

SIERRA LEONE INDEPENDENCE BILL

HC Deb 22 March 1961 vol 637 cc391-440

[§](#)Order for Second Reading read.

[§](#)3.40 p.m.

[§](#)**The Secretary of State for the Colonies (Mr. Iain Macleod)**

I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I have it in command from Her Majesty the Queen to acquaint the House that Her Majesty, having been informed of the purport of the Bill, has consented to place Her prerogative and interest, so far as they are affected by the Bill, at the disposal of Parliament for the purposes of the Bill.

It is a great pleasure for me to have the privilege this afternoon of moving the Second Reading of a Bill that will bring independence to one of the territories for which we have for a very long time been responsible, indeed, our oldest Colony in West Africa, for we have been in Sierra Leone since 1787. No doubt hon. Members have studied the Report of the Constitutional Conference and will remember that I told the Conference that it was of the greatest importance that the country, before it became independent, should have shown clearly that she had the capacity to cope successfully with the problems of full self-government". For this reason, I was satisfied that it would be wise to allow a period of a year to elapse after the Conference". The Conference agreed to that and 27th April, 1961, was put forward as the date for the attainment of full independence by Sierra Leone.

During the interval since the London Conference the interim changes in the Constitution then agreed have been brought into effect. So the Ministers have had considerable experience of the problems that they will have to face for themselves once their country becomes independent. Last November, the House of Representatives in Sierra Leone passed a Resolution asking us in the United Kingdom to introduce the necessary legislation to enable Sierra Leone to become fully independent from the date I have mentioned.

They asked us, also, to support, with other members of the Commonwealth, Sierra Leone's desire to be admitted to the Commonwealth when she had obtained independence. As the House will know, the Commonwealth Prime Ministers, during their recent meeting in London, expressed their willingness so to welcome it.

I wish to refer to two matters which have been mentioned to me by hon. Members on both sides of this House. The first is the suggestion that the Sierra Leone Constitution should have been available to the House before the Bill was taken. The second was that the Bill is being taken at somewhat short notice. Although the second matter is valid, and I shall refer to it, the first point is based on misapprehension, because drafts of constitutional Orders in Council are not published before they are submitted to Her Majesty. The procedure we are following now is exactly the same as the one we followed for Nigeria, although, for Nigeria, the drafting of the Constitution was very much more complicated.

This does not mean that the substance of the Constitution is in any way unknown, because the substance of the Constitution in so far as it is new and does not carry forward the existing

Constitution is laid down in the White Paper to which I have referred and the Order in Council does no more than clothe that in legal form. It will be published early in April. I think that it was a valid point made at Question Time by the right hon. Member for Middlesbrough, East (Mr. Marquand) that publicity should be given to these matters in Sierra Leone. A draft Order in Council, comprehensive more to lawyers perhaps than ordinary people, is not a very suitable medium for that and the Governor is arranging to publish locally descriptive matter relating to the new sections, in particular, of the Constitution and to such matters as citizenship and fundamental rights.

§Mr. A. Fenner Brockway (Eton and Slough)

Can the right hon. Gentleman say whether the members of the Legislative Council in Sierra Leone have had copies of the Constitution?

§Mr. Macleod

I think that they have. I should like to check that particular point. There are two legal advisers and draftsmen from my Department in Sierra Leone at the moment. I will check on that point and see whether I can answer it before the end of the debate.

The second point, that we are taking the Bill at short notice, is true. I apologise to the House for that, but it is due to a combination of circumstances which could scarcely be avoided. It was not possible to draft the Bill in final form for presentation to Parliament until we knew for certain whether Sierra Leone would be within the Commonwealth, although one always hoped, and, indeed, assumed, that that would be so. We therefore had to wait for the recent Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference before I could publish this Bill.

Moreover, the first constitutional matter which came before that Conference, the question of South Africa, which we are to debate later today, took much longer to discuss than we had expected. In consequence, the Sierra Leone decision was correspondingly delayed. That was why it was not possible to give any longer notice of the Bill than has been given. It was laid before the House on the same day as the Commonwealth Prime Ministers took their decision and we were able to keep to the timetable for independence on the 27th of next month.

The population and area of Sierra Leone will make it one of the smaller members of the Commonwealth, but that in itself is no bar to a country holding its independence with dignity and ability and playing a substantial part on the stage of the world. Nor is it a particularly rich country, although, as the Report I have quoted shows, we have been able to make substantial provision for financial assistance in the early stages. As those hon. Members who have been there will know, its economy is mainly agricultural, but it has, in addition, rich deposits of diamonds and iron ore, and bauxite has recently been discovered in substantial quantities. I think that there is there a sufficient economic basis for an independent future. Certainly, Sierra Leone is much better off than many other countries which have recently come to their independence.

The Colonial Development Corporation and the C.D.F.C. are assisting in a major work of construction of a dam to provide for the water supply of Freetown and that work will, of course, go on. In addition, we have promised to give Sierra Leone technical assistance in the same way as we promised it to Nigeria. The House will recall the announcement of H.M.O.C.S. That has been offered to Sierra Leone and I hope that it will prove the means of assisting the country to obtain the services

of overseas staff which it needs. I do not quote any of these things which I have touched on briefly to draw attention to our own generosity or to detract in any way from the splendid efforts Sierra Leone herself is making, but simply to show that our friendship does not consist only of expressions of good will.

The Constitution is not set out in the Bill. This Bill confers independence and for the future removes from this House its special obligations in relation to legislation. The Constitution itself will be set out in the Order in Council. In that there will be, in particular—I mention this because there has been some comment recently—provisions in relation to fundamental rights and these will be entrenched in the Constitution. By entrenching them it means that the Constitution cannot just be amended by the Government, the House of Representatives.

Any alteration of an entrenched provision, as set out in paragraph 20 of the White Paper, requires, first, that the amendment would have to be carried by a two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives, then there would have to be a General Election and, after that, the amendment would again have to be carried by a two-thirds majority in the new House. So I think that it is clear that these matters, of which fundamental rights are one of the most important, are deeply entrenched in the Constitution itself.

There has also been a considerable campaign in Sierra Leone on the question of holding a General Election before independence. The position is that when the delegates came to London they represented a number of different political parties, but they then agreed to form a united front and, later, a coalition Government, but, of the 26 representatives in London, 25 agreed that there need not be a General Election before independence, the twenty-sixth dissenting from that view.

I make it clear that the life of the House of Representatives will expire in 1962 and that there will have to be a General Election then, or before then, in any event. Although it is right to keep to the decision reached at the Conference, I must make it plain that I am assured that the Government firmly intend to hold elections, as provided in the Constitution, after independence.

At the Conference we also agreed that it would be to the mutual benefit of the two countries to enter into an agreement on defence matters, but we thought it equally right to leave that matter over, and not even to negotiate about it, until Sierra Leone became independent, so that we could then negotiate that agreement as two equal partners, as we will be after the 27th day of next month.

I need not make any particular comments about the Bill itself, which is very much in common form. Clause 1 provides for the attainment of independence and contains what I have described as the Statute of Westminster powers. It says explicitly in subsection (2) that any Act of this Parliament passed on or after the appointed day shall not extend to Sierra Leone and the Government in the United Kingdom shall thereafter have no responsibility for the government of Sierra Leone. Following the Nigerian system, that is absolutely clear.

Clause 2 is the citizenship Clause, and provides both for a transitional period and for the period after Sierra Leone has passed her own citizenship law. The whole of the rest of the Bill is entirely common form and the Schedules, with the obvious and necessary changes, are similar to those who have frequently been before the House. We have agreed with Sierra Leone Ministers that in so far as the

Bill will be amendable in Sierra Leone, when it becomes an Act, amendments can be made only by the procedures which I have described for amending the entrenched provisions of the Constitution.

This afternoon's short debate is proof again of the coming to completion of the policies in which we have now been engaged for a long time and of which we are increasingly seeing the fruits. I pay warm tribute to all those who have contributed to this progress in Sierra Leone—to the Governor, Sir Maurice Dorman, and Her Majesty's Overseas Service, past and present. It is a great tribute to the Governor and to this country that his name has been put forward as the first Governor-General when Sierra Leone becomes a monarchy under the Crown. But whatever individual tributes one wishes to pay, the real tribute is to the people of the country itself, who are now coming forward to independence, and who, I am sure, will shoulder with courage and responsibility the burdens of nationhood.

There is one personal note which I should like to sound. I am sure that we are all delighted that Her Majesty should have invited the Duke of Kent to represent her at the independence celebrations, and if I wish him the same success as his sister achieved in Nigeria I can put it no higher. She had a tremendous time and I am certain that the Duke of Kent will be equally welcome and equally successful in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone, incidentally, is very much looking forward to Her Majesty's own visit later this year.

The closing words of the Conference Report read as follows: The Conference reaffirmed the long tradition of friendship between Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom, and the representatives of both made it clear that it was the intention that their co-operation and friendship should continue. It is in that spirit that I commend the Bill to the House and in that spirit that we shall look forward to the future of our relationship with an independent Sierra Leone.

§3.55 p.m.

§**Mr. H. A. Marquand** (Middlesbrough, East)

On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, I warmly welcome the Bill. We are delighted that the third former British territory in West Africa is to become independent. We are all the more delighted that the recent Prime Ministers' Conference should have welcomed Sierra Leone as a full member of the Commonwealth. She has decided of her own free will to become a monarchy and we in the United Kingdom, naturally, cannot help but be pleased about that. I join with the Colonial Secretary in all that he said in wishing the Duke of Kent a very pleasant and enjoyable time when he visits Sierra Leone. I am sure that he will have a right royal welcome.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to questions which we had put from this side of the House about the delay in presenting the Bill. We were surprised not to have had it before, but I fully accept the right hon. Gentleman's explanation of that delay. I agree that the Bill is in common form and, therefore, does not require detailed consideration after we have discussed it this afternoon.

I was aware that there were difficulties about publishing an Order in Council before it was made, but, none the less, I was anxious to draw attention by the questions I put, to the desirability of making known to the people of Sierra Leone exactly what was in their Constitution.

In December, I had the honour to lead a very small delegation to Sierra Leone I was joined by the hon. and gallant Member for Nottingham, Central (Lieut.-Colonel Cordeaux) and the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. McLaren). I hasten to add, lest the House be anxious about it, that I had no difficulty about disciplining my followers on that occasion. They were very well behaved. All of us on that delegation have vivid memories of the beauty of the country and the variety of its scenery and the friendliness of its people.

Wherever we went we were received most cordially, by Sir Milton Margai and his Ministers, by the trade union leaders, by members of co-operative societies, by ordinary people, by important people and by less important people all over Sierra Leone. We were much impressed by the closeness of the connection which the people of Sierra Leone feel with this country, not merely in Freetown, which has been more closely associated with Great Britain over many years than has the Protectorate, but in the Protectorate, also.

With that, however, there was undeniably some feeling of apprehension and as we went around some people asked, "Why are you leaving us?". That was how they expressed it to us. It seemed as though many persons in a variety of occupations and in different places had a feeling of uneasiness. That did not exist among the Ministers, of course. It did not exist among the chiefs. Those people are powerful and are self-confident in their new mission. I do not for a moment suggest that they are not, but they are powerful and will be more powerful and they may have good reason not to feel any misgiving.

Nevertheless, we felt that there was a feeling of doubt, possibly because it was only three years between the establishment of a Ministerial system and the giving of full independence. Perhaps the people did not expect it to come quite so soon. Readers' correspondence in the newspapers showed that there was, if not misapprehension, at any rate a good deal of misunderstanding about what independence involved.

Some of this arises because the people have a trust in many of those who have been in charge of their affairs while the Protectorate remained a Protectorate and Freetown remained a Colony. I hope that one good result will be that the feeling of doubt as to whether they are fully ready for independence will translate itself into strong requests to many experienced and skilled administrators and experts to stay on. I hope that the results of the negotiations which we provided for in a recent Measure will prove to be successful. It is clear that large numbers of those people are well liked and trusted. I hope that they will feel that they can stay, when they are asked to do so, to help this small country in its further passage towards being a strong and viable economy.

It is well known that the history of the country has not always been peaceful. In the past, there has been strife between the Protectorate and Freetown. There has been rivalry between various tribes, particularly between the Mende and the Temene. There may be fear in the minds of some people that this will emerge again. I suppose that the leaders of the All Peoples' Congress, to whose correspondence with some of us the right hon. Gentleman referred, had these various stresses and strains in mind when they put forward their demand for elections before independence.

We took pains to see the representatives of the All Peoples' Congress. We were the guests of the Government, and we had many and frequent contacts with the Prime Minister, with Ministers and other persons in authority, including many chieftains. We thought it right and proper that, since

representations were being made to us, we should see Mr. Wallace Johnson, who is, in any case, a member of the Legislature, Mr. Stevens and others concerned in the All Peoples' Congress. We gave as fair a hearing as we could to what they had to say, but none of us was convinced of the full case that they put forward.

After all, the Conference in London agreed that it was unnecessary to have elections before independence, and as the right hon. Gentleman said, there was a very large representation at the Conference of people who had been elected by the people, although there were some others. It was decided at the Conference in London that there should be universal suffrage at the next election. It will inevitably take time to register the women voters who will become the electorate.

As far as we could see, there is no real issue to be decided at the moment, because everybody is in favour of independence, even though some of the simple people are not quite sure exactly what it will mean. We were not, and could not be, convinced by the statement that it was Sir Milton Margai's intention never to have elections again and to establish a one-party State. Now that Sir Milton has recommended to Her Majesty that Sir Maurice Dorman be the Governor-General, it is perfectly clear that he could never have had any such project in his mind, otherwise he would not have asked such a distinguished former Governor and so devoted an adherent of the parliamentary democratic system which we have in this country to become the Governor-General.

I extend my hearty congratulations to Sir Maurice and offer him every good wish in his future task. He has piloted Sierra Leone very skilfully towards this stage of independence. I am sure that he will give very wise advice in future when he is asked to do so. Moreover, Sierra Leone has a stout guardian of democratic liberties in Mr. Lightfoot Boston, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, who is an eminent constitutional lawyer and a great believer in the principles of British common law.

Further, as the right hon. Gentleman reminded us, an elaborate Bill of Human Rights will be written into the Constitution. It was agreed in detail at the London Conference. I am still convinced that it would have been wise to publicise this more than has been done. People just did not know about it and how thorough, elaborate, detailed and firm it is. Although I was not convinced by the story that there would be no elections after independence, I want to say how much I welcome the statement that the right hon. Gentleman has been authorised to make this afternoon, namely, that Sir Milton Margai has every intention of having elections within the due time.

The human rights section of the proposed new Constitution says this on page 17 of the Report of the Conference: Everyone who is arrested shall be informed promptly of the reasons for his arrest and of any charge against him. Everyone arrested or detained in accordance with"— so and so— shall be brought properly before a judge or other officer authorised by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release pending trial. There are some who have been imprisoned recently. I take it that the statement we heard today clearly means that those who have offended will be brought to trial quickly if that has not already been done. In the rejoicings and celebrations of independence perhaps those who may not have committed any very serious offence may find that they are released.

While we were in Sierra Leone we had a very interesting discussion in which the hon. and gallant Member for Nottingham, Central and I took part with some distinguished representatives of public

life in Sierra Leone, one of them being Mr. Stevens, who has written so many letters to many of us since we returned. The discussion was about the possibilities of maintaining democratic government in emerging African territories. That is a very live issue in Africa these days, because there are examples in Africa, as we all know, of states where the one-party system prevails and where Parliamentary democracy as we know it does not exist.

The general conclusion of the very active debate which we had was that the forms of democracy might differ and that, no doubt as the result of traditional variations, the exact constitution might not be the same everywhere in Africa, but we all felt that it was certainly highly desirable and perhaps absolutely necessary to have within a successful democracy a lively opposition.

Mr. Stevens took part in the debate. I am sure that there are legitimate differences of opinion among the people of Sierra Leone about the present Government, their policies, and their attitude to certain institutions of a tribal character. If there are those differences, that provides an opportunity to Mr. Stevens and Mr. Wallace Johnson and other people engaged in opposition to make themselves into an effective Parliamentary Opposition. I hope that they will now devote themselves to organising an opposition, if they wish to do so, on legal and democratic lines and look forward to getting elected to Parliament when the elections take place.

The Secretary of State rightly said at the Constitutional Conference, and repeated today, that Sierra Leone is not a rich country. There has been a recent large increase in its national income because of an increase in the output of minerals. Nevertheless, that total increase in wealth, though large in proportion, is not large in absolute amount, and the known supplies of diamonds and iron ore will not last indefinitely, to put it no higher than that. There are limits to the present known resources.

Bauxite has recently been discovered, but bauxite is being discovered in many places just now, in Africa as well as elsewhere. The main wealth of the country lies in its land and its ability to produce palm oil, and to grow rice, cocoa, cassava, piassava, cola nuts and, later perhaps, bananas. I believe that they are experimenting very successfully with the banana crop.

But the land of Sierra Leone, which is the main source of its wealth, has been injured much in the past by erosion, as I am sure is known by all who have been there. The country is not to be compared in wealth with Nigeria not to speak of Ghana, which is perhaps the richest country in agriculture and forestry in Africa. Development is badly needed, as elsewhere in such countries, to sustain existing levels of wealth and to provide for an increase in population as well as to increase the wealth per head. Funds are needed to be put into the hands of a people who, as far as we can judge, are very willing to help themselves.

I found the co-operative movement in Sierra Leone most inspiring. It has expanded rapidly in recent years. It has 400 societies, with 24,000 members and a staff of 135, and it has been remarkably successful in arousing the interest of women which, as all hon. Members who know Africa will appreciate, is a very important factor.

I do not think that one can exaggerate the potential importance of this movement in improving agriculture, in developing a sense of community and in providing a training ground for democracy; for democracy is by no means only a process of electing members of a Legislature: it must be practised in daily life to become deeply rooted in any nation. The same applies to the trade unions.

The mineworkers' union, whose leaders we met and many of whose members we met, too, seemed to us to be in good shape. Its secretary, I understand, is at present at Ruskin College, Oxford, following a course of training for his important duties.

This union and other unions need our help, because they, too, are a training ground for democracy. These institutions can be as African in character as in make-up. No doubt they will develop some forms of association or practice which are different from those of trade unions elsewhere, but upon these foundations of a keen and eager people, if only we can help them with adequate supplies of investment capital, a flourishing nation can be built.

Sir Milton Margai loves the life and culture of the villages, I know; he goes out and serves his people with his own hands. As he told me with pride and evident satisfaction, he often delivers babies in the bush with his own hands, for he is a gynaecologist, trained in Newcastle.

I am sure that he appreciates and values a thriving life on the land, but much needs to be done in a country of only 2½ million if it is to become strong and able to bear comparison with Guinea. This is very important indeed. As hon. Members know very well, the French have done a great deal in developing territories which were formerly under their control. As figures published recently by O.E.C.D. show, they have provided a larger amount of aid to their former colonies than we have provided to ours.

Guinea has benefited from this and is now receiving aid from Czechoslovakia. I should like to see Sierra Leone do at least as well, to be as prosperous as Guinea and to show a good example, under a fully democratic system, of what can be done in an African country. But much needs to be done in the provision of health, communications, housing, fisheries, agriculture and education.

The primary school enrolment in the whole of Sierra Leone was 34,000 in 1950. It had risen to 69,000 in 1958, but much of that progress and improvement had taken place in Freetown, which already had substantial educational advantages. The best calculation which I could make—it may be inaccurate and, if so, I should like it corrected—was that the chance of a child in the Protectorate getting primary education is still only one in ten. The Fourah Bay College, the first college of higher education in West Africa, after all these years has little over 300 students, and half of those are from Nigeria. It is a far less impressive undertaking now than Ibadan, not to speak of the enormous college of technology at Kumasi and the University of Ghana itself.

The Secretary of State has promised £7½ million over the next three or four years in loans and grants. He spoke about this today and gave his reasons for thinking that it was adequate. I hope that he will think again and that, at any rate, he will agree to review this proposition at the end of a year or eighteen months to see whether the funds then provided promise reasonably to yield satisfactory fruit and whether they could be increased.

The major feeling with which I came back from Sierra Leone was that the needs for development are urgent, that the capacity of the population is there, that the willingness of the population to co-operate is rapidly increasing, that independence should give all this a fillip and that we ought to do more. I should like to see a special grant right away for the eradication of malaria. Her Majesty's Government refused to give a grant to the World Health Organisation for its malaria eradication campaign because they say that other countries are not paying their whack. That may be true. I do

not dispute it. But why not give to Sierra Leone, as a birthday gift, a little extra, a special grant? It seems a shame that malaria should still be so widely prevalent in that country when it has been practically eliminated in British Guiana, which is a country not dissimilar in make-up.

I hope that there will be early provision of adequate funds for a co-operative bank. The co-operative societies are spreading and their growing numbers are becoming very enthusiastic, but they will not be able to carry on their productive functions unless they can obtain credit for the farmers who belong to them. They are not now getting sufficient credit. I should like to see consideration of a special grant for a co-operative bank.

I should like to see this country build a number—I do not say too many, because the teachers might not be available—of primary schools, label them independence primary schools, and put on the front of them, on a notice, "A gift to independent Sierra Leone from the independent British people".

In Sierra Leone, they have had a very long connection with this country. I think that they value it highly. Let the message go from the House this afternoon that we, too, value it highly, that we are proud of it, that we want to strengthen it and that we want it to last through the years. We wish them well. Let us help them to get off to a good start.

§4.20 p.m.

§**Mr. Norman Pannell** (Liverpool, Kirkdale)

In common with the right hon. Member for Middlesbrough, East (Mr. Marquand), I regret the delay in bringing this Bill before the House. Although I recognise the arguments advanced by my right hon. Friend, I feel that it derogates from the authority of Parliament that in this matter we must receive the assent of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers before we can, in our own discretion, grant independence to a Colony.

Even more do I regret the haste with which the Bill is being passed through all its stages. A Colony, with which we have had a connection for over 200 years, is being, in a sense, disposed of in a few hours. Whereas, yesterday, we discussed for the whole day a matter of transitory and trivial importance—the salary of one man—today we are disposing of the destiny of 2 million people in less than half that time.

I must confess that, contrary to many hon. Members, I do not greet this Bill with any enthusiasm, but I fully recognise the compelling reasons which render it inevitable. I agree that it is far better to yield gracefully now than to submit later after having put up an opposition which might have caused great resentment, and the loss of the good will of the people of Sierra Leone. Like the right hon. Member for Middlesbrough, East, I also had the honour of leading an all-party delegation to Sierra Leone. That was in 1958. Like the right hon. Gentleman, I was impressed by the warmth and friendliness of the people. I was, however, perturbed by certain aspects of Sierra Leone's economy and the fact that its revenue was very small.

The income per head of population was not more than £20, and education was only in its early stages. I estimated that only one child in six had any prospect of any kind of education.

§Mr. R. W. Sorensen (Leyton)

Will the hon. Gentleman say whose fault that was? Could not education have been started years ago?

§Mr. Pannell

I hope to make some reference to that later.

I felt, apart from the reasons for it, that was a rather insecure basis for independence. But, since my visit, a great deal has happened in Africa. So many countries have gained their independence, countries with less financial resources and smaller populations than Sierra Leone, and with less ability to control their own affairs. In that comparison Sierra Leone certainly does not suffer, and it would be quite impossible to withhold from the people of Sierra Leone the independence for which their democratically elected legislature has asked. So I join with other hon. Members, not so much welcoming the independence of Sierra Leone, but certainly in wishing her the best of good fortune and the greatest possible prosperity in the future.

There has been a very long association indeed between Sierra Leone and this country. Sierra Leone differs from any other country of Africa to which we have granted independence in that it is not a Colony in the pejorative sense. As hon. Members well know, it was a settlement of freed men towards the end of the eighteenth century. It was regarded as a great experiment of what Africans could do. Although perhaps not all the hopes have been entirely fulfilled, much has been achieved in the intervening period; and I think that the economy and progress of Sierra Leone compares very favourably with that of its neighbour, Liberia, where a similar settlement was made sixty or seventy years later in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Although we may criticise our Government for not having done everything they should, particularly in the matter of education, we must recognise that they have done quite a lot. It was only after the end of the last war—I think that perhaps all parties are responsible for this—that there was a recognition that this country should give some positive aid to the Colonies. Up to that date all we had done was to marshal the resources of the countries. The resources of Sierra Leone were not as great as those of Nigeria, and in relation to its population they were very much less than the resources of the Gold Coast, or Ghana as it is now called. Therefore, the progress made was less significant than in those other two territories.

A great deal that we had done has not been effective. While I was in Sierra Leone I visited several agricultural stations. They were models of efficiency and certainly showed the African how to cultivate his crops in a much better manner than he is doing by the present method of shifting cultivation. But very little use was made of these stations by the African. He was unwilling to abandon his traditional methods of agriculture, and side-by-side with the rich corn on an agricultural station one could see, on the other side of the road, the poor sparse crop of corn produced by the African.

I think that independence could have a beneficial effect in such matters. The British guided and controlled, but they exercised no compulsion and I was much influenced by, and interested in, the fact that when Ghana gained her independence the independent Government were able to stamp

out swollen shoot in the cocoa crop, which was threatening that industry, in a manner in which the British had never been able to do.

I do not know whether an independent Government enlists greater support from the people or is able to introduce harsher methods, but at any rate results were rapidly achieved. In that respect, we failed. The same thing may occur in Sierra Leone. The methods of agriculture recognised as beneficent may be introduced by an independent Government, perhaps by a measure of compulsion or because of the enthusiasm of the people for an independent Government which they would fail to exhibit towards a colonial régime.

The right hon. Member for Middlesbrough, East, spoke of the mineral resources of Sierra Leone. They are impressive, but, of course, they do not have any great effect on the income of the people, because they affect a relatively small number. They may raise the income per head of the population by £5. As the right hon. Gentleman said, the chief basis of the economy is agriculture, and it is only through an advance in that respect that the standard of living of the people will be substantially raised.

I hope, I confidently believe, that when Sierra Leone attains independence, it will respect the arrangements made with private companies for the development of iron ore and diamonds. A point which is worthy of mention is that, of roughly £15 million worth of diamonds produced each year, one-third is produced by the concessionary company which pays millions of pounds in taxation each year into the revenue of Sierra Leone. The other two-thirds is produced by private diggers. When I visited the Colony there were 80,000 of them.

The revenue accruing to the Government from them is insignificant, as it is founded on export duty. The limited company has to pay over a high proportion of its profits by way of taxation. That is something which I think an independent Sierra Leone might well look at. It might be able to use these very valuable resources in a less wasteful manner than by way of private diggings, and also bring much more into the coffers of the State than has been put there hitherto.

In conclusion, I should like to say to hon. Members that a very great deal of the smoothness of the operations for independence is due to Premier Sir Milton Margai and to the Governor, Sir Maurice Dorman. I found Sir Milton Margai a very wise old gentleman who had a remarkable restraining influence on the wild elements in the country; a man who earned our respect and deserved our respect.

Sir Maurice Dorman has undertaken his difficult task of leading the country towards independence with great ability. I can imagine no man who would so enlist not only the confidence of his Ministers, but also their affection. I am very pleased indeed that he will be the first representative of Her Majesty after independence has been attained.

I wish the newly independent State of Sierra Leone a prosperous future in co-operation with this country and with other members of our independent Commonwealth.

§4.31 p.m.

§Mr. Arthur Creech Jones (Wakefield)

We are today debating the loss of a member of the Commonwealth. At the same time, we are welcoming, as a member of the Commonwealth, one of our Colonies which we feel worthy of the status of independence. All of us, I think, would wish the Colony to thrive, to prosper, and that it should not be founded on the racial principles which have brought about the loss from the Commonwealth of the Union of South Africa.

I welcome the Bill because of my own long-standing friendship with many of the people of Sierra Leone. It was nearly twenty years ago that, in company with Walter Elliot and Sir Julian Huxley, I was asked to investigate some of the social, economic and educational problems of the territory. Later, when I had the privilege of presiding over the Colonial Office, I discussed with Sir Hubert Stevenson and the then Governor, Sir Beresford Stooke, the future political development of Sierra Leone. Neither I, nor, I am certain, none of those ex-Governors ever thought that within such a short time Sierra Leone, of its own will, would be independent and the settlement or Colony working in reasonable harmony with the Protectorate.

I should like to pay tribute to the initial work done by Sir Beresford Stooke when he was Governor, and to add that I myself am happy that I had something to do with the pioneer work which brought about the early constitution changes.

The granting of the status of independence is something of a bold experiment. We should recognise that this territory, over the years, has had to contend with very special difficulties. Our thoughts go back, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Kirkdale (Mr. N. Pannell) reminded us, to the settlement established in a somewhat barbaric country—when an effort was made to found a genuine Colony or settlement for free men from the United States. There has, of course, always been some profound division between the Colony and the Protectorate. That circumstance has been a very real obstacle in constitutional development.

The Protectorate itself was extremely backward, and was, for a very long period of years, mostly neglected. Its resources were poor, which made it difficult to build up any genuine social and economic life, and, in the main, it was regarded by interests in this country as a territory to be exploited for its iron ore, its diamonds, and possibly for a few agricultural crops.

One can quite understand that today there is a degree of uneasiness as to the wisdom of this Bill, an uneasiness which arises from the doubts which exist as to the alleged political immaturity of the people and their limited political experience. Also because of the somewhat limited basis for their economic life. Yet the people are demanding, with the Colony now reconciled to the Protectorate, and of their own will, independent status.

I should like, as did the hon. Member for Kirkdale, to pay tribute to Sir Milton Margai. I had the privilege of meeting Sir Milton nearly twenty years ago in a very obscure corner of Sierra Leone. I was introduced to him, curiously enough, by Mr. Wallace Johnson, who, at this moment, is going through the courts, as he was then. Sir Milton was doing a remarkable piece of medical and social work in the remote corner of Bonthe in Sierra Leone. He was said to be, at that time, the one outstanding intellectual which the Protectorate had produced.

By Sir Milton's skill in handling experiments in preventive medicine, in dealing with midwifery and maternity, and in tackling some of the difficult problems of initiation ceremonies, he showed himself

to be a remarkable and unusual person. Ever since, I have retained a close friendship with him and admired generally the political work which he has attempted to do. He came into politics not because of any inner urge on his part but because the people of the Protectorate claimed his services, so that in the end he felt obliged to give them.

I think that it should be remembered, when people talk of the immaturity of Sierra Leone, that, after all, Freetown, over a very long period, has been a great centre of political discussion and agitation. I recall some of those who acted as leaders of the people there, who tried to give wise guidance. There was the late Mayor of Freetown, Dr. Taylor-Cummings, who served with distinction on the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa. There was Dr. Bright, also, and even Wallace Johnson, in his turn, contributed something to political discussion and the political scepticism which is so necessary in the developing political life of a country.

Let us not forget, also, the great work and influence of Fourah Bay College and the pride which the people of Sierra Leone entertain for that college. We owe a debt to Durham University for standing in the shadows over a long period of time and helping the college along, in building up its standards. The college has trained Africans and done much for the general life and indeed, in inspiring education all along the West Coast. We should remember, that some of those who have taken an active part in leadership in West Africa, with moderation and with wisdom, in Nigeria, in Ghana, received their training in Fourah Bay College. One can hope that the college will go on to full university status and that, with the advice which has so frequently been given to it, particularly of late by Mr. Fulton and Dr. Daish, it will before long attain that goal.

I feel obliged to voice several doubts which come with independence. The first relates to the old division existing between the Colony and the Protectorate. It is perfectly true that there has over the years been an intertwining of interests and of personnel and an effort to bring the two regions together in a common political activity and interest. I hope that the prejudices of the past will completely die and that in legislation and in development there will be a sustained balance between the claims of the Colony and the claims of the Protectorate and harmony fully established between the peoples of the two areas. At the moment, they are integrated sufficiently to demand a common Parliament for the whole territory.

My second apprehension arises from the degree of political inexperience which the people have in the working of democratic institutions. I feel that this must be said. I am sure that Sir Milton Margai will insist on the highest standards of integrity in the political life of the country. In the past, we have heard ugly stories of corruption and nepotism, and we hope that the new country will turn its back on all that sort of thing. In the evolution from traditional forms of society to a modern democratic State, there are very real difficulties to be overcome. I hope that there will be displayed sufficient tolerance and good will, in the working of political institutions so that modern forms of democracy as we know them, modified in the light of the traditions of the country, may be well-established.

I welcome the announcement by the Secretary of State of his insistence in his discussions with the Prime Minister of Sierra Leone about the inclusion in the Constitution of a Bill of Rights embodying the principles of toleration and respect for minorities and Opposition. In a new territory, working for the first time towards a genuine democratic system, these things are of fundamental importance.

Because any new territory needs a very strong system of administration and of technical assistance, I urge that we should go as far as we can to persuade our colonial civil servants to stay and help in the future development of the country. As we have been reminded today, their service has been of a very high quality in the past, and that service is still indispensable for the future prosperity and good life of the country. I hope very much that the administrative framework will not collapse, but that Africans will be quickly trained to take their place in the Service while, in the meantime, our own overseas civil servants are employed in strengthening and helping along the country's life and administrative arrangements.

Whenever a territory reaches independence, particularly a territory which is financially weak, with comparatively limited resources, one factor always stands out. How is it to face the future with confidence when there is still an infinite amount of development work to be done both in equipping and building up the economic resources of the territory and in securing a good standard of life, including the provision for those social and educational services which are so important for its general well-being?

Colonial development and welfare grants will now come to an end for new schemes. The Secretary of State said that about £7½ million in the immediate future may be available by way of grants and loans, but for this very poor country to progress and to establish the standards it will require there will be needed not only technical aid, but a great deal of further financial support from this country. After all, this is our responsibility, and it is a responsibility which we cannot altogether shirk even when a country achieves independence. I hope, therefore, that the Government will take a very generous view of the needs of the territory so that the work of development, both economically and socially, may go ahead.

I join in congratulating Sir Maurice Dorman, Sir Milton Margai and the people of the territory who have made independence both possible and practicable. Finally, if I may, I congratulate the Secretary of State on his courage and audacity at this time in bringing forward the Bill. He has been going through a somewhat bitter period, and it speaks well for him that, in spite of the opposition which has made itself felt among certain supporters of the Government, he nevertheless remains guilty of what I might call a degree of liberal enlightenment.

I am a fellow sympathiser with the right hon. Gentleman. When I held office I, too, was frequently attacked because it was alleged that I was dismembering the Empire and removing colonial status from the dependencies; in fact, I was making efforts to build up a Commonwealth fellowship. The people who are bitter in their attacks on the Secretary of State today are the same people who attacked me when I was engaged in a similar job of trying to build a Commonwealth. The Secretary of State may console himself with the fact that at least a number of those who sit behind him now speak my language and now wear the clothes of Labour's policy. All that is to the good. I therefore congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on what he has done. I hope that the Conservative Party will have the good sense to sustain him in office so that his free and liberal work in the Continent of Africa and, indeed, in what is left of the Colonial Empire, may go on.

I congratulate Sir Milton Margai, the Governor and the people of Sierra Leone on this Bill, and I wish the country all success in the days ahead.

§4.51 p.m.

§Sir Peter Agnew (Worcestershire, South)

In no part of the House has there been any wish to delay, much less to hinder, the passage of this Bill, which will give the people of Sierra Leone their independence. This is a notable occasion, because it is one on which the smallest number of people so far to achieve independence are attaining a position in which they will have to sail out on the comparatively uncharted sea of management of their own affairs, subject only to the good wishes that we give them at the outset of their voyage.

Having said that the sea is uncharted, I should add that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has sought partially to chart it. He has told the House that there will be inserted in the Constitution, by what he described as entrenched provisions, a kind of standard of political conduct in the relationship between the Government and the people which should guide all those who find themselves, after the passage of the Bill into law, in the position of having to conduct the affairs of the territory and dominion of Sierra Leone.

However, I think it is right to utter a note of caution about entrenched provisions being placed either in this Constitution or in the constitution of any other territory which, in the fullness of time and sooner or later, may be the subject of legislation passed through this House. It is true that in the Second Schedule of the Bill there is a provision which states that Nothing in this Act shall confer on the legislature of Sierra Leone any power to repeal, amend or modify the constitutional provisions otherwise than in such manner as may be provided for in those provisions. We can insert those words in an imperial Measure that we are shortly to pass, but, after we have passed it and independence is achieved, it will be then that the people of Sierra Leone, through their Government, will have unlimited power to change their Constitution as they will, and they will have power to jettison, if foolish enough to do so, the Bill of Rights which is being entrenched into that Constitution by us today and an accumulated code of wisdom such as we have collected together over many hundreds of years of Parliamentary history.

It is right, therefore, that, in taking up their freedom, which is also their burden of responsibility, the people of Sierra Leone should recognise that if they are to make independence a success it is not only independence of the British Government and of Whitehall that they are achieving. If they are to run their Constitution properly, it is the independence and freedom of each individual within the Constitution of Sierra Leone which is at stake. Therefore, we are right in passing this Measure through as quickly as may be, and I think that the Secretary of State has the support of the House in what he has done. In passing the Bill, we hope that in Sierra Leone, in its new-found freedom, there will prevail those counsels of moderation that we have sought to write into the code which we hand to them with our best wishes.

I join other hon. Members in wishing the Government, Parliament and people of Sierra Leone every success in the great experiment which they are shortly to undertake.

§4.58 p.m.

§Mr. Robert Edwards (Bilston)

It is always a great joy to be in the House on occasions such as this when yet another African State and another African people are about to win their freedom. It indicates the great changes which

have taken place in this country when we are willing to accept the great nationalist revolutions of our time, trying to make our peace with them and to give them a constructive direction. Like every other hon. Member, I warmly welcome the Bill. Having said that, I hope the House will forgive me if I make one or two critical remarks which I feel should be made because this House is interested in human freedom.

I was very pleased to hear the opening statement of the Secretary of State, namely, that there would be a general election in Sierra Leone within a year or perhaps before the year is out. I welcome that statement very much, particularly in the light of what is unfortunately happening in Sierra Leone at this moment. The Colonial Secretary mentioned the Constitutional Conference in London in 1959. He referred to the fact that only one vote, namely, that of Siaka Stevens, was cast against independence before a general election. Unfortunately, today in court, at Bow Street, Siaka Stevens was to be ordered to be deported to Sierra Leone under a warrant. It is sad, but symbolic that on the very day that we are discussing independence—

§The Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies (Mr. Hugh Fraser)

Mr. Siaka Stevens is returning to Sierra Leone. He is not being deported, but is returning to Sierra Leone voluntarily to stand any criminal prosecution he may incur there.

§Mr. Edwards

Nevertheless, the point I was making, which I think is a valid point, for the sake of the future and for the record, is that on this very day, in Bow Street, the first Minister of Mines and Minerals in Sierra Leone, the leader of its first organised mineworkers union, the head of the one opposition party that exists in that country, has had to face a warrant issued against him in his own country. That has happened here, in the metropolis of the Commonwealth this very day.

I take a poor view of a situation of this nature, and it might very well be that if this good man, Siaka Stevens, had not been able to communicate with me last Thursday, when he was arrested by four policemen in a most crude fashion, he might have been deported. The four policemen first went to his son's home, a boarding house, looking for his father, and then went to Mr. Stevens' hotel. He was taken to Bow Street and put into the cells, and, if he had not contacted me, it may very well have been that next day he would have been shipped off to Sierra Leone in handcuffs and on a warrant.

I make this point because I think it is dreadfully important for the future of the people of Sierra Leone. Here we are discussing independence and human freedoms, and when we do so, no evil consequences can arise for a people by the pursuit of truth, and that is why I am being so frank, though I am still a supporter of independence for Sierra Leone. At the Constitutional Conference, four parties assembled in London—three major parties and two independent representatives from the diamond area of Kono. Here in London, without any discussion in Sierra Leone, without any discussion in the House of Representatives, these twenty-six people got together and formed a Coalition Government by issuing posts in the new Government with the allocation of jobs to Ministers and Junior Ministers.

No wonder they got an almost unanimous vote for independence before an election. After all, the Government of Sir Milton Margai, with all due respect to him, had only one year to go, and that is not a long time in the history of a country which has not had its freedom for 250 years. One year is

not a long time in the great struggle for human freedom, and it seems to me that they could have waited another year, could have had their elections and then independence. I think that is the democratic way of doing things. I think that it is a violation of democratic principles for a small group of articulate politicians to come to London for the constitutional conference and to form a Government here, without consulting their own people at home and without discussing it in their parliament.

On their return to Sierra Leone, the one voice of the opposition, that of Mr. Wallace Johnson, a great agitator—but all the great things that have happened in this world, all the rights and freedoms we enjoy, have been won by men like Wallace Johnson who were never afraid to fight for human rights, irrespective of the personal sacrifice which they had to make—was silenced. The one opposition voice in the House of Representatives was silenced, because he was arrested, and they threw the book at him, just as they threw it at Siaka Stevens—sedition, conspiracy, criminal libel, the whole lot. These phrases and charges are meaningless in African politics, and they are meaningless when we listen to what is said in election campaigns in any country in Africa. Wallace Johnston is out on bail of £700, and the one opposition voice is silenced in the House of Representatives.

There was another representative from the diamond area who was also a little doubtful about independence before the election. What happened to him? He went back and he was tried—an elected representative of the people with a very big majority—by a tribal court, against which there is no appeal, and he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for attacking the paramount chief. I do not know if there is any reference in this new constitution which checks the power of the tribal chief in the tribal court, against which there is no appeal, in regard to the trial of a member of the House of Representatives. It seems to me that there is to be no change in this tribal system.

I know the trade union movement in Sierra Leone very well. I have been in contact with it for many years, and, in its own modest way, my own trade union in this country has helped it. I received a petition from the Sierra Leone Council of Labour, which is a very moderate body, as I stated in the House the other day, and, up till now, has been a nonpolitical body. It has never involved itself in politics at all, but has kept right out. It was purely and simply working for trade unionism, is 30,000 strong, and it has a fine system of wage negotiations.

It sent a protest to me, which I passed on to the Colonial Secretary. What did the protest say? It said that before the present House of Representatives there are certain amendments to the law—the Juries Amendment Ordinance—and it insisted that this means that the system of trial by jury may come to an end. There are three systems of courts in Sierra Leone and the Protectorate. There is the tribal court, trial by jury, with a judge and a jury, and another kind of court with a judge and three assessors. This new ordinance will give the judge appointed by the Prime Minister exclusive control over the courts, with no jury, with no assessors, and with no appeal.

I hope that that will be put right, and I am sure they will put it right. I hope they will read the HANSARD report of this debate, and that the Government of Sierra Leone will think again about this ordinance, which will deny many people, particularly political people and trade unionists, the right to trial by jury or trial by assessors. I hope they will think again before they pass legislation of this nature through the House of Representatives. However, I have received much assurance today from the statement that a general election will take place. This is what worries people like me and many of my hon. Friends on this side of the Chamber who are concerned that the people will get the

opportunity of discussing the future of their country and that there will not be imposed on any new African State a single party dictatorship, and that the trade union movement, which has grown to strength and power and great influence under colonial rule, will not lose the privileges it gained even under colonialism in a new independent African State.

Having made these critical observations, which I think just had to be made in the light of the present situation in Sierra Leone, may I say how very much I welcome this Bill, and how very much I enjoy these occasions when we can say to millions of people that, after a certain date, they are free to elect their own Governments and run their own countries in their own way without interference from abroad.

We need to assist Sierra Leone for some time to come. Some of the assistance required is not massive sums of capital investment. From my own experience, I suggest that assistance in small, strategic directions is of great immediate importance to these small African countries whose economy is based on agriculture. They need help to extend their co-operative buying and selling. They want a few technicians to explain to them how to keep the books, how to buy and sell at the right times, how to develop means of mutual aid and self-help, how to run their co-operative banks, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, East (Mr. Marquand) so rightly said.

These countries need to be shown how to operate credit facilities, so that the farmers' co-operatives can obtain credit for nine months in the year until they harvest their crops. They need advice on the development of small handicraft industries. It is this kind of help, which does not involve hundreds of millions of pounds but goodwill and wise advice, which is needed. It involves sending out people to countries like Sierra Leone who believe in human freedom, who understand the need for mutual aid and self-help, who are dedicated to the job, and who understand the simple needs of African agriculture.

If we can have a continuous flow into Sierra Leone of people like that, there will be no danger of a single-party dictatorship, because out of the co-operatives and trade unions the people will learn democracy. They will learn how to run their own farms, villages and little industries, and out of this experience they will know how to run their own government, and no one party will be able to deny them the rights which they should be assured by this Bill.

[§5.13 p.m.](#)

[§Mr. Philip Goodhart](#) (Beckenham)

Along with many other hon. Members who have spoken in this debate, I have great admiration for the way in which Sir Milton Margai has led his country forward to the state in which many of us welcome the introduction of this Bill. It is undeniable that he has been better capable of holding his followers together than has the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition. But I cannot share the view, which seemed implicit in the remarks of the hon. Member for Bilston (Mr. R. Edwards)—who, I know, takes a very deep interest in the affairs of Sierra Leone—that the General Election which is coming along will be "cooked" and will not be a free one. That seemed to be the tenor of his remarks, but I am sure that that will not be so.

A transitional period is a difficult one, particularly for overseas civil servants. It redounds much to the credit of Sir Milton Margai and his Ministers that this transitional period in Sierra Leone should

have been so free of friction. A great deal is due also to the wise management of Sir Maurice Dorman. No better monument to this period of co-operation could have been given than the choice of Sir Maurice to be the first Governor-General of independent Sierra Leone.

In many ways, Sir Milton has a close political relationship with Earl Attlee. Both men are deceptively strong. Both have a considerable fund of commonsense, and both shun the political and social limelight. I, too, had the advantage of being a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Delegation that visited Sierra Leone. Sir Milton, as Prime Minister, was good enough to give a reception for us. At that reception, a new recruit to the secretariat, imbued no doubt by the British Council's ideal that people should meet people, went up to a lonely figure standing in the shadows and asked him whether he could introduce him to any of the people at the reception. That lonely figure turned out to be our host, the Prime Minister of Sierra Leone.

Sir Milton and his successors will, I am sure, always be welcome in this country. I have no doubt that they will make a valuable contribution to the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference when they come. But the introduction of this Bill prompts some thoughts on the problems of what happens to the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference following this Bill. Tanganyika and the West Indian Federation will almost certainly be making application to become full members of the Commonwealth within the next twelve months.

There is a possibility that Western Samoa, with a population of about 100,000, will also be making such an application. British Guiana and other countries are certainly not far down in the queue. It seemed to me that we had already become dangerously close to the level of farce at Chequers the weekend before last, when Prime Ministers seemed to scurry in and out. If that is a model for the future, then there is considerable room for disquiet.

One can imagine that no sooner is His Beatitude the President of Cyprus putting a tasty morsel of chicken into his mouth than the butler will blow a whistle, the plate and chair will be swiftly taken away and a new place laid for the Prime Minister of British Guiana. It seems to me already that the whole nature of the Prime Ministers' Conference is changing.

Once we were told that the whole Conference was an informal meeting of minds. Now, however, things are very different. Only yesterday, in answer to a question from the right hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Shinwell), my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said: ... I would remind the right hon. Gentleman that not only do we have the plenary discussion but, now that quite a number of Prime Ministers are concerned, we have a number of informal discussions between groups of Prime Ministers on various subjects £"—[OFFICIAL REPORT, 21st March, 1961; Vol. 637, c. 206.] It seems that, with the increase in the number of Prime Ministers, informality is moving from the body of the Conference itself into the ante-chambers. To me, that seems to be a move much to be regretted, but this afternoon legitimate concern about the way in which the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference goes should in no way detract from the very warm welcome which we give to Sierra Leone as a new member of the family of the free Commonwealth.

§5.20 p.m.

§Mr. James Boyden (Bishop Auckland)

It so often happens in debates on independence Bills that the debates take place in an atmosphere of crisis, the Government finding themselves facing an impossible situation and having to deal with it. This is a very welcome exception to that generality, and I congratulate the Colonial Secretary very warmly indeed on anticipating the legitimate aspirations of the people of Sierra Leone. Undoubtedly the Prime Minister of Sierra Leone and the present Governor have made a very great contribution towards what I think is the fairly uniform spirit in Sierra Leone towards independence.

I do not take the view that the present Coalition is a forced coalition. I found when I was there not long ago a desire among all sorts of people at this moment to be united in, as it were, presenting a case to the British Government, and then afterwards going to the polls. I found it very pleasing that Christians and Muslims in the Protectorate, Creoles, ordinary trade union leaders from the branches, and the chiefs were all thinking of independence through—at the moment—this Coalition. I think one can congratulate both the people of Sierra Leone and the Colonial Secretary on bringing to pass this Bill to enable the people to realise their proper aspirations.

Sierra Leone is a very loyal country. It has a very fine tradition of Christian education and Christian self-help. I had the pleasure of visiting the original Fourah Bay College at Regent, founded in 1827, which has made a remarkable contribution to the governing of the Commonwealth and Empire, and it is a very great tribute to the energies and forethought of the people of Sierra Leone. The Church Missionary Society, which founded the college, as far back as 1827, set about training the local people, their teachers, their clergymen, and, in a lesser degree, administrators, to run Sierra Leone and, incidentally, to make a contribution towards the development of Nigeria. I am very proud that I have been associated with the University of Durham in giving this institution in latter days a modern touch. Some of my own staff, when I was at Durham University, went out to found there extra-mural work which, after a number of vicissitudes, is again flourishing. One of my friends will be going out, I hope, in a few days' time, to help in a crisis in a department of the university.

One particular example of this friendliness towards Britain and loyalty to Britain can be found at Bo, the capital of the Protectorate, where the Prime Minister and the people of Bo and the Government have made a very massive contribution to the building of the British Council's headquarters there. Some months ago the Select Committee on Public Accounts made some suggestions about the British Council financing part of its work from the countries in which it works. In poor Sierra Leone—I mean in the monetary sense—there is this massive contribution to the encouragement of interest in Britain. I think that the friendliness of the people and Government towards the British Council was remarkably demonstrated in developing that centre.

Wherever I went, wherever I was, I found the very greatest friendliness towards British people. For instance, at a most lively lecture in the Union Society of Fourah Bay College and at a very charming reception from the Women's Co-operative Guild at Bo.

I enjoyed the most heart-warming contacts in the extra-mural classes in Freetown, Newton and Lunsar. Everywhere I got the feeling of a developing solidarity based on the coming of independence, and I hope that this will be a good sign that in the future the Government will develop still further democratic forms capable in looking after Sierra Leone's real interests.

Having said that, I cannot share the Colonial Secretary's complacency about the manner in which the constitutional provisions have been made. It may be that there were difficulties about the

Commonwealth Conference and the timing of the Bill, but certainly there needed to be much more publicity in Sierra Leone with a clearer setting out of what was coming, and no where is this more important than in the financial arrangements.

I found that at Fourah Bay College the whole future was most uncertain. They were telling me they might be faced with cancelling further building contracts and the dispersal of the direct labour force which has done such a wonderful job of late. They cannot get any certainty about next year's capital grants. I think that this points to very serious flaws in the relations between the Colonial Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Departments which deal with C.D. and W. grants.

I was very pleased that yesterday the Prime Minister announced the setting up of a Department of Technical Co-operation, and I hope very much indeed that in future developments of this sort that Department will be able to make a much smoother transition on the financial side than there has been in Sierra Leone. Wherever I went I found examples not exactly of the break down of co-operation but of uncertainty as to the future where there ought to have been pushing forward with new developments.

To take another example, about which I have written to the Colonial Secretary, and I am inclined to agree with his answer. In the Protectorate there is magnificent work in teaching literacy. The Literacy Bureau is in great difficulties. It is struggling to teach enough people to read and is having difficulty in providing them with enough to read when they have become literate. For a long time it has made requests for an automatic printing press to enable it to print far more. When I wrote to the Colonial Secretary and asked him if he could do anything about this at this late hour his reply was, I think, perhaps constitutionally right, that it was late in the day to pick out particular items for development, but I think it would have been very much better if the financial terms and details had been so published that they would have given some hope to the college and the Literacy Bureau and a pointer to the way they could go in the future. I know that now these matters are for the independent Government, but I think that this is the sort of thing we should safeguard when we make other arrangements in the future.

Take another very impressive scheme, the Guma Valley water and electricity scheme. Five years ago I was taken round to see some of the work. It is still not complete. The whole scheme is beyond the unaided financial resources of Freetown. Dams are very unfortunate things in the history of the Conservative Party. The Aswan Dam started consequences which have not finished yet. It is true that the Guma Valley scheme is a much smaller one and not charged with the dynamite of failure as was the Aswan Dam, but there is very great need for things to be done and things to be said to bring a successful termination to projects of this magnitude.

The Colonial Secretary probably knows that there are now no internal airlines in Sierra Leone. The three aircraft which were maintained are grounded, and will be grounded permanently, for I doubt very much whether they can fly again. Here again is something which it seems to me ought to be dealt with speedily and ought to be dealt with as a contribution to the development of Sierra Leone.

The past history of the Colonial Office in the building of roads in Sierra Leone is deplorable. Five years ago the tarred road from Freetown went 51 miles. Now, five years later, it goes only 91 miles. More bridges have been built, and there has been some progress with dirt roads, but if we compare

the progress in Sierra Leone with that in Ghana, then Sierra Leone stands out as a black spot on the record of the Colonial Office.

I could go on enumerating these projects concerning which I found it very distressing that there was not more hope for the future and more tangible evidence of things about to be done. I have written to the Colonial Secretary about the training college and about one or two other matters as well. One particular project in connection with Fourah Bay College in which I think the Colonial Secretary should take more interest is the question of the staff being treated on the same basis as civil servants. Certainly something ought to be done to put the staff of Fourah Bay College on the same level as civil servants in relation to compensation and superannuation. I hope that the Colonial Secretary will apply his mind to that matter.

We are certainly not doing enough in the way of putting forward our own material in Sierra Leone, not in the way of propaganda but in the way of making it easy for its people to learn what is going on in England and to have easy opportunities of learning about England. Could not Her Majesty's Stationery Office publications be made available to Commonwealth universities and university colleges free? Could we not have some reciprocal arrangement with the Commonwealth by which our universities would have much easier and cheaper access to their Government publications?

I found it upsetting, for example, when in anticipation of this debate I wanted to get a number of publications from the Crown Agents about Sierra Leone. I found, first of all, that I had to buy them and then that they were not available either in the Library of the House or immediately in the Crown Agents Office. Surely some imagination could be applied to this matter. Russian propaganda goes into every grammar school in Sierra Leone. The Russians go to great trouble to provide scholarships, and a number of Fourah Bay College students and sixth form students find their way from time to time to Russian and Czech universities, and, I think, to Chinese universities.

We really must be more positive in our relations with Sierra Leone. The people there are loyal and friendly. They have this very long tradition and we must certainly brighten up our ideas in providing easier and more information about Britain.

I was very pleased to see that in Nigeria there is being developed what looks to be a most excellent scheme for the vacation training of teachers. I hope that Sierra Leone will work out something of that sort, as well, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Ministry of Education.

Finally, I hope that in the matter of low-cost houses, even when Sierra Leone is independent, our Government will take some practical steps to see that housing there is developed with capital invested by us. When the Governor addressed the House of Representatives on 11th February, 1960, he said: Sierra Leone's gravest problems will not be concerned with most of the matters mentioned just now" — that is, the struggle for independence, with constitutional forms, with the exercise of political and other power, or with the winning of democratic rights. Those are hers now. The struggle Sierra Leone has on its hands is primarily economic and financial. I hope very much that when the Parliamentary Secretary replies he will be able to speak constructively about what the Government's opinions are, not only on spending the £7½ million but with regard to seeing that the development of the country can be continuously aided by Britain and that from an improving economic base its democratic traditions can be advanced.

5.34 p.m.

Mr. John Tilney (Liverpool, Wavertree)

Like the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Boyden), in general terms I welcome the Bill. I propose to take up the time of the House for only a very few minutes because many hon. Members on both sides know Sierra Leone better than I do. I remember the beauty of the old Colony. I was tremendously impressed with the iron ore development, and I enjoyed greatly the superb port facilities of Freetown. But what I remember most of all is the great friendliness of the people of Sierra Leone.

I count among my particular friends not only Sir Milton Margai and many members of his Cabinet. Only a few weeks ago Mr. Siaka Stevens, to whom the hon. Member for Bilston (Mr. R. Edwards) referred, was a guest in my home. I do not want to judge in any way what is a matter which must be sub judice, but I think it is well to remember that, as far as I know, every single Sierra Leone party in the last general election stood for independence for Sierra Leone within the lifetime of the present Parliament. That is apt to be forgotten.

It is not for me to balance the arguments of Mr. Siaka Stevens who, after all, stood at that election. It was found that his election was invalid because of corruption and bribery. He told me in my own home of his fear of customary or tribal justice to which the hon. Member for Bilston has referred. I am only glad that he is returning to Sierra Leone of, I gather, his own free will and is not being directed in any way by the Government of this country.

I must apologise to the House for not having been present throughout the whole debate, but I had to receive the Parliamentary delegation from Eire. The leader of that delegation, the Speaker of the Dail, first came to this country as a guest of Her Majesty, as a political prisoner in Wandsworth Gaol. How lucky, I am sure we can all agree, that the relations between this country and Ireland have taken an immense turn for the better. How much more lucky are we really that the relations between this country and Sierra Leone are what they are and that nothing of that sort has ever happened in the past. We can indeed be grateful for the moderation and the common sense of men like Sir Milton Margai, who reminds me very much of the statesmanship of his opposite number on the east coast of Africa, Mr. Nyerere.

I should like to add my commendation to the words of other hon. Members on the appointment of Sir Maurice Dorman at the request of Sir Milton Margai as Her Majesty's Governor-General. I should also like to say what pleasure we feel that Mr. J. B. Johnston, whom many of us will remember as Lord Boyd's private secretary, should be our future High Commissioner in Freetown. I only hope that in due course he will have a better house in Freetown than the present High Commissioner has in Lagos.

I agree with the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland in his fear for the economic future of Sierra Leone which is dependent on iron ore and bauxite, which, of course, is found the world over, and on diamonds. I am delighted that the revenue from diamonds has gone up in the last year from £6 million to about £15 million through stopping the passage of diamonds over the border. But, even so, Sierra Leone is going to be a very poor country, and I am wondering whether she can afford all the embassies which so many countries in Africa and Asia try to support. Naturally, she must be

represented in a major way at the United Nations and in this country, but it may well be that she could be represented by another Commonwealth country, be it Nigeria or Ghana, or even by ourselves, in many other territories of the world. I understand that it costs at least £10,000 a year to keep one representative overseas, and we have got to balance the panoplies of diplomacy against the immense need in countries like Sierra Leone for development and for education.

One final word on education. In the primary schools there was an enrolment of only 69,000 in 1958, which was only one-quarter of the children in the country, and no more than 6,000 enrolled in the secondary schools. Of all the territories in Africa, east or west, Sierra Leone has, I think, the lowest percentage of children of school age receiving education. I am not proud of that, because, after all, the United Kingdom has been responsible indirectly for Sierra Leone for a very long time. I am merely stressing this fact because of the immense need of outside assistance and technical aid which will exist for a long time in Sierra Leone.

In Fourah, I am told, last year only 189 pupils passed the West African G.C.E., and of the 400 students at Fourah Bay about one-half came from Nigeria and, no doubt, will return to Nigeria. So Sierra Leone is going to be desperately short of intelligent and well-educated people to govern, expand and develop her territory. But she at least enters independence united. No longer is there tremendous feeling against the Protectorate or a feeling in the Protectorate that the people there are treated as backward people by the Creoles of the Colony.

Sierra Leone is now one country. She has been an old friend of ours for many years. From the earliest days she has been attracted to Europe and, above all, to this country. She has shown her friendship to us in two major wars. May she continue to show her friendship and may we continue to extend our help to Sierra Leone.

§5.42 p.m.

§**Mr. A. Fenner Brockway** (Eton and Slough)

I am sometimes a critic of the Government's colonial policy, and therefore it gives me special happiness now to congratulate the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State for the Colonies on the introduction of this Bill, and not only the right hon. Gentleman but statesmen in Sierra Leone and all those who have contributed to this achievement.

This Bill marks an amazing development in West Africa. It follows Ghana and Nigeria, and I should think that something like 50 million Africans in West Africa who were in our Empire are now self-governing and independent. That is quite an extraordinary development. There is left only Gambia, with very special circumstances, which may have to become incorporated in other territories rather than becoming independent itself.

I want to put a point to the Secretary of State concerning procedure. I am not critical of the delay in the introduction of the Bill. I think it was inevitable in the circumstances. But I ask the right hon. Gentleman seriously to consider whether the whole procedure by which we discuss these Bills should not be revised. The constitutional conference took place ten months ago. I suppose I am one of the fortunate Members, because I saw the draft constitution then, studied it in detail and gave some African members of the conference advice about it. But this House today is passing this Bill without ever having seen the constitution at all.

I believe I am correctly informed that at least until three days ago the members of the Legislature in Sierra Leone also had not seen the constitution. I appreciate that this is a matter of protocol, but I am asking the right hon. Gentleman to consider whether it is not possible to have some revision of these arrangements. It is unsatisfactory that this Parliament should be passing a Bill without knowing what are the contents of the constitution, and it is also unsatisfactory that Members of the Parliament in Sierra Leone, which is to have its independence, should still be unaware of the contents of the constitution. This matter affects not only our Parliament but their Parliament, and it is of great importance that, if there is to be real democracy in Sierra Leone, the people of Sierra Leone should be informed about the constitution.

I wish to make only one comment on the constitution as I have seen it. I welcome the Bill of Rights. My only criticism of that would be that human rights take a rather subordinate position to rights of property. The rights of property are actually in the body of the constitution. The Bill of Human Rights is an appendix to that constitution, and I think that is a wrong priority.

As I have said, I welcome the Bill, but nevertheless one must appreciate that there is some uneasiness in Sierra Leone at this moment. I am glad that the old conflict between the Protectorate and the Colonies has become so much eased and that there is now much better feeling between them. But the Secretary of State knows that there is uneasiness in Sierra Leone on other matters. Two members of the Legislature have been arrested, are on bail and are to be tried. In addition, members of the executive committee of the opposition party are in a similar position.

I am very concerned that Sierra Leone shall start on the course of independence with political rights and liberties. Only yesterday in the House, after I had put a certain question, an hon. Member opposite rose and by implication suggested that I had not been critical when liberties had been denied in Ghana. In fact, I have been critical. I have raised those issues with the President of Ghana both privately and publicly, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. I want to see Sierra Leone starting out in a spirit of democracy and with personal liberties which shall not be spoiled as they have been spoiled in certain other African countries.

Because of that I also welcome the right hon. Gentleman's statement today that there will be a general election in Sierra Leone within one year. I am glad that an assurance to that effect has been given him by the Prime Minister of Sierra Leone. I hope that that provision for an election within one year of the acceptance of independence will lessen the fears and tensions now operating in Sierra Leone.

I want to make one personal appeal to Sir Milton Margai, the Prime Minister, who will be the head of the independent Government. I appeal to him, before independence is introduced, to declare an amnesty so that Members of Parliament and members of a party executive who are now charged may be liberated. In this way, the independence of Sierra Leone can begin in an atmosphere in which there will be hope for full democracy, full liberty and, because of those things, with the full co-operation of the people.

To that appeal to the Prime Minister of Sierra Leone, I add an appeal to the Secretary of State to the Colonies and to the Government. Evidence has been given from both sides of the House of the absence of education, of economic development and even of roads in Sierra Leone. We in this Parliament have a great deal of responsibility for that. I am asking the Secretary of State to say today

that, despite the fact that Sierra Leone will become independent, we shall give the greatest possible help to remedy those defects, that we will give the greatest possible help in industrial development, in road building, particularly in schools and in crowning the elementary schools with secondary schools.

I am appalled to hear, as I have heard in this House this afternoon, that the campaign against malaria in Sierra Leone is being held up because our Government have not given adequate contributions for that purpose. There need not be in three years' time a single case of malaria in Sierra Leone. We have ended it over vast areas of Africa. It could be ended if there were adequate expenditure upon it and proper technical aid so that this should be done.

I ask the Secretary of State, not merely to have the honour of introducing this Bill to extend independence to Sierra Leone, but, before the Bill is passed, to assure this House and the people of Sierra Leone that we will provide a social and economic foundation upon which that independence can develop, not only to true democracy, but to true happiness in the ordinary life of the men and women of the territory.

§5.54 p.m.

§Mr. Martin McLaren (Bristol, North-West)

I have promised to be very short and I will be. As the right hon. Member for Middlesbrough, East (Mr. Marquand) said, I was a member of the delegation which he led in December to Sierra Leone and of which, I might add, the right hon. Gentleman was a kindly and stimulating leader. It is rather attractive that when so many other parts of Africa are stormy we should be able to turn for a short time to Sierra Leone where independence is coming so smoothly and happily.

It is fortunate that the Prime Minister of Sierra Leone is Sir Milton Margai. Those who know him know how well qualified he is to lead the country into independence. His work as a gynaecologist has made him widely known in the parts of the country where he practised. That has made many people look on him as their friend and feel personal gratitude for him. In that way he has built up a fund of personal good will. It is characteristic of his vitality that even now, when he is in the middle sixties, he is still no mean athlete.

It is excellent news that Sir Maurice Dorman, now the Governor, is to be the first Governor-General. Those who know how closely he and Lady Dorman have identified themselves with the life of the country and who know the warm regard that is felt for them will think that no better choice could have been made.

In recent years the grants which this country has made under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts have been very valuable, but there is still much that remains to be done to develop the social services, to expand education, to improve the road communications, to which the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Boyden) referred, to build more bridges and to clean up the slums of Freetown. There is no system of social security yet. When people fall out of their employment they have to live off the charity of their relations.

When one travels by boat along Freetown Harbour, one finds a moving sight, the historic stone stairs up which the thousands of slaves climbed to find themselves free men on setting foot in Sierra

Leone. That is why the capital is called Freetown. The settlement was started at the end of the eighteenth century by Granville Sharp, who was a friend of William Wilberforce, for rescued slaves and Africans repatriated from the West Indies. He did it as a generous attempt to atone for the horrors of the slave trade. The descendants of those people, the Creoles, are still influential in Freetown.

Here at Westminster, one of the best and most disinterested chapters has been the moral campaign for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. In a sense, we are today writing the final chapter in that long and honourable story when we welcome Sierra Leone as a fully independent member of the Commonwealth.

§5.58 p.m.

§Lieut.-Colonel J. K. Cordeaux (Nottingham, Central)

It would be a pity if all the hon. Members who have spoken from both sides of the House in this debate were to have avoided, as it has perhaps so far seemed almost ostentatiously, following up the main part of the speech of the hon. Member for Bilston (Mr. R. Edwards). Therefore, although I do not want to go into the matter deeply, because I have no doubt that it will be dealt with by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State when he replies to the debate, having met Mr. Stevens on two occasions when I was recently out in Sierra Leone and on one occasion recently in this country, I should like to say that it certainly is tragic that the events described by the hon. Member for Bilston should have come to our notice on the very day that we are taking the Second Reading of this Bill, which in the ordinary way should be an entirely happy occasion unmarked by any tragedy of this nature.

I shall be brief, not because I feel that this debate on such an important subject should be cut down to make way for a full five hours on the troubles in South Africa but because, as I am the last speaker to be called before my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary sums up the debate, most of the points that could be made have already been made by others.

I certainly do not want to repeat them, but out of gratitude alone I should like to say something because I was, as has been mentioned, a member of the delegation to Sierra Leone three months ago which was led, if I may say so, with such charm of manner and with such ability by the right hon. Member for Middlesbrough, East (Mr. Marquand). The tremendous kindness that we received from everybody there, from Sir Milton Margai, the Prime Minister, down to the ordinary villagers in the most distant villages of the Protectorate, is a memory I shall treasure for a long time.

Hon. Members have very differing views about the value of that type of visit. Many hon. Members think that all such Parliamentary delegations are a complete waste of time and money, and have some extremely acid comments to make about people who come back after visiting for about ten days some part of the world that they have never seen before, and then set themselves up as experts on the country concerned. There are others, of whom I am one, who think that there is inestimable value to be obtained from such visits, and that the more of them that can be paid by hon. Members the better.

The principal impression that I obtained from my visit to Sierra Leone was of the remarkable harmony and sense of partnership with which two different races, our own people and those of

Sierra Leone, were working together for the good of the country and its advancement towards independence.

Only one controversial point came up during the Constitutional Conference last April, and it has not so far been referred to in this debate. I speak of the defence agreement that it was decided should be negotiated between ourselves and Sierra Leone after independence had been granted. That part of the agreement was challenged by the newly-forming Opposition under Mr. Stevens and Mr. Wallace Johnson, and it has also been commented on adversely to me by some people from Sierra Leone whom I have recently met in this country.

A lot of them see in the defence agreement a sort of hangover of colonialism on our part. It is true that such an agreement with Sierra Leone would be of use to us. Anyone who can remember the vast convoys assembling during the last war in that magnificent harbour at Freetown will hardly challenge that. But whereas such an agreement may be useful to us, I think that it is of far greater potential value to the people of Sierra Leone.

Some of them have asked me, "What do we get out of that, except a certain amount of embarrassment? Who on earth would we want to be defended against? Who will attack us?" Well, if one looks around Africa as it is today, and as it has been in the last few years, I think it would be agreed that it would be a very complacent citizen of Sierra Leone who would say that never in the future did he think that the people there might be glad to have someone close at hand and able to help them, someone such as ourselves, who, I am certain they all believe, will ever remain one of their best friends.

Another matter referred to by a number of speakers is the definite feeling of what might be called unease that members of the delegation sensed amongst many people in Sierra Leone about the advent of independence. I believe that when my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Kirkdale (Mr. N. Pannell) led a delegation to Sierra Leone some two years ago, he said that there was widespread enthusiasm there for independence. I can well believe that, but it always happens that when these events become imminent people begin to have their doubts. Some of the people living far out in the Protectorate in Sierra Leone certainly cast their eyes across the border to other countries in Africa where independence—that word that many of them so vaguely understand—has become a fact, were not entirely pleased with everything they saw.

However, my belief is that the people of Sierra Leone need not be too nervous about the coming of independence, quick as it is. The constitutional steps taken towards it in the last year or two have admittedly been rapid, but I feel that they have been very well timed and that, as a result, the transition will be smooth. It only remains for me, therefore, to join with previous speakers, and, I am sure, with every other hon. Member, in wishing the very best of luck and the greatest prosperity in the future to our new partner in the Commonwealth.

§6.6 p.m.

§The Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies (Mr. Hugh Fraser)

We have had more than a formal debate this afternoon on this great step forward for Sierra Leone. On all sides there have been well-informed Members advising both the Government and those who will inherit power on certain steps that it would be mutually advantageous for the two countries to

take after April, when the people of Sierra Leone will have power devolved upon them. It is only fair, therefore, that in the short time at my disposal I should attempt to answer some of the main points that have been made.

Reference has been made to the delay in the publication of the Bill, but we have had to wait. It will be seen from the Title that this is a Bill to Make provision for, and in connection with, the attainment by Sierra Leone of fully responsible status within the Commonwealth. We had to wait until the Commonwealth Conference took place. We could not publish this Title until that Conference had welcomed Sierra Leone's joining the Commonwealth.

A point has also been made about lack of publicity of the precise terms of the Constitution. This is a matter at which my right hon. Friend and I will look but, of course, we are up against problems of precedent. It is fair to say that this draft Constitution will contain only those provisions agreed by the Conference last year. They could, in fact, have been published earlier and I agree that, perhaps, in the future we should have a wider degree of latitude. Looking back, what we should perhaps have done was to make more public the findings of the actual Conference in London last May. I shall certainly look at that matter again.

The right hon. Member for Middlesbrough, East (Mr. Marquand) said that there was need for a lively Opposition in the new Sierra Leone. There, we fully agree.

The main point raised from the benches opposite was on the question of financial aid to a territory which is not, by its nature, rich. I want also to answer some of the detailed matters raised by one of my hon. Friends who has just returned, and by the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Boyden), who referred specifically to aircraft and the Guma Dam. First, the contract for the dam has been awarded. Secondly, from colonial development and welfare funds we are replacing the Rapide by the new Pioneer aircraft.

On the wider issues, we have here a territory which, compared with other territories in Africa, is not rich. I am sure that when hon. Members on both sides say that the true and abiding wealth of Sierra Leone lies in its land, they are right. As one of my hon. Friends remarked, the output from the diamond industry has gone up with improved control of the industry, and the iron ore and bauxite possibilities of the country remain great; but the main wealth must remain in the land.

I think that the offer of my right hon. Friend to continue to provide the Sierra Leone Government with technical assistance after independence is of great importance. Also, the provisions decided upon at the Conference are of great importance. First, there are the financial aids, which will continue, though here again, because of the change of status, there will have to be some alteration in the C.D. and W. and even the C.D.C. assistance. But I can say that all schemes already entered into will be completed. The C.D.C. has an important part to play in the water supply scheme, which is going forward, and in other schemes.

Beyond the existing schemes, I think it worth reminding the House that there are the chances of assistance from the C.D.F.C., and that, already, £400,000 is going into the large water scheme from this source. There are also other international funds which are available for development and, in addition, recourse to the London market as an independent country. I am sure that the statement recently made by Sir Milton Margai about the importance of capital and the fact that his

Government had no intention of embarking upon any nationalisation will be of great benefit when finance is sought, as, indeed, Sierra Leone must seek it, from overseas.

I must correct the hon. Member for Eton and Slough (Mr. Brockway), who said that while human rights were covered in the Bill of Rights, they had less priority in the Constitution than property rights. The hon. Member is ill-informed. It is really a question of reading the White Paper, and if the hon. Member looks at paragraph 20 (a) he will find that fundamental rights are fully enshrined in the procedure which my right hon. Friend described.

§Mr. Brockway

It is the hon. Gentleman who has misunderstood me. What I quite clearly said was that the protection of the rights of property is embodied in Clauses of the Constitution. The Bill of Rights is an appendix to the Constitution. It is enshrined in the Constitution by a particular reference in the body. My complaint was that the Bill of Rights is an appendix while the justification of property rights is in the Clauses of the Constitution itself.

§Mr. Fraser

Certainly, fundamental human rights are entrenched, and that is the vital thing. Where they come precisely in the Constitution is a different matter.

One of our first considerations is, I believe, how we can be of further assistance to Sierra Leone after independence so that we can make certain that the economic future of the country is assured.

The other wide area that we have discussed is the question of the Constitution itself and the feeling both in this House and in Sierra Leone that it was essential that proper human rights should be safeguarded. My hon. Friend went at some length through the safeguards and the entrenchment clauses which will make certain that there can be no alterations to these fundamental rights, to the fundamental rights of Parliament and to the fundamental rights of the judiciary without, first, a two-thirds majority passing it in the Sierra Leone House, then a General Election, and following that, again a two-thirds majority. If one considers this process one finds that the entrenchment of these rights is satisfactory.

The cases of certain members of the Opposition, and, in particular, the case of Mr. Siaka Stevens have been raised. I am unable to comment on these individual cases, as they are, and must be, sub judice, but I should like to point out to those who have raised these matters that even the Government of a country which is on the verge of achieving independence must ensure that the due course and process of the law runs. If there are to be charges of criminal libel and other things, these cases must be permitted to proceed. This is what the Government of Sierra Leone have done. Various things have been said on both sides of the House regarding these matters, and I hope that many of the things which have been said this afternoon will receive a ready ear in the territory.

As we look forward to 27th April, I think that it will be a proud day for Sierra Leone. It will also, I believe, be a proud day for this country. Politically, all parties in this House will see the achievement as a main objective of our colonial policy, that of granting independence to our dependent territories. I believe that all those who have visited Sierra Leone will agree that no people among the emergent peoples are more deserving of this grant than the people of that territory.

If our political sense should be stirred by this event, so, too, should, I think, be our historical imagination. As one looks back on the course of history over the last 190 years, one recognises that in Sierra Leone, on 27th April, there will be the culmination of an expression of freedom worked for by many in this realm far beyond the confines of this House of Parliament. Freetown was truly named. It is not too fanciful to say that its freedom traces back to the famous judgment of Lord Mansfield; indeed, James Somerset was among its first citizens. It was not merely in the High Court of Parliament or in the courts of justice here that these aims were pursued. There have been many people from this country—soldiers, administrators, missionaries and traders—who have given their lives for Sierra Leone. Let us, on this occasion, pay tribute to them.

I think that we, as a people, can be satisfied in truth and in honour; but, of course, the great pride is for the people of Sierra Leone themselves. This is a small country compared with the other great States of Africa. Before them lies a new span of history, but I feel sure that in their sense of national destiny and purpose, with the support of ourselves and, indeed, of the whole Commonwealth, they will surmount the problems lying ahead of them.

[§](#)Question put and agreed to.

[§](#)Bill accordingly read a Second time.

[§](#)Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[Mr. J. E. B. Hill.]

[§](#)Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without Amendment; read the Third time and passed.