$15 a month for a period of 6 months before being registered as a voter. The Bill seeks to make the qualification (1) ownership of a lot of the assessed value of not less than \$72 or (2) tenancy of premises at a rent of not less than \$8 a month for a period of 12 months before the application to be registered as a voter.

This Bill has received the consideration of the Georgetown Town Council since it has been put in this form and it was suggested that certain amendments be made which come under clause 4 relating to the qualification of voters and allowing an alien to be qualified to be registered as a voter. Clause 4 (2) reads:—

“(2) An alien shall be qualified to be registered as a voter under this section if he has actually resided in the city for not less than five years immediately preceding his application to be registered, and if he is qualified under paragraphs (a) and (b) and under paragraphs (d) or (e) of subsection (1) of this section”.

Those paragraphs are—

- (a) has attained the age of twenty-one years;
- (b) is not subject to any legal incapacity;
- (d) in his own right is the owner of a lot (as defined in section two of the Georgetown (Valuation and Rating) Ordinance, 1942), in the ward in respect of which he applies to be registered, of the assessed value of not less than seventy-two dollars;
- (e) during the twelve months immediately preceding his application to be registered as a voter, is the tenant in his own right of a house, building, erection or part thereof, or a parcel of land, in the ward in respect of which he applies to be registered, the rent whereof is at the rate of not less than eight dollars a month”.

It is within the knowledge of Members that appraised value is actually more preferable than market value, and the assessed value is the rental value. The annual assessed value is found by multiplying the rent which is payable per month by twelve. Those are the essential features of this Bill. I wish to say that during the course of the year the Trades Union Coun-

cil passed certain resolutions at public meetings which were held in Georgetown on the 4th and 6th August, and amongst those resolutions was one relating to voting at Municipal Elections, in which they asked that this matter be expedited. Consequently, every effort has been made to bring this Bill before the Council as soon as possible. In reply Government said it had sympathy with the resolution and appropriate legislation was under consideration. Arising out of that I had interviews with the representatives of the Trades Union Council before and since this Bill has been published, and I wish to place before the Council certain views that were represented to me.

The first point is, so far as any qualifying period is concerned — formerly six months and now it is being changed to twelve months—it was suggested that that was not necessary having regard to the fact that we are really endeavouring to reduce the Municipal franchise and give an opportunity for a wider range of electors to participate in Municipal elections; and further, that the qualifying period for the Legislative Council elections be six months and no qualifying period in respect of ownership of property by Councillors.

Mr. JACOB: To a point of correction! That is not so. There is no qualifying period in regard to the qualification of Members of the Legislative Council previous to registration.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I appreciate the hon. Member's point, but so far as the qualification for membership of the Town Council is concerned it has been represented that it should be reduced from the amount as set out in the Bill—\$25. The view was held that it might be reduced to \$8, the same as for rental, to enable a voter to be registered. If the rental qualification is to remain at \$8, then that should be the figure for the qualification of councillors, but they would prefer to see that reduced to a lower figure, possibly \$5 or \$4.

The PRESIDENT: Can I interrupt? I understand that the Trades Union Council representatives who have discussed this matter with the Attorney-General are, broadly speaking, in agreement with the proposals for the reduction of the qualifica-

tion of voters, but they do not think that the proposals in the Bill for the qualification of councillors have gone far enough. They want to reduce that too. In other words, they agree with the principle of the Bill but ask that the qualification of councillors should be reduced as far as the qualification of voters. That is the simple point, I understand, they wish. I am sorry to interrupt, but I think hon. Members should know that.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: In other words, they say they do not object to \$8, provided you reduce the qualification for councillors because that is the essential pivot. We would have a wider range of selection if we reduce the qualification of councillors accordingly. So far as the councillors' qualification is concerned. I wish to point out that section 7 (b) states :

"if in his own right is the owner of a lot (as defined in section two of the Georgetown (Valuation and Rating) Ordinance, 1942) in the city of the assessed value of not less than two hundred dollars";

That would mean a rental value of about \$16½ per month as the owner's qualification, as against the tenant's qualification under section 7 (1) (c) of \$25 per month. In other words, generally speaking, the owner's assessed value is slightly lower than the rent—payable requirement. Logically, the tenant's qualification should balance with the owner's qualification. With regard to the voter's qualification which is fixed by clause 4, it works out at \$6 per month assessed value of property or a rental of \$8 per month. Those are the points which have been put forward.

The question of changing the qualifying period from six months to twelve months is a matter entirely for the consideration of this Council, particularly having regard to the fact that the Georgetown Town Council went into the matter with the greatest degree of care when this Bill was originally drafted in view of the change over from appraised value to assessed value. If the principle of the Bill or the Bill itself is accepted by this Council and passed, then it would become necessary to pass enabling legislation to enable the Town Council to go on. The

new register will be made in the terms of the Bill as soon as possible.

The PRESIDENT: I think it would be useful to give some indication of the latter.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: I discussed the matter with the Town Clerk this morning and I understood from him that as we have a Bill under consideration already and as it is proposed to extend the life of the present Town Council to the 30th June, 1947, it would give sufficient time for the new register to be made under this new legislation. I need hardly say anything more. I believe there are Members of this Council who are anxious about this matter and will clarify any point I have not made as, perhaps, they wished.

Mr. CRITCHLOW seconded.

The PRESIDENT: The importance of this measure is this: Unless it is passed it is impossible for the election to take place on the 15th December and that can only take place under the present qualification and old register. Therefore, it is no good passing an enabling Ordinance until we make up our minds on this Ordinance. If we do not do that before the 15th December, then, by law, the election must take place on the old register.

Mr. JACOB: Your Excellency, I am glad for this early opportunity to record my objections—very strong objections indeed—to this Bill. This Bill has been published on the 20th November and consequently no debate should take place here on it within a week, but in view of the urgency of the matter I am fully prepared to waive that objection. The hon. the Attorney-General has mentioned that representations were made to him by the Trades Union Council. I do not think that the hon. Mover was able to interpret those representations in the light I know them. The Trades Union Council is connected with the British Guiana Labour Party which was formed about six months ago, and that Party proposes to discuss this Bill on Sunday. So far as we are concerned, the Trades Union Council and other organizations will do nothing to prevent the passing of this measure, because it is realised that there should be some reduc-

tion of the franchise and the Town Council election should not be held at all under the present Constitution if there are going to be only slight modifications. What is felt is that there must be a complete change. This unsatisfactory system has gone on for quite a long time.

I think it is necessary to refer to the fact that the West India Royal Commission recommended all these important changes. When the Commission visited this Colony in 1938 representations were made that the people must be given a greater opportunity to manage their own affairs. So far as the Georgetown Town Council is concerned, it will be conceded that the people have some grievance and the system that exists is so undemocratic that it behoves this Government to step in and put things on a proper basis. The Royal Commission has recommended that there should be training and greater responsibilities for the people — as I have suggested—in every form of Government—local and Central Government. In Municipal and Local Authorities the people must be given more opportunities to lead in the administration of this Government. We have been told that the qualification of Municipal voters has been reduced from \$15 to \$8 per month and it will be conceded that this is a substantial reduction, but at present if a tenant removes from one Ward to another within the six months that he should register as a voter he would be left without a vote.

According to this Bill the period would be extended for 12 months. Possibly that would be interpreted by the Town Council and this Government as an exceptional act giving the people a better opportunity to participate in their own affairs, because Government has put forward a Bill framed in that way. It is no use going into the question of valuation of property, because the system has been changed. Taxation is paid on the existing value and not on the appraised value. I think it would be better to let us deal with rental qualification. At present a person is eligible to be nominated as a Town Councillor if he or she is paying a rent of \$30 per month, and this Bill seeks to reduce the amount to \$25 per month. That again, Govern-

ment would concede, is giving a better opportunity to people for representation on the Council. Those are the two main points in the matter—the reduction of the rental qualification of voters from \$15 to \$8 per month, and of Councillors from \$30 to \$25 per month. Rather than have these two reductions don't let us have any at all. Therefore, I am wholly opposed to this Bill as approved by the Georgetown Town Council. I shall have something to say about the Georgetown Town Council later on.

The West India Royal Commission, at page 25 of their recommendations—under the heading of “Constitutional and Closer Union” state :

“We do not support either of the extreme proposals put before us for the grant of immediate and complete self-government based on universal suffrage, or for a wide increase of the authority of Governors which would convert the existing system into a virtual autocracy;

Since then this Government appointed a Franchise Commission to go into the question of the franchise for this Legislature or the Central Government. This Commission was appointed in April, 1941, and I think it reported in 1944, the date of the report being February 29, 1944. When that Commission was appointed three hon. Members of this Council including myself made representations that Municipal and local Government franchise should be included in the terms of reference. Government then decided—and I quote from the *Daily Argosy* of July 25, 1941, which carries a letter signed by the then Colonial Secretary, Mr. G. D. Owen, that it was always intended that such a Committee should be set up as soon as the report had been presented. That means that the Commission was appointed to go into the question of Legislative Council franchise and Government said they would appoint another to go into Municipal and local Government franchise as soon as that Commission had reported.

As I have already stated, the Franchise Commission reported in 1944, and since then Government have been so pre-occupied with other things that they

could not find time to go into this matter. The hon. the Attorney-General has stated that the Town Council has approved of this Bill. I cannot blame the Town Council. As I have already said, the Town Council is an autocratic body—it has the power and it wants to maintain that power. What I am surprised at, is that this Government intends to let them retain that power and continue to be autocrats. I do not know whether Government has been asked by the Town Council to go into the matter, but I do believe representations have been made to the Secretary of State that this Government should take action. Government can, however, cloak itself under the fact that the Town Council has made representations and is doing these things there.

This Colony, like others, has been promised self-Government and, I think, sitting here for years, that if we are to hope to have successful self-government we must begin with the villages and then come to the towns and then to the whole Colony. Then this Government and the Municipalities should take steps to remove the nominated Councillors and give the people in Georgetown the fullest possible opportunity to elect the best persons to represent them, based on no qualification at all. Then the people in New Amsterdam should have the same opportunity, and then the villages. I ask that that be done without any delay. With regard to the local authorities, they approached us some time ago but I am sorry to say that this Legislature does not support that view. This is no Legislature to my mind, although I happen to be a Member of it.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT: To a point of order: has the hon. Member any right to make a statement of that kind?

The PRESIDENT: I think he should be allowed to go on. I am always in favour of Members carrying through their speeches without any interruption.

Mr. JACOB: Thank you, sir. I am not surprised that my hon. friend is a party to this method. If this Government desires to do the right thing, then it should ask for instructions from the Secretary of State for the Colonies. I have no doubt

that should we send a request to Downing Street now the people of Georgetown would be granted universal adult suffrage and be given an opportunity to get acquainted with the details of Government so that they may be ready for self-government in the next few years. I do not think, however, that that would suit the hon. Member for Western Essequibo.

The PRESIDENT: I think that if the hon. Member does not want to be interrupted he should not call names.

Mr. JACOB: I am saying that it would not suit certain hon. Members to have that. I am not calling any names.

The PRESIDENT: It is better not to do that.

Mr. JACOB: I took opportunity this morning to look at the List of Voters in Georgetown and I am sorry to say that there was no 1944 List available. As a ratepayer I am entitled to go into the Town Clerk's office and get a List, but there is no List for 1944 and none for 1945. The Town Clerk was good enough to show me his own copy of the 1944 List and along with the 1945 List it makes very interesting reading. The voters in Kingston Ward numbered only 77, out of a population of 3,206. In North Cummingsburg, there were 116 voters out of a population of 5,780; in South Cummingsburg there were 140 out of a population of 6,494; in Lacytown, Robbstown and Newtown there were 133 out of a population of 7,488; in Stabroek there were 70 out of a population of 2,271; in Werk-en-Rust and Wortmanville there were 249 out of a population of 16,619; in Charlestown and Albouystown there were 253 out of a population of 16,487; in Bourda there were 141 out of a population of 6,054; and in Alberttown and Queenstown there were 273 out of a population of 9,252. That means that there was a total of 1,452 voters out of a total population of 73,541 in the City of Georgetown.

Those are the population figures as compiled by the Census Officer who was good enough to give them to me this morning, and the voters as shown on the 1944 Voters List by the Town Clerk. I want to make this point: This number—1,452—

does not mean 1,452 persons. I think a particular name appears all the time in the nine lists for the nine different Wards. Other names appear over and over, while certain names dominate the lists. That is a statement of fact and I ask Government to look into it. Whatever legislation is passed from now on, no simple individual should have the right to have more than one vote for any election. In the Legislative Council elections it is easy; a person may have more than one qualification but he may not have more than one vote.

Not even 2 per cent of the population of Georgetown are voters in the Municipality. That is a most disgraceful state of affairs and I think that alone should impel this Government to abolish the whole system and to have a proper system of representation—one of universal adult suffrage. Certain representatives of the people here say nothing at all about these things. I had very much difficulty in getting certain particulars relating to this matter; whenever I asked the Municipality they never had them. The Central Government also never knows how to give us an Officer who would give us these things. I make no reflection, however, on the present Officer. I said it is quite clear that in England the qualification for voters in all the local Governments now is the same as the qualification for the election of Members of Parliament.

That is the proper thing and I think it is the same in every democratic country in Europe. Our children went to fight for freedom and for the cause of democracy in the war that has just ended. We are told that the people in the defeated countries—every one of them—have the right to select their own representatives, but the people in this country have not got that right and when it is extended it is extended in such a way that it is almost impossible to see that any representation is given. That is what I want to say in so far as the general principles of this Bill are concerned.

I am asking this Government to give the people an opportunity to elect all the Councillors, based on the widest possible franchise. The rental qualification in this Bill is far too high, to my mind, and I am going to point out how it is not fair at all.

I propose to deal with the Bill clause by clause. Sub-clause 2 (b) states, *inter alia*, that :

- “(3) The expression “assessed value” shall have the meaning assigned to it in section two of the Georgetown (Valuation and Rating) Ordinance, 1942.”

It took the Georgetown Town Council from 1942 to the present time to amend the law relating to the collection of taxes. Do we want any stronger evidence of inefficiency than that? They are collecting taxes now on valuation and rating and not based on assessed value. That Ordinance was passed in 1942 and only now the step is being taken to put the situation in order. It shows the rate of progress being made by the Georgetown Town Council. Of course, certain things progress very fast—exceedingly fast—but other things do not. Although legislation was passed in 1942 to change the system of taxation the Council remained the same way until now. I do not know what the Government auditors were doing about it. I think they should have drawn Government's attention to it and something should have been done to put things in order before now. It was irregular and not legal for things to have been done that way. Clause 3—7. (1) (c) reads :—

- “(c) if during the twelve months immediately preceding the day of nomination, he was the tenant or occupier of a house, building, erection or part thereof, or parcel of land, in the city the rent whereof is at the rate of not less than twenty-five dollars a month.”

As I have already stated, a person may be nominated to become a Town Councillor now if he is paying a rental of \$25 per month—that is, if this Bill is passed. At present the amount is \$30 so that a reduction of \$5 per month is considered an extension of the franchise for the people of this Colony. Let us compare that with the Legislative Council for which the income qualification was \$200 per month and has now been reduced to \$100 per month—a reduction of 50 per cent. Why should the rental qualification for the Town Council be reduced by \$5 only—from \$30 to \$25 per month? Why such an arbitrary figure? Where was this figure

derived from? One would have thought that the wonderful people in the Town Council would have said "Let us follow some precedent—let us give a 50 per cent. reduction and make the figure \$15." Then, if anyone had asked why that was done, they would have been able to say "We have followed the Legislative Council and made a 50 per cent. reduction." But the "brains" on the Town Council—the graduates from Universities and other places—said "We would fix an arbitrary figure.

I come now to Clause 4 which deals with "Qualification of voters." Sub-clause 4—9 (1), (e) reads :—

"(e) during the twelve months immediately preceding his application to be registered as a voter, is the tenant in his own right of a house, building, erection or part thereof, or a parcel of land, in the ward in respect of which he applies to be registered, the rent whereof is at the rate of not less than eight dollars a month."

The present rental qualification of a voter is \$15 per month, and the Town Council has recommended to this Government a reduction from \$15 to \$8 per month. There again it is beyond my capacity and reasoning to know why \$8 has been fixed and no other figure. In one case the Town Council has reduced the amount from \$30 to \$25 and in the other case from \$15 to \$8. Why these figures? One would have thought that the \$15 would have been reduced to \$5 but the wonderful brains on that Council think differently. I cannot understand why this Government has accepted what the Town Council has submitted and has passed it on to us here. The criticisms I have made here may be considered harsh—I do not consider them harsh—but I can make them very much stronger.

We want self-government in this Colony. It was promised to us some time ago and the name of every qualified resident in this City should be put on the List of voters so that they would be entitled to vote. I am afraid, however, that that does not suit the present Town Council. The members always want to be able to say to a voter "You have a property and I can get you lumber—I can get you a

mortgage, and so on." That is what goes on; that has gone on for 15 years within my personal knowledge. I say this Government should be no party to the most unsatisfactory and undemocratic principles contained in this Bill, and I ask that this rental qualification be reduced down to zero—as low as possible. Let me take another case: I have a property and I have children—responsible ones at that—residing in it with me, but I am the only person who can be registered as a voter on that property qualification unless, of course, those children say that the premises in which they live are rented premises. Some people do that and I draw the matter to the attention of Government so as to avoid people doing that in future.

If one looks at the Municipal Voters' List he would be able to form the conclusion that people have been doing that, and if he looks at similar lists in England, Germany, Belgium and other European countries, he would see that every resident who is qualified is put on the list and given an opportunity to vote. How can one justify the fact that only 2 per cent. of the population of Georgetown are on the List of Voters for the election of Town Councillors? In Ceylon—I have the figures here—over 40 per cent. of the people are voters. The actual figure is 43 per cent., while in Georgetown it is 2 per cent. I do not want to pile on the agony much more than that. I hadn't time to make notes on this Bill and I would not say anything more at the moment. I must also say that the British Guiana Labour Party has not had time to consider the Bill, and I think it has been agreed that the British Guiana Labour Unions would make representations to Government to do away with nominated Councillors on the Town Council. I shall be disappointed if there is a change of front with respect to these two points.

The matter is going to be discussed on Sunday, I hope. We are all very busy people and these organizations cannot move too fast, but I ask this Council to defer consideration of this Bill. I am not attempting to delay this legislation. I am very willing to co-operate 100 per cent., but I cannot co-operate to have this unsatisfactory system prolonged. There must be a period put to it, and I would be

ashamed to think that Elected Members of this Council should sit here to represent the people and bolster up this Bill in its present form. I suggest, sir, that the vote be not taken and that the debate be adjourned until next week when absent Members may be able to attend and say something in this matter. I do not know why the Elected Members of this Council do not attend meetings; I cannot understand it. I make it my duty as a Member of this Council to come here on time and to leave when the Council adjourns. I must congratulate the Nominated Members for doing that; the majority of them do that. There is a time when one would have other pressing duties to take one away from the business of the Council, but I do not know what is happening. Is it because the whole place is demoralized? Is it because we do not see progress? I think if these people are given responsibility they would take more interest in the affairs of Government. Not because I make that comment there should not be an extension of the elected principle everywhere. I think lack of responsibility produces lack of interest. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why we do not have the Elected Members coming here in full numbers and regularly.

I suggest that Government should have this elected principle in the Municipality of Georgetown immediately. Change the whole system to elected representation, give the people a chance to elect the Councillors every two years. Every man who is resident in the City, who works in the City, except he be a criminal or a lunatic, should be given a chance to do so. Where he is not able to pay rent at all and is given a house free the owner should always have the right to put his name on the register of voters. As long as he is an able-bodied person over 21 years of age and is neither a criminal nor a lunatic, he should be allowed to put his name on the Voters' List and to exercise the vote one way or another. I do not think there is any more reasonable argument than that. At the moment you have on the Voters' Register persons who were tenants for six months at a particular place. That should be extended to twelve months. That is all I wish to say.

Mr. WOOLFORD: Sir, I hope Members will grant me the indulgence of speaking at an earlier time than I usually do. I have been a member of the Georgetown Town Council for many years. I joined that Council in 1903 and previous to that I was intimately acquainted with several members of that Council and with the administration under which it was being conducted. I have risen particularly to direct the attention of the hon. Member for North Western District (Mr. Jacob) and other persons in the community who take an interest in public life—and I include Municipal life—to the fact that what the hon. Member has really failed to appreciate is the substantial difference between the composition of a municipal corporation, or local authority for that matter, and that of the Legislative Council. Then one should examine either of the statements the hon. Member has made—that the circumstances under which municipalities are being governed are undemocratic, and that this Government should impose its will on the electorate and see that adult suffrage is introduced. Of course, the hon. Member will never learn anything because he is so satisfied that his knowledge is complete on a subject that he does not listen to other Members, whether he is in his seat or out of it. But that does not prevent me from continuing my speech.

The Municipal franchise is based upon an assumption, which is true, that the ratepayers, as distinct from taxpayers, are the people who are directly interested in the affairs of the corporation. In other words, the limitation is that only people who pay rent or who own property in the City should be, respectively, voters. That principle is based upon what is the whole idea of municipal life—those interested, those who have to bear taxation, should be those who make representation to the Body or become representatives of the ratepayers themselves. This is the distinction between a voter in an electoral district and a municipal voter. The voter in an electoral district is one who is interested in the community as a whole and who is taxed to support the community as a whole; the ratepayer in Georgetown is a person whose taxes are based on the value of the ser-

vices rendered by the Municipality as an entity. In other words, it is considered the better way to administer any city or town if those persons who are immediately interested are elected to be members of the council by those who are contributing to the rates of the city. In other words, a man who has property within the city is the person on whom the community imposes the obligation of sitting in the Council to the exclusion of anyone else, but he must reside in the city, have property in the city and be elected by the people who reside in the city.

Therefore, when the hon. Member talks about Government imposing adult suffrage because the voters in the community which includes the Municipalities of Georgetown and New Amsterdam have failed to do so themselves, he does not know the subject. If an individual in these days will not learn what democracy is, he is either to be ignored or suppressed. I have not the slightest desire that the hon. Member should be ignored or even suppressed, but I do appeal to him to learn something after being in public life so many years. No country in the world imposes democracy on its people. It must be the self-expressed will of the people themselves and if, sir, you just think of the circumstances under which Georgetown became a corporation or New Amsterdam a municipality, you would find no difficulty in saying that the hon. Member's strictures are entirely unwarranted. Every year there is an examination of the Voters' List, and it has always been so. It is the duty of the ratepayers when the Town Council invites an examination of the Voters' List to say, and also when the General Elections come on, if they wish adult suffrage only in Georgetown, and to see that the candidates who offer themselves for election pledge themselves to support such a view. That has never taken place, and an organized body like the Trades Union Council which has made representations has not asked for it. How then does it lie within the power of the Member to ask for it for them? If the people themselves do not wish a certain condition or thing, it would be a most unwise thing for either the Municipality that is well administered under the guidance of His Worship the Mayor, as far as

I am able to judge, or this Government to do so.

The circumstances under which election is made to these bodies are entirely different from those of the Legislative Council. The revenue of the Town Council is received from a certain limited class and no one outside the City contributes to that revenue unless in some indirect form, so that the revenue is collected from the ratepayers, whether they are tenants or proprietors, for the expressed purpose of administering the affairs of the City. Whatever value Democracy may have, are we going to allow every Tom, Dick and Harry in the City to say who shall be members of the Town Council? That is what the hon. Member means. That is what he is asking this Council to do. That is what he is appealing to the Government to impose on the community such as we have in Georgetown. They may not own property; they may not be paying any rent at all—and there are many such people in the City. Those are the people who outnumber the others. I do not mind the figures.

The hon. Member is quite right in saying that there are 73,000 persons in the City, and he has given the number of persons on the Voters' List as 1,400. Of course you can increase that number substantially, but I have no doubt in my mind that if adult suffrage were to be a qualification for Georgetown, a preponderant number of irresponsible people would have power to say what representation there should be and to put in whom they think should be their representatives. There you would have, perhaps, a most unprivileged class, wholly incompetent, administering the affairs of this City. The hon. Member is so obsessed with the idea of adult suffrage for the whole Colony that he would wish it imposed on municipalities. I have risen particularly to disabuse the minds of men like him who are thinking along those lines. They are all leaders in the community. I have always credited the hon. Member with honesty of purpose and persistence in the prosecution of his work, but he is fundamentally wrong in recommending in this Council that this Government should impose on the Municipality conditions of that kind.

With your permission, sir, I should like to say with respect to certain remarks made by the hon. Member, that his criticism is quite right. It was the intention of the Commission and it was the intention of this Government during the regime of Sir Wilfrid Jackson that there should be an examination of the circumstances in which the franchise was being administered not only in Georgetown but throughout the Colony — in every local authority. That is perfectly true, and the hon. Member's criticism that that has not taken place yet is quite just. In my opinion it should be. There should be an examination of the circumstances in which the right to vote and the right to elect should be given in the various areas, but only in respect of representation in those areas. We know, of course, that in the rural authorities the people who are illiterate are allowed to vote, but in respect of the Georgetown Municipality it is a disqualification not to be able to read and write English. The illiterate person cannot vote in the City at the municipal election, but can vote in the country at the village elections. If the hon. Member's intention is that there should be no similar limitation, that there should be no disqualification and that any person whether he is illiterate or not should vote in Georgetown, I do not agree with him. I do not know what he is aiming at, but it is dangerous to say that the same conditions should apply all over the Colony and also to make them equally applicable to the Municipality which is limited in range and objects and is relieving this Government of collecting certain revenue at certain times and appropriating it in a certain way and thus relieving the Colony of a certain amount of liability to the community which would otherwise have to be borne by this Government. That takes place because civic responsibility is a responsibility which persons in every community wish to bear, quite apart from being Members of this Council.

You will find men everywhere in the world as proud of being members of local authorities as of being Members of the House of Commons. It is a different kind of pride, a civic pride. It may not be so in this Colony, but it is also a national pride. You will find many men coming forward and being anxious to do their

share in civic life rather than in public life. They take a pride in the amenities of their town, and I can see that it is a good thing for the community not to abolish the distinction between government of the people as a whole and government of the citizens by local administration. There may be a case in which, I think, there is cause for reduction of the franchise throughout the Colony. There is a case for the examination of the entire question to see whether some qualification other than property qualification or rental qualification should not be made a qualification for a man to vote in Georgetown or to sit in the Town Council. In other words, we may, as a result of the enquiry, be able to find out some means whereby some people who do not enjoy wealth, who do not own property or own a tract of land, may exercise the franchise. There are people like that in this world, nevertheless they have a responsibility. Then you may have a special qualification on the part of women. There are lots of ways in which, perhaps, an examination of this question may be very beneficial.

I have risen to point out that there is, I think, an undertaking—I should not call it an undertaking. At the time when the Franchise Commission was about to be appointed, it was understood that when that Commission reported there would be a similar examination of the franchise and the qualifications in regard to municipal and local areas, and to that extent the hon. Member is quite right and just in his criticism, but he must not allow that promise or intention to be read that we are to have adult suffrage in a local entity *per se*. It would be a dangerous precedent for this Government to interfere with the administration of any municipality or to impose its will on municipal administration. No Government would ever do that, believe me. Until it is properly understood what democracy means in the attainment of ideals which the people seek and which the people ask for and which are those democracy looks forward to being able to gain, you cannot have people in the community saying that it is Government's duty to impose democracy in the shape and form which the hon. Member has advocated today.

Mr. CRITCHLOW: I would like to make a statement, speaking generally, on the Bill, and the Trades Union Council has also asked me to do so. There are two alternatives—one is they would like to have adult suffrage as the training ground for the election of Members of the City Council, and the other is they would be glad if the Council can see its way to reduce the rental qualification of Elected Councillors from \$25 to \$8 per month. As regards the qualification of voters they would like that reduced from \$8 to \$4 per month because the majority of people in the City do not pay as high as \$8 per month rent, and if this Council can see its way to reduce the rental qualification of both elected councillors and voters they would be very glad. I think we should have a further reduction than what is proposed.

The PRESIDENT: A further reduction in the qualification of a Councillor?

Mr. CRITCHLOW: Of both—Councillors' to \$8 per month and voters' to a rental of \$4 a month. I do agree that we should take it step by step. I have been advocating since 1924 a reduction of the qualification and the extension of the franchise so that a few years after we should get universal adult suffrage. In 1925 I asked that the period be fixed for universal adult suffrage and I was told that we were not ripe enough for that. I said then that we would have to ripen like saponillas otherwise we would always be told that we are not ripe yet. I am asking for a further reduction of the franchise and for a fixed period for us to be ripe for universal adult suffrage. I shall move those amendments when we reach the clauses concerned in the Committee stage. In the case of the period of twelve months' residence the Trades Union Council would like that qualification to be six months.

Mr. FARNUM: I had a similar point about the period to bring up, but I thought I would do so in the Committee stage.

The PRESIDENT: The hon. Member will have an opportunity then to do so. It is the principle of the Bill we are dealing with now.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT: I shall undoubtedly support the Bill *in toto*, as it has received the sanction of the Town

Council. I think that body is entitled to some respect, despite the fact that one hon. Member seems to think that the members of that Council can get lumber and mortgages. But the hon. Member who mentioned that refrained from telling the public that there is an hon. Member of this Council who can also make \$16,000 in one lash. When beer was unobtainable he did so, whether as a Member of this Council or not I do not know, but there is no doubt about it.

Mr. JACOB: What has beer to do with this debate?

The PRESIDENT: What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. The hon. Member must take what he gets. I have told the hon. Member not to make personal remarks.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT: I think beer has as much to do with this debate as lumber or mortgages. Be that as it may, I would like to tell the hon. Member, as the hon. the Deputy President with his experience has said, we need not go into the ways of municipal government, we need not look diligently into the law of Constitution to know that municipal government in a Colony with a constitution of this kind has to be placed on an entirely different pedestal and footing than that of the Legislative Council. The hon. the Deputy President has quite rightly placed it in its right perspective. I would therefore like to tell the hon. Member who says that the British Guiana Labour Party wants the absolute wiping out of nominated members both in the Municipality and in this Council that he is not the only one who wants it. I have advocated that ever since I went to the Town Council in or about 1935, but I can tell the hon. Member also that I have seen a letter and have discussed it with a Labour Member who wrote only recently to the Secretary of State for the Colonies suggesting that nomination on the Town Council should cease. The reply, as the hon. Member on my left (Mr. Critchlow) can bear out was this: "The British Labour Government and the Colonial Office are not prepared to allow nomination on the Town Council to be superseded at the present time". I do not know whether the Secretary of State for

the Colonies is a member of the Labour Party and is looking forward to some future time when it would be abolished, but that is a fact which cannot be disputed. The Secretary of State for the Colonies has turned down the request for the abolition of nominated members, and a Labour Member here is in possession of a letter to that effect. There are other points I would like to say something on but—

Mr. JACOB : May I ask as a matter of explanation, for the name of the person who received the intimation ?

Mr. C. V. WIGHT : Certainly not.

The PRESIDENT : I can inform the hon. Member that it was a proper despatch sent through Government. It was seen by Government and sent to the Secretary of State. The reply of the Secretary of State was that since the Labour Government have been in power they have not agreed with the request that there should be abolition of nominations on Municipal councils". What the hon. Member for Western Essequibo has said is perfectly correct.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT : I know that hon. Members here are not greatly perturbed over the oration by the hon. Member, but he has stated that the Town Council has been guilty of dereliction of duty in not having for his own edification a list of registered voters so that he could go and get it. If the hon. Member had taken the trouble to look at section 24 of the Ordinance—Chapter 84—he would have seen that the Registering Officer is always the Town Clerk of Georgetown who, no doubt, would be accused of dereliction of duty also, but he is a most careful person and is present here today because he likes to see that the law is being properly carried out by the Town Council. That section, 24 (2), provides that the final list of voters should be published in the *Gazette* and in one or more of the newspapers. There is no obligation on the Town Council to have any further list printed, but there is a book which the Registering Officer who is the Town Clerk keeps, and that would also have a copy of the final list. The Town Council can do nothing more and the Town Clerk is not in a position to provide anything more.

Mr. JACOB : May I correct my hon. friend ? I have a list of voters here for the year 1943 and it was given to me by the Town Clerk. These lists are given whenever a request is made relating to registration—in 1944 and 1945. That is my point.

Mr. C. V. WIGHT : The hon. Member, no doubt, forgets that there was a fire in 1945. He also forgets that the list which is now in force is the list for 1943. We were waiting on the printers to give us the list. The Revising Court sat in the latter part of 1944 and had there been no fire the 1944 list would have been there and, probably, we would not have reduced the franchise. We might have carried on through an enabling Ordinance or would have had our elections in December, 1946, as indicated by the President. Just to give a further example of what the Deputy President said as regards the incidence of taxation and the fact that this Council represents the interest of the taxpayers of the Municipality, this Council has accepted the principle of reduced rental qualification and when it was dealing with the Rent Assessor's powers it allowed the percentage for increased taxation as being that by which the tenant's rent should be increased.

It is obvious that the revenue which would be derived comes from the person who is going to contribute all the revenue. That, in the first place, is the landlord and he in turn passes it on to the tenant. The hon. Member suggests that every adult should be given the vote, whether he has contributed in any form whatever to the revenue. It is obvious that when a person including the hon. Member buys an article which is subject to Customs duty he is contributing to the revenue of the Colony, however small or infinitesimal. I may say that the Town Council has gone a step further in this question of rental qualification and has reduced it to \$3 per month for a voter. As the Deputy President has stated, it is entirely up to the ratepayer—the person who is paying and advocating—to select those who he thinks would carry out his policy. I thank the hon. Member for his reference to the administration of the City and I can assure him that but for the co-operation of the other Councillors and the help

of the present Town Clerk we would not have been able to conclude such a satisfactory year.

Mr. GONSALVES : I would like to say one or two things. First of all, the hon. Member for North Western District must appreciate that he can never get my sympathy when he gets up here to speak on certain occasions. He indulges in remarks and references which make one feel that it is very often a case of just opening his mouth and letting words flow out of it. I cannot understand his remark when he says "this is no Legislature". I would like to suggest to him that if a Member of this Legislature says things like that and treats other Members including the Deputy President with disrespect by not sitting and listening to what they have to say, he would not receive the sympathy of others, and it is not surprising that the moment the Deputy President began his speech the hon. Member deliberately walked out. I would like to suggest that such a Member is not a proper Member of this Legislature.

Mr. JACOB : I rise to a point of order. I challenge the hon. Member to say that I deliberately walked out.

The PRESIDENT: It looked rather obvious.

Mr. JACOB: It may have looked obvious, but I have a right to walk out when it suits me.

Mr. GONSALVES : I think the reasoning of the hon. Member is faulty, because he said I do not know what the Elected Members do since I do not come here. Yet, he is the one who walked out when the Deputy President was saying something of interest.

Mr. JACOB : To yourself.

Mr. GONSALVES : Something that might have helped any Member who is intelligent. If the hon. Member can only see things his way he should say that and I would agree that he must have the sympathy of the other Members of this Council. He would certainly get my entire sympathy. He goes on to say that he does not want to follow this Council, but I am sure if hon. Members of this Council want to be frank they would say they find no pleasure in listening to him.

The hon. Member has referred to figures—he speaks of the number of people registered as voters for Town Council elections and for Legislative Council elections—but I thought he would have been the last person to make this comparison here when it appears from the figures that the number of people whom he seeks to represent in this Legislative Council for a whole district—the North Western District—is not more than the number of voters in the smallest Ward in the City—the Ward of Kingston. Yet he comes here and attempts to be the champion of the entire Colony when he suggests that there should be larger lists of voters for both Municipal and Legislative Council elections.

The PRESIDENT : May I make this observation? This is a very important Bill and every Member is entitled to express his view on it. I think those views have been very interesting so far, but I should point out that this is not an election Bill—and I am going to have something to say about that later on. I am going to ask hon. Members, however, for the dignity of this Council and the better progress of the business, to let us keep personalities out of it. Let us say frankly what we feel about the Bill, but don't let us introduce the personal element.

Mr. GONSALVES : We would not have had the occasion to indulge in what we have indulged in, if when the hon. Member for North Western District raised a point of insult to this Legislature he was not allowed to proceed. I have only risen to state that so far as the Georgetown Town Council is concerned the question of the franchise is one which has been before that Council for some time. There has been correspondence between Government and the Town Council and, as a matter of fact, this Bill which has come forward today has been before Government for some little time and we have been waiting patiently for it.

We are not blaming Government because we appreciate the position and we have been doing the best we could. It is true it was advocated that there should be a Franchise Commission with regard to the Town Council, but that did not go forward. In the meantime, the Town Council considered the matter in the light that

they saw it and their recommendations are more or less in the nature of this Bill. I cannot see that a Commission is going to carry this matter much further, because the Town Council represents the whole of the City of Georgetown. Government has three nominees on it and the people have the other representatives. The Council, therefore, had the views of the nominated members as well as those of the people's representatives in the matter.

With regard to the reduction of the rental qualification, the point was raised whether we should make the amount \$7.50 or \$8, and it must be borne in mind that there were, and still are, representatives of the middle and the working classes on the Town Council. We have members on that Council who represent Trade Unions and these include the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Critchlow. The proposals put forward in this Bill are the result of a conference between Government and the Town Council. As regards the question of rental qualification, if this Council considers that the amount fixed—\$8—is too high, then we have the power to reduce it when the Committee stage is reached. The Town Council also considered the fact that the income qualification for membership of the Legislative Council was \$100 and decided that the rental qualification for membership of the Town Council should be \$25 instead of the previous figure of \$30.

Mr. JACOB : I cannot sit here and allow these statements to be made. The rental qualification for membership of this Council is \$25, but the income qualification is \$100. The hon. Member is a Solicitor and should know the difference between rental and income qualification.

Mr. GONSALVES : I shall respect Your Excellency's appeal not to indulge in too much personalities. All I have said is that this Council is not obliged to accept the figures. The rental qualification for a member of the Town Council is \$25 and for a voter \$8. That is what was sent forward by the Town Council and it was suggested to Government in this Council that a change might be made in a specific manner, but Government should say "this legislation was sent by the Town Council which is a responsible body and Govern-

ment is not entitled to interfere." That answer was given by Government in connection with a Bill which is now in the Statute Book and I do say, sir, that the hon. Member must not go away with the idea that this draft Bill was just put forward by somebody and rushed across to Government. It was carefully considered by the Town Council, and members with strong views on the question of representation—including Mr. Shankland who is no longer a member of the Council and myself—were present, and I venture to suggest that unless there is an amendment of very great importance Government would not do anything to prevent this Bill from going through as it is. If these questions relating to qualification are to be further considered, sir, let us do so some other time. If it is the desire of this Council that the position should not remain as it is, then it would be immaterial to me.

Mr. LEE : I tried my best to get here in order to express my views, and I think the majority of the inhabitants of the City would say they agree with them. Firstly, I do not agree that there should be any income or rental qualification for a voter or a Councillor. The majority of people are of the opinion that there should be universal adult suffrage and through that they should be able to choose their representatives on the Town Council. If, as stated by the hon. Member for Georgetown South, this Bill was carefully considered by the Town Council, then I say the ratepayers in the different Wards should have been consulted and asked for their decision. I say now that the members of the Town Council in considering this matter merely expressed their own opinions and not those of the ratepayers in the various Wards of the City. We all agree that if we want progress we should accept the recommendations of the West India Royal Commission, and at page 25, par. 28 (d) of those recommendations, the Commission states :—

"(d) That in order to secure that the elected element in Legislative Councils—

The PRESIDENT : I do not want to confuse you but, actually, you did not ask my permission to read and, in addition to that, the hon. Member on your left (Mr. Jacob) has just read all of that—before you came in.

Mr. JACOB : I did not read that point.

The PRESIDENT : When a Member comes late it is trying to other Members to hear him say what was said before.

Mr LEE : I am rather surprised to hear that it is trying. I am surprised to hear the President saying that, considering that we are here doing our best and giving our services free in the interest of the public. I had the greatest difficulty in order to get here, and I feel it is not nice to me to hear that what I say is trying. I ask you to withdraw that remark, sir. I am a member of the Trades Union Council and also a Member of this Council, and I feel that I am expressing the opinion of the people whom I represent. If Your Excellency feels that I have come late, we are not concerned with any expression of opinion in this Council. I admit I have not asked permission to read from this book, and that is all I am sorry for. Without referring to the book, I would say that what I intended to read is something I have been stating practically day and night.

It is in the recommendations of the Royal Commission that this Government should set up a Commission to get the views of the people in Georgetown on this important subject, but Government have failed in their duty and I submit that the Town Council has also failed in that duty because the members of the Council should have consulted the ratepayers in the various Wards and in that case they would have been expressing the views of the majority of the people in Georgetown. The majority feel that what is being done is not in keeping with constitutional progress and their request is that there should be universal adult suffrage in the Town Council, so that they could elect better representatives. To that end I shall oppose this Bill and ask for amendments to all the clauses which deal with the point.

Mr. GONSALVES : To a point of order : I think the hon. Member wants this Government to move the motions and not that he is going to move the amendments.

The PRESIDENT : We all understand what he means.

Mr. LEE : Can Your Excellency say that these views are those of the majority of the people ? I am surprised that the members of the Town Council did not consult the public. They say they had those views long before, but they ought to have consulted the ratepayers of the various Wards. All the Trade Unions are crying for universal adult suffrage, and I do not care how this Bill is termed I say it does not represent the views of the majority of the people. It has been said that we are only asking for universal adult suffrage as regards the Legislative Council, but can the members of the Town Council say that we are advocating rental qualification because the people in Georgetown are illiterate and do not understand the politics of the State ?

I am positive that no one in this Council can say that the people in Georgetown are not taking an interest in the affairs of the various Wards, and I feel that before a Bill of this kind is passed the Town Councilors should go to the people and ask them if they approve of it and hear what they have to say. From my own experience and contact with the people, they do not want any restriction at all as regards voting, save and except the ability to read and write and to register their names as voters. I sincerely hope that those Town Councilors who are Members of this Legislature would make it their duty to consult the people in their Wards and hear what they have to say.

Mr. THOMPSON : I am prepared to support the principle of this Bill, and I regret very much that so much personality was introduced into the debate because we, the juniors, are not assisted in maintaining a healthy form of debate around this table. I think we look forward to our seniors to guide us and I must say it is exceedingly painful to have Members here crossing swords so much one with the other. There are certain things that could be dealt with in Committee stage and I would refer to them there, but I have accepted the principle of the Bill.

The PRESIDENT : I have listened with very great interest to the remarks that have been made and I agree with the last speaker. I think there are too many personalities. I have already said so, and

I hope I would not have to repeat it. The first thing I want to say is that I regard this as a very important Bill and I am sorry there is such a thin attendance of Members. I am also astonished that there is practically no attendance in the public gallery. If hon. Members agree that it would be the better course, I think we can postpone the voting on the second reading until we meet next Wednesday. It is such an important Bill that I would like to give other Members an opportunity to be present. On Wednesday, therefore, we will take the second reading, and it is really up to Members of this Council to attend. I cannot postpone it any longer.

I have listened very carefully to the first speaker, the hon. Member for North Western District, and as the hon. the Deputy President said, he certainly made the point about the fact that Government had promised in writing the appointment of a Commission. Without saying anything more definite today, I can tell hon. Members that I am going into that question very carefully with my advisers. Government is introducing this Bill and, therefore, I think, Government must accept responsibility for it.

I am not altogether in agreement with the hon. Member for Georgetown South when he says this is a Town Council affair. I think it was introduced by the hon. the Attorney-General, and if the Attorney-General introduces a Bill, I think, Government has taken the responsibility for it. On the other hand the hon. the Deputy President made a very cogent observation when he said he did not think Government should override the Municipality. I myself have a very open mind in the matter. I will not oppose a further extension of the franchise at all. If Members in Committee move an amendment to the relative clauses and the majority of Members of this Council approve I would certainly not oppose it. It is a matter for this Council. I am only speaking now because I think it is a serious matter, and I am appealing to Members of this Council to attend on Wednesday when we go into Committee. I hope that between us we will make a good job of this Bill. There is no other item on the Order Paper for today, and we therefore adjourn to 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday next, 27th November.