

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
[VOLUME]**

**PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE THIRD PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE
CONSTITUTION OF GUYANA**

114th Sitting

2 p.m.

Friday, 14th January, 1977

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Speaker

Cde. Sase Narain, O.R., J.P., Speaker

Members of the Government – People’s National Congress (50)

Prime Minister (1)

Cde. L.F.S. Burnham, O.E., S.C.,
Prime Minister

(Absent)

Deputy Prime Minister (1)

Cde. P.A. Reid,
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of
National Development

Senior Ministers (9)

Cde. H. D. Hoyte, S.C.,
Minister of Economic Development

(Absent – on leave)

*Cde. H. Green,
Minister of Co-operatives and
National Mobilisation

(Absent – on leave)

***Non-elected Ministers**

*Cde. H. O. Jack,
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources (Absent)

*Cde. F. E. Hope,
Minister of Finance

*Cde. S. S. Naraine, A. A.,
Minister of Works and Housing

*Cde. G. A. King,
Minister of Trade and Consumer Protection

*Cde. G. B. Kennard, C. C. H.,
Minister of Agriculture (Absent)

*Cde. C. L. Baird,
Minister of Education and Social Development (Absent)

*Cde. F. R. Wills, S. C.,
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Justice (Absent)

Ministers (5)

Cde. W. G. Carrington,
Minister of Labour

Cde. S. M. Field-Ridley,
Minister of Information and Culture (Absent – on leave)

Cde. B. Ramsaroop,
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs
and Leader of the House

*Cde. O. M. R. Harper,
Minister of Health (Absent)

*Cde. C.V. Mingo,
Minister of Home Affairs

Ministers of State (9)

Cde. M. Kasim, A. A.,
Minister of State for Agriculture

***Non-elected Ministers**

Cde. O. E. Clarke,
Minister of State – Regional
(East Berbice/Corentyne)

Cde. P. Duncan, J.P.,
Minister of State – Regional (Rupununi)

Cde. C. A. Nascimento,
Minister of State,
Office of the Prime Minister **(Absent)**

Cde. K. B. Bancroft,
Minister of State – Regional
(Mazaruni/Potaro)

Cde. J. P. Chowritmootoo,
Minister of State – Regional
(Essequibo Coast/West Demerara) **(Absent)**

*Cde. W. Haynes,
Minister of State for Consumer Protection

*Cde. A. Salim,
Minister of State – Regional
(East Demerara/West Coast Berbice)

*Cde. F. U. A. Carmichael,
Minister of State – Regional (North West) **(Absent)**

Parliamentary Secretaries (6)

Cde. J. R. Thomas,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Minister of National Development

Cde. M. M. Ackman, C. C. H.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Office of the Prime Minister,
and Government Chief Whip

Cde. E. L. Ambrose,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture **(Absent – on leave)**

***Non-elected Ministers**

Cde. S. Prashad,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Minister of Co-operatives and National Mobilisation

Cde. R. H. O. Corbin,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Education and Social Development

Cde. M. Corrica,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Works and Housing

(Absent – on leave)

Other Members (19)

Cde. L. M. Branco
Cde. E. M. Bynoe
Cde. E. H. A. Fowler
Cde. J. Gill
Cde. W. Hussain
Cde. S. Jaiserrisingh
Cde. K. M. E. Jonas
Cde. M. Nissar
Cde. L. E. Ramsahoye
Cde. J. G. Ramson
Cde. P.A. Rayman
Cde. E. M. Stoby, J. P.
Cde. S. H. Sukhu, M.S., J.P.
Cde. C. Sukul, J.P.
Cde. H. A. Taylor
Cde. R. C. Van Sluytman
Cde. L. E. Willems
Cde. C. E. Wrights, J.P.
Cde. M. Zaheeruddeen, J.P.

(Absent)

Members of the Opposition (15)

(i) People's Progressive Party (13)

Leader of the Opposition (1)

Cde. C. B. Jagan

(Absent – on leave)

Deputy Speaker (1)

Cde. Ram Karran

Other Members (11)

Cde. J. Jagan

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, J. P., Opposition Chief Whip

Cde. Narbada Persaud

Cde. C. Collymore

Cde. S. F. Mohamed

Cde. L. Lalbahadur

(Absent)

Cde. C. C. Belgrave

Cde. R. Ally

Cde. Dalchand, J. P.

Cde. Dindayal

Cde. H. Nokta

(ii) Liberator Party (2)

Mr. M. F. Singh

Mrs. E. DaSilva

OFFICERS

Clerk of the National Assembly – F. A. Narain

Acting Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly – A. Knight

14.1.77

National Assembly

2 – 2.05 p.m.

2. p.m.

PRAYERS

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave To Members

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to Cde. Minister Hoyte from the 14th to the 20th January both days inclusive and to Cde. Green from the 13th January for a month.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

APPROVAL OF ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE 1977

Assembly resolved itself into Committee of Supply to resume consideration of the Estimates of expenditure for the financial year 1977 totalling \$417,203,736.

Assembly in Committees of Supply.

The Chairman: Pages 103 to 114.

HEAD 36 – MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING (WORKS)

Question proposed that the sum of \$28,108,727 for Head 36 Ministry of Works and Housing (Works), stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Will hon. Members kindly indicate? Hon. Member Mr. Feilden Singh.

Mr. M. F. Singh: I think it would be more expeditious if I just announce them as I go along, as I have been doing before. One page 103 subhead 1: I will deal with items (2), (4), (9) and (11) together, all of which are supernumerary posts.

2.05 p.m.

I recollect being told by the hon. Minister that these supernumerary posts were necessary to safeguard the pension rights of the officials seconded to the Upper Mazaruni Road Project. However, the revised amounts for 1976 against the substantive posts are much less, suggesting vacancies. Would the hon. Minister tell us, particularly in the field of professional engineers – and this is a question he can answer in respect of the entire Ministry – whether he is getting enough experienced staff to carry out the day-to-day work of the Ministry properly in view of secondment of officers to the Upper Mazaruni Road Project. Also would he inform us of the general situation with respect to staff vacancies and the shortages of professional engineers and people in the professional staff?

I am moving on now to item (14), Senior Economist, (15), Economist, and (16) Cost Accountant, which I will deal with together. These posts are supposed to constitute the basis of a planning unit in this very big Ministry and the planning unit's job was to plan and co-ordinate the work of the Ministry. These posts were created as far back as 1968 if I recollect rightly, and as far as I am aware at no time at all has this unit functioned to 100 per cent capacity. There have always been vacancies in the posts or people filling them for a short time and then going somewhere else.

In fact, as far as the Estimates go we will note that in 1974 the actual expenditure for these posts was only in respect of Economist, \$700, and in 1975 there is no actual expenditure listed at all, thus giving the impression that no money was spent in respect of 1975. If money was spent, well then this is a mistake, but nothing is listed here for 1975.

In the 1976 revised estimates the figures are much less than the voted amounts. Maybe I should make the observation that the posts of Senior Economist and Cost Accountant were upgraded to A27 by supplementary estimates in 1975. Could the hon. Minister tell us what the position now is and what are the prospects for this Unit functioning 100 per cent in the future?

Turning over to page 104 I should like to deal with items (59), (62) and (66) in the Buildings Division. Those are the posts of Chief Architect, Chief Maintenance superintendent (Buildings), and Chief Quantity Surveyor. I should like to ask the Minister whether officers have been appointed substantively in these posts and, if not, what are the prospects of filling these posts in this important Buildings Division in the foreseeable future?

Turning over page 105 I should like to speak on item (96), specialist Meteorologist. There are three positions – Aeronautical Meteorologist Climatologist, Agrometeorologist. Are all these posts filled? I note from the legend that two were created last year by Supplementary Estimates, and one was redesignated. In view of the serious effects the weather seems to have on our economy when can we reasonably expect these vacancies to be filled.

May I take the opportunity to suggest a more frequent and widespread dissemination of weather information throughout the country particularly for the benefit of our farmers. One would have to take into consideration that the information should be very simple, succinct, and easily understood by farmers.

On page 106, I deal with item (109), Quarries Manager and I take this opportunity to ask a general question. I should like to ask: How many operational quarries do we in fact have? And since stone is so seriously in short supply to the public, when does the Government think that it would be able to sell stone to the public in view of the vast amount of money that has been spent to open up quarries and to rehabilitate quarries? Glasgow/Teperu and Itabu are now being run by the National Service. A vast amount of money has been spent to rehabilitate them. And there are other quarries. Can the hon. Minister give us the details? I remember very distinctly

that a former Minister, Minister Green, when he was Minister of Works, gave the undertaking to make cheap stone available to John Public in order to get rid of the capitalist sharks.

On Item (119), Surveyors, I merely wish to repeat something that the hon. Minister may have answered before. We seem to continue to have a shortage of surveyors because the Approved Estimates call for an expenditure of \$347,236 and the revised figure is only \$295,531, approximately \$52,000 less than was asked for, which does suggest serious shortages in this very important field of surveyors. What is being done in respect of training and filling these vacancies?

And on page 107 I should like to deal with item (136), Trainees. Let us note the figures. The 1976 Approved Estimates is \$20,000, the revised figure is \$10,000 and the amount being asked for in 1977 is \$20,000. We will note that there are no other actual figures for 1975 or 1974. I made this point last year and I make it again: every year the same thing happens, \$20,000 is provided in the Estimates, then it is subsequently revised to about half the amount and nothing is spent. Therefore when we look at actual expenditure nothing is reflected.

In December 1975 when we were discussing the Estimates I made a note in the 1976 Estimates on page 104 where this item was reflected. The Minister said training is being done by the Ministry of Education and he mentioned the University of Guyana. This training, he said would soon be free at all levels. I appreciate that, but why then do we keep providing this \$20,000, reducing it to \$10,000 and then spend nothing at all?

If this is not required, let us scrap it. This is “austerity year”; Let us take it out of the Estimates and not have it there at all. We have never spent it before as shown in the Estimates. Why do we keep putting it in?

2.15 p.m.

Just a small point in respect of items (141) and (152): They both deal with checkers on salary scale A7. I wonder whether there is any particular reason why we cannot combine the twenty-four at (141) with the thirteen at (152) so that would be thirty-seven checkers on salary scale A7. Why do we have to have two sets of checkers reflected?

Item (156) deals with Constables and Security Guards. Let us note that the establishment for 1976 was 102; for 1977, it is, 102, so, there will be no change in the establishment for 1976 and 1977. But let us look at the figures. In 1976, the approved estimate for those 102 people was \$285,094; in 1977, the amount voted is \$257,435. And if we look at the Increase or Decrease column, the last column, we will see “\$27,659.” What I want to ask is whether we do not appear to be reducing staff in 1977? The complement remains at 102 yet we are asking for \$27,659 less than that approved for the staff of 102 in 1976. No explanation has been given for this reduction; it is normally customary for an explanation to be given when there is a minus or a plus sign. None is given in this case and this worries me because this deals with Personal Emoluments, salaries of the small men, Constables and Security Guards. I would like to ask whether there is going to be a retrenchment in this particular category or whether it would be merely non-filling of posts that are at present vacant. Are these posts at present vacant and is it that the proposal is not to fill them for this year? Certainly the complement still remains as 102.

Turning to page 109, I would like to deal with item (199), Cleaner. It is a similar point to the one last made. There are supposed to be 20 cleaners. There were 20 during last year. The approved estimate for those 20 cleaners for 1976 was \$50,808; in 1977, the estimate is \$36,672 for those same 20 cleaners thereby showing a reduction in the last column, “-\$14,136”. Why should there be a reduction if the complement remains at 20? With the normal increments, one would expect to find an increase – if the staff remains the same – rather than a reduction.

On the same page, (215), 1 Clerk of Works II and 8 Clerks of Works I. I would like to compare that with the estimates for 1976. If we were to look in the 1976 estimates on page 107, we would see that in respect of this item (215), the bodies for the job were 5 Clerks of Works II instead of one, as reflected in this year's Estimates and 13 Clerks of Works I instead of 8 as reflected in this year's Estimates. So, last year we had thirteen plus five, that is, a total of eighteen; this year we have eight plus one, a total of nine persons. Of course, that does reflect in the last column in a decrease of "-32,248". Again, we are reducing staff in 1977. If we are doing that, what are the prospects of deploying these people elsewhere? But certainly there has been a reduction between 1976 and 1977.

Across the page to page 110, item (222). It states specifically "302 Security Guards". We notice that the amount voted in 1976 for these 302 Security Guards was \$958,800, the revised estimate was \$1,123,674 and what is being asked for this year is \$761,040 thereby indicating a reduction of \$197,760 in the last column in respect of what was approved for 1976. I make the point "approved" sir, because it may well be that out of the revised figures some elements of back pay may have been involved. On page 108 of the 1976 estimates, item (222), there is listed 302 Watchmen on A3. Now we are not listening Watchmen any more, they are Security Guards and they are on a higher scale, A4, yet, we are catering for a decrease in the amount of money we are to pay to these 302 Security Guards. I cannot see how this can be unless the posts have not been filled or unless we are going to be reducing the amount of Security guards and deploy them elsewhere. Could the hon. Minister give an indication as to why there is this significant decrease?

The same reasoning applies with respect to items (226), (227), (230), and (231). In item 226, instead of 1 Materials Technician II, there were three in 1976; instead of 3 Materials Technicians I, there were 26 in 1976. There is a reduction because you are employing people. In item (227), instead of 3 Surveyor Technician II, there were 7 in 1976 and instead of 10 Surveyors Technician I, there were 17 in 1976. That is why a reduction is shown in the last column. Why has there been this reduction in staff?

Survey Crew, item (230): In the 1976 Estimates on page 108, the Survey Crew consisted of 3 Foremen, 12 Chairmen, 12 Staffmen, 12 Instrument men 6 Linesmen, 3 Chainmen-/Staffmen, making a total of 48. Now, that total reflected in this Estimates for 1977 is only 10. Therefore the bodies have been reduced from 48 to 10. What are we doing to the rest of these people? Have they been deployed elsewhere? Where will they be getting work? They are ordinary people who go out with the survey teams but they got work and one would like to know that they would not suffer as a result of this reduction in the staff here. Machinist/Fitters, in respect of item (231). Is the same enquiry. The complement here is 8 whereas it was 14 in 1976.

2.25 p.m.

Turning over to page 111, item (232) we find the same situation. The establishment was 13 in 1976 now it is only 10. On the same page, I would like to make one point in respect of items (245), (248), (253) and all the other items on the following page and indeed all the items which have against them the legend: “No longer required.” There are many such posts where the legends state that they are no longer required and no money is voted. What is to happen to these people? Has the Ministry found alternative employment for them? I do hope that they will be redeployed somewhere else so that they do not join the ranks of the unemployed.

Having dealt generally with page 112, I move over to page 114, subhead 28, Roads. The approved estimate for 1976 was \$3 million. The revised estimate for 1976 is \$2,750,000 and what is being asked for 1977 is \$2 million. I want to make the point that on a visit to the West coast last year I noted that deviations were being done on the roads there. I have no quarrel with deviations; I have no quarrel at all with straightening roads. As an ideal, this is good, though I have heard it argued that the straightening of roads causes drivers to increase their speed and this contributes to an increase in accidents. I am all for straightening roads, maybe because I am not as bad a driver as some other people, but some others might disagree with that.

What I want to talk about is the question of priorities. Does the Minister not agree that this same money could be used to build, for example, access roads to farm lands and a road like the Parika-Maripa road which the Government will now be continuing under the capital estimates helped, of courses, by an E.D.F. loan? Should not the roads to agricultural lands have a higher priority than the straightening of an existing road? I certainly would like to think that the farmers would agree with me in saying that they would prefer to leave a good existing road with a good surface and give them a road in the agricultural area rather than merely straightening that existing road which has a fairly good surface.

Dealing with subhead 33, Unallocated Stores, the approved estimate for 1976 was \$8 million. This was revised to \$6 million but for 1977 the figure being requested is only \$500,000. This is a reduction of \$7.5 million and though I recognize that this is austerity year, I would like to ask: Can we really operate efficiently on such meager stores? If a part is not immediately available from the stores, it can result in a lot of “down-time” for very urgently needed vehicles and equipment; if the men are not working for a period of time while someone runs around looking for parts and things like that, the “down-time” can cause wastage of manpower that is being paid for and wastage of many things. I am sure the hon. Minister knows what I am talking about. What will happen in respect of all the supporting circumstances if, for example, a lorry fetching bitumen, or a bitumen plant, or a scraper, or something along those lines, is down because a spare part is not readily available from the stores.

2.35 p.m.

I am speaking of fast-moving parts, not something which you require once every three or four years. I am speaking of fast-moving parts which one would require regularly, like oil rings or hoses for a big piece of equipment. If a hose is leaking the machines cannot work. It is a small item but that can cause a lot of down-time which would be very, very costly to the project.

I am moving on now to subhead 36, National Insurance. I want us to note particularly that the revised figure for 1976 was \$920,400 but the estimate for 1977 is only 500,000. This supplies me, as far as I am concerned, with definite proof that there must be a reduction in staff. If you are paying \$½ million for N.I.S. instead of a million dollars, then you must necessarily have reduced your staff. The supplementary question I would like to ask is what is going to happen to this entire staff you have reduced your complement by?

Subhead 40, subsidy to Guyana water Authority: Again let us look at the 1976 revised estimate in respect of this subsidy. In 1976 the revised amount was \$4,220,000. What is the estimate for 1977? It is \$1.6 million. From \$4.22 million to \$1.6 million! I would not want to dwell on this for any length of time but I am sure the Minister will appreciate what is involved here. Can we really operate efficiently in such an important and vital field as water with such a great reduction in the subsidy that was given to the Guyana Water Authority? It does seem to me that the service must suffer. If the service is not to suffer than perhaps we will have a rise in the charges for water. The water rates would probably have to go up as the electricity rates had to go up in order to meet the reduction in subsidy. This is so vital an area that I would like to hear from the Minister how the Water Authority expects to function with a reduction of \$2.13 million in the vote.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Chairman, I have a short question and it deals almost with nearly all the Divisions under the fixed establishment, Administration and Technical. This is a big Ministry and there is no doubt about it. It spends substantial sums of Government money each year. What is terrifying is that this Ministry has got a situation where – if I am wrong it would be in a very small way – nearly 90 per cent, if not 90 per cent, of the substantive officers both in the administrative and technical field are acting, beginning with the Permanent Secretary and going right down the line.

I raised under another Head some time ago the need for us to keep our people. I have all respect for the people working in the administrative section because, as in the field of

accountants, we have been losing so many that we find ourselves year after year without enough accountants and hence accounts are in a state of choose and confusion. I think the Minister owes, those who work as faithfully, so loyally, so dedicatedly with him, in both the administrative and technical section of his Ministry, to tell them when they are going to be appointed, when they are going to be told what their position is in their areas of service.

The hon. Member Mr. Feilden Singh posed the question as to whether the Ministry has enough technical staff. They have lost staff as in so many other Ministries, but the point of the question is that action is not taken and people are not satisfied. The loss will increase and continue to recur year after year. Whatever staff remains to serve in these sensitive Ministries must be preserved and every effort ought to be made speedily. There are people who have been acting there for years. I do not want to identify any area. Something is wrong. Is it that the Ministry is at fault and the recommendations are not being put up? Is it that the Public Service Commission has become static and the members are not acting. Tell us so that we can have these people. The Minister himself said he complained when he was acting in a post. Of course, he was acting during the colonial days when the Ministers did not enjoy the powers that all Ministers enjoy today. In fact, the Public Service –

The Chairman: That is a statement made when he was sitting. Do not answer. Let us get on.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Sometimes the questions are so relevant that one is forced to answer. Unless these things are done we will continue to have a brain-drain in this country in every segment. Let us stop it. First, satisfy those who are serving, appoint them, treat them well, allow them to have job satisfaction so that the country can make progress.

The Chairman: Cde. Ram Karran, would you like to speak?

Cde. Ram Karran: I wish to raise two questions on page 104 under all the professional and sub-professional posts in the Building Division. I should like to ask the hon. Minister if he could indicate to us not only how many of the positions are filled –

The Chairman: Kindly use one of the microphones. They are provided for the use and benefit of members.

Cde. Ram Karran: - but how many are professionally qualified and are acting in these positions.

One the next page I want to ask a similar question in relation to the draughtsman. We have a group of draughtsman at item (72) – Chief Draughtsman, 3 Draughtsman, 4 Senior Assistant Draughtsman and 8 Assistant Draughtsman. How many of them are certified? I do not know what sort of qualifications they have. My information is that a whole lot of them are at the University of Guyana. How many are qualified to do the job? How many are sitting at their desks at the moment? I want to raise a very small question and ask the hon. Minister to explain item (83), Locksmith, and item (84), Assistant locksmith. This year we are providing \$3,000 and \$22,08 respectively but last year we spent only \$1,500 and \$1,104 respectively. What is the position? Have these people been upgraded? There is nothing to show. What is the explanation for that? If I am going too fast, perhaps the hon. Minister will raise the red flag.

How many vacancies are there in the Hydrometeorological Division? This is a very heavy group of professional people and I want to make sure that we do not have all this money here shown against subheads which are non-existent. Will the hon. Minister please tell us how many of them are professionally qualified and how many vacancies there are in connection with the entire Head?

Page 106, item (132), Pensionable Allowance in lieu of Consultation Practice: The amount requested is \$48,000 and that has been running since last year. The previous amount

was \$69,600. How many officers does this relate to? Does it, for instance, include the Minister? Page 107:

The Chairman: Is that a question? Then when you get the answer we get problems.

Cde. Ram Karran: The item relates to the Ministry and the Minister is attached to the Ministry. That is a question, a serious question, and I hope I can get an answer to it.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister, when you come to that question kindly ignore it.

Cde. Ram Karran: Sir, it is a question. There is no note.

The Chairman: Is the Minister employed as a Civil servant?

Cde. Ram Karran: I do not know. There is no explanation here. It states “Pensionable Allowance in Lieu of Consultation Practice” and there is no explanation at all alongside. I want to know who are the people, and how many people are affected.

Page 107, item (136) Trainees: May I ask what they are trained in and how many people are involved. I heard what my friend Mr. Feilden Singh said about it. Perhaps the Minister might answer the question with the bias that I have asked.

Item (139) Craft Crews, Tug Engineers and so on.: Can I have an indication from the hon. Minister as to the size of the fleet. I wish to ask the hon. Minister under item (147), Plumbers, whether it is not considered that this is too high a bureaucracy to have a Plumber Foreman, 2 Plumber Chargehands, 1 Leading Hand Plumber, 20 Plumbers? Is the supervisory section not too much in relation to the size of the gang they are supposed to work with? It would appear that we have too large a proportion of people who merely do paper work when you can reduce that top heavy bureaucracy with a view to getting more workmen.

A similar question I would like to ask in relation to item (155), Electricians. If you total the number of people engaged in this section I think you will come to the same conclusion that I have come to, that it is an extravagance which the country at this stage cannot afford. If your supervisory section is going to be so top-heavy it means that your production at the bottom is extremely low. The same applies to item (157) on page 108.

May we now turn to page 108 merely to draw to the hon. Minister's attention what was referred to on the previous page with respect to the Plumbing Section where we have the same sort of bureaucracy?

I shall be grateful if Your Honour will turn to page 113, item (284), Responsibility Allowances. I shall like to ask the hon. Minister to explain what this \$25,000 under this item is. How many officers are the beneficiaries in this and what does it relate to. What sort of responsibility is it?

2.45 p.m.

Lower down the page, subhead 13. We are to pay \$1,626,000 for the transportation of crushed stone. I shall be grateful to know where this crushed stone is transported from and where to.

On page 114 subhead 103 we have a repeat of that description "Transportation of crushed stone" for \$1,625,999. What is the relation between these two apparently similar items? I am sorry. There is a little difference in the figures.

The Chairman: Only one dollar out.

Cde. Ram Karran: Maintenance of Public Buildings. I wish to ask the Minister what is being done with a view to keeping Government buildings in a better state of repair. The

situation at the moment reveals that many Government buildings are not kept at the standard to which the buildings were being maintained in the past.

Can I ask on page 114 the last item. Would the hon. Minister tell us where is this stone crushing plant which is listed under subhead 30? Subhead 43, Road, Traffic and Soil surveys, \$100,000 appears in the Estimates for the first time with a very vague explanation “New subhead to meet cost of Traffic Census and Soil Surveys.” Where are these surveys being carried out and in relation to what? Secondly, I wish to make the observation if I may, that Traffic Census in the past has always been done without any additional funds on the Estimates. It used to be done by employees drawn from the Public Works, clerical employees and a few technical ones with assistance from persons in the Transport and Harbours Department and other places. That is how the Traffic Census has been done in the past. I wonder why we have a departure for that.

Subhead 44 Maintenance of Electrical Installations and Equipment in Government Buildings: Nearly \$½ million is to be voted and it says that this was provided formerly under subhead 24. I presume that was on the previous page. There seems to be a slight reduction in that but what is the reason for it to be transferred under a special subhead. Is it an administrative decision or will the Minister give us the reason? This is about all I have to ask, Cde. Chairman. We stop at page 114 isn't it? Perhaps the hon. Minister might be willing to help us

The Chairman: Cde. Dalchand.

Cde. Dalchand: I just want to speak on page 114 subhead 40, subsidy to Guyana Water Authority. Cde. Chairman, this subhead has been drastically cut from \$4.2 million to actually \$1.6 million. As I said before, the entire pure water supply situation in this country is grave. During the dry weather late last year, people could not get pure water in many areas. We were told that 20 wells were dug and many millions of gallons of water were supplied. I wish to say – and I would like to refer to West Demerara especially – the situation is very grave. Today because of the cut in the electricity supply in the area the whole area cannot have any pure water.

There is no stand-by equipment in any of the pumping stations from Vreed-en-Hoop road to the end. No water at all in the area. The well at La Grange in fact served actually the entire area during the last rainy season when the Pouderoyen well collapsed; the Belle Vue Well collapsed and the No. e Canal well collapsed. The La Grange well is now on the verge of collapsing and unless something is done urgently to improve the situation on the West Demerara I am sure the people are going to wake up and find themselves without any water for a long period. I am surprised that this subhead has been so cut. I want to ask the Minister concerned to re-examine the situation and provide a better sum for pure water.

I would also like to ask the hon. Minister to say what is the position with the well at La Grange. We were told that the well was dug at the Clay Brick factory No. 2 Canal and this would have helped supply water to some areas in No. 2 Canal. This is not so. The people are still receiving a trickling of water through the tap and all the lines are disconnected. There is no water. People here and there are disconnecting the lines to get a little bit of water.

During the last dry season people could not get water and water had to be supplied from a water-tender. When I tried to investigate this situation I was told by the officer in charge that the pure water supply department had no water tender and that they are supplying water with a tender loaned to them from the road construction people and this is only available after these people cease work or at 4 or 6 o'clock. So you can imagine. I want the Minister to say whether he will provide money so that West Demerara can have a water tender. I would like the Minister to answer some of these questions.

Mr. M. F. Singh: I forget to mention subhead 37, Miscellaneous Works and Services. The sum provided for 1976 was \$50,000. That is reduced to \$20,000 for 1977. So the reduction in the last column should be minus \$30,000 and not “-2,130,000”. I don't know how \$2,130,000 get in there.

Cde. Ally: I would like to ask a few short questions on the pure water problem in the country. Number one: I wish the hon. Minister would tell us the reason why the pure water department is not collecting rates in the various Local Authority areas. For instance, on the Corentyne people have to travel all the way from Crabwood Creek to Canje to pay their water rates which is costing them at least eight dollars for travelling expenses. They also lose a whole day's pay because the pure water department is not collecting rates promptly. Many people are living in fear that their lines will be disconnected. I wish that the Minister would look into this and see that the various Local Authority Offices collect their rates.

Prinetown, Corriverton, in one housing area, but one part of the housing are is being provided with pure water service and another part has no pure water supply. Is it because the people there are from different political parties? I would like the Minister to tell us why.

2.55 p.m.

People are not yet living at the new housing area at Corrivertown that has been built but pure water has already been provided in that area. People have been living at Line Path, Section E, and at Race ground, Springlands for the past nine years but unto this day pure water has not been provided for these people. Is it because people who will be living in the new scheme are P.N.C. supporters?

I would like to ask the Minister to look into the present situation where water pumps are concerned. They break down frequently and it takes months and weeks before they can be repaired. In some areas there are no water tenders so the people, in most cases, are forced to use trench water. I hope that the Minister will understand the situation. Instead of cutting down from \$4.2 million and I think this should have been increased at least to \$6 million to put pure water supply in a very good position so that people throughout the length and breadth of this country could get water.

One last question: I would like to ask the Minister what is the position at Black Bush Polder? How soon does he expect to supply Black Bush Polder with pure water? The people have been suffering for years. Since the introduction of this scheme the people have not received this service. They are using trench water and the Minister is aware of the fact that the shallow wells have actually ceased flowing in that area. Pure water supply is a necessity at the moment and urgently needed.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

The Minister of Works and Housing (Cde. Naraine): Cde. Chairman, the hon. Member Mr. Feilden Singh raised a number of questions pertaining to supernumerary posts and shortages of staff. I think in a way e has answered himself in respect of supernumerary posts in that these posts were created because the substantive holders of certain posts were taken on special assignments. For instance, Cde. George Williams, who is the substantial holder of the post of Permanent Secretary has been seconded to the University of Guyana as Bursar. Later, he was seconded to the Public Service Ministry. Therefore there was need to have a supernumerary post which was filled by Cde. Marshall. Cde. Marshall himself was put quite recently on a special assignment relating to Housing.

In relation to some of the technical posts, these officers were put on the Upper Mazaruni Road Project and Cde. P.A.D. Allsop, the Chief Workers Officer, was seconded to the Ministry of Economic Development. Posts had to be provided for the officers on the Upper Mazaruni Road Project, so that those officers remaining in the Ministry as well as those officers transferred on special duties on the Upper Mazaruni Road Project could enjoy the opportunity of promotion. Since it was felt that the Upper Mazaruni Development Project, the bigger project in Guyana; the road project being only part of it – would involve the utilisation of these officers for some considerable time, it was though justifiable that additional posts should be provided whereby they would not lose promotional opportunities.

I would not say that the transfer of these officers to this project would cause any inefficiency in the Ministry as such because additional posts have been provided, allowing for the promotion of suitably qualified personnel to fill them and so not leaving positions vacant.

The shortage of staff referred to is due to a general shortage of certain skilled personnel, and steps are being taken to recruit such persons from qualified Guyanese living abroad who are willing to return to Guyana as well as from persons from abroad who may wish to come and work in Guyana. Also Guyanese are being trained to become qualified, and we heard in this House that we are spending as much as \$7 million for such overseas training.

A question was also raised in relation to the Planning Unit. I will be the first to admit that this Unit is not functioning in the way it was intended. It may be because economists and cost accountants do not see within this Ministry opportunities for their future advancement. That may be the reason why we have been having difficulties in having posts filled. Some have been filled by secondments for short durations but there have been persons like Cde. Bob Wyatt who, I understand, is a qualified economist and who has worked as P.A.S. (Planning) in this Division. No doubt that we have been having difficulties in filling vacancies in the planning unit.

However, as you know, Cde. Chairman, the whole question of planning units and planning generally in the Government and in the public sector is being examined in relation to the formation of a Planning Commission and the restructuring of the economy of the country. Although these posts have still been put in this Ministry it may be that in the end, after we have got the results of the recommendations for the restructuring of the economy and the legislation passed and the Planning Commission established, we may very well find the planning unit being part of the Planning Commission where opportunities for promotion and advancement and research and consultation with colleagues would be more easily available. Therefore, this whole thing is really a bit fluid right now.

3.05 p.m.

A question was raised on items (5), (60) and (65) about vacancies being filled. This question was also raised by Cde. Ram Karran. I am happy to say that insofar as Architects and Assistant Architects are concerned, we have our full staff as shown in the Estimates. These are all qualified persons: two are foreigners and three are Guyanese. The post of chief Architect is about to be filled by another Guyanese very shortly but the posts of Deputy Chief Architect and Senior Architect have not yet been filled. The post of Chief Quantity Surveyor has been filled by a Guyanese and we have seven Guyanese acting in the posts of Quantity Surveyor.

Item (96): These posts, I am afraid, have not been filled substantively but there are persons acting in them. I am almost sure two of these posts will be filled shortly. It may be possible to fill all three before the end of this year.

The question was asked on item (109), Quarries Manager. How many operational quarries are being run by the Government? A quarry is being run at Teperu and one at Makouria and, by the end of February, another quarry will be run at Itabu. It is hoped that when the Itabu quarry comes on stream, the Makouria quarry will be phased out and the staff will be deployed in either the Teperu Quarry or the Itabu quarry. The Itabu quarry will be run by the National Service. We have heard that it is proposed to make this a Corporation and therefore we see in the Estimates here a rather substantial increase of expenditure. This will come under Other Charges, insofar as quarry operations are concerned. The quarries Manager presently looks after both Teperu and Makouria. One superintendent is in charge at Teperu, one at Makouria and one in Georgetown because the sales operation of the quarries is controlled from Georgetown. We did suffer last year from a short supply of stone because of private suppliers not being able to supply as much as they said they would and because of the tremendous expansion of work - buildings, sea defences, road work and other kinds of work during 1976. However, with the Itabu quarry becoming operational at the end of February, it is hoped to increase the production of quarry products in the country by 500,000 tons per annum. When this comes about I have no doubt that the Government quarries will be able not only to supply

stone for Guyanese work and Local Authorities but would also be able to supply some stone to private persons as well. It is my belief that the private quarries will still be needed and they will be carrying out a useful function by continuing to be in operation particularly in relation to the supply of stones to private users.

The shortage of surveyors: Cde. Chairman, falls under the general shortage of technical staff and all I can say is that possibly in surveying we feel it a bit more in that essential work of giving titles to lands have been lagging, also giving titles for house lots. But the general intensification of programmes for training will take care of this situation in due course. In the meanwhile, a number of Guyanese, who were operating in the Bahamas and other places, have returned to Guyana and are now in private practice. They have assisted in no small measure in having the surveying requirements of the country satisfied.

Item (136), Trainees: Questions were asked both by the hon. Member Mr. Feilden Singh and Cde. Ram Karran. The position is that this vote is being used presently for certain specialized and peculiar types of training such as locksmiths. It has been said that there are vacancies there. I will admit that there are two vacancies. Both posts are vacant. The locksmith had retired but he still assists us in our locksmith work. In the meanwhile, two persons are being trained; two others will be sent for training this year and personnel in the Hydrometeorological Division have also be trained from money provide on this vote. I gather there are four such persons being trained right now.

The point, raised about Checkers, items (141) and (152), is noted and possibly they should have been combined. Item (156), Constables and Security Guards: My information is that there is no reduction in staff but what could easily have happened is that there has been an arithmetical error in (156) and (159). The previous figures might have been overstated not in terms of the number of posts in the Estimate but probably in terms of the number of people who have been employed in previous years.

3.15 p.m.

It was asked why we had a reduction in the number of Clerk of Works II and Clerk of Works I. There is no question here of retrenching people. What has happened is that certain people, who have reached retirement age or who might have left these jobs to go to other jobs, caused a reduction in the number of these posts. During this year, 1977, the volume of work is anticipated to be less than in 1976 and therefore it was felt that we could live with this reduced staff. Possibly in 1978, if there is need, they will be increased again. In the meanwhile, if people of these categories are required, that is, new people, as is happening in the case of the Upper Mazaruni Road Project, they can always be paid from the capital vote until the adjustment is made in the following year.

Item (222), 302 Security Guards: Again the question was asked: why this reduction? There are two things here. One was, as the hon. Member Mr. Feilden Singh said that there were certain payments for arrears of salaries paid last year. The amount still appears to be smaller than say 1975 and I am afraid that without making a more thorough check into this figure I would not be in a position to say whether the \$761,040 is adequate or not. It would be adequate if in fact there are some vacancies of security guards which will be filled later on in the year but I am afraid that this will have to be further examined. I am not in a position to give an answer now.

Again the question was raised, in relation to items (226), (227), (230), (231) about the whole question of retrenchment. I would like to assure this House that there is no question of retrenchment. What has happened in some of these items is that we have kept the level of the number of posts in keeping with what actually existed at the end of 1976 and what we will further do, if there is need for additional posts, is to employ persons on the capital estimates to be utilized on capital work. Then at the end of the next year, we can review and see whether the number of posts could be increased again. That goes for item (232), Welders, as well.

On Roads, subhead 28, the question was asked why this figure is lower than in 1976 where the revised estimate was about \$750,000 more. In relation to this road vote, I would like the members to look at the 1974 actual expenditure which was approximately \$1½ million and the 1975 figure which was approximately \$1.3 million. What happened last year was that we took on a lot more than we normally did in that a lot of resurfacing work was done on the East Coast and some of it was also done on the East Bank.

I do not agree with the argument that the West Coast and West Bank, where there is a World Bank project loan for the reconstruction of those roads, really has anything to do with this subhead. Therefore, all what I would like to say is that although the estimates for 1977 appear to be low by comparison with 1976, in fact, the 1976 estimate was a very high figure. It was more than twice the actual figure of 1975 and using 1975 and 1974, particularly 1975, then \$2 million I sin fact providing for even a higher standard of maintenance of existing roads, particularly when we take into consideration that there are a number of roads shown under capital estimates which will be receiving the benefit of additional money in terms of re-construction.

Unallocated Stores, subhead 33: This needs some explanation and I can understand the wonderment of the hon. Member, but there is in fact quite a simple explanation to this subhead. The explanation is that in the public sector there are now many business places that were formerly owned and operated by the private sector. In the past it was necessary for the Government to run a rather large unallocated store in terms of bulk purchasing.

Now that the Government controls the bulk of foreign trading in the country and since the Government owns the means of storage and distribution of these goods coming into the country through Guyana Stores, Guyneco, G.N.T.C., and other corporations and since these corporations are also the distributors and agents for equipment and spare parts coming into the country, then there is no longer this need for having a very large unallocated store being run by the Ministry, for it will create a duplication of efforts. However we have kept the item at a lower level in the Estimates. The whole question of whether in fact we should have the unallocated stores being

run at all is being examined at this very moment and we may find that there may be further changes next year.

Subhead 36, National Insurance: The high expenditure for 1976 was due to arrears which had to be paid. It will be observed that the \$½ million provided for 1977 is not too far out in so far as actual expenditure for 1974 on 1975 is concerned so we feel that that provision would be adequate.

Subhead 37, Miscellaneous Works and Services, the comments are in order. That is not \$2 million. It should be \$30,000.

Several hon. Members and comrades on the other side raised the question of the subsidy on water supply and I would like to spend a little time on this. In a way, Cde. Ally from the other side assisted me with an answer when he asked the question: Why is GUYWA not collecting its water rates in local authority areas? But we may ask this question in relation to wherever GUYWA is supplying water: Why has GUYWA not been collecting monies that are owing to GUYWA in terms of water supplied to people throughout the country?

3.25 p.m.

I am appreciative of some of the difficulties which we have been experiencing in some areas in terms of breakdown of equipment, in terms of very old wells which can no longer stand up to pumping. As has been shown clearly by the past action of this government, we have waived rates in terms of some of these areas. There are many areas supplied with an adequate and dependable water supply and collection of water rates collection has not been what it should be. GUYWA, therefore, will carry out a very intensive programme for the collection of water rates, water rates in terms of persons who already have private connections and water rates in terms of new customers who will be getting connections. It is proposed to introduce a metering system and for this purpose GUYWA has in its possession 14,000 metres. It may be necessary

for them to acquire more. There will no longer be the complaint that a person should not pay for water because he does not receive it, because if he does not receive water the meter will register no quantity and, therefore, he would not have to pay for water.

It has been raised in this House that water comes from heaven and water is free, therefore why shouldn't the people get this water free? But I would like to point out that even before we had a water supply scheme the only things that was free about the water was that it fell from above. But whether this water is collected in a trench, whether it is collected in a pond, whether it is collected in a drum, whether it is collected in a vat, whether it is collected in a cistern, whether you have to sink a well and pump it out of the ground, whether you collect it in a reservoir, then there is a cost attached for the storage of the water. After having stored the water, then there is an additional cost of getting the water where you want it and you have to get it there in terms of quantity and quality so as which will not create a health hazard to the people. Therefore, even in the old days when people collected water in vats, which they had to construct at their own cost, to get that water upstairs they had to either put a pump and pump it by hand, put it in an overhead tank and distribute it in the house or they had to use an electric pump or some other device for distributing the water. Therefore, trying to fool people that water is free is really so silly that I cannot understand why this thing is being repeated in this House so often.

I would like to point out – and I think that I have done so very convincingly – that water costs money. I am not saying that because water costs money you should charge the full cost of the water to the people. The Government has never done this because the cost of the well is not charged to the people. The capital cost of the pump is not charged to the people. The cost of the overhead tanks and installations are not charged to the people. I am talking about direct cost, the cost in the price of the water. Is it clear now? This cost is not transmitted to the users of the water.

A comrade asks: Who is paying for the cost? The country is paying for it but it is not reflected in the direct cost of the water. Therefore, the only cost that is attached to the price of

the water is the current cost of pumping, of maintenance of facilities for distribution of this water. This is all that is put in the Estimates there under the current head.

I hope that having said this, the comrades from the other side will be a bit more enlightened. I know Cde. Narbada understands so he will explain to the others.

What we are attempting to do is to be abundantly fair to the general and to all the consumers of water, and to the taxpayers because we know that some people do pay for the water while others use water without paying and they use it wastefully. When trench water could be used for watering their garden, they use well water because it is there to be used. As the Cde. Prime Minister said, this is not a capitalist measure. In Cuba, people pay for water and Cuba is a socialist country. The water is metered in Cuba and therefore we can accept that as a model. In all kinds of economy water must not be wasted. Particularly things that are given free should never be wasted; they should always be put to good use.

3.35 p.m.

Cde. Chairman, it is proposed by these measures to reduce the subsidy that has been given without interfering with the quality of service provided. I would like to assure Cde. Ally that this Government will never discriminate in relation to its policy in the distribution of water. It has been drawn in relation to its policy in the distribution of water. It has been drawn to my attention – you have not drawn it before – that certain things are happening at Corriverton. I am prepared to look at the situation. We have both the General Manager of the Corporation and the Chairman of the Corporation here and they are hearing me. I would also like to find out tomorrow whether in fact this practice exists and if it does then they must do something immediately to change it. This is a public declaration of my position on the matter.

I must re-emphasise that in all new housing areas it is the Government's policy to supply the residents with a good water supply and I will tell you why this is absolutely necessary. In all

the government housing schemes the people are provided with water closets, septic tanks and therefore a water supply is a must. You cannot do these schemes without having water and if it appears that it is discrimination, because in the new housing areas the people are getting a good water supply, it is not intended as discrimination it is intended as a need for those houses which are provided with water closets. Therefore as we proceed in our development we hope that all comrades, wherever they may be, will benefit from similar supplies. I think I have said enough on that.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud raised the question of acting appointments. He did refer to the Permanent Secretary. I wish to point out to him that although Cde. Bob Wyatt is acting Permanent Secretary, in fact he is acting Permanent Secretary because the two Permanent Secretaries have been put on special assignments. One, several years ago was at the University of Guyana; he is now at the Public Service Ministry. The other one recently has been put on special work on housing. Also, Cde. DeAbreu, in on leave and he will be returning in April I think.

On the question of acting appointments there are a number of posts where people have been acting for some time. I admit that. But during last year the Ministry has made recommendations for the filling of these vacancies. I hope very shortly we will all be happy including the officers awaiting promotion as the posts are filled.

On the question of the draughtsmen and how many are qualified: we do not run a diploma course for draughtsmen. What, in fact we do is to take students from the government Technical Institute who have got certain basic technical training and we bring them into the Ministry whether it is in the structural division, the architectural division, the roads division or even the surveying division and they go through a period of further training in draughtsmanship. Depending on the type of activity, the kind of draughtsmanship, will be different. This is the way we have been recruiting draughtsmen. I think Cde. Ram Karran knows this only too well.

However, his statement is correct that for this year a number of such draughtsmen have been attending University to get further training.

Now I think that we should not begrudge those comrades who have gone to the University to improve their training and although this might cause some slight disruption in the running of the architectural division particularly, I would like to assure the Comrade that we have taken steps to have additional persons brought into the system. They have initially been brought in as open vote employees and as they progress, the vacancies will probably be filled, because we do not anticipate that the Comrades who have gone to the University to get degrees in various subjects, which we need in this country, will be returning to do the job of draughtsmen.

With respect to the vacancies in the Hydrometeorological Department, here again there are a few vacancies. I am very glad to hear the comments which were made by the hon. Member Mr. Feilden Singh in relation to the Hydrometeorological services which we are giving the nation. He seems to have some doubt as to whether the forecasts go to everybody. I think if you listen to the forecast coming over the radio, it comes over in rather simple language and it can be heard regularly and at particular times. In addition to this, the forecasts, both short-term and long-term, have been circulated to such bodies or people who have requested them for instances, the sugar companies and the Guyana Rice Board. We cannot identify every farmer and send him a copy.

What is of even greater importance in the service that we give, is that the forecast has been fairly accurate and that the information which you get from this forecast can be used several months in advance in planning, ploughing and reaping. In relation to this work, we are as advanced as if not more advanced than, the most developed countries of the world. If you doubt it, check it.

On the question of craft: Cde. Ram Karran raised the question of craft. I would like to tell him that the fleet comprises 5 tugs and 12 pontoons. The pontoons vary in size of 600 and 800 tons to 100 tons.

3.45 p.m.

There was a question raised by him on supervisory staff being top heavy at item (147) Plumbers. My calculation is that, even if you take from charge-hand, the proportion is 4:20. I do not think that taking a charge hand, a leading hand, and a foreman to supervise in the proportion, 1:5 can be considered excessive. As a matter of fact, it is good management practice. They say you have five fingers in one hand. If you have six invariable you do no more.

Responsibility allowance was raised by the comrade. The question of out duties in addition to what they are normally expected to do, but for which no provision is made by other Public Service Commission. Therefore the special allowances have to be taken from a special vote. This money is provided for this purpose. I do not know if he is serious about the question of transport of stone because all that we have done here is to charge the expenses for the operation of the fleet on one side. A charge is made for the hire of the ... to recover the expense, the purchase of the stone paying for transportation.

Maintenance of Buildings was raised by the comrade and he mentioned the term “standard”. I do not know what standard the Member is talking about there but certainly it cannot be the standard of the early 1960’s, because if we consider those standards then standards of the buildings today are exceptionally high. Look across there and you are at any place an example. I will agree however, that in the general interest of buildings, particularly wooden buildings, we should have standards of maintenance that are higher than you would keep in, say, concrete or brick buildings. We have got a tradition of wooden buildings in this country, and some of these buildings have very good architectural features.

We have heard earlier in this House the question of maintaining some of these features as part of our environment. Therefore, I will agree that we must strive for both, because wood is more perishable. We should strive for a continuing higher maintenance, but I will not agree that this higher maintenance will be achieved only by providing more and more money on the Estimates. What we to do is to be vigilant on wooden buildings. Because of the perishable nature of the material, whenever there is a leak it must be stopped immediately to prevent nothing. This will not happen with concrete and brick and therefore what we have to do is to have a high efficiency in our maintenance. We should make sure that adequate sums of money are provided in the Estimates for the maintenance of our buildings. We feel that we have been doing this very well and we will continue to do this in the future.

Cde. Dalchand raised some general questions about the water supply and I think I have answered that part of it. But in relation to the claybrick factory and the well that had been put there, it was the intention and still is the intention that the excess water, the water that is not required to be used at the claybrick factory, will be distributed in the Canal No. 2 area; I understand it has already been connected. When I was there a few months ago, I think it was in early December, a pipeline was being laid along the road. That should give some immediate relief to the water situation there. We will have another look at this.

I should like to assure Cde. Dalchand that we are conscious of some of the problems we are having in some of these areas. The question is not to increase maintenance. What we are hoping is to improve on the capital out lay in by putting in wells and better equipment. Only recently I had some discussions with the Caribbean Development Bank and the Chairman and General Manager have had some further discussion. If we are able to get some additional funds we will be able to supplement not so much the maintenance but the capital provision so that we can put in more wells, we can put in more pumps and have spare pumps as standby. We can then have efficient and economic maintenance implemented.

Black Bush Polder was raised by Cde. R. Ally. There are well in Black Bush Polder, but there is a problem of distribution as additional pipelines are needed. Work will continue as funds are available so that the water supply can be extended to other areas. I know in the meanwhile some will have to collect in drums and so forth. We regret this, but we will do everything possible to try and improve the conditions. I hope I have been able to cover all the question which have been raised by the Oppositions.

Cde. Ram Karran: There is one observation I would like to make with respect to cost of water to consumers. The question I had raised earlier was in relation –

The Chairman: Cde. Ram Karran, I am not going to listen to observations. If you have a question to ask, ask the question. Observations are not permissible under this. So if you have a question to ask, in view of what the Minister has said, you may do so.

Cde. Ram Karran: We examine these Estimates with a view to ensuring that these monies are applied to the projects for which the Government has asked for them to be applied based on the policy of the Government. The observation I wish to make is to clear up a distortion.

The Chairman: I am not going to allow an observation.

Cde. Ram Karran: I do not know what we are here for, we are wasting time as far as I can see. I would like to ask the hon. Minister if the provision of water matters to supply the country cannot be obviated, and thus save foreign exchange, by putting an additional charge on the provision of water as it is now applied. If that is how you want it, we can have it that way, but if we are going to examine these Estimates and we are going to see that money is applied in the region in view of the need to save money in this country, -- As I pointed out the Public Accounts Committees cannot meet, the accounts of the country have not been examined since 1969. When in the name of God are these going to be examined to ensure that the public who

14.1.77

National Assembly

3.45 – 3.55 p.m.

are putting this money here are not paying through their noses. The institution we have for a proper examination is being degraded by those who sit in this House. That is the responsibility which we have to carry out. But you are yourself a Member of this Parliament. Instead of acting as Chairman, or as the Speaker, you are yourself taking part.

The Chairman: Cde. Ram Karran, I will not have that.

Cde. Ram Karran: I will move a Motion of No Confidence.

The Chairman: You can do as you like. Cde. Minister.

3.55 p.m.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

Cde. Naraine: Cde. Chairman, I think internationally it will be accepted that I can address this forum or any other forum on water supply as an authority – [Applause.] - and all I can do is assure this House and the nation that it has been the experience and still is the experiences of every country in the world that wherever metres are used the consumption of water goes down. Further, is there any fairer system, if we are going to charge for water, than for a person to pay for what he receives?

Now, it could be that because of the income incapacity or capability of an individual, the Government may choose to give additional subsidies to certain users. If the comrade doubts me, let him find out from Suriname where water meters have just been introduced and the consumption of water there dropped dramatically by 50 per cent. Cde. Speaker, I feel I am an authority but I do not speak here as an authority. It is for the comrades who seem to be more knowledgeable on the subject, to check it out for themselves.

Head 36, Ministry of Works and Housing (Works) - \$28,108,727 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Comrades I merely wish to remind you that we have got nine Heads and/or Divisions to be completed. Page 115.

DIVISION XXI, MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING (WORKS)

Question proposed that the sum of \$31,325,000 for Division XXI, Ministry of Works and Housing (Works) stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Cde. Ally.

Cde. Ally: Cde. Chairman, I have seen here on the Crabwood Creek/Orealla Road there is no money under this head for this year. I would like to ask the Minister whether this road has been finished, if not, why money was not placed in the estimates so as to continue the work on this road? Will the Minister also say how many million dollars this road is estimated to cost for completion?

Will the Minister indicate whether he is aware of the fact that farmers, Amerindians, loggers, are all badly in need of this Crabwood Creek/Orealla Road because water transportation is very costly? Will the Minister also say whether it is true to say that because of bad planning and squandermania the work has been held up on this road and, if this is so, whether it is true that he is now thinking of setting up a Commission of Enquire to look into the whole question to know what amount of this money has been spent on this road and what sum has been squandered?

The Chairman: Cde. Wrights.

14.1.77

National Assembly

3.55 – 4 p.m.

Cde. Wrights: Cde. Chairman, I have three questions to ask the Cde. Minister. On page 115, subheads 1 to 17 and 23: Can the Minister say that his Ministry has any active programme in the new roads work for 1977? Can the Minister say what is the extent of the Ministry's building programme for 1977? And also, on subhead 22, Hydrometeorology, is the development of hydrometeorology to be pursued actively for 1977?

The Chairman: It is now 4 o' clock. Let the Assembly resume.

Assembly resumed.

SUSPENSION

The Speaker: The Sitting of the House is suspended for 30 minutes.

Suspended accordingly at 4 p.m.

4.45 p.m.

On resumption –

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

The Chairman: Comrades, 17 minutes were spent by me in discussing some complaints made by Members of the Assembly. If it is your wish, I am prepared to sit on for 17 minutes after 6.30 p.m. I will sit on until quarter to seven. If not, I will adjourn at 6.30. If that is agreed, will the Assembly let me know please?

The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House (Cde. Ramsaroop):
Cde. Chairman, at the appropriate moment, I was proposing to move the Motion for us to go

beyond 6.30 not only to make up for the lost time but to do Ministry of Trade and Consumer protection as well.

The Chairman: It depends on the state when we reach quarter to seven, but I am prepared to sit until quarter to seven. After that, if it is only another fifteen or twenty minutes, I will go on, if not, I will return at eight.

Cde. Ramsaroop: We will let you know the state of the game before 6.30 p.m.

The Chairman: Cde. Nokta.

Cde. Nokta: Cde. Chairman, page 115, subhead 12, Essequibo Island Roads, \$500,000 and the legend states: “To continue work on the Leguan Road.” I would like to ask the Minister, if this \$500,000 is to be spent on servicing the existing Leguan roads or is this sum of money to be used for the extension of the road which started some time ago from Phoenix to the southern part of Leguan to a place they call Hog Island Point?

4.50 p.m.

If all this money is to be spent on completing that project by adding to the road, then I would like to ask the Minister how will the Government be able to maintain the existing roads that are in such a deplorable condition?

The second question is: if \$5,000 is to be spent on Leguan how does the Government intend to surface the roads in Wakenaam which are at present in such a deplorable condition?

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: The capital expenditure reveals to me a very fundamental point, that is, that the Government has reduced its vote on road and ancillary similar works.

The Chairman: Would you advise me what you are speaking on, please?

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: From subhead 1 to subhead 17 and then I will take subhead 27.

The Chairman: Let me hear you on subhead 1.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: They are all related. I will refer specifically to the basic point afterwards. The point I make is that from \$84 million in 1976 to \$31.3 million in 1977 shows a decrease of 63 per cent. I wish to ask the Cde. Minister concerned whether this is a change of policy or this reduction has come about because we are in this austerity year. I make that point because I think if it is a question of policy or this reduction has come about because I think if it is a question of policy, a fundamental change, we on this side of the House went to welcome that change and to support the decrease of 63 per cent from 1976 to 1977 so that priority can be given to these productive sectors of our country. Having made that point which I think is significant and we would like to have an answer, I processed to pose certain points under these subheads.

For instance, these items listed from subheads 1 to 17 deal with roads in a number of areas. I want to ask the hon. Minister concerned whether priority will be given to roads in those areas from which farmers will be able to transport their produce at cheap cost. If the answer to that question is in the affirmative, I would ask the Cde. Minister concerned whether he is not aware of the fact that in the Development Programme there is a scheme known as the Crabwood Creek Southward Scheme where there are thousands of acres of good land for farming. Since we have already completed about half a mile of the road from Crabwood Creek to Orealla, and another fourteen miles or so from the Orealla and coming down to Crabwood Creek – there is a space in between – does he not consider it vital and necessary to the people at Orealla, who would like to use it to transport produce but also for many other facilities? At the same time it would allow the Minister of Agriculture to allocate that land so that it can reduce unemployment

in the Upper Corentyne, at least. Indeed, persons may wish to go on land from other areas on the Corentyne because one would expect that, if there is land the authority should be given to those who are nearer to the areas.

Subhead 8, East Berbice Roads: The legend refers to roads. “Bridge” probably might include roads if one takes into account the Roads Act. If this sum of money will be spent entirely on the bridge, I say it is not adequate but that is not the point I wish to make.

Mara Settlement is a settlement which farmers have been running away from. I do not want to deal with the road rehabilitation aspect but one of the complaints of the settlers has been bad roads. I think that that area should be given priority and indeed it is my point that in all areas where we have farmers talking about the disparity in social services and other amenities that are vital and necessary, priority in those things should be interlinked so that the Roads Division can service those areas where our farmers reside. Indeed, the Division must service them. It is only then that the Government’s declared policy of developing the agricultural sector will have meaning. If not, it cannot and will not. Cde. Nokta has already referred to Wakenaam and Leguan. Those are farming areas and the roads are deplorable.

A short question on subhead 27, Revised Laws of Guyana: I see that the sum of \$50,000 is to be provided. I thought this was the function of the Attorney General’s Office. It should really come under the Ministry of Justice. Probably the Minister will have an explanation for that. I thought the law process had more or less been completed. We have got the fillers to the various volumes. Perhaps he will tell us what is this item.

The Chairman: Comrade Feilden Singh.

Mr. M. F. Singh: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Page 115, subhead 1, Georgetown Approaches. The Revised Estimate shows that we have spent \$26,600,000 during last year. But the sum being asked for now is only \$1.4 million. Is this enough to maintain for this year

5 p.m.

the work in respect of the Georgetown approaches? I take it that would include the present two-lane highway which is now under construction from Georgetown along the East Coast. I think the original intention was to go to Buxton but maybe that has been lessened now. I want to make the point that if this money is not enough to keep construction work going on that road for the rest of this year, then we all know that if we bring the project to a standstill the cost of mobilizing after that standstill is tremendous indeed, and certainly does add considerably to the total cost of the project.

Additionally, I would like to ask whether this \$1,400,000 for this year would also include the Demerara River Bridge. We have read in the newspapers very much of the Demerara River Project. The hon. Minister would correct me if I am wrong. I do not see any other subhead under which it appears. I note that the Canje Bridge does come under subhead 8, East Berbice Road, so perhaps the Demerara River Project will come under Georgetown Approaches also.

The other question is with respect to the road leading East from Sheriff Street. It has been made on the old railway embankment starting approximately from where the Kitty Railway Station used to be shortly before Plaisance. That is an approach to Georgetown. That road was built on the old embankment and used to serve to a great extent to relieve the congestion of vehicles coming in and out of Georgetown. I understand that the road has now deteriorated to the extent that it has a lot of pot-holes. Since it is a road that did relieve the congestion, would the hon. Minister tell us what will be done to make that road usable again? Vehicles are scared to go on it now because of the big holes but it was serving a very useful purpose and I do commend the Ministry for having made that road. Many people have found it useful to get to their homes between Georgetown and Plaisance.

Subhead 16, Upper Mazaruni Road: I notice the revised amount for this road was \$20,200,000 and the sum being asked for this year is \$10 million approximately 50 per cent lower. Could the hon. Minister give us an idea of the approximate cost per mile of this Upper

Mazaruni Road? Again, I have not had the privilege of seeing the construction there. I understand security precautions are very strict but I hope the hon. Minister would afford me the opportunity of seeing the construction there in the not too distant future. I understand that this is being surfaced not with a bituminous surface, not macadamized but just an ordinary surface. But I wonder whether the hon. Minister would care to venture an opinion as to how the surface is standing up to the traffic and to the rains. What is the degree of deterioration during the rainy season in respect of this kind of surface on the Upper Mazaruni Road.

The last item on this page is subhead 35, (new) Purchase of Transport. The sum being requested is \$2,230,000. All this will be Other Finance so I take it that all of this will be from funds raised in Guyana. I wonder whether the hon. Minister would give us some details. Are we going to be purchasing in respect of transport under this subhead?

Cde. Ram Karran: I have few questions under this Capital Expenditure Head. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether he will clarify and indicate to us whether it is the intention of Government under subhead 5 to continue the road beyond Maripa. Does the Government consider going on to Larimakabra or even to the head of Bonasika with a view to help the farmers in Bonasika to catch up with the Parika and thereby avoiding a great deal of water transportation.

May I go on to the Essequibo Roads subhead 9, and ask the hon. Minister what is meant by “right of way” here? The legend states by “to provide for right of way and construction costs”. When are the Essequibo Roads going to be completed bearing in mind what appears in these Estimates at a later stage for the construction of the terminal at Supenaam? Is it Government’s intention to complete to Essequibo road from Charity on the Supenaam taking into consideration the terminal at that point?

Under subhead 17, Coastal Feeder Roads, I notice that the Government is asking for \$2 million. The legend states: “To provide for work on the Port Mourant and Belfield access

roads.” May I ask the hon. Minister the length of these two roads individually and the sort of a level to which the road will be made because it does seem to me that the sum of \$2 million is very high for secondary roads serving the main road.

In the Estimates under subhead 21, the sum of \$3,000,000 is required for the purchase of equipment and the legend states: “To provide for the purchase of miscellaneous equipment.” Surely, this does not tally with the requirement for secrecy in so far as other purchases are concerned. Will the hon. Minister be able to itemise or give us some idea of what is being bought? Is it water meters, silos, pumps, equipment or what? We would like to know. May I draw to the hon. Minister’s attention that subhead 35, (New) Purchase of Transport, does not seem to tally with the legend which states “To provide for an extension of pure water facilities.” We need to identify what the word “transport” means or the Minister must indicate to the House how these two things are related. The legend has 35 and the subhead is 35.

The Chairman: Comrades, I merely wish to remind you all that we have several Heads. At a quarter to seven this Head will be finished.

Cde. Dalchand: Cde. Chairman, I wish to speak on page 115, subhead 17, Coastal Feeder Roads. The legend states: “To provide for work on the Port Mourant and Belfield access roads.” I notice that \$2 million is being requested to be spent on this subhead. I would like to ask three questions. Will the Minister say in which specific area at Port Mourant and Belfield these roads will be built? How many miles of road will be built in each area?

The Chairman: *Cde. Ram Karran* asked that already.

Cde. Dalchand: On the question of subhead 35, a huge sum is being asked here for Transport. I would like to ask the Minister what is being done to stop the mis-use and abuse of public vehicles.

The Chairman: That is not a question under this Head.

Cde. Dalchand: It is a question of transport.

The Chairman: No. Cde. Minister.

Cde. Naraine: Cde. Chairman, I wonder if I could answer the question asked by Cde. Roshan Ally and if I could use this opportunity to correct a statement made in relation to the collection of rates in Local Authority areas. I misunderstood what Cde. Ally was saying. He was saying that we should use the Local Authority offices for the collection of rates and I interpreted that to mean the rates within Local Authority areas. Taking his question as he has corrected me, I would like to say that we do intend to use Local Authority offices but, more particularly, we hope to use the Post Office for the collection of water rates. Cde. Ally raised a question on Crabwood Creek and I think it was also raised by Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud. The estimated cost of the 40 miles of road to be constructed was \$12 million. At present, about \$3 million has been spent and about 12½ miles of road have been constructed mostly at the Orealla and.

5.10 p.m.

The Government is looking at its road priorities for 1976. As a matter of fact, since the end of 1976 work has been temporarily suspended on this road. The matter will be kept under constant review and, depending on our resources both in terms of finance, in terms of capacity, equipment and manpower, we will take the observations made by the Opposition into consideration.

Cde. Wrights raised a number of questions on roads and buildings and the hydrometeorology services. Now in relation to roads I wonder if I could use this opportunity to make some corrections. Under Roads, subhead 5 Parika/Maripa Road, the legend states E.D.F.

loan. Instead it should be C.D.B., Caribbean Development Bank. This sum of money is for the commencement of a programme of roads which would include not only the Parika/Maripa road. We can add Ruby Dam, Burma Mill (Mahaicony) Burma Mill (Abari), Onverwaagt and Dehoop.

Under subhead 17, Coastal Feeder Roads, the legend should read Farm-to-Market Roads. We can add Philadelphia, Barnwell and Belladrum.

Under subhead 5 the total length of road would be about 20 miles and under subhead 17 the length there would be 7 miles. The sum of \$750,000 provided under subhead 5 would be just to make a start but it should be possible to do most of this 7 miles under subhead 17.

In answering the question on roads, both those asked by Cde. Wrights and others, I would ask for another correction under subhead 16. In the explanatory note it should not be "To purchase equipment" but "To construct an access road to the Hydropower dam site." I think that would clear up quite a lot of questions in the minds of Comrades and hon. Members.

In relation to the Georgetown road, Comrade Feilden Singh asked a question whether it includes the Demerara River Bridge. It does. As a matter of fact, a substantial part of this very high expenditure of \$26,000,000 in 1976 was for the cost of the bridge which is now in the country. Work will progress within this framework of expenditure.

In relation to the question raised about the Mara Road by Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud I would like to tell him that although no item is in the Estimates at this time this road has been put up by the European Development Fund for financing and the prospects look very favourable. Some preliminary design work has been started. We hope to get a loan from the European Development Fund and maybe later this year or at the beginning of next year something will have to be provided by Supplementary for this road. We appreciate that this road is very much required and we have every intention of having it done.

The Upper Mazaruni Road Project was again raised by Cde. Feilden Singh, the cost per mile there is \$400,000. It is going through virgin territory. The surface until the construction of the Hydropower project will be in laterite and with a sufficient fitness of construction to take the heavy traffic which will be moving on that road, to take heavy equipment and materials for the construction of the hydropower project.

The question was raised how the \$500,000 will be spent on the Essequibo Island. This sum is capital and is intended for the construction of the road from Goodman Freetown to the existing public road. We do appreciate that more can probably be done for the maintenance of the roads on the islands and there is every intention of improving the maintenance of the roads, there. One of the problems which we experienced over the past year was the shortage of road-building material particularly crusher run stone, and quarry cleaning. Now with the new crusher in operation it is hoped that it will be possible to get these products much more readily and we would be able to do improved maintenance not only on the Island but at other places.

A question was raised in relation to the Essequibo Islands Roads. The sum of \$500,000 is for construction of the right of way, that is for the new construction of the new designed road. It will be necessary to move ditches, widen the road and move houses, standing in the way. Also, it will be necessary to remove fences; remove obstructions in the road so that the right of way can be opened whereby it can give the easement that is necessary for the construction of a better road which will follow. I think I have covered most of the road questions. **[Interruption]** I said that the Demerara Bridge is included as part of the project. I don't think we will finish it this year but we will do some additional work and we will review the financial position as time goes by. The railway tract actually that is not a declared public road. When we did some grading there it was intended to divert the carts and the bicycles on that tract but the trucks and the cars started using it and we will have to look at this in relation to our operation on the main road, and the intensity of traffic.

A question was raised in relation to road census which I did not answer. What I would like to say is that this census is always done and used to be charged to the capital vote. Now a special provision is made for it. I am sorry I did not answer that earlier.

5.20 p.m.

The miscellaneous equipment mentioned at subhead 21 may be a bit misleading but we have attempted to put certain types of equipment, machinery, transport equipment under a central Ministry, and the Ministry of Works and Housing has been selected as that place. There is an Equipment Committees that site and looks at the requests made by various Ministries and Corporations in terms of their need for equipment. After a request has been examined by the Committees and the need has been justified it will then come to the Ministry of Works and Housing and either this head for miscellaneous equipment or for purchase of transport will be utilized for purchasing the equipment depending on what category it falls under.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud questioned some reductions in the Estimates. I would like to state that we feel that transport and communications roads are an essential part of any kind of production activity, particularly in the agriculture and forestry areas, because it is no sense growing more crops, producing more, cutting more logs and then there is no road, or no facility for moving these products. Therefore, although we agree that we must concentrate on productive activities we feel that transport and communications are essential and must be provided in getting your inputs and moving your produce after they have been reaped from the soil. I do not think that the reduction this year should be regarded as indicative that it will keep declining or it will not rise up again. We have a big country, we have to move into the hinterland of the country, we have to improve existing roads, we have to improve farm-to-market roads, feeder roads, and all these various types of roads are required for the support of productive activities of the nation.

Cde. Wrights raised the question of building what I would like to say, as far as buildings are concerned, is that this year we will be concentrating on completing a number of building projects which have been started. For instance, for this coming year the new Customs Building on Main Street will be completed. The Attorney General's Chambers in Carmichael Street, the new Supreme Court at New Amsterdam, also will be completed. There is further design work to be done on the new Audit Department, the Caricom building and offices, and a whole complex of activities for the new civic centre at D'Urban Park. Further design work will be done on these. This year on building construction, that is for office buildings, we will be concentrating on completing projects already started and preparing designs for new projects to be started next year and to be included in the next four year Development Plan, 1978-1981.

That I hope answers the questions raised on buildings. Cde. Wrights also raised the question on the Hydrometeorological Services. In addition to the very excellent work which I think is being done, there will be further expansion of services, of facilities, whereby we can improve on the work being done and to provide forecast and information pertaining to areas outside of the coastal areas and some also on the Coast. For this reason a climatological stations will be established at Ann Regina and Matthews Ridge and hydrometeorological stations at Peter's Mine, (Cuyuni), Dadanawa, Rupununi, at North For, and Konawaruk. These are areas where more and more activities will be taking place and while these are going on a programme of short – range and long-range forecast will continue.

Agrometeorological investigations will be conducted not only in relation to growth of plant, but in predicting outbreak of pest and disease to major crops. This is a new field. We will continue to collect information for analysis on hydro power, drainage and irrigation and water supply.

Cde. Ram Karran raised the question of the extension of the road to Bonasika. This is not in this year's programme but I have no doubt in the next four-year programme this will be looked at along with the many road projects to be done. I think I have covered all the questions.

14.1.77

National Assembly

5.20 – 5.30 p.m.

I wonder if I can make one observation with respect to the question Cde. Ram Karran raised about the Explanatory note for subhead 35. He is perfectly correct. I wonder if we can change in the Explanatory Notes 35 to 36 and 36 to 37.

Division XXI, Ministry of Works and Housing (Works) - \$31,325,000 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

5.30 p.m.

The Chairman: Page 116.

**DIVISION XXII, MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING (WORKS)
IBRD/IDA PROJECTS, WEST COAST DEMERARA ROAD PROJECT**

Question proposed that the sum of \$3,300,000 for Division XXII, Ministry of Works and Housing (Works), IBRD/IDA Projects, West Coast Demerara Road Project, stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Cde. Dalchand.

Cde. Dalchand: Cde. Chairman, subhead 1, West Demerara Roads. The West Demerara Road contract was awarded in 1973 for the construction of the West Demerara Roads – I believe from Uitvlugt to Vreedenhoop to Patentia including Canals Polder, approximately 38 miles of road. Up to the time of speaking, not even one mile of road has been completed and I wish to state that from the estimate submitted so far over \$14,795,820 has been spent and this amount excludes what was spent in 1973. Work commenced on the West Demerara roads in June 1973. I want to ask the Minister if he can tell us what sum of money was awarded for the contract. What was the stated period for completion of this work? What has happened to the contractors? Is the Minister aware that a portion of the paved road at No. 2 Canal is now

slipping into the No. 2 Canal thereby causing blockage of the drains? How much money is needed to complete this bridge and when will the bridge be completed as the legend states:

“To continue construction work on West Bank Demerara, Canals 1 and 2 and West Coast Demerara Roads.”

Mr. M. F. Singh: My question under subhead 1 has been asked by the last speaker so I will just deal with subhead 2, Weigh Bridges. The sum being requested is \$100,000 and the legend states:

“To provide for the acquisition and installation of weigh bridges. I.B.R.D. loan.”

The note I made was: are we really getting any loan money for these weigh bridges in 1977? If so, one would have expected something to be under Specific Finance but since the entire sum of \$100,000 has been put under Other Finance it would appear as if the entire amount of \$100,000 is the loan money to Guyana. Fine. But then I checked with last year's estimate on page 113 and I note that the amount provided for 1976 was \$500,000 made up of \$300,000 Specific Finance and \$200,000 Guyana Finance. But the legend for last year and this year is exactly the same thing so could we get a progress report? Have we started this and is it just \$100,000 to be financed with Guyana money.

This is a small point I am making now. Could the hon. Minister or the Ministry make a correction? You have two columns of 1976 Revised Estimates. One should be 1976 revised and the other 1976 Approved Estimates. I am speaking of the fourth and fifth headings. The third to last one should be Approved Estimates instead of Revised Estimates.

Cde. Ram Karran: One last question. I wonder if the hon. Minister could tell us where these weigh bridges will be situated and at what total cost? How many weigh bridges will there be?

Cde. Naraine: Cde. Chairman, the West Demerara Road is approximately 40 miles and the estimated cost is \$20 million. That is about \$½ million per mile and in these days of high cost of materials and equipment, this is not considered an exceptionally high cost for these types of road. The work completed so far, is about 45 per cent and by the end of 1977, the entire road should be completed except for the Crane deviations and Canal No. 1. I am aware that in certain parts of Canal 2 there are some slipping. The slipping is not due to any fault in the construction of the road but to the canal and the dredging of the canal from time to time. I think Cde. Dalchand is quite aware of this.

In relation to the questions raised by the hon. Members Mr. Feilden Singh and Cde. Ram Karran, I wish to say there are five weigh bridges to be constructed. They were received last year. They arrived late last year and they are to be constructed at Adventure on the Corentyne, Canje on the Corentyne, Burma on the East Coast, Crane on the West Coast and Anna Regina on the Essequibo. It appears from the estimate that the total cost bridge would be about \$600,000. I should point out that we should not get too much concerned about Other Finance rather than Specific because for some projects when the Specific Finance is exhausted then we are still permitted to complete the project and we have to use Other Finance.

Cde. Dalchand: Cde. Chairman, the Minister has not answered parts one, two and three of my question. Also, he said about 45 per cent of the road has been completed. As I said, not even one mile of the 38 miles of road has been completed.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister, question one, two and three asked by Cde. Dalchand.

Cde. Naraine: In any kind of construction one has to lay foundations.

Cde. Dalcand: What was the original price of the contract? What period was stated for the completion of the road and what has happened to the contractors?

Cde. Naraine: The contract was awarded to Hack and Lewis for \$11.9 million in 1973. The contractors got into trouble and they could not do the work and the contract was terminated. The Government has taken over the job and with the agreement of the World Bank the job is being done by force account direct labour. The revised cost is \$20 million and this has been due to the increased cost of materials, mainly, the increased cost of cement, equipment, labour and everything imported. Bitumen has increased three times or more. In relation to the road, and the allegation that not a mile is completed, the point is when you build a road you build structures for the road you build a sub-base of sand, then you build a base which may be a stabilized cement base so that when you reach that point you complete with a bitumen surface. But when you say 75 per cent of the total work completed – **[Interruption]** – then 45 per cent is completed.

Division XXI, Ministry of Works and Housing (Works) - \$31,325,000 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

5.40 p.m.

The Chairman: Now that the comrades have finished and answers are given, I would point to the behavior. Then it is said that people are not doing their work.

Pages 117 to 110, Head 37 Ministry of Works and Housing (Housing).

HEAD 37 – MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING (HOUSING)

Question proposed that the sum of \$2,086,611 for Head 37, Ministry of Works and Housing (Housing) stand part of the Estimates.

Cde. Collymore: I would like to ask a question on page 117, item (13) Housing Administrator, and on page 118, subhead 8, Maintenance of Government Housing Estates. I would like to ask the Minister who is the Housing Administrator and what are his duties. We know his name, but we do not want the Minister to say that the Housing Administrator administrates. We want him to give information. We are in possession of certain information that there is a duality of powers, that some other person went into that Ministry and grabbed the powers of the Administrator who is involved in housing.

On subhead 8 we are very much concerned with the size of the amounts which have been allocated. In fact, the revised estimates say \$200,000 for 1976 and in this year the Government is seeking \$¼ million. We feel that this is very small in comparison with the task that this Ministry has to perform and we would like the Minister to say whether this mean and parsimonious sum will be sufficient to carry out this tremendous task.

I would like to ask the Cde. Minister if he is aware of the rapid deterioration of the Government Housing Estates. I would also like to ask the Minister if he could say what is the position at the East Ruimveldt Housing scheme, the Laing Avenue Housing Scheme, and the La Penitence Housing Scheme, and if there is no maintenance going on? The tenants have been complaining that floors are rotting, doors are falling off their hinges, windows are dilapidated, sometimes panes are missing and toilets and baths are in a bad state. It casts a very bad reflection on the Government because these schemes belong to the State. I would like to ask the Cde. Minister is he is satisfied that this sum is going to take care of the maintenance. We would also like to ask the Minister if he thinks that the overall allocation for this particular section of his Ministry is adequate. For instance, last year we note that the revised sum spent on the Ministry in the Capital and Current Estimates amounted to \$12.6 million and for this year an astonishing sum of \$5.2 million is being sought. This is a reduction by 57.8 per cent. We would like to ask the Minister is he thinks that this small amount of money is going to look after the housing crisis in the country and reduce the pressures on the low income group. I would like

to ask the Minister also to tell this House, considering the capital budget is only \$3.2 million, how this sum will be spent.

The Chairman: We will go into the capital expenditure later.

Cde. Collymore: In that case I will take my seat.

Mr. M. F. Singh: Just one question and that is on page 118, subhead 9, Expenses, Central Housing and Planning Authority. The revised figure for 1976 is \$22,000 and the 1977 estimates is requesting only \$6,000. That is a reduction, as reflected in the last column, of \$16,000. This is indeed a very drastic cut, and I am sure the hon. Minister knows that already there is grave dissatisfaction with the delays in the passing of plans by the Central Housing and Planning Authority. Will this grave reduction not compound the problem?

Another thought has just struck me. Is it in accordance with the announced intention of the Minister of Co-operative and National Mobilisation, Mr. Hamilton Green, that we will shortly be giving local authorities the power to pass these plans? I may be wrong but my opinion is that we would need legislation to do that. We all know how busy our draftsmen are, and that certainly would take some time. I wonder what the explanation is for this very low level of money being voted.

Cde. Belgrave: I would like to deal with two matters under this Head. Subhead 8, Maintenance of Government Housing Estates: This is a follow-up to Cde. Collymore's question. Is the Ministry aware that there is conflict now between the City Council and the Ministry of Health in relation to sanitation works, re septic tanks, in all the housing areas? If he is aware of it, how will the Minister plan to tackle this problem? If he is not aware of it, will the Minister investigate this matter and see what can be done.

The second question, subhead 11, Entertainment Allowance: It is noted here that in 1976 the approved estimate was \$2,400, the revised estimates for 1976 went on to \$4,000. It has increased in 1977 to \$4,800 but the legend states: "Increase due to the Permanent Secretary being on Special Assignment." Will the Minister tell this House if that assignment is in relation to that Ministry or another Ministry? If it is related to another Ministry, then the Ministry will then have two Permanent Secretaries. Will the Minister clear this point and let it be known to this honourable House what is the position of his Ministry in relation to Permanent Secretaries.

5.50 p.m.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

Cde. Naraine: Cde. Chairman, the substantive holder of the post of Housing Administrator is Cde. Dey who is now acting Permanent Secretary and the Acting Housing Administrator is Cde. Johnson. The duties of the Housing Administrator involve the co-ordination, the planning and general supervision and execution of the housing programme. In the housing programme there will be self-help housed, hire-purchase houses for sale and rental houses. In a way, other than the Central Housing and Planning Authority section, he is a sort of technical head of the whole Housing section. We have the Town and Country Planner in charge of Town and Country Planning and then the Permanent Secretary who looks after financial and other matters as well as General Administration.

Maintenance: I think Cde. Collymore got a bit mixed up because although the sum of \$200,000 was approved in 1976, in fact the expenditure was \$906,600. What we are seeking to get in 1977 is \$900,000 which is roughly what was actually spent in 1975. I would like to repeat what I said earlier. In terms of wooden houses, there is always the need for having a better quality of maintenance and most of these rental housed are wooden houses. I would say generally that the standard of maintenance and repair is good but there may be cases – and we have had to deal with those cases very severely – where there has been abuse to premises; some

of the tenants may break windows and things like that. Those are isolated and limited cases and I do not know if those are the cases Cde. Collymore is referring to. Generally, the sum is adequate and we attempt to give a reasonably good maintenance standard to these Housing Estates.

On the question raised by Cde. Feilden Singh about the reduction to \$6,000 for the Tax Planning Authority I think he is perfectly right. What is being planned is for decentralization of some of the functions to Local Authorities whereby directions will be given to the Local Authorities and for routine cases approved by them based on a plan prepared for the area. They will be able to approve those plans there. Right now the authority meets almost every week although they are not required to meet more than once a month. Therefore, there has been a multiplication of expenditure all around. We are hoping this year that we will be able to – **[Interruption]** It may be proven that this sum may not be adequate but we will try to do this decentralization process as quickly as possible.

The question raised by Cde. Belgrave is in relation to sanitation works. I am not aware of any conflict but I will enquire into this matter. On the question of entertainment allowance, there is a substantive Permanent Secretary put on special work and he gets an entertainment allowance. The Acting Permanent Secretary, also by virtue of that post gets an entertainment allowance so the sum has been double.

Head 37, Ministry of Works and Housing (Housing) - \$2,086,611 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Page 120, Division XXIII.

DIVISION XXIII – MINISTRY OF HOUSING

Question proposed that the sum of \$3,200,000 for Division XXIII, Ministry of Works and Housing (Housing) stand part of the Estimates.

Cde. Collymore: We are speaking about the capital allocation for this year and pointed out that it is very meager. For the previous year the Government expended \$3.6 million and for this year it is going to be initially \$3.2 million. We would like to ask the Minister if this meager sum would be able to construct houses in accordance with the pressing need for houses in the country.

I want to deal particularly with subheads 1 and 2 on page 120. Subhead 1, Development of Land and Construction of Housing: The total amount being sought is \$2.4 million. I would like the Minister to say where these houses are going to be constructed and what land is going to be developed. Is the Minister able to say how many houses the Government expects to construct during this year or to complete and if the houses are to be low rental houses, subsidized by the State, or co-operative housing or hire-purchase houses or what form of housing is envisaged under this Head?

I would like to ask the Minister also if the workers on the West Coast of Demerara who squatted some months ago and were supposed to receive housing lots, have been given their house lots and, if not, how soon they will be given the house lots. I would like to ask if he could say how many housing schemes have been planned for Leguan and Wakenaam on the Essequibo Coast. We would like to know also if any schemes are being planned for Amerindian areas in the Hinterland.

We would like to ask the Minister a pertinent question of tenancy. We have information to the effect that persons who are in dire need of low-cost housing and who make applications to the Ministry or to a particular comrade, have to wait sometimes as long as 8 to 9 years. This may be an extreme case, Cde. Chairman, but some people have actually told us that they have waited for three or four years. Why is this so?

I would like to ask the Minister if he could say what is the criteria for acquiring units in the Government Housing Estates. There is a further charge that certain yardsticks are used at arriving at allocations. This yardstick will not bear the light of day. I would like to ask the Minister if he can explain what the criteria for the allocations are and why it is that certain yardsticks are being used when they ought not to be use.

I would also like to ask the Minister, dealing with the housing estates, if he can say what is the effect of the material shortage on the Government housing drive and the maintenance of Government housing estate. We have information to the effect that there is a material shortage, lumber and so on. The officials in the housing Ministry are saying that when they have materials there are no carpenters and skilled workers and when they have the skilled workers they do not have the materials. We feel this is having an effect on maintenance. The Minister can tell us how he is going to solve this problem and how the shortage of materials and manpower is affecting the Government's housing drive.

6. p.m.

Subhead 2, Housing Corporation: We notice that in 1976 the revised estimate totaling \$300,000 but there is no allocation for 1977. We would like to ask the hon. Minister if he could explain what is going on here.

Cde. Narbada Persaud: I just seek the opportunity to ask the Minister one question on subhead 1, Development of Land and Construction of Houses. I would like to ask the Minister whether he is aware that there is a problem in relation to the sanitation facilities in connection with the houses now being constructed just after Turkeyen on the public road. That is construction of the septic tanks whereby hollow blocks are being use.

The Mayor in a recent broadcast warned residents of Georgetown not to use hollow blocks. The Government Public Health Department has already condemned that system and the

City Council's Public Health Division has also condemned the blocks. Is the Minister aware that the system is still being used in that area and what is being done to remedy it?

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

Cde. Naraine: Cde. Chairman in relation to the question raised on subhead 1, I would like to explain that to look at this sum of money provided in the Estimates as the only money that will be available to the Ministry for house construction could be very misleading. What this sum reflects is an additional sum of money which is being provided by the Government to the Ministry of Housing for its housing fund to construct houses. Maybe this could be explained in real terms by taking the example in 1976. In 1976 under the Capital Estimates, the sum for the year was \$6.6 million but the actual expenditure was \$13.5 million. So, in addition to the \$6.6 million, the revolving fund had approximately \$6.9 million which was also available and still is available for housing construction. What in fact will happen now is that to this sum an additional \$2.4 million will be added and will be available for houses construction.

Similarly, under subhead 2, Housing Corporation, it will be seen that in 1975 and 1976 a sum of about \$4 million was provided to the Housing Corporation. This money is working capital and will be utilized for construction because the houses are sold and the money is recovered.

Of course, more and more money can be pumped into housing but I think that the points raised by Cde. Collymore in terms of constraints to housing must be taken into consideration, and these are the availability of materials when we need them and, secondly, the necessary skilled manpower to do the work. Now there is constraint in both. In other words we can use more skilled manpower than we have, not because of the housing programme only, but because of general construction that is taking place in the country both in the private and public sectors, e.g. the construction of factories like the glass factory, the textile mill, the bicycle factory and office buildings in various parts of the country. Therefore, these are real constraints and ought

to be taken into consideration. So although you may wish to spend a lot more money or you make a lot more money available to your housing drive, these constraints may come into operation and may prevent you from having the programme expanded.

I would like also to add that the Co-operative Mortgage Finance Bank gives loans directly and indirectly to co-operatives and private people for house construction and for house improvement and, therefore, within the public sector this is another resource of funds being available for housing. The Co-operative Trust and the National Co-operative Bank also give loans for housing. Therefore, these are other areas of housing loans.

I would like to assure Cde. Collymore that in Amerindian areas housing is being considered. In the Rupununi area house construction is taking place. There is need for housing in Kamarang area because there will be a lot of movement of people from one area to another because of the hydro – projects being constructed. In these areas housing is also being done either as part of a development project or complimentary to the project.

We have been looking at Wakenaam, particularly in the Success area where there is some very poor housing. We are trying to organize a project for moving those people from the very poor housing conditions into better houses.

Cde. Narbada Persaud raised the question of the used of hollow blocks in septic tanks. I understand that there is a considerable number of septic tanks constructed in North Ruimveldt, South Ruimveldt, Atlantic Ville, Melanie Damishana in hollow blocks. I have heard complaints that individual tanks may be seeping or leaking. It has not been brought to my attention that the tanks are no good and the designs should be changed, but I am prepared to have an examination into this to see whether anything needs to be done.

With respect to the criteria for allocation of houses there is a number of criteria used. First are your present housing conditions. In other words, where you live and whether you are

living under good, bad or what kind of housing. The second criterion is the size of the family, whether you have a large family or a small family. Another criterion is your need in terms of income. If there are houses available some can probably afford to rent a house at a higher price. Then there are those persons who get lower incomes going to subsidised housing. There may be other criteria but these are the main ones which are being utilised.

Division XXIII, Ministry of Works and Housing (Housing) - \$3,200,000 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

6.10 p.m.

The Chairman: Pages 121 and 122.

**HEAD 38 – MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING
(COMMUNICATIONS)**

Question proposed that the sum of \$803,522 for Head 38, Ministry of Works and Housing (Communications), stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. M. F. Singh: Page 121, subhead 1, item (8), Post Office Inspector and item (13), Post Office Assistant Inspector. These are two posts which have a nominal amount of \$1 each. I raise these items knowing your stringencies. I presume now that the Post Office Corporation has been set up these people have moved to the Post Office Corporation and these nominal amounts are put here to preserve their rights as regards pensions. I think they will now be under Mr. Philadelphia who I know Executive Chairman of Guystac and will not be under the Ministry of Works and Housing (Communications). Now that they will no longer be under the general supervision of this Ministry, could we not have expected a greater reduction in staffing and not only a reduction for these two posts which are reflected at \$1 each? I do not mean we must dismiss people, but I can well imagine the responsibility and the duties which would have

pertained to the Post Office and which were being carried out by this Ministry. These will not now be carried out by this Ministry. It must necessarily have the result that staff other than the Post Office Inspector and Post Office Assistant Inspector will not be required in the Ministry. I wonder whether the extra staff could not have been deployed to some other Ministry. There are so many other Ministries that are terribly short-staffed. The extra people here who would not now have to deal with the Post Office surely can be transferred to other Ministries and thus help them out rather than keep them on the staff here merely to warm the seats in this particular Ministry if they do not have enough work to do. If you look at the establishment 1976, 110 people, 1977 the same 110 people are there. There has been no reduction as a result of the Post Office coming from under this umbrella. I should like to suggest that there should be a reduction of staff and they should be sent to other Ministries, not dismissed.

On page 122: It seems as though there was envisaged that there would be such reduction in staff because if we look at subhead 15 on page 122, National Insurance, the 1976 revised figure is \$21,000. In 1977 the amount required in was only \$10,000, which is less than half. Is it not reasonable to assume that if you are asking for less than half your workers are much less in number? Why then do we have an establishment of 110 when we are paying much less National Insurance? I am glad to see that even though the complement has not come down it seems as though they intend to reduce staff and I would like the assurance that the officers would be deployed otherwise.

The Chairman: Cde. Persaud.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Chairman, under the same head, item (6), Transport Project Officer II/I. I want to raise a substantial question: we have been hearing that the Transport Service was to be converted into a corporation and then we stopped hearing what would be the position. I think what has happened in this country is that too many different agencies seem to be handling the same thing. This is responsible for additional expenditure. So, in addition to the points made by the speaker who preceded me I want to make a more

fundamental one. For instance, it is this Ministry that deals with the issuing of road service licences, hire car drivers licences and road services licence generally. This exercise is a tedious one because I think the Minister is the proper authority now for the issuing of these licences under the amended Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act. People have to go to police stations, make applications and sometimes they are told that they are not ready.

The Chairman: Cde. Persaud, I did not want to stop you, we have four other heads to finish.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: The point I wish to make is very important. What I want to ask the Government is fundamental: Does the Government not consider the time ripe for the transport service as a whole – buses, land, water and generally – to be managed, administered and supervised by one agency so that you can have better relations and co-ordination of all the segments of transport for an effective transport service in this country both on land and water. There have been complaints and grave complaints about the inadequacy of the transport service.

Talking about land, I do not want to go into the bad roads in Bartica and the North West. Take Bath Settlement, for example: children, who have to travel to the Bush Lot Secondary School, are compelled to be on the road from 5.30 in the morning to catch the buses. I feel that the transport service is not functioning generally as it ought to. We need immediate consideration of this matter so that we can provide the country as a whole with better transport services. This follows the earlier point I was making that the whole question of licensing should be administered by one authority instead of having the Police involved, then the Ministry involved and people having to go to one place then another place before they can get their licences. In fact, the whole system needs to be looked at.

These car licences have to be renewed annually. Why? I do not think you pay for the renewal of hire car drivers licence. Why should it be annual? I want to ask the Minister to

consider what I think is a reasonable proposal, that namely that the minimum should be five years if you want to look at the person at the person. This does not deny the proper authority the right at any time to suspend the issue of a hire car driver's licence if he is found guilty of dangerous driving because while the court suspends the person or even if the court does not suspend him – the law makes provision for suspension or withdrawal by the proper authority. I wonder if the Minister could look at this and particularly at the question of having unified transport services in this country.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

Cde. Naraine: Cde. Chairman, what I would like to say is that I take the point on the deployment of some of the staff. This is being examined.

But I would like to point out that the mere removal of the Post Office which, in fact, has resulted in a fall in the provision for National Insurance does not mean that the functioning of this communications Division comes to an end. Because as Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud said there are other things that this Division has to do, including transport and harbours, general administrative matters on civil aviation, dealing with matters pertaining to WISCO, the West Indies Shipping Company, and LIAT, in which Government has shares. These are regional transport matters. Also there is the issuing of permits for buses and other allied matters pertaining to the Transport and Harbours Department. **[Interruption by Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud]** Yes, but what I am saying relates to the Post Office people. This has to be looked at, and the officers who will no longer be required to carry out particular functions will be shunted off and put to work elsewhere. I can give this assurance because this is being done.

6.20 p.m.

I thought that Cde. Persaud raised a very interesting point and a point which we have been looking at for some time. That is the whole question of rationalizing of the transport

services. Government has looked at, and we are continuing to look at, the whole question of rationalization and we are thinking not only of land transport and water transport but air transport as well. We have had a preliminary look at this, and for the time being the Government is expanding its road transport service rapidly, while we are still engaged in the question of having all road transport – particularly passenger transport – put in the public sector, either controlled or owned by the public sector – This does not mean that hire cars would be out of work.

The programme that has been explained to this House up to 1980 will be a \$60 million programme but we have also an expansion programme of ferry services and shipping services. The Government is thinking not only of involving itself in regional shipping but international shipping and improving the coastal shipping. For instance, the sugar estates used to run shipping. Now we have to look at that in relation to what the Government itself does in its own shipping. Since the earlier exercise was done there have been some changes resulting in Government's increased activity in transportation. We also have to look at the whole network of waterways, airstrips as well as road communication. I can assure the House that these things are being looked at very carefully but I do not want to pre-empt what is likely to be put in the next development programme and I have no doubt that the fruits of this exercise will be reflected in the next four-year plan.

Head 38 Ministry of Works and Housing (Communications) - \$803,522 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Pages 123 and 124.

**HEAD 39 – MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING
(COMMUNICATIONS) – POST OFFICE**

Question proposed that the sum of \$40 for Head 39, Ministry of Works and Housing (Communications) – Post Office stand part of the Estimates.

Head 39, Ministry of Works and Housing (Communications) – Post Office - \$40 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Page 125.

**HEAD 40 – MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING
(COMMUNICATIONS) – TRANSPORT AND HARBOURS**

Question proposed that the sum of \$1,500,000 for Head 40, Ministry of Works and Housing (Communications) – Transport and Harbours, stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Mr. Singh.

Mr. M. F. Singh: Sir, the request is being made here for \$1.5 million for 1977. As a result of the reduction of the subsidy by the Government this figure is so low but the majority of the people using the ferry will now have to pay very substantially increased fares. The least they would be entitled to in return is a decent and efficient service.

I must point out that since it came into office this Government has bought only one passenger boat, the Kurupukari and this boat has been giving trouble even from the inception – both the gangway and the engine. It has had very frequent breakdowns. This has been told to me by the sailors themselves. I think I mentioned it once to the Minister himself. Not only that, the Berbice River steamer, the Bartica and North West district steamers have been likened to cattle boats, the boats of old that used to bring slaves to the country.

I would like to ask the Minister whether there are any immediate plans to improve this service because the services, particularly in the interior areas, are really very, very terrible. In fact, one occasion I was advised not to book a cabin to go to the North West District to

Mabaruma because it was unfit for really travelling on and people are entitled to immediate relief.

Cde. Ram Karran: May I ask a few questions on this Head? First of all, will the Minister not agree that in recent years, since 1973 particularly, traffic has increased considerably on these steamers? Will the Minister not agree that the increased traffic will naturally create greater profitability. If he agrees with that, is it not obvious that with the increased traffic and the increased fares now proposed to retain the deficiency so large – my friend across there said so small a deficiency – such a large deficiency of \$1.5 million, with an increase in fares of nearly 75 per cent is serious reflection on the efficiency of the service? Does the Minister agree with the submissions? If he does agree, then there would be no justification for such a whopping increase in fares.

The Chairman: Comrades, before we ask the Minister to reply, I had indicated that 15 minutes were taken up by me dealing with some complaints raised by some Members of the Assembly. I intimated I proposed sitting for that additional 15 minutes to complete this Head. There are two items after this to complete this Head. I am however told that the Members of the Assembly will only take half an hour to do the Ministry of Trade. If thirty minutes is the time agreed on, I will sit until a quarter after seven – given a few minutes here or there – if not, I propose to suspend at quarter to seven and return at eight. Are Members agreed that we will sit until quarter after seven to complete the Head, Ministry of Trade? Those in favour?

Members of the Government: “Aye”.

The Chairman: I should like to hear the Opposition too because they are part of the Assembly.

Members of the Opposition indicated in the affirmative.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister, please move the suspension.

SUSPENSION OF STANDARD ORDER NO. 2

Cde. Ramsaroop: I move that the relevant Standing Order 9 (2) be suspended for us to complete our consideration of the estimates under the Ministry of Works and Housing and also the Ministry of Trade and Consumer Protection.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

Cde. Naraine: Cde. Chairman, the Kurupukari did have some problems initially but my information is that since July last year we have had no further trouble on the Kurupukari. The North West District has been a bone of contention for some time but a new passenger ship costing about \$5.8 million is now being constructed by GUYNEC and the completion date for this ship will be March, 1978.

6.30 p.m.

I gather the design of this ship is such that it will be able to do the trip to the North West/Kaituma in 17 hours as against the 25 hours presently taken by the existing ships. This should improve the service substantially. One would see later on that in fact no provision has been made for this ship in this year's estimate but the reason for this is that the down-payment of \$1 million has already been made on the ship and the remainder of the money will be paid in 1978 when it is completed.

The increase in fares: I would like to point out that it is true that a few years ago there was a small increase of five cents on ferry fares but the general fares in the Transport and Harbours Department have not increased since 1966. This is a very long time ago and since then all kinds of things have increased. I do not think that we could carry on much longer with this very heavy deficit because if we had continued with the very heavy deficit then our capacity for providing new equipment to improve the service would have been further removed. We hope, therefore, by this increase and by reducing the deficit we will now be able to invest more money in new equipment to improve the service.

Head 40, Ministry of Works and Housing (Communications) – Transport and Harbours - \$1,500,000 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Pages 126 and 127, Head 41, Ministry of Works and Housing (Communications) – Civil Aviation.

**HEAD 41 – MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING
(COMMUNICATIONS) – CIVIL AVIATION**

Question proposed that the sum of \$1,519,451 for Head 41, Ministry of Works and Housing (Communications) – Civil Aviation, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: There were circulated to comrades and hon. Members some corrections to page 126. They relate to a change in classification of names. Hon. Members Mr. Singh, please bear in mind that we have 10 minutes more. Other members are entitled to ask questions too.

Mr. M. F. Singh: Yes, sir. You took up some of those 10 minutes. Subhead 1, item (1), director of Civil Aviation, item (2), Deputy Director of Civil Aviation and item (3), Aviation

Inspector. I will deal with these together. Are these three posts filled or do they merely have people acting in them? If they are acting, how long have these people been acting and when is it expected that these posts will be filled permanently?

Across the page item (62), Flying Allowance, the sum of \$10,564 was the revised figure for 1976. In this year of austerity, 1977, the sum requested is \$20,000. If only \$10,564 was revised for 1976, why is it felt that \$20,000 would be required for 1977 austerity year. This is on page 127. What is the reason for this increase over the revised amount.

Subhead 13, Civil Aviation Authority: We see that the amount voted in the Approved Estimates for 1976 was \$19,580. The revised amount was \$37,000 and the amount being requested for 1977 is \$60,960. The legend says: "Increased charges by the Civil Aviation Authority." The increase is \$41,380. Could the hon. Minister explain this? How does this whole business work? Who fixes these increases and on what basis should it be increased by \$41,380?

The Chairman: Cde. Nokta.

Cde. Nokta: In the Budget Speech the Minister said that transport service fares will go up by 75 per cent. I would like to ask the Minister whether this goes for civil aviation and if a plane ticket to North West which costs \$40 will now cost \$70.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

Cde. Naraine: I do not think Cde. Nokta's question relates to the Civil Aviation Department but to Guyana Airways Corporation. This is an administrative body which looks after civil aviation generally in the country and co-operates with aviation services abroad. I think that enquiry will have to be made to Guyana Airways Corporation.

In relation to the questions raised by the hon. Member Mr. Feilden Singh, the post of Director of Civil Aviation is filled. Arrangements are now being made to fill the post of Deputy, and one of the aviation inspectors.

Item (62), Flying Allowance, the increase is necessary because we intend to do a lot of our training locally and these increased allowances will have to be paid to the trainers as flying allowances.

Subhead 13, Civil Aviation Authority: I am afraid that the arrangement in the past was that the United Kingdom authority would give this service to civil aviation. They were the civil aviation authority for the examination of planes and giving air worthiness certificates in the country. They have recently increased their charges by nearly double. This is the reason for this increase. I would like to announce that the CARICOM Secretariat is now examining this matter regionally to see if we can set up a Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority and this authority will then look at aircraft in the entire region. This should be very good for us in terms of our experience in civil aviation and may very well cause a reduction in these charges.

Head 41, Ministry of Works and Housing (Communications) – Civil Aviation - \$1,519,451 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

6.40 p.m.

The Chairman: Page 128.

**DIVISION XXIV – MINISTRY OF WORKS AND HOUSING –
COMMUNICATIONS**

Question proposed that the sum of \$2,100,000 for Division XXIV, Ministry of Works and Housing – Communications, stand part of the estimates.

The Chairman: Again, there are some corrections here. They have been circulated, appearing on page 128.

Cde. Ram Karran: There are a few questions on subhead 7, Reconditioning of Ships. May I ask the hon. Minister what is the position - -

The Chairman: Please bear in mind that there is a correction there. It is \$300,000.

Cde. Ram Karran: What is the position with respect to the “R.H. Carr”? Where is she and what is the cost of maintaining her if she is still afloat? May I ask the hon. Minister what is the cost of keeping afloat the “S.S. Ambrosio” and what has been her duties over the past four years and the cost, of course, of keeping her afloat? What does the government propose to do with these two vessels? What is the position with respect to the pilot launches? How many are available and in service and will the hon. Minister give us the circumstances surrounding the recent death of a pilot and of the over-carriage of one or four key pilots to Surinam? Is the hon. Minister aware that the Supernaam terminal was removed to Adventure because of constant silting of that part of the river resulting in severe difficulties in getting vessels of shallower draught to be moored along the Supernaam stelling and, of course, creating tremendous delays to the travelling public shallower draught vessels than those we now have. Does the Government have the facilities to remove the shifting sand at the mouth of the Essequibo and has it worked out the cost?

The Chairman: Is all of this under subhead 7?

Cde. Ram Karran: The last one is with respect to subhead 5 which is reflected in –

The Chairman: *Subhead 5 is Demerara Ferry Terminals.*

Cde. Ram Karran: There is a single asterisk at the bottom which reads: “To continue work on the resisting of the Adventure Stelling at” – they have “Supernaam”, which, I think, is wrong – “and the improvement of the Stellings at Wakenaam, Morawhanna and Port Kaituma.”

The Chairman: That would relate to subhead 6.

Cde. Ram Karran: Yes. I am sorry I did not indicate the subhead. So all of those questions would do the trick if the hon. Minister is in a position to answer.

The Chairman: Cde. Wrights.

Cde. Wrights: I would like to ask the hon. Minister a few questions on page 128, subheads 4, 18, 25 and 32.

The Chairman: I am afraid if you ask all those questions the Minister would not get a chance to answer any.

Cde. Wrights: What developments are taking place in 1977 in the area of (a) hinterland Air Transport and, (b) Water Transport?

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

Cde. Naraine: Cde. Chairman, I will deal with Cde. Ram Karran’s questions. I do not know if the discussion in your office had anything to do with this I, will try to answer them. The “Ambrosio” - -

The Chairman: I think he is talking of subhead 7, Reconditioning of Ships and he specifically mentioned the “Ambrosia”.

Cde. Naraine: The “Ambrosia” in 1972 was estimated to cost \$750,000 to repair. The reason why it was kept afloat so long without something happening is because it was felt that the ship, although it was not sea-worthy to go outside into deep sea, could have been kept and used as a training ship for seamen. This was examined very carefully and it was only recently, after some advisers came here through the Ministry of Labour, that the question was thoroughly gone into and not found feasible.

The cost of rehabilitating the ship was re-estimated at something around \$1½ million. It was thought that to spend this very large sum of money on this ship was not justified and, therefore, it was decided that what we would do was to remove the engine and other useful parts from the ship and use the remainder of the hull and other parts as scrap. This decision has been taken a very shortly the ship will be brought to Georgetown for the removal of the useful equipment and the rest of it will be kept for scrap which, hopefully, will be utilized in the mini steel mill, when constructed.

A question was raised on the Pilot launches. There are two launches that could be used. One is under repair at GUYNEC and the other is being used. Normally, we would have about three to four launches. The “Govita” which is found suitable by the pilots has also been brought into use. Thus, there are two launches now that can be used and one is being repaired by GUYNEC. On the position of the pilot who lost his life is concerned, I am afraid I would not like to say anything at this point. This matter is being investigated and I would prefer to get the official report from the reasons who are investigating it.

I have also had discussions with the pilots and we are also undertaking some designs for another pilot boat and that should probably be on stream next year for construction. The “R.H. Carr”, I am informed, was sold some years ago so it is not with us any longer.

Cde. Ram Karran: Was the “Ambrosia” re-engined?

Cde. Naraine: One new engine was put in at a cost of about \$67,000. The idea was to have it re-bottomed but the re-bottoming could only have been done in Trinidad and the cost was very, very high. It is not always good to accept freeness, and this ship proves this point.

Division XXIV, Ministry of Works and housing – Communications - \$2,100,000 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Pages 193 to 195.

HEAD 81 – MINISTRY OF TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Question proposed that the sum of \$13,528,962 for Head 81, Ministry of Trade and Consumer Protection, stand part of the Estimates.

6.50 p.m.

The Chairman: Cde. Narbada Persaud.

Cde. Narbada Persaud: Cde. Chairman, I wish to ask some questions on items on page 193, that is, (4), (6), (7), (9), (10) (13)-- these relates to one question-- and then items (8), (9), (11), (13) and (23); on page 194 subheads 5, 6, 7, 8 and 17 in one question and subheads 9, 11 and 12.

I mentioned last night that there seems to be one trend in all the Ministries where vacancies exist. If my information is correct the posts at item (4), Economist, calls for 3 Economists. I am told that all these posts have not been filled.

Item (6), Administrative Assistant and item (7), Export Promotion Officer follow the same pattern. The Senior Trade Licensing Officer, item (9) is acting, and the Trade Research

Assistant, item (10). There is vacancy here. Item (11), 2 Trade Licensing Officers II and 6 Trade Licensing Officers I. As far as the licensing officers are concerned there are some vacancies there. At item (13) there should be 12 Price Control Inspectors. I am told there are also some vacancies here.

As I said earlier, it seems that there are quite a lot of acting appointments and a number of vacancies in perhaps all the Ministries. I would wish the Minister to tell us how early he expects that these posts I have called out will be filled, those that are completely vacant and how soon will officers be appointed where personnel are acting?

I think the Minister will agree that the Ministry of Trade is also a very important Ministry and we have no quarrel. The control of trade is, of course one of the pre-requisites towards the construction of socialism. I have been informed, whether it is reliable or not, that some of the holders of these posts which are vacant – perhaps the Minister will be able to tell us – have been transferred to the National Service or seconded to the National Service and to the Co-operative College. I do not know whether it is just secondment on the same salaries or whether the salaries are more attractive and that has caused these persons to go off.

At this point I would wish to suggest to the Minister, in view of this situation that exists in his Ministry – and it goes for all others also – that the condition laid down for the students at the University of Guyana can perhaps be reconsidered in order to allow students, bright people, to have their education completed in order that they can fill some of these vacancies. We have had cases where because of the condition of National Service, persons were relieved from their studies, they were not allowed to continue and in this case as in all developing countries where the brain drain is so high, the personnel question becomes important. We should re-consider this condition for students at the University in order that we can have best results from the sons and daughters of Guyana and fill these vacancies in order that we can have them involved in national development.

I move on to the other part which deals with items (8), (9) and (11) the Licensing Division. I want to ask the Minister whether he does not consider the system that presently exists is not a proper system. For example, there is a box provided at the Ministry of Trade for all licences to be put into. I want to feel that this system is not a proper system since personal experience has taught us that a number of licences have been misplaced. After a long search which takes a number of weeks, sometimes it runs into months, new applications have to be made and this sometimes contributes towards the shortages of certain commodity.

As I said earlier, we agree with the control of trade. This is in the making and in the meantime we will have to accommodate the private sector to some extent. The Ministry of Trade through the External Trade Bureau is not in a position at the moment to handle everything and therefore persons have to make their own applications and take them there. In the course of processing the licences are misplaced – and I speak from personal experience. It happened to the New Guyana Company Ltd. on three occasions and after months had passed we had to make new applications. Therefore, I would like the Minister to state whether he does not consider that this is not a very proper system and would he devise ways and means of having another system?

The other question I would like to ask the Minister is this: in building the nation towards socialism a number of man-hours are lost by the agents and the customs clerks of various firms who have to run every other day to check whether licences have been actually approved. Does he not consider that this is not really in keeping with the interest and the aspiration of the Guyanese nation in having maximum use of man-hours in this country? Quite a lot of man-hours are lost checking. I am talking from experience with regard to this. In the Licensing Division there are very long delays in the process and perhaps the Minister will tell us this afternoon whether he does not consider that this system still is the cause of many shortages.

We have had recently cases in the Government agencies like the Guyana National Trading Corporation – has such experiences as I am going to talk about and that is in relation to shortages – the External Trade Bureau also. With your permission, sir, I would like to make the

point that first the law provides that we must first have a **pro forma** invoice from the suppliers then we make the application which takes some time in some cases to be processed before it is approved. In the meantime, after the application has been approved, the goods have been ordered, the prices have gone up. It means, therefore, that extra foreign exchange is involved in this process and hence the delays that we are experiencing at the ministry of Trade, I think the Minister can tell us what he hopes to do in order to avoid such burdens. Of course, the goods have to come in but the External Trade bureau is not geared to handle all and additional prices are always passed on to consumers. The consumers have to pay. Perhaps the Minister can tell us whether the staff in this Licensing Division is adequate to deal with these matters because, as I have pointed out, there are the vacancies there which are causing some delays.

The other point in relation to the Licensing Office is that I have noticed during my period in Parliament, the Minister comes here every day with a number of licences on which he works. Perhaps the minister can tell us, since the National Trading Corporation and the External Trade Bureau are both controlled by the Government, whether ways and means cannot be found to avoid this whole process of licensing for the Guyana National Trading Corporation and also for the External Trade Bureau. We know the price of paper has gone up considerably over the past years and each application takes three forms. And the External Trade Bureau and the Guyana National Trading corporation have to use these three forms. At the moment there is a shortage of printing paper in the country. I don't know whether it is bad planning or processing at the ministry of Trade in this licensing process that is causing these delays, and not only these delays but delays in relation to trade at the Guyana National Trading Corporation and also at the External Trade Bureau. At this stage I want to make a suggestion or perhaps ask the Minister whether he does not consider –

The Chairman: you are not giving Mrs. DaSilva any opportunity to speak. The Minister has 15 minutes more.

Cde. Narbada Persaud: Cde. Chairman, I am not too sure whether we have taken –

The Chairman: Cde. Narbada Persaud I distinctly said half an hour.

Cde. Narbada Persaud: I will speak. I have to speak. I only have three or four questions. If I don't get an answer –

Cde. Chairman, the Minister can perhaps tell us this evening whether it is not because of the problems at the Ministry of Trade particularly in the Licensing Division that we are facing today some shortages in goods. For example, take the question of school books, the Minister can tell us whether there is not this delay in the Ministry of Trade that has caused the shortage of basic textbooks at the moment.

Apart from basic textbooks being short, we notice, for example, that in this House we are short of drinking glasses.

7 p.m.

The Chairman: Mrs. Da Silva.

Mrs. DaSilva: My questions are very short and brief. On page 193, subhead 1, items (8) and (9) which deal with the post of Chief Licensing Officer and Senior Trade Licensing Officer respectively. I would just like to ask the hon. Minister if he would be prepared, or wishes, to say now what is the position with regard to the granting of licences for this year. I understand that many firms have applied for licences for their quota for the year and they have not been granted; the licences are being held back.

On the same page 193, subhead 1, item (13), Price Control Inspector. The previous speaker made reference to the apparent vacancies. He asked the Minister whether they had the full complement of twelve. Apparently they did not have the full number last year and he wanted to know whether they had twelve persons this year. There are two questions I should

like to ask the minister under this question of price control. In view of the ever-increasing prices on local produce, can the minister say if he is considering, or if he will consider, any form of price control on local produce, say, ground provisions, when we know yams are \$1.50 per lb., plantains 50 and 60 per lb., the price of greens 25 for a small bundle and very often you don't even get that price. Sometimes you have to start with 50. Maybe a few items like the very basics that people use most often, plantains and ground provisions could be controlled. The price of cassava is high. We appreciate the need for fair prices to the farmers, but the processes for a household with many children are very high. Can you give a child half of a plantain to eat? That is what will happen if you have to pay 50 a lb. for plantains.

My second questions is this: We know that charges are being laid on people who sell above the price control, what is being done to shop-keepers who are imposing conditions of sale?

On the next page, 194, I have two questions. On subhead 9, Exhibitions and Fairs, would the hon. Minister say, in view of the terrific need we have for education in every aspect of our lives in Guyana why this amount of \$500 is being asked for this year for exhibitions and fairs when the revised estimates for 1976 called for \$25,000. It is a very big drop, and there is vital need for education. Exhibitions and fairs are certainly necessary.

My last question is on subhead 11, Subsidy – Conveyance of Foodstuff to Hinterland. There is a drop of about \$23,000 between what the Revised Estimate was in 1976, that is, \$256,000 and for \$233,000 the Ministry will now ask to be approved for 1977. Could the hon. Minister say why was it necessary to make this big cut under this head when it is so important to get foodstuff to the interior and it is only reasonable to pre-suppose that the cost on interior travel will go up. We all know that it is only a question of time before fuel prices go up.

The Chairman: Cde. Dalchand.

Cde. Dalchand: Page 1954, subhead 12, Subsidy – Flour. I do not know if the Minister is aware that the G.M.C. sold flour to people last week at the old price and when they went to collect the flour this week they were told that they would have to pay the new price. **[Interruption]** The point is they bought it last week.

The Chairman: Cde. Persaud, I think you have another five minutes if you would just ask questions and not make commentaries.

Cde. Narbada Persaud: On page 193, item (7), Export Promotion Officer. Can the Minister tell us something in relation to the functions of this post? What efforts are being made to change the trading pattern from capitalist countries to socialist countries?

Item (13), Price Control Inspector: Can the Minister say where they are stationed, whether they are only in Georgetown? And since more items are placed under price control, does the Minister feel that the number he has at the moment is adequate to tackle the problem throughout the country?

On the other page, subhead 5, Telephones. Can the Minister tell us whether he hopes to achieve this 60 per cent reduction in relation to the telephone allocation as shown here?

Subhead 6, 7, 8 and 1: Can the Minister say on what basis the grants and contributions are paid since the amount vary from year to year? They are not standing.

Subhead 9, Exhibitions and Fairs, on the same page: Can the Minister state whether his Ministry took part in the 1976 Leipzig Trade Fair? If not, why not? If yes, was it advantageous? And if advantageous to Guyana, whether they would be taking part in the 1977 Fair since the allocation under this head only calls for \$500.

Subhead 11, Subsidy – Conveyance of Foodstuff to Hinterland: Perhaps the Minister can tell us whether it is not intended – this is one of the principles of socialism – to have people living in the Interior pay the same price for a lb. of flour, a tin of milk, etc. as the people in Georgetown. By reducing the subsidy it is not going to –

The Chairman: Cde. Persaud, was that not discussed in the general debate where it was said that the whole system is being looked at and is to be changed?

Cde. Persaud: It is a specific question and it was not answered in the Minister's reply. The last question I have is in relation to the one Cde. Dalchand raised.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

The Minister of Trade and Consumers Protection (Cde. King): Cde. Chairman, I shall attempt to answer these questions as briefly as possible since I appreciate the understanding which has been arrived at with Members of this honourable House in order to conclude the heads with which we are now dealing. First of all, may I speak on the question of vacancies which has been raised by Cde. Persaud to say that the Ministry of Trade has not in fact transferred and/or seconded any member of its staff either to the Co-op College or to the National Service or to any other institution. The question of vacancies is one which has indeed plagued this Ministry not only in 1976 but in prior years. The question of trade is both complex and integral and one which is not easily dealt with by an economist without having the experience to deal particularly in foreign trade. Therefore it is not easy to put into very senior positions those economists who have just graduated without having had the necessary experience.

With regard to the Export Promotion Officer, subhead 1, item (7) this along with the other vacancies has been advertised for some time and, indeed, my Ministry is actively pursuing a short list from which we hope to select a successful candidate.

7.10 p.m.

Insofar as the vacancies which exist in the Price Control Department are concerned, it is true that we have advertised and again we are now examining a list of fifty-odd applicants shortlisted from whom we hope to choose the twelve persons. Here again, there is a certain amount of training which will be undertaken for these comrades after they have been recruited. I hope that disposes of the question of vacancies.

The next question asked is whether or not in my opinion of the Government the prevailing system which relates to licences is adequate and the word I think used was “proper”. The answer is “yes”; it is proper and it is effective.

I believe that there is a misconception on the reasons for having introduced a licensing control system. People believe that it only has to do with import of commodities but in fact the licensing system is used to perform or to achieve a number of other goals. One such goal is to catch up with or to discover tax dodgers in our community. In fact, we have had people coming in seeking quotas of something like \$150,000 and when they were asked to substantiate that request and further examination was made, it was found that they were evading taxes for several years.

The other purpose for the licensing system is to be able to identify those commodities which out of the skills and ability of our local and indigenous resources can be made by our own people. I quote a simple example of an importer submitting an import licence to import flour sifters made in a country where the highest level of costs exist and that is West Germany where the standard of living and the cost of labour insofar as I know, barring Sweden, is the highest. Yet, our short-sighted importers, our short-sighted shopkeepers are prepared to bring into this country, for the use of poor people, sifters made of wood which can be made in Guyana. Therefore, those licences have to be screamed and referred to technicians who will decide whether they can be made here.

There is another practice and I cite, Cde. Chairman, a typical example of plastic raincoats which any of our schoolgirls just coming out from school can cut and cement and provide. Yet, we are trying to bring these in from Hong Kong and various parts of the world and thus deprive our citizens of much needed employment. Therefore, it is not just a rubber stamp that we operate; it is not just licences which come through one door and go through the next. There are many specialists who must deal with these.

A remark was made by Cde. Narbada Persaud about my signing licences. I shall deal with that separately but I wish to say now that very often my own expertise, built up after 37 years in commerce, must be applied to some of these licences. And, therefore, the answer is that we are satisfied that the licence is proper.

May I say that to suggest that the licensing system will contribute to shortages is a myth which ought to cease by now. I do not wish to quote any authorities since our time is limited but the greatest authorities on economics and trade will tell you that if any business or any county is never short of an item then they are over-trading and they are not maximizing on the use of money. There are bound to be times when certain items will be short. In the history of Guyana, insofar as my knowledge goes, there has never been a time when everything has been in adequate supply all through the time and so let us face it in this House. It is not true and I will not give this assurance to this House that there will not be periods of shortages. One only hopes that it will be brief and not in any prolonged duration.

On the question of man-hours lost, I believe that these man-hours are lost for two reasons. One is that Customs Clerks or those who are charged with the responsibility of firms to process licences believe that their presence and the pressure put on my staff in the Ministry can create a situation in which they can get faster service. If they are prepared to take their queue in the line and collect their licences when they are completed then certainly there is no need for a loss in man-hours. Let us assume it took two months to process a licence. I am not saying it takes two months but let us assume this. If our businessmen are of any caliber, if they have the

business experience, all that is necessary is to add sixty days to the lead time and therefore, if you planned to bring goods into this country and you normally plan a lead time of ninety days, you merely add to that lead time. It is simple, very simple.

Now, Cde. Narbada Persaud made a suggestion that this Government should discriminate in favour of the state-owned corporations, a suggestion which shatters me, a suggestion which completely mystified me, that we should consciously treat the Guyana state corporations like the G.N.T.C. or E.T.B. differently from how we treat Fogarty's companies of our good friends like Banks D.I.H. I cannot accept that, Cde. Chairman. We believe that the state corporations must plan their imports, must plan their purchases, must make up their licences, must pay the revenue stamps and must be efficient managers of their corporations and must at all times be competitive. What is more, as I shall say on this when I deal with Cde. DaSilva's question, we do not accept that state corporations should have preferential treatment or should have any discriminatory treatment. I do not accept it and I feel - - **[Interruption]** Equal Rights for all, I am reminded.

Let me say that insofar as the shortage of school books is concerned, to answer that question, this is not due to the licensing system. We have had our problems with schools books; we are not going to deny it in this House. One of the serious problems is that manufacturers were suddenly faced with very heavy orders which went into their production stream, too much of a shock at one time, where you had ten people ordering. The orders are placed but they are suddenly faced with huge quantities running into thousands and in one case ½ million books which created pressure on the printers. But certainly not licences.

Insofar as drinking glasses are concerned, we have no control on drinking glasses and if there is a shortage of drinking glasses then it must entirely be due to the lack of foresight in management which is responsible for ordering such drinking glasses.

14.1.77

National Assembly

7.20 – 7.30 p.m.

7.20 p.m.

Cde. Chairman ,I am still with Cde. Persaud who asked a question: what are the changers proposed for the Export Promotion Officer? I would like to link that with his question dealing with the Leipzig Fair, and I also, with your permission, would like to link that with the question asked by the hon. Member Mrs. DaSilva about the reduction in the amount for fairs. In other words, may I talk on the question of the Export Promotion Officer, the Leipzig Fair and the reduction in the amount for Exhibitions and Fairs?

When certain members of the Opposition, not in this House but elsewhere, criticized the Lomé Convention, it was in some cases styled as a new colonial pattern. Now one of the things which are provided under the Lomé Convention is the allocation of funds to A.C.P. countries to participate in fairs in any part of Western Europe or in any of the A.C.P. countries, that is to say, a total of 50 plus countries. There are large allocations to Guyana for the promotion of export commodities and we have now added to our available funds, which are not shown in these estimates because they are provided under the E.E.C. Budget, and also there is provision in those estimates of the E.E.C. for the printing of export promotion material, pamphlets, leaflets and other such literature. We hope to maximise our efforts by the use of such funds.

The small amount which has been shown here in the Estimates will be used for sending samples of local products to our various Embassies. During the course of the year as officers return to Guyana there is an intensive course in export promotion which will be given to the various officers of our Embassies hoping eventually to have a trade promotion officer attached to each Guyana Embassy in the main and important markets requiring Guyana's goods.

Insofar as changing the pattern of exports in regard to our socialist philosophy, I am not aware that the socialist philosophy demands a technique in which we sell only to our socialist friends and socialist countries. We are certainly in the Government prepared to maximize on our exports and to meet demands in any part of the international market where the best prices are paid. Therefore I have no apology to make except to say that we will be changing our export

pattern and except to say that we have already in 1976 diversified our markets and today we are shipping, and as we have already said in the general debate, we have increased our exports to socialist countries far beyond the expectation of the Opposition.

In so far as the Leipzig Fair is concerned, as this House may well know, the Leipzig Fair is not a socialist fair. It is kept in a socialist country. It is an international fair which embraces countries like Brazil, which embraces countries like the United Kingdom, and which embraces countries from both East and West, from both capitalist and socialist countries. We knew this and have participated in this, I believe in 1975 – I am subject to correction, but there were two occasions on which we participated. We will not participate in 1977 because of our austerity measures and the need to conserve funds in so far as it is possible. Nevertheless we are pursuing a course of action by keeping our commodities within that country to be marketed through similar State-owned corporations and I am happy to say that we have made three successful shipments of run so far; we have sold sugar through the agent's appointee during our stay in Leipzig, and the procedure is continuing except that we will not be in the fair. I hope that that deals with Exports, Exhibitions and Fairs.

And if I may just dispose of one question very quickly: how do we hope to reduce our telephone bill? We may not succeed but I feel that if we are to be serious about our austerity measures, we must begin in our Ministries. My Permanent Secretary and my staff will tell you that as from the day the Budget was presented to this House, I have turned off both my air conditioners and now enjoy the pleasant Atlantic breeze that flows across the palm yard.

Also in keeping with our austerity measures we have ordered a telephone lock for every one of the telephones and we believe that we shall control the outgoing calls which, I say, are abused not only in Ministries but in firms and other places. We believe that with a proper control we shall certainly achieve some reduction in our bill and in our electricity bill as well.

On the question of the variation in the contribution to various corporations, for example, in the case of the West India Committee, last year's estimate reflected arrears in payments and this year we are showing the true position. Other associations like the sugar association, the Latin American Association, the International Sugar Organisation; these will vary from year to year. There are contributions, there are dues for these international organizations over which we have no control except that we sit in at the time the budget is made and we endeavour to use our influence to keep the overall cost down, but when that is done the charges for each country are allocated and we accept them in good faith and as a part of our binding agreement in those associations.

Two questions were raised by Cde. Dalchand and the hon. Member Mrs. DaSilva on the question of the reduction in subsidy on food items going into the interior. We are indeed very serious when we say that people in any part of Guyana must learn to become more self-reliant within their region. The distinguished comrade from the North West District, the Regional Minister, pointed out during the debate that they were actively pursuing the planting and cultivation of lands in the North West and in other parts of the interior to grow more food.

When we look through the freight notes to certain places like Winiperu, where there are beautiful farm lands, and we see on that manifest the shipments of frozen chickens from Georgetown to Winiperu, we have to ask ourselves: Are we really serious about self-reliance in our various districts when our comrades in that area cannot only grow healthy chickens in a climate congenial to do so but can also plant some of the feed on which to feed them? And so we must seriously move to a position in 1977 where people in the interior grow their own meat whether it be in pork or whether it be in chicken, create their own fish ponds, and in fact grow more food to help themselves. This reduction is based on the premise that we shall be increasing and intensifying our activities in the interior to grow and to produce more food. However let me say this, that if we are not successful this Government is committed to provide support to our comrades who settle in the interior and if we do not succeed, then I hope that this

House will accept with grace and in good faith any supplementary expenditure which may be brought before it.

7.30 p.m.

Another question related to the payment of flour purchased and on which higher prices were paid. The morning after the Budget was presented to this honourable House, after discovering that there were 5,038 bags of flour undelivered but sold and paid for, I gave instructions that that quantity of flour, which on the date of the Budget Speech was to be delivered, should be delivered without any additional charge and, further, that the bakers, in order to maintain a supply of bread on the market, should have daily supplies of flour at the old price until such time as the question of bread prices were resolved. I shall certainly investigate whether there was anyone who sought to take any excess money for flour which had been already sold. If this is so it was a breach of instructions. I shall certainly investigate it.

Finally, if I may conclude on a few other questions asked by the distinguished and hon. Member of the House, Mrs. DaSilva. She asked what the position with regard to licences this year is. I believe that the Minister of Finance painted a picture which I believe impressed this House; that we are really in a difficult and trying year in 1977. What has happened is that there is a deliberate and conscious hold up of all licences except for drugs, spare parts, stockfeed, concentrates, until the Bank of Guyana has finished its exercise. This has nothing to do with the system as Cde. Persaud said.

I would like to tell this House that we have to reduce our imports in this year 1977 by a figure in excess of 100 million Guyana dollars and, therefore, to be fair to all importers we are establishing a transactor's budget in which we are allocating sums of money to each transactor or, for clarity, each importer, and then we are sub-dividing that block sum into commodities in terms of essentialities. When that is done we shall immediately begin to release licences on the usual basis, either rejecting them or approving them as the case may be. My latest information

is that the Bank hopes to conclude that exercise not later than next Wednesday. Hopefully, the processing of licences will certainly be back to normal by the end of this month.

However, let me assure this House that we are certainly giving extensions of licences where we have evidence that the commodities have already been shipped to this country or where we have evidence that by letter of credit or by any other means the money or the revenue or the currency has been irretrievably committed.

The other question which Mrs. DaSilva asked was about controlling process of local greens and vegetables. I wish again to suggest to this House that it is a fallacy to believe in any case, that farmers are over-paid for the toil that they put into the soil and into the land. I wish and I hope, indeed, that Members of the Opposition would take a page out of the Government Members' book and spend some time on farms to see the toil that they have to do in the early hours of the morning, to see the toil that they put on the land and then suddenly, either by rain or some other flood disaster, that toil and labour is all gone.

Cde. Chairman, I am trying to come quickly to an end and therefore will not impose on your generosity. Let me say that we believe that the farmers still need an incentive to produce more. What I would like to assure this House is that we are, indeed, examining the whole question of distribution. We believe that the excess charges are put on, not by farmers but because of the present system of distribution in which they go through several hands.

As I said earlier in the debate, we are no looking – I take this question along with Cde. Persaud's – we are looking at the situation in which we shall have one price governing the riverain and coastal belt of this country and special process for the interior because there is a significant difference there. I hope to publish those first prices before this month is out on some of the commodities.

The other question is conditions of sale. This is a burning question and I believe, without casting any reflection on our price control squad, they are doing their utmost to catch up with conditions of sale. We are dealing in situations where we have clever business people, where we have people who are very shrewd in this type of business and impose conditions very skillfully. It takes a fox to really catch up with them. I am capable of going down to that level and I have no wish to deny that. The positive measures which this Government believes to be the answer to this situation are a rationalization of our distribution system.

In this year, we shall be taking firm steps to do two things: One, to make the state-owned Corporations the sole importers of those basic items which we must still bring into this country out of necessity and to have registered and duly appointed sub-distributors in the various regions of the country. In other words, we shall take full control of imports and wholesaling, thereby leaving only the retail business in the hands of the private sector. The second measure is, as I said in the debate, we shall be bringing to this House legislation which will make it obligatory for any retailer to carry a complete range of commodities if he deems himself a gracer.

Permit me, if you please, to say that this Government is not unfair by asking retailers to carry those basic items at a reduced margin of profit. There are two avenues of control open to us; either we control all the products that they sell at a margin which is profitable or – and I hope the Opposition would understand what I am about to say – we use a profitability mix and by using a profitability mix, it will be a combination of various items which we control but leaving other items for them to sell at a reasonable margin of profit to come out ultimately with a satisfactory R.O.I. For those of you who would not know, it means “return on investment”.

I believe I have answered all the questions and I wish to thank you, Cde. Chairman, for the tolerance that you have shown towards me

14.1.77

National Assembly

7.30 – 7.40 p.m.

Head 81, Ministry of Trade and Consumer Protection - \$13,528,962 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Assembly resumed.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, “That this Assembly do now adjourn to Monday, 17th January, 1977 at 2 p.m.” [Cde. Ramsaroop]

Adjourned accordingly at 7.40 p.m.
