

# LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

*Wednesday, 27th January, 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. T. T. Smellie (Nominated Unofficial Member).

The Hon. P. James Kelly, M.B., Ch. B., Surgeon-General.

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

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

The Hon. B. R. Wood, M.A., Dip. For. (Cantab.), Conservator of Forests.

The Hon. S. H. Bayley, General Manager, Transport and Harbours Department.

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

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

The Hon. N. Cannon (Georgetown North).

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

The Hon. A. R. F. Webber, F.R.G.S., (Western Berbice).

The Hon. J. Gonsalves (Georgetown South).

The Hon. V. A. Pires (North Western District).

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. F. J. Seaford (Nominated Unofficial Member).

## MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on the 26th January, as printed and circulated, were confirmed.

## GOVERNMENT NOTICE.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY (Mr. C. Douglas-Jones) gave notice that at a later stage he would move the suspension of the Standing Rules and Orders to enable "A Bill further to amend the Tax Ordinance, Chapter 37" to be read the third time.

## PRIVILEGE.

Mr. WEBBER: Before the business of the Council is proceeded with, sir, I crave leave to raise a question of privilege. When the Estimates were under discussion and the subvention of an institution came up I brought to the notice of the Council that the institution subsidised was not as economically and efficiently administered as it should be. I am glad to say that before I resumed my seat a Nominated Member of the Council told me that every word I said was true.

THE PRESIDENT: What is the hon. Member referring to?

Mr. WEBBER: The debate on the subvention to the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society.

THE PRESIDENT: What is the point of privilege?

Mr. WEBBER: The point of privilege is that the Directors of that Society wrote me a threatening letter as a Member of the Council for daring to criticise the subvention that was being voted by this Council. That, I submit, is an outrage

and invasion of the privileges of this Council. I say it is the right of Members. I took the opportunity to discuss the matter with the Government leader and submitted the letter to him and informed him that I proposed to raise the question of privilege. I was threatened with dire penalties and I am submitting that it is an invasion of the privilege of this Council to attempt to limit the free discussion and expression of opinion by Members of the Council on any vote that comes up before the Council. I intend to lay over the letter and invite Government's attention to this attempt to invade the liberties of Members of this Council. I submit with some confidence that it is a matter of privilege and within my right and that of any Member to raise any question here. I do not propose to ask Government to pursue any punitive measures against the Society, but I believe that in a question like this it is within my province to ask that the item be re-committed. I do not propose to pursue that course. I am asking for the protection of the entire Council because it amounts to this: If I attempt to discuss the vote of the Comptroller of Customs he can write and tell me that I had the impertinence to criticise his vote and whenever I came to pass entries he would squeeze me (Laughter). It is not only an invasion of privilege but a dire piece of impertinence.

THE PRESIDENT: I think we need not deal with the criticism and action to be taken until we know something about the matter. The hon. Member is in order in calling the attention of the Council to the fact that a question of privilege arises, but I think the proper course to adopt is to forward the document to the Official leader of the House who, if he is satisfied, would call the attention of the House to the fact that there has been a breach of the privilege of the House. If he is not satisfied he would communicate with the hon. Member, who could then call attention to it either by question or motion.

Mr. WEBBER: I lay over the correspondence.

THE PRESIDENT: The correspondence can be laid on the table for the consideration of the Council if it is considered necessary to bring it forward again after discussion with the hon. Member. As to the form it should take would be a matter for suggestion.

## ORDER OF THE DAY.

### TAX BILL.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY: When the Council adjourned yesterday I had moved the second reading of "A Bill further to amend the Tax Ordinance, Chapter 37," and I had explained the reasons for the introduction of this Bill and why it is necessary to effect these amendments in the main Ordinance. It is now open to hon. Members of the Council to deal with the principles of the Bill in any way they like.

Question "That the Bill be read the second time" 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: Pursuant to notice I move the suspension of the Standing Rules and Orders to enable the Bill to be read the third time.

Mr. SMELLIE seconded.

Question put, and agreed to.

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.

### SALARIES OF TEACHERS.

Mr. FREDERICKS: I beg leave to move the motion standing in the name of the hon. Member for Demerara River (Mr. Crane):—

THAT in view of the fact that the salaries of Elementary School Teachers have already been reduced by 10 per cent. since permanent increases of salaries were given to Public Servants, this Council is of opinion that the proposed cut in Civil Servants' salaries should not apply to the salaries of School Teachers.

It is necessary for me to give a short and precise history of this matter. From a statement which has been furnished by

the Education Department it appears that before the War head teachers were paid by results (certificate salary plus grants for each pupil who passed an examination). This scale of salaries was continued till 1st January, 1920, when a new Code came into force providing a new scale for head teachers and certificated assistants. These teachers having suffered a 10 per cent. cut, which they never recovered, it seems hard that they should suffer a further cut which is to be applied to the Service as a whole. The teachers regard their remuneration as inadequate in most cases for what is expected of them. They have to maintain a certain standard of living and possess a certain amount of knowledge and they ought to be paid a decent wage. This was recognised when they were given an increase before suffering the 10 per cent. reduction. Other Civil Servants did not suffer that reduction, and if the teachers are now to suffer a further cut of 10 per cent. it would mean a loss of 20 per cent., which would be discriminatory so far as they are concerned. Government, I know, have no desire so to do. There is another point. Is a schoolmaster a Government servant? I am sorry to raise that question because, at the last Education Day, Your Excellency cheered the teachers quite a lot by telling them they are Government servants. But they are Government servants of a kind. Not a single teacher draws salary from the Colony Chest but from the grant to the school which is paid to the Governing Body or the Manager. There is a clear line of demarcation between Government servants and teachers. Apart from that a teacher could not get a lump sum when he retires. He gets a statutory pension and that is not on a scale with other pensions. His leave of absence, I think, depends on his Manager and is not more than a month if not fourteen days, and he has to provide a substitute, whereas Government servants have sick and vacation leave, so that a teacher is not for all purposes a Government servant. There has been quite an amount of retrenchment in the Education Department which at the present time prevents a large number of persons becoming teachers although they have passed the first examination for a certificate. That means that a large number of teachers must depend on their brethren in active service to help them support themselves until they can secure employment of some

other kind, so that in retrenching teachers' salaries Government is inflicting a great hardship on many people who are dependent upon them. I may be told that it would be wrong for the teachers not to help the Colony at a time like this. My answer to that is that it should not apply because the teachers have contributed long before this serious moment has arisen. Government is in need of the money and must get it from somewhere. The question is: Should the teacher contribute? If he is not a Government servant it seems not fair that he should contribute and still more unfair because his contribution at this time would be more than the contribution of the real Government servant as there must be added to it the 10 per cent. retrenchment which he previously suffered. I do not believe that the country at large would look with any pleasure on a reduction of teachers' salaries, and it is a hardship which I hope Government will not inflict on this deserving class.

Mr. WEBBER: I second the motion. The mover has so well covered the ground that it leaves very little to say. I feel that it is a question of equity. If these men have already suffered a reduction I do not see how in equity you can make them suffer twice. In past years whenever economy was necessary in public expenditure a 10 per cent. cut was made in the Education Vote and teachers' salaries were automatically reduced in consequence. That vote was regarded as a favourite hen roost to be plundered by Government. You cannot in one breath tell them they are not Government servants and in the next say they are. I do not know whether the Director of Education can tell me the number of teachers who will suffer this cut and what is the sum involved.

Major BAIN GRAY (Director of Education): The number is 70 out of 950 and the amount involved is \$3,128.

Mr. WEBBER: If out of so large a number of teachers you are going to select 70 it is for this Council to consider whether they are going to break through all the principles so well established by the mover of the motion for the sake of \$3,000. Personally, I think the game is not worth the candle. It is not worth while doing a palpable injustice for the sake of \$3,000. Government might well consider the advis-

ability of accepting the motion in justice and equity.

Dr. SINGH: I am in sympathy with the teachers. I think they should be paid a good salary in order to allow them to live up to a certain standard. Village communities look to teachers for exemplary qualities and advice. A teacher is a prominent figure in a village and in order to live up to a proper standard he must be free of monetary responsibilities. At the present time teachers are at a disadvantage. They have been subjected to a reduction of salary from the year 1923, and they do not enjoy the same privileges as Civil Servants.

Mr. GONSALVES: I have risen to support the motion. There is not much for me to add to what has been said by the mover of the motion who was himself an experienced teacher. Unless you give teachers a decent salary it is impossible to expect them to live up to the standard required of them. I agree with the view that in no case should the proposed cut of 10 per cent. be applied to teachers.

Mr. CANNON: I feel that this motion is somewhat unfortunate. I wish to do my duty to all men alike. I do not think that teachers' salary should be tackled in this form. I am in agreement with the view that teachers should be well paid but I cannot say that one branch of the Service should be allowed a preference as against another. If it were possible I would say give the teachers a fair and reasonable salary and let them share the responsibilities of Civil Servants and other members of the community. I am not in agreement with touching Civil Servants' salaries at all. I feel it is wholly unnecessary to have so tackled Civil Servants when all the money necessary can be got in other directions. I am going to reserve my decision as to how I shall record my vote until I have heard what Government has to say, but I do not see how I can be expected to single out teachers for special consideration. They have my greatest sympathy.

THE PRESIDENT: There is one point in the remarks made by the hon. Member for Georgetown South which should be corrected at once. The salary of no teacher would suffer reduction of more than 5 per cent.

Mr. SEAFORD: I should like to endorse the views expressed by the hon. Member for Georgetown North. Within the last two years the Education Vote has gone up 100 per cent. and I do not know that the Colony has benefited very much by it. It is 10 per cent. of the total expenditure of the Colony.

Major BAIN GRAY: Sir, I am sure that we all congratulate the teachers on the advocacy which their case has received this morning. The whole case has been well and fully stated by the hon. Member for Essequibo River and has, of course, been supplemented on various points by those who followed. Before I proceed to deal with the question generally there is one point in the text of the motion which I think is causing a little misapprehension. The text suggests that since permanent increases of salaries were given to Government servants the salaries of teachers have already been reduced by 10 per cent. That suggests that Government servants were given permanent fixed salaries and that afterwards teachers' salaries which had been increased at the same time were reduced. That is not so. The settlement of the two kinds of salaries was almost simultaneous. It was done by the Civil Service Commission and the teachers' salaries which are now in force are the result of the permanent increases granted after the War. In both cases the position was much the same. There was a pre-war rate and temporary increases were given to both classes of salaries. It became obvious in the years between 1919 and 1922 that these temporary increases could not be made permanent and the Commission decided what portion of those increases should remain with the two classes of persons paid from Government funds. The 10 per cent. reduction to which frequent reference has been made was the method by which the temporary war increases were brought back to the permanent level as it were. It is perhaps best illustrated by what happened to the salaries of head teachers with whom this motion is concerned. In 1920 Government expenditure on the salaries of head teachers was \$126,000. As a result of the temporary increases that were given them it rose to \$173,000. That was the temporary post-war increase. Steps were then taken in regard to teachers, as in the case of Civil Servants, to stabilise it, and

by means of this 10 per cent. reduction and one or two other measures the permanent settlement was brought down not to \$126,000 but to \$142,000, at which it remains except for the fact that the number of individuals employed as head teachers has been reduced. If the comparison is to be driven home—personally I do not attach much importance to it—I think you will find that certain Civil Servants have probably lost more than 10 per cent.

Hon. Members in speaking have quite rightly drawn attention to the fact that the whole body of teachers are not particularly well paid. The Department accepts that view and so does Government to a large extent. It cannot be said that the whole body of teachers are overpaid. There are 70 of these teachers receiving salaries ranging from \$60 to \$105 per month, so that no one will suffer a reduction of more than 5 per cent. within the zone of the  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. rate. My own arguments apply to the whole body of teachers and this particular group. The question really is whether this group of public servants, or indirect public servants or whatever you care to call them, are to share in the common loss. Why should a group of individuals enjoy 100 per cent. of the privileges of Civil Servants and not share the disabilities of Civil Servants? It can fairly be said that the discipline of teachers can not be maintained at the high standard of Civil Servants, for teachers have the privilege of writing to the newspapers, from which Civil Servants are debarred. Govern-

ment's policy with regard to teachers has been to take the general conditions of employment into consideration and try to give them a fair wage. I have never really heard it suggested by the teachers themselves that as a class the salaries are grossly inadequate. I have heard them frequently say that the salaries of assistant teachers are far from being adequate, and that is a view that many of us are inclined to share, but to give them credit they have never suggested that present salaries are grossly inadequate. It therefore comes to the question whether they should contribute to this common sacrifice or not. If they do not share in this particular disability can they expect to share in any future advantage? If you compare salaries now with 1919 I do not think you will find that there is a single headmaster doing the same work generally whose salary is less than he received in 1919. On the other hand, there is a very great number whose salaries have gone up quite substantially, and rightly so, because they have got better jobs in the schools. I am not going to go into the question of teachers being Civil Servants. The question at the moment is whether everyone paid from public funds should suffer this temporary abatement for this year, as everyone at least hopes it is. Government for these reasons is unable to accept the motion.

The motion was put to the vote and lost without a division.

The Council adjourned *sine die*.

