

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 Monday the 9th April 1923, at 2-30 P.M.

P R E S E N T :

The Hon'ble Rai Bahadur Nalini Kanta Ray Dastidar, *President*, the Hon'ble two Members of the Executive Council, the Hon'ble Minister of Education and 34 nominated and elected members.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

(UNSTARRED QUESTIONS.)

SRIJUT BEPIN CHANDRA GHOSE asked :—

Suits instituted by Mechpara Court of Wards.

1. (a) Do the Government know that the Mechpara Court of Wards at Goalpara have instituted about 900 cases under sections 105, 105A and 106 of the Bengal Tenancy Act (1885) as extended to Goalpara ?

(b) Are the Government aware that a large number of these cases is going to be transferred to the Munsiff's court at Goalpara and the settlement court is not going to sit after 31st of March 1923 owing to financial reasons ?

Appointment of whole-time munsiff at Goalpara.

2. If the answer to question 18 be in the affirmative, will the Government be pleased to consider the desirability of appointing a whole-time Munsiff,—preferably a law graduate at Goalpara ?

THE HON'BLE MR. W. J. REID replied :—

1. (a)—On the 7th March last 824 such cases had been instituted.

(b)—The Government have no information, but up to the 7th March only one case had been transferred to the Munsiff's Court. The Settlement Officer's Court will continue to sit up to the 30th June 1923.

2.—Does not arise.

MAULAVI ABDUL KHALIQUE CHAUDHURI asked :—

Promotion in Subordinate Educational Service.

1. (a) Is it a fact that in making promotion from Class I to Class II of the Subordinate Educational Service regard is not exclusively and rigidly paid to seniority or merit ?

(b) Is it not at the discretion of the Director of Public Instruction to promote a Muhammadan or a Hindu to Class II for posts of Deputy Inspector, Head Master and Assistant Head Master ?

THE HON'BLE RAI BAHADUR PROMODE CHANDRA DUTTA replied :—

1. (a) and (b)—Promotion to Class II of the Subordinate Educational Service is ordinarily made from Class I of that Service, due regard being had, to seniority and merit in selecting officers for promotion.

It is however in the power of the Director of Public Instruction to decide with reference to any particular vacancy.

(1)—that an outsider should be appointed,

or

(2)—that it ought to be filled by an officer belonging to a particular community.

MAULAVI ABDUL KHALIQUE CHAUDHURI asked :—

2. Will the Government be pleased (a) to refer to the reply sent me by letter No. Apptt.—25-99A.P., dated the 5th January 1923, to my question No. 20 asked at the last September session of the Council and state what steps have been taken to secure further communal representations during the year 1922-23, and (b) to lay on the table a statement showing names and qualifications of all the candidates praying for the appointment from the beginning of 1921 till the 15th March 1923, indicating the successful ones ?

Communal
representation.

MR. A. W. BOTHAM replied :—

2. (a)—The returns received during the year 1922-23 showed that the orders of Government regarding the representation of Muhammadans were being observed.

(b)—Government do not propose to collect the information as this would involve a disproportionate amount of time and trouble.

MAULAVI SAIYID SAMIUR RAHMAN asked :—

1. Will the Government be pleased to lay a statement showing the names of Makhtabs in the Sylhet district ?

Names of
Makhtabs in
Sylhet dis-
trict.

2. Will the Government be pleased to state what arrangements have been made to remove the latrine attached to the Habiganj Moslem Boarding from its present site ?

Habiganj
Moslem
Boarding.

THE HON'BLE RAI BAHADUR PROMODE CHANDRA DUTTA replied :—

1.—Government consider that no useful purpose will be served by the collection of the information which will involve trouble and labour incommensurate with the results.

2.—No proposal to remove the latrine has been under consideration.

RESOLUTIONS.

SEX DISQUALIFICATION.

MAULAVI MUNAWWARALI :—I beg, Sir, to move :—

“That this Council recommends to the Government that ‘sex disqualification’ with regard to voting for election of members to the Legislative Council, be removed”.

It is known to you, Sir; that the Legislative Council rules, the rules for election, do not give franchise to the women. It is with a view to remove that disqualification that I am bringing forward my resolution. First of all, Sir, permit me to clear the position by saying that my resolution means nothing more than the recognition of a *just, inherent, and existing* right. What I want to do is only to give, to invest that *just, inherent, and existing* right with legal sanction, and nothing more than this. It is just because it strives after nothing but a return, an equivalent for what they actually pay. It is something which is to be given in return for what women actually pay. In these days of democracy, Sir, it would be unjust on our part to keep one side of the population undeveloped while developing the other side. It is *inherent* because it is a common heritage of humanity. It is nothing but giving women their dues. Sir, if a man pays a certain amount of tax, he can vote, but paying that very amount of tax does not entitle a woman to vote because it is paid by a member of the other sex and because the law-making power is in the hands of males. Is it just that women should thus be deprived of this right? For the harmonious development of the body politic it is essentially necessary that both the females as well as the males should develop their thoughts and their culture equally and proportionately so as to be equal partners in the body politic. It may be asked, Sir—has there been a demand grade for it? Well, I should say to this, I must give this the crushing reply by asking, “Did the Khasis of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills demand the civilising influence that the Christian Missionaries are imparting”? It is nothing but a humanitarian question, it is a question of humanity and the demand is all the stronger because it is a question of human improvement. Sir, the women have not demanded it, is it proper on the part of the Government to do nothing knowing full well that justice, equity and good conscience demand it? If it were so no uncivilised nations on the surface of this earth would have become civilised, for no uncivilised people have ever demanded for civilisation.

I hope, Sir, that my resolution will not be misunderstood. Some of the hon. members might be thinking that I am going to thrust a right upon women. There is no compulsion. The idea of compulsion is altogether absent. It is nothing but an opportunity given to the women. If there are some willing, they only might utilise it. Nobody forces a woman to come forward and vote. It is her option. It depends upon her sweet will. According to the Hindu religion, Sir, a woman is the half of man and an Englishman calls her his “better half.” And it would have been presumptuous on my part if I were to bring forward a resolution which would not have the sanction of my religion. My religion, gives the greatest possible liberty to the woman. It is in the *Koran Sherif* that men and women should have equal rights, and equal opportunities, and when Islamic religion was fresh I will show you how that spirit was acted up to to the very letter.

Now, let me, Sir, examine our position, the position of the people of India with regard to this very question. I will tell you that Bombay, Madras and the United Provinces have already adopted the resolution on the "removal of sex-disqualification" and I am very much encouraged to notice that in the United Provinces the resolution received overwhelming support from the Mussalman members of that Council, who are mainly responsible for the passing of that resolution there. I must invite the attention of my Moslem brethren to the spirit of Islam which exists in the United Provinces. It was the seat of the Moghuls, it was the seat of the Pathan Rulers and there the Islamic spirit is more fresh than elsewhere and we would do very well to act up to the policy of our Moslem brethren in the United Provinces. I will just draw from the Islamic history. I do not know if my other co-religionist brethren are aware of the names of Khaula, Zubeida, Rabeya, and in our own India - Nur Jehan, Chand Sultana, Jahan-Ara, Raushan-Ara, Zeibun Nesa, and in our own days the Bai-Amma, and the Begam Saheba of Bhopal. Eliminate the Begum Saheba from the Islamic body politic of India, and see where you are. She is the Chancellor of the Moslem University, the greatest Islamic centre of culture and learning in the world. I will tell the House that she is not only the first lady Chancellor of an Indian University, she is the first lady Chancellor of any University of the world at any time. She is the first woman Chancellor in the history of the world. Those who have been at Aligarh must have seen what her activities in connection with education and in all other respects have done for the Mussalman. I will just mention a few names from the Hindu history. Who is not aware of the names of *Khana*, of *Lilaboti*, of *Gargi*? These are only a few from the myriads.

Sir, I do not like to say anything more than this that this is a resolution which demands the heartiest support of all the members of whatever creed, of whatever religion he may be. We know how greatly and how hard our sisters of England, the suffragists, fought for their franchise and how ultimately they succeeded. The wave of that spirit has already touched the shore of India and reached several provinces here. Should we, Sir, be lagging behind? Sir, the other day only, in the March session of the Council, we adopted a resolution, namely that of woman franchise in a municipality. We have adopted it so far as the right of voting is concerned. I myself gave my most violent opposition to a motion brought forward by my worthy friend Srijut Dalim Chandra Borah who to my mind seemed to have been somewhat wide of the mark. He was going to give the woman the right not only of voting, but of sitting as a member in the Municipal Council. To me as a business man that seemed to be rather too wide of the mark. So I opposed it. Let us first of all give them a beginning and see how they do and that is the proper way of introducing reforms. The principle we have already adopted. I propose to-day to give a wider application to that principle and there is no bar to carrying out this resolution. If we do not do so, it should be contrary to what we already have done. With these few words, I commend the resolution to the consideration of the hon. House.

THE HON'BLE MR. A. MAJID :—Sir, I have listened with interest to the speech which has just been delivered by my hon. friend, the mover of the resolution. It may safely be said, Sir, that there are people who think that franchise ought to be given to women, and also that there are

other people who think quite otherwise. The question is one which admits of discussion from opposite points of view and arguments can be urged for and against it at interminable length. I would therefore ask the Council to consider whether they should dwell too much upon the theoretical side of the question and whether they should not examine this question from a practical stand-point. Hon'ble members are aware of the Report of the Southborough Committee. That Committee after a patient and laborious investigation submitted a valuable report. In that Report, the following observations occur :—

“ We are satisfied that the social conditions of India make it premature to extend the franchise to Indian women at this juncture, when so large a proportion of male electors require education in the use of a responsible vote. Further, until the custom of seclusion of women, followed by many classes and communities, is relaxed, female suffrage would hardly be a reality ; it would be out of harmony with the conservative feeling of the country ; and it would involve grave difficulties in the actual recording of votes. Whilst appreciating the object of those who advocate this measure as an aid to the emancipation of women, we have decided not to recommend the extension of the suffrage to them, but are of opinion that at the next revision (as contemplated by the Joint Report) of the constitutions of the Councils the matter should be reconsidered in the light of the experience gained of the working of the electoral system and of social conditions as they then exist. ”

The distinguished body of statesmen who formed the Joint Parliamentary Committee seemed to have recommended the exercise of prudence and caution. The Select Committee in their Report made, among others, the following observations :—

“ The question whether women should or should not be admitted to the franchise on the same terms as men should be left to the newly elected legislative Council of each province to settle by resolution. ”

These remarks seem to imply that the question is not to be decided upon abstract theoretical considerations, but that it should be examined by people with local knowledge from a practical stand-point. Their recommendation was that :—

“ The Government of India should be instructed to make rules so that, if a legislative Council so voted, women might be put upon the register of voters in that province. ”

In accordance with that recommendation, the Government made the following proviso in *Rule 7(1) of the Electoral Rules*.

“ Provided further that, if a resolution is passed by the Council after not less than one month's notice has been given of an intention to move such a resolution, recommending that sex disqualification for registration should be removed either in respect of women generally or any class of women the Local Government shall make regulations providing that women or a class of women, as the case may be, shall not be disqualified for registration by reason only of their sex. ”

The rule seems to imply that this question is not to be settled on mere theoretical considerations. It should be settled by the people, like the hon. members of this Council, with knowledge of local conditions exercising their judgment and discretion with reference to local circumstances, local conditions and local needs. In considering the present resolution, it should be remembered that a voter cannot vote by a proxy, that the voter must appear in person to record his vote and this is a very important point which must be borne in mind. I will not enter into any controversy on questions relating to Islamic law and usage, in regard to the question of *pardah*, but I think I may safely say that in this province there is a large body of Hindus and Muhammadans who believe in *pardah* and do observe *pardah*. I do not know whether the hon. members who believe in and keep up *pardah* would like their women to show their faces and appear in public places, where one may meet a mixed crowd of men and women. Should we not wait till ideas relating to *pardah* get modified and relaxed?

It may be urged 'that we should make special *pardah* arrangements.' If so, should we not have to provide a lady Returning Officer for each polling booth; and should we not have to provide *pardahs*, or special porticoes or rooms for the women voters so as to help them to record their votes? These are practical difficulties. I sympathise with the view of my hon. friend and can appreciate his enthusiasm; but as I have become older I have learnt to realise that we must pay regard to practical difficulties in the situation. The difficulties are not few, several complications will crop up, as for instance it may be urged after an election is over that the lady who voted was not the person who was entitled to vote, and such disputes will lead to inconvenient and unpleasant enquiries. Would it not be advisable to wait and watch? Should we not wait till we see the results in Bombay, Madras and United Provinces where sex disqualification is being removed? Should we not await the result of what is going to be done in our own municipalities in accordance with the provision which we passed at the last session of the Council, namely the provision by which women are allowed to vote? In that meeting only one point arose for discussion, namely, whether women should be allowed to become members of the Municipal Board. It was decided that we should not allow women now to become members of the Municipal Committee? I do not say that they would never be given votes, but I ask is the time now ripe for giving them votes to elect members for the Legislative Council?

Sir, there is one important point of constitutional importance which I might now bring to the notice of the Council. All resolutions are requests, recommendations to Government. Government may give effect to them or may not according as they after consideration think proper, but this resolution is different from all others. If it is accepted by the Council it will be binding on the Government. The electoral rule must be changed at once no matter what the cost that is incurred is and what the inconvenience that is caused is, and I therefore ask whether we must not proceed cautiously, whether we should not carefully consider before we take the leap. I venture to say, Sir, that the time is not yet ripe for the removal of the disqualification. If the resolution is adopted it will be at once binding, but if it is defeated or withdrawn it may be brought up again. All that is required is that a month's notice be given before it is moved. This resolution is a matter the decision on which rests with the Council. I sincerely hope that the Council will give their decision after full consideration.

SRIJUT NILMANI PHUKAN :—Sir, the resolution as moved by my friend Maulavi Munawwarali is I think on the ground of principle. I do not think this resolution if carried will make the matter of franchise more difficult or more easy. But I do not see what is the difficulty in accepting this resolution. If the Franchise Committee was cautious on the point it was on the ground that there may be many social difficulties if this franchise is given to women. I think the matter must come up at some time and on this ground we can make a beginning somewhere. To remove the sex bar we must make a beginning somewhere. Women taking part in politics in this country is not a new thing; they not only used their pen but also their swords. We know of many women rulers both Hindu and Muhammadan in this country. We know how women took part in politics in this very province. It is not a question whether it will serve any useful purpose at this moment but I think it is from the higher stand-point of principle that my friend has moved this resolution. And as regards the direction given by the Joint Select Committee I think it is open to us now to pass the resolution. They have indicated there that they could not come to a decision due to the social difficulties of this country. They thought it wise to leave the question to our representatives who will be there to decide social as well as political matters. So I do not think there will be any difficulty if we accept this resolution. Of course there may be many *purdah* ladies both among the Hindus and the Muhammadans who do not like to take part in these things. But if the resolution is passed we will never drag any woman down to the polling booth against her will. Again, there will be no fear of misusing the name of one woman voter in place of another because those women who come to vote will not vote behind the *purdah*. So on these grounds and on the matter of principle also I think we should have no difficulty in accepting this resolution in the spirit of the recommendation of the Joint Select Committee and also in the spirit of the Southborough Committee.

SRIJUT DALIM CHANDRA BORAH :—Sir, I beg to say that I regret that I could not hear the whole of the speech of the hon. mover but from what I heard of the earlier part of the speech I was inclined to support this resolution, but from the concluding portion of the speech I was quite certain that the resolution was a partial one. I oppose the resolution not that I am an opponent of female liberty or franchise nor that I am satisfied with the answer given by the Hon'ble the Judicial Member, but that the resolution is an imperfect and one-sided one. Had the hon. member advocated the right of the females not only to vote but also to stand for election I would have been the first man to support his resolution, but he does not want that, he simply wants them to have the right to vote for the benefit of the male candidates. So I do not find myself at one with him and I oppose the resolution.

MAULAVI RASHID ALI LASKAR :—Sir, I cannot help saying a few words in this connection. First of all it strikes me how gallant the hon. mover of this resolution is. He wants to give one who does not want a thing that is not wanted as yet. First of all, Sir, this is not a subject to be handled so playfully. Of course it is cautiously reserved that it will be necessary later on. But is the education of the country sufficiently advanced? Is the time ripe? When the time is ripe for that and not before that should this be considered. We must not deal with the subject playfully. I think

it will be child's play so to say to ask for the extension of franchise to women at the present time. Then, again, Sir, if we see the fountain head of the Reforms we see that what is wanted here now is not to be, to such extent, found even there in England where the liberty is equal in both sexes. Then, again, Sir, some hon. members support the resolution thinking that this would remove the seclusion leading to liberty of the women. If that be the object then this resolution should be regarded with suspicion from the point of religion. Then if we consider the matter a bit more seriously we see that nature created the two sexes different, with different constitution and different adaptabilities for different fields. I do not know why we should try to take away that difference to make our tender sex more masculine. As for some of the instances quoted by the hon. mover the nature of his quotation leads one to suspect that he would rather cry one day to bring our tender sex to the Council Chamber, and even to those instances I think they are so many honourable exceptions, and not general. Then, Sir, as for seriously thinking of this resolution I think the hon. member if he had an intension of moving it he should have circulated it in the country and asked the opinion of both the sexes before moving it and also he should have given an earlier opportunity to the members of this Council so that they may also consult the people, but this was not done, so it is very difficult to give a verdict either this way or that way. Then, Sir, so far as I have followed the arguments of the mover of the resolution I think he looks at the resolution from the point of view of a principle and not of a necessity. So apparently if this resolution is carried and given effect to it will be for the present a dead-letter and if at all used will be used more by people of objectionable character. Then, Sir, may I ask the hon. mover himself whether he would like to see the female members of his own family take advantage of this resolution. It is a true saying that 'Charity begins at home.' If this principle does not begin in his own home how does he come forward with such a resolution (*laughter*). Then, Sir, I think that a resolution of this nature should have come from a married man and not from a bachelor like the hon. mover (*laughter*).

I beg therefore to oppose this resolution with all the force in my power.

BABU HIRALAL BOSE :—Sir, I must admit that this resolution has been very ably and gallantly moved by my hon. friend Maulavi Munawwarali. In spirit I think it is perfectly all right. It is the order of the day that women should be accomplished, that they should be educated and that they should share with us all political rights and privileges. Up to that point only am I at one with him, old though I am and young though he is. But from that point, Sir, I must join issue. We are to see whether it is within the range of practical politics. We should not deal with mere theories but rather with practical facts, and facts as we find them to-day in the country. This resolution has been moved to enfranchise the women of Assam—rather the ladies of Assam—of whom I believe at least 75 per cent. if not more, are *purdah nashin*. Of course it has been urged by both the hon. mover as well as by my hon. friend Srijut Nilmani Phukan that we are not compelling the ladies by enfranchising them to come up. Well, it is our duty to give them powers. If they do not come forward well and good. Yes, there my hon. friends are perfectly right, but there are certain classes of women—and we know who they are—who will not hesitate to take undue advantage of these powers. We cannot possibly keep such

women out. Are such women fit to undertake such work? Then again, Sir, it has been urged that women have illustrious histories behind them in point of female education both among the Hindus and Muhammadans. As a Hindu I am not unaware of the fact that there were many illustrious Hindu women in India but I should like to ask my hon. friends to remember that in those days Hindus had no *pardah* among them. I should also ask them to remember that there were very, very few learned Muhammadan ladies in ancient days and even then I don't think they came out of their *pardahs*; on the contrary they were strictly *pardah nashin*. Now my friend Maulavi Rashid Ali Laskar has I think correctly remarked that at least 75 per cent. of the Indian members of this House would not allow their ladies to go to the polling booth. So that if we cannot do that, but must allow a certain number of disrespectable sort of women to come into the polling booths then it is to my mind highly undesirable. My friend Mr. Borah has also said that while we are going to take advantage of the votes of our women-folk we are not going to allow them to come to the Council. If we think that they are not sufficiently qualified to go to the Council and take part in the work of the Council then I say why should we take advantage of their votes? It is well-known I presume to all the members of this House that in England only recently the women have been allowed to enjoy a larger measure of freedom and they have been allowed to vote at the elections. But we must remember that so long they were not given that privilege and that only the other day it was thought desirable to do so after systematic and persistent demand from them. We are now only in the initial stages of the development of self-government. Let us learn the art ourselves before we invite our women-folk to join. We should not be incautious, we should not do anything by revolution, but rather by evolution. On these grounds, therefore, I beg to oppose the resolution.

BABU KRISHNA SUNDAR DAM :—Sir, 'Happy are the people who have no history.' We heard this said by His Excellency only a short while ago at the Darbar. The Hindus have a history and traditions of their own and so also have the Muhammadans and I am sure that neither community would be very happy at the conception of the sort of powers which it is contemplated to give to the women-folk of this country by the present resolution. The hon. mover gave what he called a crushing reply by stating the case of the women-folk in the Khasi Hills. This analogy cannot certainly apply to the women-folk of the Hindu and Muhammadan communities because as I have already said that the Khasi community has not got a history of their own while the other communities have. My friend the mover has cited the names of certain illustrious Hindu women of ancient history in support of his resolution. I should like to say here that the names which he has quoted are those of philosophers and mathematicians. None of them ever were politicians. The Hindu *Shastras* contain the saying :—
 मन्त्रीकः धर्मनास्त्रेण—
 that is, we are to perform religious ceremonies with our wives but our *Shastras* never call upon us to enter into the political arena with our female folks. So what my friend the mover of the resolution has said,—that the conception of giving the right of vote to women is not altogether foreign to the Hindu notions—is not perfectly right. Now, Sir, we are just passing through a period of transition and experiment and it is to be carefully considered whether we should bring forward in the present form questions

involving social evolution along with the current political problems. As has often been commented upon by many speakers, this question not only involves the question of political life but also affects the social side of the Hindu and Muhammadan communities. Srijut Nilmani Phukan has said that there are instances of Hindu women who wielded the sword, but he overlooks the fact that the functions of the Councillors and all those who are meant to co-operate with them in the Reform Council are those of wielding the tongue and not the sword, and we are exercising tongues more than necessary. I do not therefore think that this example will apply in support of the resolution. I am here reminded of what Mr. Cunningham has stated in his Quinquennial Report. He said that there is yet a world of difference between the voter and the village. So in my opinion we should look to the education of the village if we are at all to make any advance with the Reforms and certainly not very much to the increase in the number of members in the Provincial Legislative Councils. I shall request the hon. mover to go through the forceful paragraphs of the Quinquennial Report aforesaid very carefully. I cannot altogether overlook the financial troubles which will be created not only to the Government but also to the governed by the adoption of the principle involved in this resolution. I refer to the financial troubles in connection with providing money for polling officers for identifiers and so on. I think the Finance Member would find it difficult to find the necessary money however small the amount may be. At any rate I think it would be difficult for all to spare money for the purpose of making proper and separate arrangements for female voters. I am afraid that the male folk and election candidates will be seriously affected by the passing of this resolution by the adoption of its principle. One gentleman made a reference to what the case is in England. But we cannot forget the fact that in England female franchise was granted only when Mrs. Pankhurst wielded the broomstick upon the males of Great Britain and never before that did the male folk of the British Isles agree to give franchise to their women folk. Whatever that may be, Sir, according to Hindu notions, and I believe according to the Muhammadan notions also, politics is a reserved subject which the male members of both the communities will be too unwilling to transfer to the females.

REV. J. J. M. NICHOLS-ROY :—Sir, this resolution brings a very interesting subject, especially to me. I have heard with intense interest all the speeches that have already been delivered. It appears that in the Hindu and also in the Muhammadan communities there are different opinions regarding this subject, because some have spoken for and some against; and it is quite clear that the majority of the Hindus and Muhammadans in Madras, Bombay and the United Provinces are for such a resolution, for women suffrage has been given in those province. Now, as regards the objections that have been raised against this I want to say a few words. The Hon'ble Judicial Member has said that the question should be considered from a practical stand-point, whether it is practicable or not at the present time in Assam to give women franchise. One of the difficulties that has been raised seems to be the existing custom of seclusion of women and I think if we consider the matter aright from a psychological point of view political liberty given will create an interest among the women behind the *purdah* and will rouse them to think in a better way than they have been used to. I think this political privilege given to them will rouse the dormant ability

that there is in them and will make them desire to be better, and at the same time it will create an interest among them to bring up better children for the country. It may be argued, as I have heard some already argue, that the women of this province cannot be compared with the women of the other provinces or of other countries. This is true. But I say that though to a certain extent the women of this province are not yet equal to the women of the other provinces or of other countries yet it cannot be denied that a wave of nationalism has entered into the very closets of the women in India. In my travels up and down in India, from north to south I have talked with many public men whom I met in trains and at different places and stations. I have noticed that there is a new interest created on account of this political agitation that is going on in the country among the different communities of the country and also among the women folks we see in many places in India signs of womanhood coming out and entering political spheres. Just a few months ago when I was in Calcutta I was told that a large number of women were going from place to place holding political meetings to uplift the country, and this even in the cause of agitation against the Government; and amongst these women I was told that some women were from Assam. I do not know whether there were really women from Assam, but I was told by some gentleman from Calcutta that he saw some Assamese ladies among the company. That shows that this spirit of nationalism has entered into the closets, at least, of the non-co-operation families. It appears that a political interest has been created among women.

We must observe also that this is an age of rapid development, things happen so quickly which fifty years ago would not have been thought possible. Countries have been turned upside down, Governments have been overthrown, just in half a decade, or in three or four years. It seems that events in the world are moving so fast that man can hardly follow them. And I believe that many of us realise, almost all the educated people in India realise, that the system of *purdah* is not conducive to the welfare of the people of India. If the women are free the sons and daughters will be better educated and will have far greater privileges than they are having now. When we look at other countries, at other civilised countries, we find it is the mothers who have liberties who have made the nations as they are today.

Another point that has been raised by the Hon'ble Judicial Member is that a voter cannot vote by proxy and that she must appear in person. I am sure the hon. mover of this resolution did not mean that the women voters should vote by proxy. He anticipates that women would soon be interested enough in politics—it would not be very long before they become interested enough in politics—and then they themselves will want to come out and vote and exercise their privilege. Therefore there may be no need of any lady officer to record the votes and it may be also that in a few years there may be ladies who will be fit enough to be Returning Officers. We are expecting that our country will be so educated that many educated ladies will come up and take part in politics and therefore the difficulties that we are thinking of now may not be in existence just in a few years' time. Then another advice has been given us by the Hon'ble Judicial Member—he advises us to wait until we see what will go on in other provinces, in Bombay, Madras and in the United Provinces that have given women franchise or to

wait until the time is ripe. But I say, Sir, that it is for us to make time ripe. If we do not make an attempt, that ripe time will never come. It is for the members of this House as well as for the leading men of the country to make such an attempt. If the leading men of the country and the members like the members of this Council will not work for the sake of giving franchise to the ladies and educating them there will be little chance of progress. And I believe that the privilege given in this way will psychologically be good for the sex behind the *purdah*. It will create an interest among them and it will help them to think in a different way altogether from what they have been thinking. Then another difficulty has been raised which is called, a constitutional difficulty. If I understood the Hon'ble Judicial Member aright he said that the electoral rolls would have to be changed—I am open to correction if I misunderstood him. But I think that is not a very great difficulty at all, for if this resolution be carried in the House it may be brought into effect, perhaps not for the next election, but after three years or so.

I am in hearty sympathy with Srijut Nilmani Phukan when he said that the giving of votes will not mean the dragging of women to the polls. It rests with them and with the members of their families whether they will vote or not, or whether they will exercise their right to come to the polls. It is not a matter of force but it is only a matter of choice. It is possible that many of the ladies may want to vote. As it is evident many of the gentlemen in the United Provinces, Madras and Bombay want their ladies to go to the polls, there may be many gentlemen in Assam also who may want their ladies to go to the polls. Of course it is only a matter of guesswork now to say whether the ladies will go or not to the polls. It is true some will not allow their ladies to go to the polls, while some others will.

Srijut Dalim Chandra Bora said that he would have given his hearty support to this resolution if it had not been a partial resolution, if the resolution had given full rights to women. I say, Sir, that it is better to get half a morsel than none at all. Well, this is only a matter of progress. It was only on practical considerations that it was decided in the last session of the Council that it would not be practicable, for the present, for women to enter into the Local Boards or to sit as councillors in the municipal councils. But the time will come when those women who have been given the right to vote, will themselves want to be Municipal Commissioners; and that time, I suppose, will not be very far away if we take steps to enlighten our people to feel their responsibility which they ought to have for the sake of their own country.

Maulavi Rashid Ali Laskar has said that it is not right to give one what he does not want, that which is not wanted? I do not think that is always true. We have parents who force their boys against their will to go to school, for their good. Again a doctor will force a patient to take medicine for his good. In the same way if we know that it is good for our ladies to take part in politics what is the harm in taking steps to rouse their ambitions to take part in politics?

And then he has said that the question has been handled playfully by the hon. mover of the resolution. I think the hon. mover did not move this resolution in a playful manner. I think he felt the responsibility as any other members in the matter of moving resolutions.

Then he said that the women franchise which we want here is not granted even in England. I think he is misinformed.

THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT :—The hon. member has exceeded the time limit.

MR. R. N. CHAUDHURI :—Sir, I find that the matter has drifted too much and beyond the issues some members have been travelling for nothing. There are two aspects of the question. I admit and so everybody admits that as a matter of principle women are entitled to franchise. Civilisation will bring the natural sex into the forefront and the question does not arise in that aspect. The only question is whether the country is willing to give the women the franchise that has been proposed. In other words it can be said whether there is any necessity now for allowing the women to be electors. Of course it does not matter much and means can be found out to overcome any practical difficulties of polling, etc., as the Hon'ble Judicial Member has said just now, that there might be difficulties. Those difficulties we can certainly avoid. On the present occasion we have to decide whether women of Assam should be allowed to be electors or voters. In my opinion the country is not ripe yet. That is to say, the women are not being educated; they cannot understand the value of franchise. They can be simply misled to vote for one person or other and on the whole there will be chaos and not harmony. It was pointed out by the mover that in early times there were ruling princesses, but the princesses were not electors, I understand. And those remarks have little bearing upon this question. The question to be determined is whether the women on the present occasion are entitled to be electors. Then several *shastras* were quoted and it was shown with some vehemence that ladies amongst the Hindu community were supreme, that they had talents and so forth. I would submit that those are not within the scope of the subject matter of the discussion. To my mind no occasion has arisen for giving franchise to women. I would simply say that this sort of resolution ought not to be carried. I would ask the hon. mover to withdraw the resolution.

SRIJUT LOHIT CHANDRA NAYAK :—Sir, I quite sympathise with the hon. mover of the resolution and his able supporters for their anxiety to make a beginning for the enfranchisement of our female folks. That question of female enfranchisement has exercised the conscience of the whole world and there is no wonder that the question will also exercise the minds of little Assam. But, Sir, however ardent or earnest a man may be in his younger days, still I think the age will have some mollifying effect on his constitution. The effect is not to see things from the visionary's point of view but from the view point of a practical man. Now I am firmly of opinion that nothing is more dangerous to the body politic than uninformed democracy. We ought to know the effect of the votes that have been given to the male voters. When a man is approached by several candidates, he does not know how to exercise his votes, on whom his votes should rest. Take the case of females. The percentage of literacy is so small among them that

it will not be quite expedient to enfranchise them at present as they will not know how to exercise their votes. They will be in the leading strings of others. But I am quite sure, Sir, that time has not come yet to concede votes to the female folks of Assam. A man who aims at the formation of Indian nationhood cannot do so unless half the portion of the population constituting the nation is capable of exercising the vote. To my mind time has not come as yet. We have given votes to women in case of municipalities. Let us see the effect of the concession that has been made in the case of municipalities and after that we can carry the question of female vote to Council election.

With these remarks I oppose the resolution as the time is not ripe for the purpose for which this resolution is intended.

THE HON'BLE MR. W. J. REID :—I must say, Sir, that I agree with a recent speaker who said that the discussion, interesting as it has been, has travelled rather beyond the few and comparatively simple issues that are really involved. I listened closely to the speech of the hon. mover, but I found no answer to the first question that suggested itself to me when I read this resolution. I said to myself—"Has the hon. mover got a mandate, and if so from whom? Have the ladies of Assam expressed any desire to be enfranchised?" Several other speakers have asked this question. One or two seem to have thought it a matter of no importance. I confess, Sir, to me it seems a matter of the first importance. In my own country before women were enfranchised their demands had been long and insistent and expressed in what one might call a somewhat forcible manner. The hon. mover's main argument so far as I was able to make out was that there have been many ladies whose names are recorded in both Hindu and Muhammadan history who were greatly distinguished. As one hon. member has observed we are not told that these distinguished ladies were electors or that they ever exercised the vote. Another hon. member justly pointed out that ladies who wielded the sword as well as the pen were not thereby peculiarly qualified for political or Council life.

My Hon'ble Colleague has pointed out the serious nature of the resolution and the far-reaching results of the decision the Council are asked to give. And Maulavi Rashid Ali Laskar, who has anticipated several of the points that I intended to make, also impressed on the Council the desirability of not approaching a matter of this kind without due seriousness. I do not want to weary the Council, but must ask them to consider again the precise terms of the proviso to Rule 7 (1) of our Electoral Rules. As my Hon'ble Colleague said the decision of the Council in the case of an ordinary resolution is merely a recommendation. The Government are not bound to accept the recommendation. If the Council to-day vote that the sex disqualification shall be removed, we are bound to give effect immediately to this decision. I ask, Sir, if the time has come when this serious step should be taken, if the question has been sufficiently ventilated? Again—I am repeating what my hon. friend Maulavi Rashid Ali Laskar said—ought we not to insist that before we are asked to consider a question of this kind it shall have been discussed in this Council Chamber, in the Press, in public meetings? Ought we not before we give our decision on the matter to know what the public think, not only the women of Assam but the men of Assam, the present electors, what the weight of public opinion in this province is?

The difficulties that would arise in giving effect to it if this Council adopted the resolution have been mentioned. It is true that there would be difficulties. But I should not myself lay too much stress on them. We must overcome them if the considered verdict of the Council is that this step must be taken, that this change must be made. Before the forthcoming election we shall have to prepare new electoral rolls and provide the machinery which will enable such women as wish to record their votes to do so. On the question whether female suffrage is or is not a good thing I am too old and too wary to express an opinion. I put it to the Council that that is not what we are asked to decide to-day without having heard all that there is to be said on so momentous a question and with so little information at our disposal I do not think that many of the Council will agree with the Rev. Mr. Nichols-Roy that if a thing is good we are entitled to force it on people who do not want it, that we have several precedents for forcing good things on people who do not wish to take them. Had there been a wide-spread demand for the franchise from the women of Assam the case would have been different. We should certainly have had to consider such a demand, but I personally have never heard the subject even mooted until this resolution was put in. Last of all, Sir, I suggest that it would be most dangerous to look at this question from the point of view of one province against another province, to argue that because certain other provinces have given their women the vote therefore if women are not immediately enfranchised here Assam must necessarily be considered an inferior and a backward province. We have heard that three provinces have given votes to their women. My impression is that our nearest neighbour Bengal when the question came up rejected a similar resolution.

SRIJUT BIPIN CHANDRA GHOSE :— Sir, I beg to add a word or two in connection with this resolution. I am sorry I cannot give my whole-hearted support to the hon. mover of the resolution. Now let us see whether it is time to give franchise to our females, whether we are sincere and whether we are willing and we like to give franchise to our females. Female franchise succeeds in my opinion female liberty. First we must give liberty to our women and then we may press for franchise. Mere speeches in public places will not do. If we ask whether we will let our women go and discuss with males if necessary political matters, I think the majority of our countrymen will say 'No'. Of course some instances of illustrious literary women both Hindus and Muhammadans have been cited by the hon. mover in support of his resolution, but those days are gone. In those days females were allowed to go out in public places and attend public functions along with the men but those days cannot be compared with the present days. I am supported probably by my experience which I got in the March session of the Council. In that session we pressed hard for female members being elected as Commissioners of the Municipality but the majority of the House has proved that it was not wanted by the public and now after not even a month we have come again to express our opinion in the same Council that we want female franchise and this resolution comes from the quarter which opposed the other motion moved in the March session regarding the same question of female franchise. Are we sincere in saying that our females are well advanced and are fit to get it?

Now, Sir, our women are not properly educated to understand the force and utility of female franchise. More than 95 per cent. of the females of Assam are not educated. Let them first get themselves educated and let them cry that they are fit to get female liberty and get female franchise. It has been urged that in Madras, Bombay and the United Provinces franchise has been granted to females but we are not to judge the question, important as it is, from their point of view. We are to judge from the circumstances of our province, from our point of view. We are to see whether our females are quite competent to deal with political speeches publicly and not behind a *pardah*. We are to judge according to our own circumstances and according to the condition of the province we are living in. So, Sir, with these few words I am sorry I cannot support the resolution.

MAULAVI MUNAWWARALI :— I think, Sir I must make a reply, because many a misunderstanding has arisen and many a distortion of facts has been made. First of all, let me hasten to contradict my hon. friend who has just now preceded me and said that the franchise of women was opposed in the Municipal Bill and was thrown out. It was not the right to vote but the right of women to be elected members and to sit on the Municipal Boards that was opposed, and that was a subject which was urged by no less a gentleman than Mr. Dalim Chandra Borah, one of the most senior members of this House, and it was myself who opposed his motion most vehemently as one being beyond the range of practical politics. Sir, it has been said that the cry must come from the female sex for this. I say, Sir, if we have decided that this backwardness is a disease, I do not think that we should wait for the cry to come, it should be removed before that. Did the cry for female education come from the women? Was not the initiative taken by the men? So also in this case, if we have decided that we should not wait for the cry to come. My hon. friend Rev. Nichols-Roy has said that a great interest would be created among women by enfranchising them, at which I was reminded of Cardinal Newman who was one of the greatest men, one of the greatest thinkers of the last century, when he was speaking about an Irish University where he dwelt at great length upon expansion of the mind. The mind can be expanded with the consciousness of an existing right. The mind might not be exercised but the mind will be expanded by the knowledge. What I mean is that the knowledge that they possess this right will lead to the expansion of the ignorant minds of the women of our province. Sir, it was also said that the time has not come. What is the criterion of the time being ripe? Changes are taking place in these days with astronomical rapidity. Courses of events are turning from day to day, nay, from hour to hour, and it is no easy matter to keep pace with times at the present moment. I tell you of my own experience. If I do not read the newspapers for a single day I find myself a different man. People talking about the events of that day have often appeared to me to be not of the world in which I lived but of a more advanced, different world.

I think, Sir, I have also spoken about the mandate from the woman sex. There has come no mandate and I have just now said that we should not wait for a mandate. This was urged by the Hon'ble Finance Member.

As regards information, it might be that the Hon'ble Finance Member did not get the information. He might not have received the warning I gave the Government in the very first year of the new Council, 1921. I had put a question whether the Government was willing to give franchise to the women. I gave the warning about 2½ years ago and that warning was also meant for the people of my country. Not only this, Sir, this very resolution I brought forward in the March session and it was postponed to this session and thus the resolution itself also is not a surprise. When I spoke of women franchise I had not lost sight of the prevalence of the *pardah* system among Muhammadans. Do not many Muhammadan ladies go to the Registration Court in their *pardah*? Could it be urged that the Sub Registrars be abolished because our women do not go to the Registration Court? But they do. Even with the *pardah* they do, and they can do this also in *pardah*. There can be no question of difficulty as to the identity of the real voter because they will be accompanied by men who will certify to their identity at the time of recording their votes. So the question of *pardah* does not arise. Sir, there will also be a national gain in so far as the existence of this right will be diffused throughout the length and breadth of the country. Women would know that they have such a right to enjoy and the country as a whole would be awakened to the consciousness of this fact. So, I do not see why such an innocent resolution which has no revolutionary characteristics in it, no social revolution, but rather social evolution, should be discarded. But, Sir, I have felt that this question has been looked upon by this House—at least by many hon. members sitting to-day in this House—in a spirit contrary to that in which I have in view. It has been distorted and many fallacious arguments have been put forward. I have neither the time nor the inclination to make a retort at this stage, but would leave it to the public at large to judge for themselves by reading the speeches in the Gazette. I shall feel my labours amply rewarded if the debate on this motion creates an interest among the people who will read the discussions, and I shall wait till the time is ripe for our gallant friends who opposed this resolution to think over the matter so that I may have the opportunity for the second time of bringing forward this motion before this House.

With these few words, Sir, I beg leave of the House to withdraw my resolution.

The resolution was, by leave of the Council, withdrawn.

KHAN BAHADUR MUHAMMAD BAKHT MAJUMDAR :—Sir, the resolution which stands in my name runs thus :—

“ That this Council recommends to the Government that the scale of travelling allowances for all provincial and subordinate service officers be fixed on the following scale :—

- (1) Officers drawing above Rs. 800 as salary, first-class.*
- (2) Officers drawing above Rs. 250 up to Rs. 800, second-class.*
- (3) Officers drawing up to Rs. 250 third-class.*

Sir, in our budget charges for travelling allowance form a heavy item of expenditure and almost every retrenchment committee throughout India has realised that of late this has grown to a very high figure and substantial saving can be effected by reducing it. The re-organization of all the Services leading to sudden rise in salaries of officers which in some cases had been as much as 100 per cent. has led to a corresponding rise in the travelling allowance as a result of many third-class officers being classed as second-class and second-class as first-class. Admitting that the rise in cost of living demanded a higher rate of pay can it be maintained that a similar all-round increase in the travelling allowance of officers was necessary? The wave of generosity which passed over Government in matters of salaries also affected them in matters of travelling allowance. And if not satisfied with the heavy concession in salaries, Government in a fit of prodigality declared forcibly many officers of lower status as artificially belonging to a higher class. The case of the Excise Department is to the point. For no tenable ground the officers of this Department were declared as first-class officers. Did anybody ever hear that there was a murmur or complaint amongst officers of this Department on the score of travelling allowance? Examine the cadre and you will find that many of them were recruited from Sub Deputy Collectors and were undoubtedly inferior in rank and status to Extra Assistant Commissioners. If they are given first-class travelling allowance on the ground that they are like Subdivisional Officers, why not the Deputy Inspectors of Schools, Inspectors of Police and Deputy Superintendents of Police be classed as first-class officers as well? Can it be suggested that the Excise officers perform more responsible work than those who are in charge of justice and administration? I dare say it is known to most of us here that travelling allowance forms a regular source of income to many Government officers. I know that rule 6 of the Subsidiary Rules has been revised but this was done quite lately and not sufficiently high and this revision has not affected many of the artificially inflated officers. Moreover as incremental rate of salaries is general, in a short time we will find the province practically having first-class officers only and unless we are watchful in this respect no amount of circulars will stop the general loot that is going on in the form of travelling allowance. It is preposterous that we should be compelled to provide annually not only higher salaries in our budget but also wastefully higher travelling allowances.

I am fully conscious of the fact that we must help our responsible officers to maintain their position by conceding first-class travelling allowance and I have consequently excluded from the resolution officers of Imperial Services who perform higher type of work. My resolution therefore is regarding the Provincial and Subordinate Service officers only who form the vast majority of our officers and should this be accepted I am sure we will wipe off all our deficit at a stroke without in any way affecting the salary of a single officer of Government.

THE HON'BLE MR. W. J. REID :—I imagine, Sir, that the hon. mover of this resolution has read the Report of the Bengal Retrenchment Committee. At all events his first proposal more or less follows the lines of the Committee's recommendations and here I am glad of the opportunity of making an explanation. Mr. Botham promised at the last Council session that copies of the Report would be procured and supplied to all members. We took steps to fulfil this promise and found that the Report was out of

print. It was only a day or two ago that Messrs. Thacker Spink & Co. told us that there had been a reprint and that they could supply us with copies. We telegraphed for them and they only reached us a day or two before the Council sat. That is the reason why hon. members have not had the Report in their hands before and have not had the opportunity of studying it before they came to this budget session.

Well, Sir, the hon. mover goes rather further than the Committee in some respects and in others he does not go quite so far. His resolution is couched in very wide terms, but I gather from his speech that he is thinking more of officers of the Excise Department than of officers of other Departments. The Committee, as hon. members can see for themselves, wanted to make a broad distinction between officers of all Services who held what they called district rank, that is to say occupied posts which are usually filled by officers of the All-India Services, posts of Deputy Commissioners, Subdivisional Officers, Superintendents of Police, and so on. Presumably when they spoke of district rank they meant to include also officers holding provincial rank, that is to say Heads of Departments and officers who are not exactly Heads of Departments but occupy prominent positions in the different Departments. We have been examining the question, and as the Council will readily understand we have come across some very difficult cases. We are anxious on the one hand to economise as much as we justly can. On the other hand we are anxious to do justice to officers whose duties require them to travel widely and to travel in a manner befitting their position. I told the Council the other day that we are examining all the recommendations about travelling allowances made by the Committee and not only those contained in paragraphs 417 and 418 of their Report with which the hon. mover of the resolution is mainly concerned. We have drafted tentative proposals and we have circulated these for an expression of opinion, asking that opinions should be expressed immediately because we have no intention of allowing this matter to drag on. I am unable at the moment to say precisely what the final decision of Government will be, and I do not think the Council would wish me to go in detail into all the different suggestions that have been made. I hope, therefore, that in view of this explanation the hon. mover, having ventilated the question, will accept my assurance that we are going very closely into the matter, and not press his resolution.

KHAN BAHADUR MUHAMMAD BAKHT MAJUMDAR :—Sir, in view of the assurance given by the Hon'ble the Finance Member, I beg permission to withdraw the resolution.

The resolution was, by leave of the Council, withdrawn.

KHAN BAHADUR MUHAMMAD BAKHT MAJUMDAR :—Sir, the resolution which stands in my name runs thus :—

“That this Council recommends to the Government of Assam that the Departments of Industry and Co-operative Societies be amalgamated with the Department of Agriculture.”

Sir, in bringing forward the resolution which stands in my name I am actuated with the idea that with a deficit budget it is necessary for us to examine every possible field for curtailing expenditure. Several years back we had no separate Department of Industries and Co-operative Societies and

the general idea is that its creation has not benefited the province in the slightest degree. Excepting some reports which remain shelved in the Secretariat records and in which no interest is taken by the people or any attempt made to create interest amongst them, this useless department of Government has neither fostered and improved any of the existing industries nor showed to any enterprising person the way to anything new. I am not surprised for this sterility as most of the officers of this Department are mere administrators, fit for file work without of course possessing any training for direction and guidance. Are we not therefore justified to question its utility or at least ask that the benefit if at all accruing from this Department is worth the tax-payer's money which is annually wasted over it.

While scrutinising the detailed budget my attention was drawn to the fact that the pruning knife can safely be used here without in any way sacrificing efficiency. The Department of Industry is certainly one of those departments which can safely be amalgamated with that of Agriculture. The province of Assam is pre-eminently an agricultural province and its industries are intimately connected with the agricultural population while the great majority of the members of its co-operative societies are also people who till the soil. "34.C.—Agriculture" shows that the cost of Director of Industries and Co-operative Societies has been estimated at Rs. 25,455. I feel and in doing so I am voicing the popular idea that this burden is anything but necessary. More than Rs. 20,000 can be saved if the two Departments are amalgamated. The Department of Industries, Assam, spends more than a lakh of rupees for the development of weaving, silk rearing and maintaining three or four small technical schools. Since the creation of the Industries Department nearly four years ago this amount is being spent on identical purposes every year but as far as I have seen or heard very little is felt of this Department's work by the mass of tax-payers of this province. Neither the Director of Agriculture nor that of Industries in this province is as far as I know a technically trained man, but simply administrators and in the circumstances any able executive officer could be selected to direct these Departments and thus relieve the province from the burden of paying for two Directors.

With these words I beg to move the resolution for the acceptance of the House.

THE HON'BLE RAI BAHADUR PROMODE CHANDRA DUTTA :—Sir, on reading the resolution I thought that what was intended was that the Departments of Industries and Co-operative Societies should be amalgamated with the Department of Agriculture. But after listening to the speech of the hon. mover it seems to me that he wishes that certain departments, specially the Department of Industries and the Department of Co-operative Societies should be abolished. I am therefore somewhat at a disadvantage as to what to say in reply. I shall however take the resolution as it is and formulate my reply accordingly. Now, I believe the object of the hon. mover is to effect retrenchment in the cost of the administration.....

KHAN BAHADUR MUHAMMAD BAKHT MAJUMDAR :—Quite so.

THE HON'BLE RAI BAHADUR PROMODE CHANDRA DUTTA :—
 And with this object in view he suggests that the Department of Industries and the Department of Co-operative Societies should be amalgamated with that of Agriculture. Now as the hon. members are aware, the Department of Industries and the Department of Co-operative Societies are in the hands of the Director of Industries while the Department of Agriculture is in the hands of an officer who is also the Director of Land Records, Commissioner of Income-tax, Commissioner of Stamps, and Inspector-General of Registration and he has also charge of certain other minor departments. Now if we decide to transfer the Department of Agriculture to the hands of the Director of Industries, that officer, I mean the Director of Agriculture, will be there, only he will be performing the other functions. So that, by transferring the Agricultural Department to the hands of the Director of Industries we effect no economy whatsoever. It might be argued that the Departments of Industries and Co-operative Societies might be transferred to the Director of Agriculture. But then I put it to the hon. members to say whether it is possible for one officer to discharge the functions of Director of Industries, Director of Co-operative Societies and the Director of Land Records and Agriculture and also the duties of the Commissioner of Income-tax, Inspector-General of Registration, Commissioner of Stamps and so forth. So then, the only alternative would be to let these things as they are. I do not know, as I said in connection with the budget, whether it may not be possible to effect certain economies in the subordinate agencies. That is a matter which has not yet been finally considered but it will be considered in connection with the suggestions of the Bengal Retrenchment Committee. So far as these posts are concerned, I mean the posts of the Director of Industries and the Director of Agriculture, these two appointments must remain. This suggestion has probably come as the result of the recommendations of the Bengal Retrenchment Committee. Now that Committee has recommended in paragraph 295 that the three departments of Agriculture, Co-operative Credit and Development of small industries should be placed under a single administrative head. But there things are different. There they have got a Director of Agriculture, a Director of Industries and a Registrar of Co-operative Societies, and the suggestion there is : " We think there is very important work here for an energetic and capable officer with wide district experience. He would require"—I would particularly invite the attention of the hon. mover to this—" He would require a Registrar of Co-operative Societies to carry out the statutory functions of the Registrar and a Director of Industries of the type we have indicated in the chapter on that department". So that what is recommended there is an officer for all these departments with a Registrar and a Director. But here we have only two officers while the Bengal Committee recommends three. These suggestions are applicable to Bengal and not to Assam. In Assam we are managing things as cheaply as possible. It is impossible to do away with the post of Director of Agriculture as that officer's duties cannot be transferred to the Director of Industries because his duties cannot be transferred to the Director of Agriculture as that officer holds certain other charges equally heavy. But as I said in my budget speech if it is possible to effect any economy in the subordinate agency to which also reference has been made by the hon. mover that matter will be duly considered along with the recommendations of the Bengal Retrenchment Committee.

SRIJUT NILMANI PHUKAN :—Sir, I think this resolution as it stands cannot be wisely accepted. We are crying 'halt' at a time when we should proceed quicker. These two departments, the Departments of Industries and Agriculture are undoubtedly nation-building Departments and they have been created for that purpose so that the country may ultimately get the proper benefit. It seems to me that both these departments have sufficient work to perform. The Director of Agriculture has to perform some six or seven different functions. I do not therefore think that these departments can be efficiently managed by one man. Rather I should like to suggest there might be some re-distribution of works. I personally should like to see Co-operation, Agriculture and Veterinary Departments coming under one head and Trade, Industries, Registration, Land Records, Income-tax, Excise and all these things under another officer. But all that is a different question and we cannot propose these things at this moment on this resolution as it stands at present. I think it will not be wise on our part to accept this resolution in its present form.

SRIJUT LOHIT CHANDRA NAYAK :—Sir, the order of the day is the cry for retrenchment but retrenchment should not be effected so as to do away with efficiency. If we make retrenchment in a way so as to affect efficiency then it will only be scrapping the Reforms to the very bones. Let us follow the policy of what is called *festina lente*, i.e., hasten slowly. I think it is better on the part of the hon. mover to withdraw the resolution because it is impossible on the very face of it to amalgamate these departments.

KHAN BAHADUR MUHAMMAD BAKHT MAJUMDAR :—Sir, as the Hon'ble Minister has assured us that he will consider the question of retrenchment in this matter, I beg to withdraw this resolution.

The resolution was, by leave of the Council, withdrawn.

MAULAVI ABDUL KHALIQUE CHAUDHURI :—Sir, the resolution that stands in my name runs thus :—

"That this Council recommends to the Government of Assam to move the proper authority to take necessary steps to abolish the post of one of the Ministers in this Province from the beginning of the next term of the Council."

Sir, after hearing what has been said by His Excellency the Governor in his Darbar speech this morning, I do not like to press it as it appears that the matter is already under consideration of the Government, and let us hope that it will result in what the country demands.

So, I beg leave of the House to withdraw the resolution.

The resolution was, by leave of the Council, withdrawn.

SRIJUT NILMANI PHUKAN :—Sir, the resolution that stands in my name runs thus :—

"That this Council recommends to the Government of Assam that legislation be undertaken as early as possible to prevent people from exporting or importing water hyacinth to places within the province of Assam where it does not at present exist and also to compel people to destroy it in localities where it has made its first appearance and which are not exposed to uncontrollable water channels which carry the plant."

Sir, this question of water hyacinth has come into prominence in this Council several times thus showing that it is really a question of first-rate importance. In the September session of the Council, 1922, Khan Sahib Alauddin Ahmad Chaudhuri while moving a similar resolution said :—

“The water hyacinth which was quite unknown to our land first made its appearance at the time of the last European war. In the course of a few years the luxuriant growth of this irresistible plant has already created havoc in the district of Sylhet and also in some other parts of the Province. The banks of rivers are full of this pest. *Haors* are fuller and in paddy lands and fields for grass nothing but water hyacinth in a particularly beautiful crop can be found presenting a horrible aspect to the cultivators. Inroads of this pest if not checked will I am sure deprive the people of all their paddy lands and lands for growing grass bringing distress and hardship to man as well as animals.”

In connection with that resolution the late Minister for Local Self-Government said :—

“Government are of opinion that any legislation for the eradication of the water hyacinth is impracticable in the places in which it has already spread widely and places connected with water-ways which bring the plant every year in enormous quantities from other parts of the country. Government are at present considering some legislation to prevent its spread to such parts of the Province in which it does not exist now, and I hope I shall be able to present that Bill to the Council before long. Further than that Government do not think they can do anything in the way of legislation.”

Sir, actually on these words of assurance I have brought my present resolution exactly on the lines which was suggested by the late lamented Minister for Self Government and in that very connection another member of the House, Mr. Cresswell, said :—

“The free growing nature of this weed is such that in other countries it has shown itself easily able to adapt itself to other conditions, since I have no hesitation in saying that if steps are not taken to check its advance, we may eventually find this demon following in a much greater measure the *aquatum* which 35 years ago was hardly known in this Province but to-day is ruination to everybody who owns a Sunkhola or grass patch in the Surma Valley.”

Sir, there I also said :—

“I hear that the pest has already made its appearance in some quarters of this Valley too, and if I am correctly informed, recently there was a report at Dibrugarh that this pest has been imported there in connection with the trade in tortoises, which is a regular trade from Sylhet to this Valley. I hear the people generally use this plant in packing these tortoises. I do not know how far that is true.”

And Mr. Grayburn also after hearing me said :—

“ Mr. Phukan just now rather startled me by saying that this weed is being removed from one Valley to another in the form of packing materials.”

“ This matter was brought forward in Calcutta, I think, last year. There was then a suggestion that the sellers of the flowers of this pest should be prosecuted. Cannot the Government do something to prevent this pest or weed being removed from one district to another? If it propagates as rapidly as the Hon'ble Minister said, we should soon be in trouble in the Assam Valley if people removed it from one place to another.”

Sir, in conclusion and as a result of these discussions in that debate, the late Hon'ble Minister said :—

“ I pointed out in my previous speech that Government is contemplating some legislation—in fact the drafting of the Bill is already in hand, to prevent people from exporting or importing the plant to places where it does not at present exist. I think some provision might be made also to compel people to destroy it in localities where it has made its first appearance or which are not exposed to uncontrollable water channels like the lower part of the Surma Valley. That legislation will not be for this valley or that valley, but for the whole province. But the proposed legislation does not wish to go the length of asking the people to do something which natural causes beyond control make it impossible for them to do. It is impossible to ask people by legislation to control the growth or spread of the weed in places where fresh supplies from other parts of the world are brought by rivers. In such cases all efforts will necessarily have to be made on the lines which have been so far adopted in other countries also, *viz.*, by spending what money we can to remove or destroy it as far as we can by physical force.”

Sir, it is on the strength of this reply that I have moved this resolution and if the hon. members of the House will take the trouble of going through the resolution, then they will find perhaps that the resolution has been actually framed in the very wording of the late Minister himself. In this resolution I propose nothing else but to consolidate all these opinions held from time to time in this Council by several members and on the strength of the assurance of the late Minister that there was actually a legislation in contemplation—at least to introduce such a Bill as to check its spread any more where check is possible. So, I think this will not be a hard piece of legislation and also it will be practicable to enforce it in those places where this pest has not done great havoc as yet.

So, on these grounds, I beg to move this resolution and I am sure the whole House will support it.

THE HON'BLE RAI BAHADUR PROMODE CHANDRA DUTTA :—
Sir, the subject of water hyacinth has been brought before this Council more than once and the policy of the Government has been stated and re-stated in no uncertain terms. They are fully aware of the danger from this pest and

they fully share the anxiety of the hon. mover that it should not be allowed to spread where it does not exist now and that it should be destroyed forthwith whenever it makes its appearance for the first time. As the hon. members are aware there was a Committee appointed by the Government of Bengal under the presidency of Sir Jagadish Bose and they came to the conclusion that—

“No exact scientific intimation is yet available as regards the life history of the plant, the various modes of its propagation and effective modes of holding it in check. It is only after several years of close investigation (in which it is hoped different countries will collaborate) that really effective measures for combating this menace which threatens so many countries may be devised.”

and the remedy—an interim remedy—they suggested was that all these plants should be collected, burnt and buried. This suggestion was considered by the Government of Bengal and they issued a pamphlet containing the recommendations of that Committee. That Committee has further suggested that Assam ought to be invited to co-operate with the Government of Bengal for no isolated action on the part of either will be of any use and recently we have received a letter from the Government of Bengal asking us to co-operate with them in this matter. They are probably thinking of legislation. As a matter of fact the lines on which such legislation should proceed have been laid down by the Committee and we have been asked to co-operate with them and as far as possible we shall do so. We shall place ourselves in correspondence with the Government of Bengal in regard to this matter and if as a result of our joint deliberations it appears feasible that legislation should be undertaken for the purpose of coping with this evil, we shall gladly do so.

Certain suggestions were made in this Council that this plant—water hyacinth—was being transported from place to place in the shape of packing materials. As soon as this suggestion was made we placed ourselves in communication with the Steamer Companies and the Railway Companies and they have issued orders that no goods packed in waterhyacinth shall be received for conveyance. We have similarly approached the Eastern Bengal Railway and I have no doubt that they will also come to our help. So that all that can possibly be done has been done by Government. What can be done to eradicate it and to prevent its spread is a matter which will be decided in consultation with the Government of Bengal.

In view of this, I think the hon. mover of the Resolution might not press his resolution.

KHAN SAHIB SHARAFAT ALI CHAUDHURI:—Sir, in this resolution I very heartily support my friend, the mover, Srijut Nilmani Phukan. Of course for what we heard just now from the Hon'ble Minister we are thankful. I will be glad if earlier steps are taken in this matter because of my late experience. Three years before I went to *Hakaluki haor* for duck-shooting when I found all the *beels* open. This year when I went for shooting there I found almost all the *beels* covered by water hyacinth. I enquired from the fishermen what could be done to remove it. They said that there was no

remedy for it. It could not be removed. It has spread all over the places. Before the spread of water hyacinth I used to get from one of my *beels* Rs. 1,050 whereas now for that *beel* I am offered only Rs. 50 on account of this water hyacinth. I came to learn from the Government Tahsildar that the fate of Government fisheries will be the same very shortly. I received complaints from the cultivators of all sides that they would be ruined very soon unless and until this water hyacinth was removed. I am the Manager of the Prithimpasha Estate and in this connection I once met a gentleman from Karimganj, Kedar Nath Roy, by name. He told me that he had received some money from the Karimganj Local Board to remove water-hyacinth and to burn them for manuring purposes. I said How was that; is water hyacinth of any good for manuring purposes? He said 'Yes'. I do not know whether it is good for manuring purposes or not. But so far as I heard from the cultivators, what I personally saw there, I very earnestly request the Government to take some early precaution to put a stop to all this nuisance caused by water hyacinth. Of course we do not know what it is and wherefrom it came. Some four or five years ago we had no experience of water hyacinth. In Bengal water hyacinth is called '*kachuri*' and here *Germany pena*. I have received information from the people of my lower division and also I received information from Habiganj side that navigation by boat is almost entirely closed because all the channels are being covered with water hyacinth. Now if any step in this direction is to be taken I request that very early steps be taken as a perfunctory measure to put a stop to the increment of water hyacinth. I do not like to say anything more as I have only brought to the notice of the House what I have actually seen.

KHAN SAHIB ALAUDDIN AHMAD CHAUDHURI :—Sir, I should say a word for the information of the hon. mover of this resolution. The resolution which I moved in 1921 was carried by this House and we were told that Government would undertake some legislation in time. But six months after I was intimated that the Government was not prepared to undertake any legislation or to frame a Bill and I was requested rather to frame a Bill and to introduce it myself if I liked. Thus having no other alternative I have drafted a Bill and propose to introduce it in the Council shortly. I shall be glad if hon. members, and particularly the hon. mover, will look into it and advise me. I think this will cover the point of view of the hon. mover.

SRIJUT NILMANI PHUKAN :—Sir, I wish to make a brief reply. It seems that the whole House including the Government side also is perhaps in sympathy with this resolution and actually from what has been heard from the Hon'ble the Minister I gather that some sort of precautions have already been taken by executive order or by an executive request, and that the different Railway and Steamer companies have been asked to stop importation of this pest in packing boxes, rather to refuse to accept such commodities. Then what I want in the resolution has already been done by some sort of executive order. I simply want to make that executive order more permanent, more clear, by bringing it under statutory law. We have been already doing that as regards importation of this pest by rail and steamer. I only wanted to add here that this might be applied as well in those places where

this pest has made its first appearance and not only where it is possible to take it for the first time. So under the circumstances I am happy to know that substantial action has already been taken. And again I am happy to know that my hon. friend Khan Sahib Alauddin Ahmad Chaudhuri has already drafted a Bill. Then I think if this resolution is now accepted rather he will be under more obligation to attend to the fruition of this Bill and the Government side also will have no objection to qualify the very thing which has already been done by executive order. So on the strength of this I would like to request the Hon'ble Minister to accept this resolution which is not far away from the action he has already taken.

THE HON'BLE BAI BAHADUR PROMODE CHANDRA DUTTA :—Sir, as I said in my reply we are corresponding with the Government of Bengal as to what lines we should proceed on in this matter, and until we have come to a decision I regret I cannot accept this resolution. I repeat that Government is extremely desirous to see this pest banished from this province.

SRIJUT NILMANI PHUKAN :—Sir, I leave the matter to the House.

SRIJUT DALIM CHANDRA BORAH :—It is better to withdraw for the present.

SRIJUT NILMANI PHUKAN :—Sir, on the assurance of Khan Sahib Alauddin Ahmad Chaudhuri and also of the Hon'ble the Minister I have no objection to withdraw the resolution, and I beg leave to withdraw it.

The resolution was, by leave of the Council, withdrawn.

THE HON'BLE THE PRESIDENT :—Before adjourning the Council I should like to announce that the next three days are to be devoted to Government business. If however all the demands for grants are disposed of in time the resolutions which could not be taken up to-day will then be discussed.

The Council then adjourned till Tuesday, the 10th April 1923, at 11 A.M.

SHILLONG :

The 13th April 1923.

A. MELLOR,

Secretary to the Legislative Council, Assam.

