

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Saturday, 4th November, 1944.

The Council met at 10 a.m., His Excellency the Officer Administering the Government, Mr. W. L. Heape, C.M.G., President, in the Chair.

PRESENT:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hon. J. Gonsalves, O.B.E., (Georgetown South).

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

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

The Hon. T. Lee (Essequibo River).

The Hon. V. Roth (Nominated).

The Clerk read prayers.

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Thursday, 19th October, 1944, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS.

GOVERNOR EXPECTED ON NOV. 13.

The PRESIDENT: I must apologize for asking Honourable Members to attend this emergency meeting of the Council on Saturday morning. The reason is explained in the Message which I sent to you. I regret any inconvenience that has been caused.

I have one announcement of interest. I have received a telegram from Sir Gordon Lethem stating that he expects to arrive in the Colony on Monday 13th of November. I hope, therefore, that we will be able to finish off as much business as possible and leave him a clear table. We are meeting, as you know, on Tuesday next to pass two essential Bills and deal with some motions. Then we shall have a clear field for Sir Gordon.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES.

EXTENSION OF RENT RESTRICTION ORDINANCE, 1941.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL gave notice of the following motion:—

WHEREAS the Rent Restriction Ordinance, 1941, was enacted on the 3rd day of November, 1941, and came into operation on the 8th day of November, 1941;

AND WHEREAS section 16 of the said Ordinance provided that the Ordinance should continue in force for one year but that prior to the expiration thereof it could be renewed for further periods of one year by resolution of the Legislative Council;

AND WHEREAS, by resolution dated the 29th October, 1942, and 28th October, 1943, the said Ordinance was continued in operation during the year 1943 and until the 6th day of November, 1944;

AND WHEREAS it is expedient that the said Ordinance be continued in operation for a further period of one month;

Now therefore be it Resolved that the Rent Restriction Ordinance, 1941, shall continue in operation for a period of one month with effect from the 7th November, 1944.

ORDER OF THE DAY.

EXTENSION OF RENT RESTRICTION ORDINANCE, 1941.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Sir, I move that Standing Rule and Order No. 11 of the Council be suspended to enable me to move the motion standing in my name.

Mr. J. A. LUCKHOO seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: In moving the motion for the continuation for one month of the Rent Restriction Ordinance, I suppose I ought in the first place to give some explanation why hon. Members have been put to the inconvenience of attending here this morning at a very short notice. Actually, the resolution passed by this Council is due to expire at midnight on the 6th November which is a public holiday. The then Clerk of the Council clearly marked on the file "To be brought up on the "1st October" but by some error that file was not brought up until the 1st November which was last Wednesday. That is the cause of the trouble. I suppose in the best regulated offices slips occur occasionally. In this case the file was in fact brought up or

the 1st November which was Wednesday last, but the resolution was due to expire on the following Monday which is a public holiday. It was therefore necessary to call hon. Members together to-day in order to continue the Rent Restriction Ordinance in force.

The Council has power under section 16 of the Ordinance to continue it for another period of one year, and as the greater includes the lesser the Council has power to extend it for a lesser period. As Hon. Members will see, the motion proposes to extend the Ordinance for one month only, from the 7th November. The reason for that is that as the notice of this meeting could not possibly have been sent out before Thursday it follows that some Members who are up country could not have received the notice in time to attend to-day, and it equally follows that those hon. Members who may wish to say something on the Ordinance would be precluded from doing so if we extended it for a whole year to-day. For that reason it is proposed to extend it for one month and then immediately give notice of another motion which would extend it for the full period of one year.

As to the merits of the motion I do not think there is need for me to speak at all. I think there is no person who will not agree that it is absolutely essential that rents should be controlled. At the moment they are controlled in Georgetown, Christianburg, Wismar and Bartica. His Excellency informs me that it applies also to New Amsterdam. That was done during my absence from the Colony. This extension, of course, will apply to all those places. I therefore move that the Rent Restriction Ordinance be continued for a further period of one month from the 7th November.

Mr. J. A. LUCKHOO: I beg to second the motion and to suggest that the extension be made to the end of the year in order to synchronize with

the payment of rents from month to month. I do not think any harm would be done if we extended it to the 31st December, so that if the Ordinance is further extended for one year it would become operative from the 1st January to 31st December. That would be more convenient. Next year we may miss the time again and have to come back to the Council for an extension.

Mr. JACKSON: I am of the same opinion. I agree with the hon. Nominated Member that instead of extending the Ordinance for one month it would be more convenient to extend it to the end of the year. There is every reason why that should be done as I am almost certain that the Council will extend it over that period.

Mr. JACOB: So far as I am concerned I would like the Ordinance to remain permanently on the Statute Book, or at least for several years after the termination of the war. I do not understand why it was limited to one year. I think I stated then that it should be made like every other Ordinance to remain on the Statute Book, and if it became necessary it could be repealed or amended to suit conditions. Perhaps Government believes that immediately after hostilities cease things would become normal or sub-normal. So far as I can see I believe that 3, 4 and probably 5 years after the war conditions will be just as bad. In fact with reconstruction all over the world—and I hope this Colony is also planning reconstruction—the building of houses will become harder. I therefore cannot understand why Government should pass a resolution extending the Ordinance for one year. Now it is suggested that it should be extended for one month. I agree with the suggestion that it should be extended to the end of December, and after that steps will be taken to put the Ordinance permanently on the Statute Book to be repealed or amended later on if necessary.

There can be no doubt that the Ordinance should have been applied to the entire Colony. It is not only in Georgetown, Wismar, Bartica and New Amsterdam that ordinary poor people are finding it difficult to get houses and are paying excessive rents. Government appointed a Committee to deal with rural housing and I hope the report of that Committee has not been thrown aside, and that something will be done. I was a member of that Committee which recommended that certain things should be done for the Essequibo Coast, but so far as I am aware nothing has been done. I think it is within the knowledge of Government that although the increase of rent in certain areas may be small they are still increases. People cannot get houses and complaints have reached Government (I am sure I sent in one or two) about the country districts being affected in a large measure as a result of the Ordinance not being applicable to all parts of the colony. I suggest, therefore, that the Ordinance should be made applicable to the whole Colony and should be made permanent when it comes up for consideration later on.

Mr. LEE: I would like to support the suggestion that the Ordinance should be made applicable throughout the Colony. I know there are cases of great hardship among the working classes of the people. I do not, however, support the suggestion that the Ordinance should be made permanent, but I would ask Government to enact it for 3 or 5 years, after which it may be repealed or extended. There is no doubt that it will have to be continued after the war. After the last war it was continued for a number of years, and that may be taken as a precedent. I agree that perhaps it will be hard on property owners who have invested their money and expect certain returns from their investments, but Government has to protect the tenants.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: As regards the amendment suggested by the hon. Mr. Luckhoo there can be no

objection to the Ordinance being extended to the end of the year so long as Members who are not present today are given a chance to express their views when the Ordinance comes up for review. It really does not matter whether they are given that chance this month or next month. I therefore accept that amendment.

The hon. Member for North Western District (Mr. Jacob) objected to the constant extension year by year, and asked why not put it on the Statute Book? If he carried his mind back he would recollect that when the Bill originally came before the Council that clause was not in it, but in the Committee stage there was considerable difference of opinion, and in order to meet the opposition of certain hon. Members that clause was added, and since then it has always been operating.

The hon. Member also suggested, and the hon. Member for Essequibo River (Mr. Lee) supported him, that the Ordinance should be made applicable to the whole Colony. If any Member or anybody else could show that it is really required in any area there would be not the slightest objection to extending the Ordinance to that area, but Members must bear one thing in mind. In many parts of the Colony the application of the Ordinance would have the reverse effect; it would have the effect of increasing rents. The reason for that is that there is what is known in the Ordinance as permitted increases. Where rents in any part of the Colony have not been increased beyond the increase permitted under the Ordinance it follows that if we applied the Ordinance to that area we would immediately put up the rents. If there is any area in the Colony where rents generally speaking are greater than those which are permitted by the Ordinance, and the facts are put before the Government I give the assurance that the Ordinance would be made to apply to that area immediately. It is the desire of Government to keep rents at that rate

all over the Colony, but in putting it forward it is necessary to show that the reverse effect would not take place. So that when the hon. Member speaks of the Essequibo district where rents have been increased slightly, he must remember that if those rents have not increased more than a given percentage it would be better to allow economic rules to govern the situation rather than apply the Ordinance to that district.

The hon. Member for Essequibo River said that the Ordinance will have to continue for a long time after the war. It will have to go on until such time as there is sufficient accommodation. Once there is adequate housing accommodation the landlords themselves will be on the look-out for tenants, and when that starts we need not worry about rent restriction. In England a Rent Restriction Act was passed during the last war and was in operation up to the point of the present war. The same Act is in force to-day, so I agree with the hon. Member that the Ordinance will have to continue after the war, but I think it is quite possible we may have to make one or two amendments. As everybody is in favour of the motion I formally move the motion as amended by the hon. Mr. Luckhoo.

Mr. JACOB: May I speak on the amendment?

The PRESIDENT: Yes, if you will be very short.

Mr. JACOB: I do not know how Government will be convinced that this Ordinance should be made applicable throughout the Colony. If Government would indicate in some specific way as to how it would be convinced I would be prepared to convince Government. I have known of cases where rents have been increased by 100 per cent. in the country districts, and the arguments for rent restriction in Georgetown and other places are

equally applicable to the country areas. If Government is prepared to state how it would be convinced that the Ordinance should be made applicable throughout the Colony, I would be prepared to submit proof to Government that rents have been increased in some cases more than 100 per cent. in the country districts.

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Government would welcome the information.

The motion, as amended by the substitution of the words "until the last day of December, 1944" for the words "for a period of one month with effect from the 7th November, 1944," was then put, and carried.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, gentlemen, for turning up so quickly at such short notice. We meet again at 12 o'clock on Tuesday next.