

MINISTRY PAPER NO 3!

BUREAU OF STANDARDS

In December last year Parliament passed the Standards Act which is to come into operation on a day to be appointed by the Minister. Before that can be done a number of formalities, including arrangements for seconding to the Bureau of Standards Civil Service staff now employed in the Standards Division of my Ministry, must be finalised. These matters are now being examined with a view to the Act being brought into operation as soon as possible.

In the meanwhile, work is proceeding on the new laboratories being built for the Bureau at Winchester Road, adjoining the Jamaica Industrial Development Corporation. The building is due to be completed by the end of this year.

2. A Technical Consultant for the Bureau arrived from the United Kingdom at the beginning of April this year. His services have been generously provided by the British Government under technical assistance arrangements for an initial period of eighteen months. He will be working closely with the Standards Council and my Ministry on a variety of matters connected with the organisation and functioning of the Bureau.

3. The House has been informed before that early in 1966 I appointed an advisory Standards Council with wide representation, including the manufacturing, distributive and consumer sections of the community. Since that time the Council has had 36 monthly meetings. Significant consultative work and planning have thus been proceeding.

At an early stage the Council had appointed a number of committees, all of which are still active, on the basis of assessed priorities in the various sectors of industry, including:

Processed Foods
Textiles and clothing
Leather and footwear
Furniture
Electrical goods
Labelling.

4. These committees and the Council have initially been concentrating, inter alia, on:-

- (i) preparation of a Jamaican standard on electrical panelboards and panelboard enclosures. This work is now far advanced;
- (ii) draft regulations for a number of processed foods to be added to the prescribed list under the Processed Food Law;
- (iii) dimensional and other standards for office furniture;
- (iv) standards and codes of practice for the footwear industry;
- (v) labelling standards, particularly as regards sizes for various items of clothing;
- (vi) labelling requirements for processed foods.

The House will appreciate that it is not possible to enumerate in detail the full inventory of work which has so far been done through the Standards Council but it will be seen from the foregoing that much preparatory work of significance has been proceeding. This programme will shortly be taken over and developed by the statutory Council to be appointed under the Standards Act.

5. In introducing the Standards Act in December last, I warned the House and the public at large that establishment of the Bureau of Standards must not be expected to solve all the problems - real or imagined - which confront us in our efforts to become industrialised. From time to time, for instance, various statements have appeared in the press implying that establishment of the Bureau of Standards will automatically give assurance of excellent goods at cheap prices. As I have indicated before, we must be clear from the outset that it is not possible for any standards organisation to achieve such a happy state of affairs by itself. The Bureau will, of course, be very much concerned with quality and must have regard to the cost and price implications of the standards it formulates from time to time. It is, however, essential that our manufacturers should progressively develop their own quality control methods. In the final analysis the technical progress of industry and the forces of competition within our economy are the factors which must ensure that the goods we use are produced as economically as possible.

6. The significant benefits which standardisation will confer lie in an assurance of acceptable standards of quality of the goods which from time to time come under the surveillance of the Bureau of Standards and are able to secure its mark of approval. This will be important to Jamaican consumers, as well as in the promotion of our export trade. There need be no fear that standards might be set so high as to interfere with the reasonable operations of the manufacturer or make goods unduly expensive. Acceptability in terms of good commercial practice will be the normal yardstick.

7. Dramatic changes cannot be expected overnight since this is a long term programme demanding continuing commitments from many sectors of the community. Everything cannot be done at once and what is, therefore, essential is to get our priorities right. That is the vital job the Bureau of Standards will have to do.

ROBERT C. LIGHTBOURNE
Minister of Trade and Industry.
12th May, 1969.