

Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Council assembled under the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1919.

The Council met in the Council Chamber, Shillong, on Friday the 6th April 1923, at 2 P.M.

P R E S E N T :

The Hon'ble Rai Bahadur Nalini Kanta Ray Dastidar, *President*, the Hon'ble the two Members of the Executive Council, the Hon'ble Minister, Education and 30 nominated and elected Members.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

(UNSTARRED QUESTIONS.)

SRIJUT DALIM CHANDRA BORAH asked :—

1. Will the Government be pleased to state the amount of expenditure incurred monthly in maintaining the probationary Extra Assistant Commissioners and Sub-Deputy Collectors appointed lately ?

Probationary Extra Assistant Commissioners and Sub-Deputy Collectors.

2. Will the Government be pleased to state whether there is any immediate need of appointment of such Extra Assistant Commissioners and Sub-Deputy Collectors ?

If not, will the Government be pleased to state whether, in view of general cry for retrenchment, the services of these probationary Extra Assistant Commissioners and Sub-Deputy Collectors are going to be dispensed with ?

3. Is it a fact that the services of the Government servants of all ranks and in all departments of less than five years are going to be dispensed with ?

Dispensation of certain Government servants.

If so, are the services of the probationary Extra Assistant Commissioners and Sub-Deputy Collectors referred to in question No. 2 included in the list of services to be dispensed with ?

4. If it is decided to dispense with the services of Government servants of any rank, will the Government be pleased to state when are they going to give effect to such decision ?

5. In case of dispensation of certain services will the Government servants concerned get previous reasonable notice thereof ?

6. Is it a fact that at present the number of Sub-Deputy Collectors and Extra Assistant Commissioners and Munsiffs is in excess of actual requirement ?

If so, will the Government be pleased to reduce their number ?

MR. A. W. BOTHAM replied :—

1.—The total of the monthly salaries drawn by probationers in the Assam Civil Service and the Subordinate Executive Service is Rs. 4,615.

2. and 6.—In view of the necessity for economy Government made no new appointments to the Assam Civil Service and the Subordinate Executive Service during 1922-23. They have decided to reduce the strength of the cadres of these services from 84 to 78 in the case of the Assam Civil Service and from 84 to 74 in the case of the Subordinate Executive Service. The Assam Civil Service will be reduced to the new strength by retirements during 1923-24, and Government do not propose to dispense with the services of probationary Extra Assistant Commissioners unless they show themselves wanting in proper capacity. The Subordinate Executive Service is at present below the new strength, and it will be necessary to make a few fresh appointments almost immediately

Government have further decided in the interests of economy to utilise Sub-Deputy Collectors in certain posts which have hitherto been filled by members of the Assam Civil Service. This will entail a further reduction of the Assam Civil Service and a corresponding increase of the Subordinate Service ; but it will only be possible to give effect to this economy gradually as the additional Sub-Deputy Collectors required are appointed and trained.

3.—The answer to the first part of the question is in the negative, and the second part therefore does not arise.

4.—Subject to the rules requiring notice to be given, effect is ordinarily given to decisions to dispense with the services of Government servants as soon as the decision has been arrived at.

5.—Yes. Under Article 436, Civil Service Regulations an officer in permanent employ is entitled to at least three months' notice if his services are dispensed with on the abolition of his office. Under Article 352 an officer employed temporarily on monthly wages without specified limit of time or duty is entitled to one month's notice of discharge.

MAULAVI ABDUL KHALIQUE CHAUDHURI asked :—

Release of
Pallakandi,
Elias Ali
and Ahmad
Kabir Ward
Estates.

1. (a) Do the Government intend to release the Pallakandi, Elias Ali and Ahmad Kabir Ward Estates ?

(b) Is it a fact that Syeda Tanjunnessa Khatoon, a ward of Pallakandi and Ahmad Kabir Ward Estates, has submitted a petition to the Government making some allegations ? If so, (i) will the Government be pleased to lay the copy of the petition on the table of the Council, (ii) to state what steps the Government have undertaken in the matter ?

THE HON'BLE MR. W. J. REID replied :—

1. (a)—As at present advised the Government do not propose to release the estates till Maulavi Saiyid Ali Aktar, Ward of the Pallakandi Estate, attains his majority in about three years' time.

(b)—Yes. The petition has been sent to the Commissioner, Surma Valley and Hill Division, for disposal. Government are not prepared to lay a copy on the table.

MAULAVI ABDUL KHALIQUE CHAUDHURI asked :—

2. Will the Government be pleased to state (a) the necessity for the appointment of Mr. Barnes as Additional Commissioner in these days of financial crisis, (b) his monthly pay in the grade of Deputy Commissioner prior to his appointment as Additional Commissioner, and the pay he was allowed as Additional Commissioner, and (c) the actual expenses incurred by him as Additional Commissioner showing separately the total amount of pay and travelling allowances, item by item, drawn by him, his tour clerk and orderlies and the total amount of contingencies?

Additional
Commis-
sioner.

MR. A. W. BOTHAM replied :—

2. (a)—Mr. Barnes returned from leave at the end of October 1922 and was required to officiate as Commissioner at the beginning of January 1923. It was not thought desirable to disturb district arrangements by placing Mr. Barnes in charge of a district for the interval of a little over two months, and it was considered that the most advantageous method of employing him during the interval was as Additional Commissioner. In that capacity he was specially deputed to tour in the Garo Hills in view of apprehended scarcity.

(b)—Mr. Barnes' monthly pay as Deputy Commissioner was Rs. 2,500. As Additional Commissioner his pay was Rs. 3,000.

(c)—Exact figures are not available, but the total amount was not greater than would have been drawn by a Deputy Commissioner doing an equal amount of touring.

GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE BUDGET.

SRIJUT BISHNU CHARAN BORAH :—Sir, the budget for the current year is one of economy and as such provides to keep things merely going. In framing the budget I admit great care has been taken to reduce expenditure and with pleasure I note the assurance given by Government that further retrenchments will be made in the course of the present year by abolishing posts and reducing establishments where this is possible. But the spirit underlying the policy of retrenchment has not been a commendable one. It has been confined to starving peons and clerks only but the principle of abolishing unnecessary posts should be applied throughout in the case of all services from top to bottom to make them proportionately heavy. Although our income has been gradually growing and our expenditure is decreasing yet unfortunately and to the surprise of all we are having a deficit budget. The reason for this state of things is not far to seek. Whatever money has now been available by reduction has been absorbed by the salary charges and the large increments earned in the time-scale of pay by all classes of officers and with the increase of revenue in future this particular charge will also go on increasing. The tax-payers have very patiently waited and may be consoled to wait for their progress and improvement but the increments granted in the time-scale of pay can in no way wait. The Government was much too liberal when the prices were at their highest in increasing the rates of pay in regard to some services but now as there is a fall in the cost of living and there is a marked tendency in this direction, an all-round reduction of pay of all services other than the All-India services is urgently called for. Unless strong measures are adopted in this direction we shall not be able to overcome our difficulties and to avoid additional taxation which is much more unpleasant and dangerous than retrenchment.

It is very painful to observe again and again that Government seems to do nothing to abolish the posts of the Divisional Commissioners although the majority of the opinions collected by the Government are against their retention and the Council also in one voice recommended it. The question of the abolition of the post of the Superintending Engineer has been shelved by abolishing the subordinate establishment. One of the posts of Conservator of Forests instead of being abolished is now in abeyance. Similar is the case with one of the posts of Inspector of Schools. Although the reforms intended that in succeeding years public opinion would receive greater consideration at the hands of the authorities in matters of public concern yet the state of things hopelessly remain unchanged as before. Sir, the end of Government is the happiness of the people and with this noble object in view the Government should proceed in the process of abolishing posts and reducing pay and establishments. What I urge upon the Government is that they should enable us to feel that our interests are their interests and that Government subordinate all other considerations to the welfare of the people. Sir, if retrenchment is effected in this spirit we the people will have cause to rejoice before long.

BABU HIRALAL BOSE :—Sir, since yesterday I have very carefully thought over the several speeches delivered by my hon'ble friends and I think they have said everything that could have been said on the subject, or rather ought to have been said. Still for the sake of principle I shall only say a few words without inflicting any set speech on the Council or

trenching on the valuable time of the Council. At the very beginning, Sir, I think I would be failing in my duty if I did not thank the Hon'ble the Finance Member for the trouble that he has taken in the preparation of the budget. Everywhere we find signs of the special care he has taken towards retrenchment except of course in certain places which it shall be my painful duty to point out as far as I can. Of course it is well known, Sir, to every member of this House that to live beyond one's means is objectionable and reprehensible even to a private individual. If it is reprehensible to a private person it is doubly reprehensible to an officer who is the custodian of the public purse. Of course we have heard the Finance Member in his speech introducing the budget and with the permission of the House I shall read that portion to which I wish to make reference at this moment. He said that "the taxation measures put forward by the Government were approved by the Legislature but notwithstanding, the current year closes not only with all the provincial balances exhausted but with an overdraft which we estimate at Rs. 7,28,000." Then again in the next paragraph he says: "The year for which we are budgeting thus begins with a minus balance and in spite of all efforts the estimated expenditure will exceed estimated receipts by Rs. 72,000." Now, Sir, I think though the Hon'ble Finance Member said at first sight no outlook could be more hopeless I can only concur with the Hon'ble Finance Member when he gave expression to that sentiment. Of course it must be admitted that the prospect is rather hopeless. But I am not ignorant of the fact that if no unprecedented calamities happen and the year be a peaceful one we may hope with the Hon'ble Finance Member to see expenditure kept within bounds and that improvement will gradually accrue. Now, Sir, so far as I understand hon'ble members of this House have since the last two years been very keen about retrenchment and I must admit so far as I have been informed that to a certain extent they have been successful. We have no other course open to us if we must go on with keeping up the Government so that retrenchments must be effected. Where and how are the two questions before the Council. I have seen that the Hon'ble Finance Member has been at pains even to reduce the amount allotted on very small heads such as feeding of cattle as laid down at page 91 of the Budget, medical stores (page 154), free distribution of medicines (page 154), hospital charges (page 69), dietary charges (page 69), lighting charges (page 69), cost of medical stores, sick diet and extra diet (page 72); conservancy (page 72). These are minor items of expenditure and the Hon'ble Finance Member was put to such a strait I must say that he was obliged to cut even the smaller amounts allotted on these subjects. Now, Sir, I think in my humble opinion these are the subjects which should not have received any pruning. They should have remained intact as they were in the last year. I am not ignorant of the fact that there are certain heads on which the Hon'ble Finance Member has got no power such as non-voted subjects. He cannot for instance reduce the pay of certain officers of the Government, but as has been very ably put down by my hon'ble friends yesterday the only course to save the Government from wreckage or bankruptcy is to Indianize the services as far as possible by the Provincial Service officers. We know, Sir, that we are to pay higher salaries to the All-India Service officers and I think I speak without contradiction that there are many able officers in the Provincial Service here who can as well run a district or any department of which the All-India Service officers

are in charge now. Suppose we are paying an All-India Service officer Rs. 2,000, I think that work can be done and ably done by an Indian officer who can be satisfied with Rs. 800 or Rs. 1,000. Sir, if we make retrenchment in this way that ought to be real retrenchment, otherwise any policy of petty retrenching is no good. It will not be of any interest or good to the province. The entire policy of retrenchment is to be and must be changed. Then again certain suggestions were made yesterday by certain hon'ble members to do away with the office of one Minister and one Councillor. I am sorry, Sir, that I cannot see eye to eye with them in this matter. In my humble opinion and for obvious reasons I think both appointments should remain, but in deference to patriotic feelings I say that their salaries may possibly be reduced. But even then I say that if any reduction is sought, the post of one Executive Councillor should not be abolished. If I mistake not a whisper came to my ear that a certain gentleman who now holds the post of a Minister of this province said or rather gave it to be understood that he would not be unwilling, considering the financial condition of the province, to accept the post on a reduced scale of salary. I think nothing can be more patriotic and generous than this. So I say that keeping the posts intact but at the same time judiciously reducing the salary to a smaller sum, say Rs. 2,500 a month would be the right thing to do. I think that would be quite sufficient for a Minister when he comes from among us. I think even for that reduced pay many patriotic gentlemen would be forthcoming to take up the post, considering the financial condition of the country.

One word more, Sir, regarding retrenchment. I think full effect has not been given to the recommendations of the Assam Retrenchment Committee. Had it been done, Sir, we would not have seen so many clerks thrown out of employment. Now, the question of unemployment is a very serious one, and I invite the Hon'ble the Finance Member to look to it very seriously. The question of unemployment is not a question of this province alone, it is a question of the world to-day. All over the world we find the question of unemployment very keen. As the hon'ble members of this House know unemployment breeds discontent and discontent is a thing which every good Government should be very careful to remove. It is the fundamental duty of every good Government to see that people are not discontented. Discontentment brings in sedition in its train. So, I say that in effecting retrenchment the Government should seriously look to the question of unemployment. It is no good to throw out lots of clerks, while the highly paid officers are drawing their salaries as they were drawing before. While an officer drawing Rs. 2,000 a month can very well live on Rs. 1,500 or Rs. 1,200, a clerk earning a salary of Rs. 60 will have to starve if his pay is reduced to Rs. 30. So, I submit, Sir, that the main question, as it has already been very ably put by some hon'ble members, is to reduce the number of All-India Service officers and to man the service with Assam Provincial Service Officers, reducing the scale of pay—that is the only way to save this Government from bankruptcy.

SRIJIT NILMONI PHUKAN :—Sir, in introducing the budget for the year the Hon'ble the Finance Member said that it was an "economic budget" where he provided for "essentials alone"—meaning thereby, I believe, not to bring in any larger question of "changes of policy" as regards "the amount

or direction of its expenditure or as regards the amount or the sources of the revenue." Nothing could be wiser than this at a time when the disturbed revenue and expenditure are tending steadily towards balancing. Like a thrifty housewife the Finance Member has however succeeded in pacifying every departmental child by offering a fare not provokingly small—he has not at least over-fed any at the cost of those who are still suffering from chronic rickets. Though penury is thus at our gate, nevertheless in view of the fact that "our income has been growing while our expenditure has decreased and is decreasing" we have every reason to hope along with His Excellency that "in the course of a year or two we shall be enjoying a small surplus which will at all events enable us to make a start with some of those schemes of advance and improvement" which we no less than the Government have so much at heart. In this regard the Hon'ble the Finance Member has indeed proved himself to be a "skilful manipulator" though I hope none of us will take him for a juggler. I am further happy to be able to think that my fears of the last year have been belied and I find the Hon'ble the Finance Member still maintaining his position of dignity, not compelled by circumstances to go round with his "begging bowl," turning to any quarter for relief.

In spite of all the hopeful signs, it must be admitted, we have not reached the safe haven still and the sheet-anchor of finance has yet to be cast. Our only feeling of security is that the boat has been so far well piloted by an able hand all these years of stress and storm and is making steady headway towards a safer port.

Sir, a new feature of the budget is, as has been well said, "the inclusion of three statements which analyse the estimated expenditure." They have really proved much helpful to us as anticipated, in studying the budget. If "for the idea" the Finance Department is indebted to the Government of Bengal we on our part are much thankful to the Finance Department for this facility given.

The Hon'ble the Finance Member has invited us—if not actually invited, at least kept the gate open for us—to enter into "a general discussion of the budget as a whole and of any principles involved therein." I think he is right in thus indicating the lines of discussion. To discuss an economic budget in detail, to my mind, will be more academical than real.

In this connection I am reminded of the "axe" which is now being wielded by different Governments, whether provincial or central. True it is that we do not own such a sharp "axe" ourselves at the present moment, but lending an axe to a neighbour is a time-honoured practice in our country. Nobody will call us beggars for that. The axing operation is going on now. Its necessity has become manifest every day; only how to handle it effectively has exercised the minds of every Government. But there can be no two opinions as regards indiscriminate felling and giving too deep a cut. For the regeneration of the whole forest sometimes valuable timber has to be removed along with undergrowth. Some trees thrive better under shades, others under an open sky. All will depend upon climatic and soil conditions. I frankly say that the recent revision of the scale of pay for the ministerial officers will not bear much scrutiny. However plausible the reasons offered may appear there is the fact that when in the case of some, dainty dishes are daily coming, they are going to be deprived of a few morsels necessary to

keep the body and soul together. It was certainly not the question of merit so long unrequited that led to reorganisation of their services, but their hard lot in these days of economic stress that cried for the necessary reform. To deprive them of that now in the very act of enjoying will only increase their cravings which will perhaps bring in their train some functional disorders. This one instance of retrenchment naturally leads to the question—what principle is involved in it and how to arrive at it. Is it merely a patchwork or does it point to an utilization of new materials in a different mould? In my opinion there can be only one answer to this :—It may be anything but patchwork. The parts which fitted well the old machinery may now work as clogs to the new. Complete overhauling is necessary. In this act of overhauling, replacement of some parts may prove to be more costly and other costly parts may easily be replaced by cheap but durable invention. Extremes of both sorts—undue anxiety for false economy and extravagant desire for efficiency at any cost—should be prudently shunned. It would not be out of place here to refer to the recommendations of the Retrenchment Committees of other provinces. We are thankful to the authorities for supplying us with a copy of the Report of the Bengal Retrenchment Committee. They would have deserved our very best thanks if these copies were made available to us a few days earlier. I find there the Committee “have recommended a curtailment of particular activities of an intermediate character, either as being superfluous or because in their opinion “it is possible to substitute less costly methods without detracting from the efficient discharge of the main functions of Government.” The Report of the Bombay Committee is also out. It appears to me that they have tackled the question of the All-India and Provincial Services with strong grips and have taken the sensible view of the “rates of pay,” deprecated “inflation” of salaries, desired “standard rates of pay in all departments”. We are told that the Report of the Bengal Retrenchment Committee “is being closely examined” by our Government. We are further assured that “the examination of suggestions made will be a very serious one.” We are right glad to know all this. I would only suggest—perhaps my suggestions would appear superfluous—that our Government will take a special note of the recommendations of these Committees and others that have a direct bearing specially on the conclusions of our own Retrenchment Committee on their terms of reference.

So far as regards retrenchment. There is another aspect of the question of finance. If the spirit of retrenchment is abroad, a fear has also settled in the breast of the people that depressed finance will force up fresh taxation measures. If that exigency happens at all—which I hope will not—it is time to be forewarned and forearmed. I should not be rash enough to attempt at giving an off-hand idea of the taxable capacity of the country at this moment. But I have no doubt that the Government will not,—I say again, if the emergency happens at all—move in the old rut. We have however reassuring words of the Finance Member in this connection. In presenting the budget for the year 1921-22 he said :—“But for the present it is the intention of Government to develop its existing sources of revenue. We anticipate that land revenue will continue to increase as new land is brought under cultivation, as higher rates in progressive reassessments come into force and as our deposits of coal and oil are further exploited. I may tell the Council that in the last direction great activities are manifest. Our forest

revenues owing to a number of causes have not expanded to the extent that they might perhaps have done, but a large and rapid growth of receipts is confidently anticipated in the near future. I shall have more to say about this on another occasion and need only say here that we have recently given to commercial firms leases of one or two large areas which should in time bring in large royalties while by the grant of purchase contracts we are enabling the smaller men to exploit the forests to, we trust, their advantage as well as ours. We have also in view—and the Council will be specifically consulted about this later in the year—large schemes for working the valuable *sāl* forests in the Goalpara district." Again, "under the new system" we were told "we have an interest in the growth of receipts from taxes on incomes", and "we may expect that with the industrial development of Assam there will be larger profits to be taxed". So we can also confidently look up to Government taking stock of all these activities before feeling compelled to resort to fresh taxation. I am one of those who believe that there is a vast possibility for coal, oil, tea and timber of the province. Every facility should be given for their proper development but every reasonable farthing they should yield to the coffers of the State. These facilities remind me of the bad system of communications of the Province. No modern and modernised country has been found to have developed without a good system of communications. This will again, I am afraid, lead to development schemes. But where is the finance for that? To my mind to induce such development some initiative must be taken at any cost. If we cannot hopefully beg, or steal with impunity, we should somehow borrow and be busy. Inaction will never lead us to the promised land. We mark time only to march. In this matter our hope lies also in another direction. We should not be parsimonious in remunerative expenditure. That sort of expenditure is to be met first. Any money spent wisely at this moment on agricultural and forest improvements will ultimately amply repay. I cannot agree with those who are suspicious of the Titabar farm and the Sericultural farm.

As regards forests I make no apology in quoting substantially from the Report of the Bengal Retrenchment Committee. There they say "This is a revenue earning department, quasi-scientific and quasi-commercial and we are opposed to the reduction of any expenditure that is likely to provide a good return. The forests of the province are a valuable asset that should amply repay conservation and development." As regards departmental operations they remark "when purchasers or lessees are working a forest and extracting the produce, the expenditure is far smaller than when this is done by departmental agency. Departmental work, if properly done, yields a larger profit, but not a larger percentage of profit in proportion to expenditure. We note this because we feel that before there is any material extension of departmental operations the financial results likely to accrue will require careful examination." These remarks, I believe, hold water in the case of our forest activities also. I think forest regeneration operations have been going on in the province for a pretty long time to justify a full review of the situation with a view to wind up or extend these activities in the light of experience gained. In this connection I may suggest that it is time that the "lawless laws" of the Forest Department are properly consolidated and framed. This reminds me of Land Revenue Regulations also. In the Report of the Joint Select

Committee we find "The Committee" are impressed by the objections raised by many witnesses to the manner in which certain classes of taxation can be laid upon the people of India by executive action without, in some cases, any statutory limitation of the rates and in other cases, any adequate prescription by statute of the methods of assessment. They consider that the imposition of new burdens should be gradually brought more within the purview of the Legislature." The Committee are of opinion that the "time has come to embody in the law the main principles by which the land revenue is determined." Nowhere these remarks will be found truer than in Assam. The annual settlement is a fruitful source of harassment to ignorant ryots. The sooner the system is done away with the better.

I may be permitted to speak a word or two in connection with our existing financial resources. Under the new financial arrangements in the matter of allocation of revenues, there is much room to prevent leakage and wastage. We are thankful to the Finance Department for throwing the searchlight in many a dark nook and as a result we have been able to get back some extra-provincial revenues which so long used to slip away from our hands. More searching I am confident will reveal more grounds. But some danger is awaiting us also. The same anxiety on the part of our sister Province has compelled us to give where we so long enjoyed.

I should be false to the Reform itself if I omit to mention Education. We are fortunate at this time to have the remarkable Quinquennial Report of the Director of Public Instruction. His handling of the situation has been masterly and his suggestions provocative of most serious thoughts regarding educational ambitions of the Province and their realisations of the policy to be pursued regarding educational matters. The time has arrived for a new departure. Reform will be meaningless if there be a "world of ignorance between the villager and the vote." I am afraid the efforts of the Government in this direction have not been all that could be desired. The country suffered long from the policy of neglect of the East India Company for more than a century. It is true the same indifference is not there now, but there is still wanting a will to grapple the problem more energetically. For the last two years I have been crying hoarse over the lot of the aided schools and other educational institutions, but to no effect. Last year even a sum of Rs. 16,000 could not be found for helping the aided institutions. But two official quarters were built at Jorhat at a cost of Rs. 64,000, I believe, only to be occupied by ghosts. No further comment is necessary.

Again I find in the introductory speech of the Hon'ble Finance Member regarding excise receipts. "A marked recovery in excise receipts is anticipated now that the times are normal, and this despite the fact that we have increased the price of excisable articles, further reduced issues and added to existing restrictions." Then it seems all these restrictive measures have not been able to cope with the vice. I have no doubt as a result of the last opium census a further policy will have to be adopted and may I not again suggest registration in some selected areas?

Sir, I should like to see the Jorhat State Railway either mended or ended. We cannot afford to keep it at a loss.

I congratulate the Inspector-General of Police for his bold cut in his department. It is no small satisfaction for me to know now that our reduction of the Armed Police budget was not irresponsible and unwise.

I have grave doubts whether floating dâk bungalows have any regular use now-a-days.

Sir, I beg to conclude with a hope that years will bring peace and prosperity to the province under the beneficent guidance of a worthy successor of a most constitutional Governor whom we are proud to possess.

MR. W. D. SMILES :—Sir, we used to have a saying in Ireland “another injustice”. But after two days in this Council I feel sure that even an extraordinary peaceful people like the Irish would feel aggrieved at the injustices Assam has to suffer. Another injustice which I bring to your notice is the tax of 6 annas per gallon on petrol—another tax levied in Assam and appropriated by the Imperial Government. We have no objection to reasonable taxation so long as the industry is prosperous. We would not mind paying a small export tax on tea provided the money is used for the treatment of diseases like *kala-azar*, hookworm, etc., in the province : or we should not object to the tax on petrol provided this was used for communications in the plains. Why is the price of petrol so high in Assam and why are we paying here for cheap week-end joy-riding in England? We are in the hands of a Trust—the great Burma Oil Company. This Company as well as its big interests in Assam and in Burma, also hold with the British Government the bulk of the ordinary shares of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. I will suggest that the Assam Government give no more concessions to this Company until they undertake to sell their petrol in Assam at least as cheaply as they do in England. There is a saying ‘the nearer the bone, the sweeter the meat’. In Assam the nearer the oil-well, the dearer the petrol (*Laughter*). Letters to the Burma Oil Company have produced no result, they only promise a reduction in the price of petrol by 6 annas per gallon provided the taxation is taken off. Petrol is sold for 11 annas per gallon in New York, but we have got to pay Re. 1-15 in Assam. The late President Roosevelt by legislation broke the monopoly of the Trusts in America and I hope the Assam Government will emulate his example.

I see very few signs of expensive administration in the province. At every Local Board meeting we suffer from the hidden hand at Shillong, whether it is a matter of four ounces of santonine for a dispensary or Rs. 50 for repairing a bridge. I have heard the Hon’ble Member for Finance being criticised as stingy, parsimonious and “The Shylock of Shillong” is one of his latest titles (*Laughter*). If to be abused on the score of economy is a compliment, then our Member for Finance has good reason to congratulate himself. We do not ask for a fair play from the Imperial Government. That is too much to expect. Look at our sister Colony, the Malay States. Look at their roads, their hospitals and their schools : compare them with those that you have got in Assam. When their rubber industry was in a bad way, their Government saved it by legislation and enforced restriction. When the tea industry here was going through bad times, the Government of India does its best to “kill the goose that lays the golden eggs”.

Mr. Roffey has pointed out to you that 60 lakhs has been filched from this province. If the Hon'ble Member for Finance will include the tax on petrol, this will come to a considerably larger figure.

Assam has got the unenviable reputation of being too loyal and it does not seem to pay. When the Imperial Government is searching for money for experiments in exchange or for building a new capital at Delhi, they say "What more can we get out of the Planters, they are loyal they wont squeal". I have heard in this Council Chamber the expression 'poor and backward community' applied to Assam. If we had only a part of our deserts, "rich " and " progressive " would be more suitable expressions.

KHAN SAHIB SARAFAT ALI CHAUDHURI:—Sir, I beg to say a few words. I went through the budget estimates produced by the Hon'ble the Finance Member and after scrutiny I find that the budget estimate for the year under discussion was very carefully and cautiously and economically prepared leaving very little behind for further curtailment, rather I ought to thank the Hon'ble Finance Member for the way in which he has prepared his budget in the time of such a financial crisis of the Province. It is well known to all the hon'ble members of the House that the figures of receipts and expenditure are generally given in the budget under many heads as probable amount and nobody could forecast the actual receipts and expenditure previously for next year, so we may hope to make up our deficit next year or the year after next if we be fortunate to get normal years. In case we be unfortunate, then there will be more deficit than there is now.

Some of the hon'ble members are very anxious for early retrenchment in the province which I understand will no doubt be made in time by the Government considering the circumstances all round. This retrenchment means to cut the neck of many people with their wives, children and other family members whether rich or poor. In the circumstances this is not an easy task on the part of Government to make all these horrible retrenchments immediately and all at once; so we must wait and see to these patiently.

I heard the speeches of some of the hon'ble members of this House yesterday. Though they have given thanks to the Inspector General of Police for his drastic measures taken in the reduction of more than five per cent. in the Assam Rifles, yet they want more reduction in the Police. As for myself what I find is that the Inspector General of Police has taken far more drastic measures in this direction immediately than any other department in the province. He has at once abolished his Police Training School from Dibrugarh, his Military Assistant and other staff and ordered 15 per cent. reduction in constabulary, etc., etc. So far as I know the Police are the backbone of the Government. They are the eyes, nose and ears of the administration of the province to keep peace and order everywhere whether in the open place or in the jungle. Either in the plains or in the hills, whether on the water or on the shore they are for safety of life and property of the public though they are generally a hated thing to the ignorant class of people who have no internal idea of police. If the Inspector General of Police takes further drastic measures in this way, I am afraid he could not keep peace and order in the province with a small force at the time of need and emergent calls from different directions. Under the circumstances in my humble opinion there should not be any further retrenchment in the Police.

Similarly, Sir, I am not in favour of more retrenchment in the Education Department which is the main part and parcel of the development of self-government for which we are assembled here to-day. It is a well-known fact to all that without mass education in the country we cannot expect to go up the ladder soon. Some of the hon'ble members said yesterday in the discussion for the economic purpose to take a step to reduce one Minister and one Executive Council Member, but as for myself I strongly oppose such an unwise proposal of reduction in this direction, which will no doubt hinder our efficient and proper administration of the province at the beginning of the development of self-government, and His Excellency may be pleased to fill up the vacancy created by the sad demise of the Hon'ble Minister of Local Self-Government.

In conclusion, I beg to draw the most serious attention of the Hon'ble Minister of Education and the Director of Public Instruction to the great setback which Muslim education in the province has received from the non-co-operation movement. We look to them for the revival and progress of education of our community and hope they will spare no pains to improve the situation.

KHAN BAHADUR MUHAMMAD BAKHT MAJUMDAR :—Sir, I beg to speak a few words on the budget. First of all I heartily congratulate the Hon'ble the Finance Member for the retrenchment he has been able to effect in the expenditure. I equally share with him in his anxieties to find a solution to the difficulty of the situation. It would be denying hard facts to say that our financial position is in any way hopeful. I should think that the axe of retrenchment can be even now laid more effectively on many other bigger items which the Hon'ble Member would do well to curtail. Enough has been achieved at the bottom, now we should look up to the head which is too heavy to permit the bottom or the foundation to bear its lean structure. It would be suicidal to the cause of responsible self-government if the popular element on the cabinet, *i.e.*, the Minister, were to be reduced in number. The aim of the Reforms is to gradually increase their number and to decrease the Executive Members as the Ministers are increased. It would be a sheer disservice to the country if I were to suggest the reduction of the popular element. It would be false economy too. I am therefore strongly opposed to any idea or suggestion like this.

In conclusion I wish to invite the sympathy of the Government to the great need for the encouragement and special attention to Muslim education which has been so much interfered with by the non-co-operation movement. Nothing is so lamentable as this. I hope the Hon'ble the Education Minister will kindly do his best to give fresh stimulus for the education of the Muslims.

With these few words I beg to resume my seat.

MAULAVI MUNAWWARALI :—Sir, I had hesitated whether I should make a speech when so many hon'ble members have reflected on the budget so ably during these two days, but, Sir, I did not like to be a silent spectator here, so I will briefly put in my opinion on the budget.

The Hon'ble the Finance Member has received much encomium for the reduction he has effected in various ways. I think, Sir, he deserves it to the extent the hon'ble members have been pleased to give it. The chief merit of the Hon'ble the Finance Member to my mind to deserve our thanks is the anxiety he has shown all through the budget to curtail expenditure, but I must confess that he does not deserve our gratitude in this that he has not been able to place before us a budget which is a hopeful budget. No budget, Sir, is so hopeless as the one presented before us, inasmuch as the budget is not only a deficit budget but one which bears a negative opening as well as a closing balance. Sir, I consider the situation to be not only desperate but very, very hopeless. Let us hope that circumstances will be very favourable to us so that at the end of the year the Hon'ble the Finance Member might deserve our gratitude as well. The order of the day is retrenchment and other hon'ble members of the House have shown retrenchment to be the only remedy, rather the antidote to the present situation and I for one am prepared to agree with them. It will be very good for us if we were to picture to ourselves the possibilities brought in the train of the Reforms. Under the Reformed Government we are face to face with deficit budgets; and why? Are the Reforms responsible for these? I would say, Sir, that the Reforms are not. When we closely examine the Reforms we find that not much of our expenditure is due to these. I shall consider that the retrenchment is being carried on not in the right direction. Reforms came in our midst in the nature of a beneficent earthquake—I use the expression “beneficent earthquake” as it shifted the centre of gravity of the Government. From a single aristocratic ruler it has shifted it to the present dyarchy. The Governor with his cabinet and guided by the advice of the legislature is the first step towards progressive realisation of responsible Government. It is an earthquake and a beneficent one it must always be remembered. Organisation and reorganisation have to take place according to the light of the Reforms. So, Sir, it will not do to look to the bottom alone. The bottom as well as the top is shaken and it would not be doing justice to the Reforms if we were to confine our attention to the bottom alone. They affect the high and the low, the bottom and the top alike, and all must submit to the fate as they cannot but, if the Reforms are to remain,—they are fated. The old order is to change yielding place to the new—in form, in spirit, and in the very outlook. Having regard to this we should find how many officials are redundant, how many superfluities there are, and I would invite the very serious attention of the Hon'ble the Finance Member to look to the Reforms as his ideal and cut and lay his axe wherever he finds that the old order of things does not conform to the Reforms, and it will be found that we have emerged triumphantly from the present calamity that is staring us in the face. The report of the Bengal Retrenchment Committee which is on our table has striven to give an idea as to what the superstructure of the present Reformed Government should be made of, and how, and although we know that many of the recommendations are defective yet one point is very sure, and it is this that it has striven to give us an idea as to what the machinery of the present Government should be and how it should be reorganised. We press for retrenchment not only for economy, we press for it also to conform the old state of things with the changed conditions brought on by the Reforms. Other hon'ble members of the House have exhaustively dealt with the budget and I do not like to discuss the matter at any

great length but will put forward a few suggestions. Indianisation is I would urge, as I have urged on previous occasions, a sure remedy. Also the scale of pay in the services—I do not mean that the Government servants who are at present employed should have a lower scale of pay than they are at present drawing, but that there should be a scale of pay according to the resources of the province, and I think very able officers would be available at a reasonably reduced scale of pay in the future. I would put it to you, Sir, whether the Local Fund Audit establishment that exists in this province is an indispensable necessity and whether or not the Comptroller as he used to do the audit work before could not again manage the work as well. The post of Economic Botanist seems to be unnecessary; the Law College at Gauhati may well be abolished because the number of pupils therein does not justify a costly establishment like that. Rupees 19,000 might be saved, as in the case of dispensing with the services of the Economic Botanist Rs. 6,600 could be saved, and in the case of the Local Fund Audit establishment Rs. 45,000 annually could be saved. Sir, we send annually many teachers to be trained in colleges in Bengal, but does the necessity still exist for sending our people to different provinces for training? By discontinuing this we may save Rs. 25,500 annually. There are at present many trained teachers who are out of employment whose services may be well utilized. Our normal schools which cost us Rs. 83,800 annually may also be abolished because nowadays there are suitable and well qualified persons available for the pay we are offering to our primary teachers; of course with a little bit higher pay this can be better done. In that case we can effect a saving of Rs. 63,800. In the case of Agriculture I should request the Government to insist on not allowing any further expansion to this. Cultivators left to themselves would be found to be very good practical persons and with a little help from the Agriculture Department they would do quite well. I would suggest a single administrative head for Agriculture, Industries, Co-operative Credit Societies, because these are subjects inter-dependent one way or another and would be well managed by one single head. As regards forests one of the hon'ble speakers to-day has said that the forest laws are lawless laws. I quite agree with him and with a view to that the other day I sent in a resolution asking the Government to take to forest legislation. Sir, I do not like to give specific ideas as to that but I would urge upon the House the fact that new forest laws are a *sine qua non* at present. I would give more attention to the subject later on and probably if the Government do not undertake legislation I might be under the necessity of bringing forward a Bill myself.

Sir, the retrogression which Moslem education has received has been fully explained to you by several of my hon'ble Moslem friends to-day. I need not dilate upon it by saying that retrogression has been very severely felt but I am thankful to the Hon'ble Minister for Education who also has felt keenly about it and has spoken to me about it most sympathetically. I hope he will do his best to ameliorate the condition of Moslem education.

Sir, the scourge, and a great catastrophe that has overtaken the Province is *kala-azar*. We cannot do better than save the last farthing to combat this scourge of humanity. I was under the impression that my subdivision at least was free from it, but it galled me when I heard the other day that a few thousand cases were discovered in my subdivision.....

THE HON'BLE RAI BAHADUR PROMODE CHANDRA DUTTA :—
Not a few thousands, but about 500 only.

MAULAVI MUNAWWARALI. :—

And it is expected that many more will be discovered (*laughter*).

As to the question of the University, the Bengal Legislative Council by introducing Bills have ignored the claims of Assam. This is a very serious question of which the Government as well as the Council would do well to take stock and try their best to secure a place, an honourable place, for Assam in the constitution of the University. Sir, I do not wish to speak on any more subjects to-day as I have already said that my predecessors have done full justice to them. I must conclude by saying that in our seriousness and anxiety for economy let us not forget that we must not lay our axe at wrong places but we must always be unsparing where to do so can be justified. I cannot lay greater stress on the necessity of economy in every direction but I should warn the Council as well as the Government not to embark on retrenchment on wrong lines. I do not like to tire the House at this stage and would now resume my seat.

HAJI MUHAMMAD ABDUL AHAD CHAUDHURI :—Sir, I wish to make one or two observations only. Our financial position this year is undoubtedly more desperate than it has ever been. We do not really quite know how best we can properly meet the position. Our Finance Member has been exerting his utmost to ease the situation by retrenchment and he has achieved much in that direction for which he deserves our hearty congratulations. I think that is the right direction and much more remains yet to be achieved. There are great possibilities of retrenchment in higher services and in several other respects which should be properly dealt with. Bankruptcy of our Province to be removed by curtailing unnecessary expenditure, is the only possible remedy. Permit me, Sir, to express my heartfelt gratitude to His Excellency the Governor for the appointment of a non-official Indian to officiate for the Hon'ble Judicial Member during his absence on leave and I hope henceforward the policy of the Government will be to appoint non-official Indians to the post of Executive Member.

Sir, I have noticed in the Budget estimate that the salary of the Hon'ble President has been reduced to Rs. 500 per mensem. Retrenchment welcome though it is in these days of financial stress and strain should also be proper. I think to give Rs. 500 only to a gentleman adorning such a dignified position, at a place like Shillong is to expect too much from him. His family budget like our Provincial Budget cannot but end with a heavy *minus* closing balance. To my mind Rs. 1,000 is the minimum salary that can be given to the President. I hope, Sir, that I may not be misunderstood for what I think to be economy not in the proper line. I shall be glad to see the President's salary restored to what it was. It is well-known to what a great extent the Moslem education of the province has been hampered by the non-co-operation movement. My earnest appeal to the Government, to the Hon'ble Minister of Education, and to the Director of Public Instruction is that they may kindly see their way to devise means for bringing about a speedy amelioration of the untoward situation.

One word more and I have done. I beg to record my emphatic protest against any idea of reducing the popular element on the cabinet. Such would be crushingly detrimental to the real interests of the country and would militate against the spirit of reforms and nullify their effect. The salary it may be conceded may be reduced to a certain extent but never the number. The vacant post of Minister may therefore be filled up.

With these few words I beg to take my seat.

MAULAVI RASHID ALI LASKAR :—Sir, we were very glad to see that unlike other provinces in India Assam began the reforms by a very solvent budget—I say very solvent, because we began with an opening balance of 48 lakhs of rupees which is about a quarter of the entire revenue of this province, but I am sorry, Sir, that within two years of the beginning of the reforms our position has become wretched. We have not only consumed this surplus amount but also have gone about with the begging bowl for Rs. 7,28,000 and this is all within the short space of two years. When I look at this aspect of our budget I am sorry, Sir, to think that I cannot associate myself with many of the hon'ble members in giving credit to our Finance Department. The difference between the opening balance and the closing balance in the year 1922-23 goes up to about 14 lakhs, in spite of the 5 per cent. retrenchment, but for which I believe it would have gone up to say over 25 lakhs of rupees. The future is darker still and this is indirectly—no, why indirectly, rather expressly hinted at by the Hon'ble Finance Member in paragraph 5 of his speech introducing the budget. There he says in one place that the 'situation bad as it undoubtedly is, is yet not wholly desperate.' Mark, Sir, the words the situation is bad and desperate but only not wholly desperate (*laughter*). If we consumed 48 lakhs of surplus money and Rs. 7,28,000 overdraft from imperial funds which is more than a quarter of the entire receipts of the province in two years' time and if the present state of affairs continues—I do not see any sign why it should not continue—then, Sir, it does not require an expert or say a Finance Member to foretell that our complete bankruptcy is sure within a decade, perhaps before the next instalment of the Reforms comes. Now naturally two questions arise. What is the root-cause of this hasty run into bankruptcy, and what may be the probable remedy for that? The Finance Department tries to attribute it on the receipt side to the effects of the non-co-operation movement and on the expenditure side to the building of the Council Chamber for us to sit in, colleges to read in, tramways to travel in, contributing some amount to the High Court at Calcutta for us to receive justice. But, Sir, similar expenditure has always been and should always be; because taxes are not meant for tax collectors only, but some sort of substantial and productive works, at least some such works, the tax-payers should get in return. They should get some benefit which may be productive in future. Now, this is not the cause of our deficit. To my mind it appears, if not entirely, at least certainly to a great extent, that it is due to the inconsiderate, unnecessarily, but disproportionately generous increment of salaries given. In this connection, Sir, I beg to quote the report of the Bengal Retrenchment Committee which was so very kindly given us only yesterday. "When on account of the war, prices began to rise, establishments were granted relief

in the form of temporary allowances, which continued until they were replaced by permanent revisions on a time-scale basis. Most of the revisions were made in the year 1920, when prices were at their highest, and we think it was precipitate to stabilise rates of pay at that juncture. There has certainly been a fall in the cost of living since 1920, and tendencies point to a continuance in this direction." Increments were given, it appears, for giving's sake without any regard to the necessity to give and the power to give. If increments be given more than proportionate to the increase in receipts of the Province the result is obviously bankruptcy; when such is the case the Province cannot but become bankrupt. Of course, it would be bankrupt when the whole revenue is being used in rearing up so many official agencies without giving any return to the tax-payer. The Government tendency at present appears to be directed to maintaining such agencies rather than returning any benefit to the people who are now on the verge of bankruptcy. This is the situation that we have arrived at now. Then, Sir, what is the remedy? The Government propose two remedies, one retrenchment and the other taxation. Taxation is out of the question as it is simply horrible and inhuman at the present stage of the country to tax further the half-fed, half-clad people. So that we have to go back to retrenchment. Retrenchment is good in principle but it is quite contrary in its application in the way it is adopted by the Government. The country, the Council and the Retrenchment Committee wanted retrenchment in one way and Government want to retrench in another way. People want the abolition of superfluous and sinecure posts, but Government drives out bag and baggage the poor peons and clerks for no fault of their own. Sir, the Government is looked upon by the people as their *ma bap*, but no father at the time of scarcity, if his means becomes insufficient to feed all his family well, will drive out some of his children in order to supply food to the remaining ones. Again Government retrenchment appears to be directed more against men than for money; because if it were meant for real retrenchment, for the saving of money, then it would apply where the abolition of one post would have saved, say 30 poor clerks and as many families dependent upon them. But they are not going to do that. So I say retrenchment in itself is good but the application at present adopted is quite in the contrary way. I would rather prefer to have no retrenchment at all than to have this sort of retrenchment. Again while the people are clamouring for lightening the top of the Government in order to make it steady, what is the Government doing? They are weakening the legs with the result, I am afraid, of some day the structure tumbling down. If they do not want to effect retrenchment in the proper direction, then I ask them, for God's sake, not to blacken their hands by killing little mosquitoes, but if possible and if they dare they should bag a few lions which will both add to their name and to the solvency of the budget. Then, Sir, as regards the real remedies that I can propose, I think the remedies should be in the way of removal and suspension of the causes that led to this sort of deficits. In this connection I beg to read a few lines from the report of the Bengal Retrenchment Committee. "The financial position and outlook of the province can scarcely be regarded as satisfactory, and without further taxation there is little prospect of substantial improvement except by the reduction of expenditure. When little money is available for the

development of much-needed activities, the maintenance of a more expensive agency than is necessary constitutes a drain on provincial resources that is open to criticism." Then in another place the report says :—"The present system if persisted in must lead in time to the employment of an indigenous agency at an unnecessarily high rate of remuneration, and to an unjustifiable imposition on provincial revenues. Much harm has already resulted. The recruitment of Indians to the All-India services has created an unnecessarily high standard of remuneration in the provincial and subordinate services, and has led in some instances to the promotion of Indians from a provincial to an Imperial service without any increase of duties or responsibilities. We consider that the recruitment of Indians on the present terms to the All-India services should cease, and that such Indianization as may be determined on should be made from the sole standpoint of provincial conditions."

Then, Sir, what is the condition of our people? The people are being crushed under heavy taxes. Poor peons and clerks are being kicked out and yet the budget is so heavily in deficit. What appears to be seen is only the rearing up of, and providing of luxuries for, a class of fortunate people drawing fabulously large salaries which is in my opinion little short of legalised robberies. In consideration of the present condition of the budget the old graded scale should be substituted in the place of the present time-scale, or at least increments should be suspended until the budget from which these people are to get their salaries shall again be balanced; and I understand that already in some offices this time-scale basis is being substituted by the old graded scale. If that be so why should not this system apply to one and all, high and low, touchable and untouchable? Then, Sir, according to the idea of the people there are many posts which can safely be abolished. There are many departments which may be safely amalgamated with much saving. Some of the hon'ble members have already suggested that the post of the Superintending Engineer is kept now although he has got no office and no original work to look after. Similarly the posts of the Deputy Superintendents of Police are to a great extent only clerical posts which can be safely abolished and, if necessary, some clerks may be appointed in their places. These are only a few instances. There are many such rooms for economy in this direction. And the last remedy in my opinion would be the Indianisation of many services. By 'Indianisation' I do not mean that if an Indian is posted to a place which is held by a European, he should also get the salary that the European is getting. Not that, he should get a salary according to the conditions of the province. And this will save much expenditure. Last of all, Sir, I specially request the hon'ble members and the hon'ble members on the Government side to try their best to give effect to the recommendations of the Bengal Retrenchment Committee in Chapters XXI and XXII about the Indianisation of services and to rectify the present salary charges. These and nothing less than these measures will save this province and rectify the budget.

THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT :—Is there any other member who would like to speak?

The Council was then adjourned to Saturday, the 7th April 1923 at 11 A.M.

SHILLONG :

The 10th April 1923.

A. MELLOR,

Secretary to the Legislative Council, Assam.