

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
[VOLUME 7]**

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

202nd Sitting

2 p.m.

Thursday, 27th December, 1979

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (63)

Speaker

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

Members of the Government – People’s National Congress (46)

Prime Minister (1)

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

Deputy Prime Minister (1)

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

Senior Ministers (11)

Cde. H.D. Hoyte, S.C.,
Minister of Economic Development and Co-operatives

Cde. S.S. Naraine, A.A.,
Minister of Works and Transport

- Cde. B. Ramsaroop,
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House
- Cde. C.V. Mingo,
Minister of Home Affairs
- *Cde. H. Green,
Minister of Health, Housing and Labour
- *Cde. H.O. Jack,
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources **(Absent – on leave)**
- *Cde. F.E. Hope,
Minister of Finance
- *Cde. G.B. Kennard, C.C.H.,
Minister of Agriculture **(Absent)**
- *Cde. M. Shahabuddeen, C.C.H., S.C.,
Attorney General and Minister of Justice **(Absent)**
- *Cde. R.E. Jackson,
Minister of Foreign Affairs **(Absent)**
- *Cde. J.A. Tyndall, A.A.,
Minister of Trade and Consumer Protection

Ministers (2)

- Cde. O.E. Clarke,
Minister – Regional
(East Berbice/Corentyne)
- Cde. C.A. Nascimento
Minister, Office of the Prime Minister of
Works and Transport **(Absent)**

Ministers of State (10)

- Cde. F.U.A. Carmichael
Minister of State – Regional (Rupununi) **(Absent)**
- Cde. P. Duncan J.P.,
Minister of State, Ministry of Economic Development
And Co-operatives

***Non – elected Ministers**

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

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

Cde. J.R. Thomas,
Minister of State, Ministry of Education,
Social Development and culture

Cde. R.H.O. Corbin
Minister of State for Youth and Sport,
Ministry of National Development

Cde. S. Persaud,
Minister of State – Regional
(East Demerara/West Coast Berbice)

Cde. R.C. Van Sluytman
Minister of State,
Ministry of Agriculture

*Cde. F.U.A. Campbell,
Minister of State for Information,
Ministry of National Development

(Absent)

*Cde. H. Rashid,
Minister of State,
Office of the Prime Minister

Parliamentary Secretaries (6)

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

(Absent – on leave)

Cde. E.L. Ambrose
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture

Cde. M. Corrica,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Education, Social Development and Culture

***Non – elected Ministers**

Cde. E.M. Bynoe
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Trade and Consumer Protection

Cde. C.E. Wrights, J.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Economic Development and Co-operatives

Cde. J.G. Ramson,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Works and Transport

Other Members (15)

Cde. W.G. Carrington, C.C.H. (Absent – on leave)

Cde. S.M. Field-Ridley

Cde. E.H.A. Fowler

Cde. J. Gill (Absent)

Cde. W. Hussain

Cde. K.M.E. Jonas

Cde. P.A. Rayman

Cde. A. Salim

Cde. E.M. Stoby, J.P. (Absent)

Cde. S.H. Sukhu, M.S.

Cde. C Sukul, J.P.

Cde. H.A. Taylor

Cde. H.B. Walcott

Cde. L.E. Willems (Absent)

Cde. M. Zaheeruddeen (Absent – on leave)

Members of the Opposition (16)

(i) People's Progressive Party (14)

Leader of the Opposition (1)

Cde. C. Jagan,
Leader of the Opposition (Absent – on leave)

Deputy Speaker (1)

Cde. Ram Karran,
Deputy Speaker

Other Members (12)

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| Cde. J. Jagan | (Absent – on leave) |
| Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, J.P., Opposition Chief Whip | |
| Cde. Narbada Persaud | (Absent) |
| Cde. C. Collymore | (Absent) |
| Cde. S.F. Mohamed | |
| Cde. I. Basir | |
| Cde. C.C. Belgrave | |
| Cde. R. Ally | |
| Cde. Dalchand, J.P | |
| Cde. Dindayal | |
| Cde. H. Nokta | |
| Cde. P. Sukhai | |

Liberator Party (2)

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Mr. M.F. Singh J.P. | (Absent – on leave) |
| Mr. M.A. Abraham | |

OFFICERS

Clerk of the National Assembly – F.A. Narain, A.A.

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly – M.B. Henry

PRAYERS

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Leave to Members

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to the Cde. Prime Minister, Cde. Jack, Cde. Carrington, Cde, Cheddie Jagan and to Cde. Janet Jagan, and to the Hon. Member Mr. Feilden Sing for today's sitting.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Paper was laid:

Guyana International Telecommunication Corporation (Dissolution) Order 1979 (No. 95), made under section 63 of the Public Corporations Act, Chapter 19:05, on 18th December, 1979, and published in the Gazette on 22nd December, 1979.

[The Minister of Works and Transport on behalf of the Prime Minister.]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

BILL – SECOND AND THIRD READINGS

Rate of Interest Bill 1979

A Bill intituled:

An Act to provide for the prescription of a maximum rate of interest in any contract of transaction.”

[The Minister of Finance]

The Minister of Finance (Cde. Hope): Cde. Speaker, before moving forward the Second Reading of the Rate of Interest Bill 1979, I would wish to give some background to the presentation of this Bill. It is well known that for many years the government has been

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maintaining a policy of relatively low interest rates. Indeed, most interest rates were not regulated by any Act of Parliament or direction of any governmental authority, the only exception being the rate of interest charged on deposits and charged on loans by commercial banks which interest would normally be regulated by direction from the Governor of the Bank of Guyana ... Central Bank under the Bank of Guyana Act. Apart therefore from the rates of interest chargeable by commercial banks, all interest rates remained unchanged and unregulated until now.

As I said before, it has always been the policy of the government to always have a low level of interest on most borrowing, one of the main ... Mortgage interest, particularly those set forth by the Bank ... which the government has control, has been deliberately ... long-term rate of interest charged on government borrowing ... debentures, remained at 7 per cent for a overall year.

2.10 p.m.

However, it has now been clearly demonstrated that interest rate ... need to be treated as an instrument, ...

In particular, we need to take a more positive attitude to interest rates in order to encourage people to save. It is well known that one of the objectives of our present economic strategy is to increase the level of savings within the economy of and therefore we need, as an encouragement, to ensure that depositors, people who save money, can get a reasonable rate of interest, by reasonable rate of interest one has to mean a rate of interest which has some relationship to the rate of inflation so that in fact it is not required that those who save suffer a diminution of income over time by having to live with interest rates which are negative in the real sense.

With this in view, the Government last year allowed certain things to happen under resolution. One of those things was to require the commercial banks to increase the rates payable on deposits. On that basis, the commercial banks in the two steps were required to pay something of the order of five percentage points increase in their deposit rates so that, as of now, those deposit rates, the ordinary savings book rate on which depositors used to receive 3½ per cent, those depositors can now receive some 8½ per cent and there was a consequential increase on deposits of a longer-term nature. At the same time, the Government also enabled, through regulations by the Central Bank, the same bank to charge an increase of just 4 percentage points above their previous lending rate.

For me to get those things in perspective, first of all, the Government required the commercial banks to increase their deposit rates by 5 percentage points but permit the commercial banks, based purely on the rate of interest that they had to pay for their deposits and the rate of interest they charged on their lending, lost, on that basis, one percent point. The idea, as I said, was to encourage saving by making saving a little bit more remunerative to the saver.

While this Government did this, the Government was very conscious, however, that there were certain kinds of borrowing which, as Government policy, an economic and social policy, needs to be kept as low as possible. One of those rates was the mortgage rate. When the commercial banks interest rates were increased by 4 per cent, as I mentioned earlier, we looked at the institutions that were lending for mortgages and encourage – because, you will remember there was no law at that time – those lending institutions not to increase their lending rates but rather to maintain their lending rates whenever that was clearly the ...

Take for instance, the interest rates chargeable by the Mortgage Finance Bank which is a Government institution. Those interest rates, as a matter of Government's policy, still remain at the low level of 6½ per cent for higher-income borrowers, who are very few. Those rates at 6 ½ per cent for self-helpers were in fact subsidized rates should be made as low as possible and should remain low.

There is one other group of institutions, however, which lent very largely on mortgage and those were the insurance companies. We took the view that there was really a need for an insurance company that was lending for mortgages – and those would be largely life companies – to increase its interest rates on mortgages, the reason being quite simple had in my view quite obvious. The insurance companies, in fact accrued their money from premium and while premiums remained a form of saving, a narrow form of saving, they represented one kind of saving which represented no cost whatsoever to the institution that was collecting it. In other words, we know that the insurance companies lend on mortgages almost exclusively perhaps exclusively – cut of premiums which they receive from life policies and those premiums were not in any way affected by the interest rate charges which were made last year, so we persuaded the insurance companies that since their costs have not increased in any way by the interest changes affecting commercial banks there as really no logic, no reason, in them seeking to impose on people, ... with them, higher interest rates for their mortgages.

... Government's social policy to ensure that institutions do not proceed unilaterally to increase interest rates, to a point where such interest rates become tantamount to exploitation.

2.20 p.m.

One such case which came to mind is the insurance companies and I will explain in a moment to the House why we thought the insurance companies should not find it necessary to increase rates. However, when this was discussed, the insurance companies as a whole took the view that since interest rates in the commercial banks have gone up, their interest on mortgage should, inso facto, also go up irrespective of the logic or the circumstances necessitating the interest in the interest rate. I will say this that the increase which came about in interest rates last year and earlier this year benefited the insurance companies. The insurance companies, as a matter of fact automatically benefited more than other institutions.

A substantial portion of the funds of the insurance companies are invested in government bonds. Government long-term bonds are earning 11 per cent as from this year. From last year interest was increased from 7 per cent and the insurance companies automatically benefitted from that. Secondly, the whole substantial portion of their assets is in treasury bills, earning something like 10 per cent per annum, when previously they earned just under 6 per cent.

Then we looked at the long-term plan, we looked at 20 per cent of the long term benefits which will be affected by the rate of interest which the government has permitted to insurance companies. Where we have an objection, it is really on the mortgage rate and it is here where in my view, the insurance companies as a group within the country display what I consider to be lack of consideration. They clearly would seek to enjoy interest rates which will be some 1½ to 2 per cent points higher than the present level merely because interest rates in the commercial banks have gone up although they have nothing to do with the banks. Today, the cost of money to them would not change, while at the same time, some of their assets will in fact increase more. We, therefore think that the time has come when the government should be ... to regulate the interest rate chargeable by all institutions without ... the Bill which we have before you this afternoon.

The Bill basically seeks, Cde. Speaker, to prescribe that all interest rate ... of this Bill into an act, should be on the basis of an ... contracts will need to be prescribed and it is on the basis of that prescription by order, that interest rates, after the passage of this Bill into an Act, can be increased.

Indeed, as I said before, all kinds of contracts are involved, whether the contracts related to movable property, whether they relate to debts, or for that matter, , judgment debts, anything that relates to borrowing, and the order when made under this Act, will take precedence over the interest rate fixed by any other Act of Parliament as of now. Indeed, Cde. Speaker, the Bill also provides for the freezing of interest rates as they are today, as they were prior to the passing of this Act until those interest rates are changed by an order.

Basically, therefore, Cde. Speaker, the Act, I think, is a simple one, is short one, but I venture to suggest that it is an important measure for establishing reasonable surveillance of affairs within the country and not only that, but putting the government in a position where it can supervise and protect the interest of poor people who could be exploited by those who have no interest except in maximizing their profits. Indeed Cde. Speaker, one could well say that the interest and, indeed, the profits would go to the shareholder, but I think none of us who have been life policyholder knew of the very little say that policyholders have in terms of determining what takes place within the insurance companies. In fact, the Government does have power, under the Insurance Act, to look into insurance companies, but I believe that all the Government has to do is to utilize that act more fully than it has done in the past to ensure that the policyholders get a fair deal from the earnings of their premium, even if the Government does not allow the insurance companies to increase their premium rates.

When this is passed, the Minister will proceed to make a new order that should prescribe what the new rate of interest for the insurance companies should be so well or the interest affecting policyholders, but I think that the general population can stand assured that the Government will use its new instrument to guarantee that no one is exploited. With that explanation, Cde. Speaker, I would like formally to move the Second Reading of the Rate of Interest Bill 1975.

2.30 p.m.

Question proposed.

Cde. Ram Karran (The Deputy Speaker): It would ---, Your Honour, that the very long explanation the background, as the hon. Minister calls it, leaves us in the same position as we were when we saw the Bill as printed. The Minister has delivered the point, it seems to me, that the insurance companies are the recalcitrant ones in view of the fact that they are covered by premiums still seek to increase interest payable by the people who borrow money from them.

Well, I need not outline the policy as has been endorsed, repeated over and over, of the People's Progressive Party in relation to the insurance companies. It would appear to me that the government refuses or rejects or will not face the facts and that is why we have to come and treat this matter in such a roundabout way.

Of course, everyone supports, and to particularly, the view that interest should not be prohibitive, and that people who are unable to finance projects of their own by themselves – in fact, only the rich people, very few of them in this Chamber, can do that – should have recourse to the people who have the money whether they are the insurance companies, the banks, or the Khailans, or the Kishnao. We know of the unconscionable interest that was charged by some people, and this is undoubtedly a good thing.

I remember appearing, before the hon. Minister of Health and Housing, who is now Minister of Works and Housing in making representation on behalf of some workers who were at that time entitled to certain assistance from a statutory committee and the Minister and the Government insisted that they should not go through that course but they should adopt another course. When I asked the hon. Minister what interest rates they would have to pay in this organisation to which they were entitled to loans, he said they would pay no interest. But they wanted to shift them down to something else and when I asked them how much interest, "I don't know." That is the answer that we got. We ought to protect, sir, in measure like this, these people who are entitled to certain things, to have these things done rather than to siphon them into areas where they will have to pay what I call oppressive interest.

The hon. Minister belaboured the point about insurance companies. There is another insurance organisation in this country that is exploitative, very exploitative and repeated representations have been made to the Government for the amendment of that legislation which ensures that the people who are paying their money by force have their money deducted from the pay table. I will give you an example, sir. A man works today, Thursday. He goes home in the

night; he is beaten up by thieves; there is no protection for which he pays. I am looking at my friend, the hon. Minister of Home Affairs. He spent some time in hospital, sir, three weeks in the hospital, he makes out the claims to the N.I.S., having satisfied all the ingredients, all of them. He had contributed. He had paid all the money; he had worked the day before. When his claim went in, it was sent to the estate. The estate said he would not have worked the following day, that is the day when he was in hospital, and therefore his claim goes to naught.

The hon. Minister must ensure that all insurance companies, including the Government insurance company, are fair, and they don't cheat the people as they are cheating them in this case.

There is another case in which a man died on the West Demerara. The doctor who performed the postmortem said that the stomach smelt of insecticide, and the estate authorities refused to give the requisite form for his family to claim. That is an insurance company too, and I think it is more exploitative than those the hon. Minister talked about in relation to interest rates and all of that. All come in the same pot and we should look at them in the same way.

Sir, the Minister, in introducing his measure and giving us some of the background, talked about increasing the interest on deposits by 5 per cent and increasing the interest that people have to pay by 4 per cent and made it appear as if the Government is really against the banks. They must not make more than they give. But when we examine the situation, is it really that? Is it really true that the banks have been made to lose? What has happened is that a large number of people cannot get money, can't get loans from the banks set up by the government for lending. Many people cannot, unless they happen to have some godfather or they are related to somebody. So, most of the people go the commercial banks, and that is where they are squeezed by the so-called 12 per cent. The interest rate. I think, used to be 8 per cent, now they have been authorised to go to 12 per cent, whereas in the statutory banks run for these purposes, for housing, loans, etc., they charge far less.

The banks must be made to charge the same interest rates on loans for the same purpose, that is, if a man can get a loan from the Guyana Mortgage Finance Bank for building a house at 7 per cent, then for a loan for the same purpose, whether it is taken from the Bank of Guyana, it is taken from Royal Bank, or Barclays Bank – and I hope Barclays Bank is let out of this country because of their trading in South Africa – or the so-called Co-operative Bank – I say so-called because it is not a co-operative bank – he must get at the same interest rate. Then, the hon. Minister will be talking for Peter and Paul. The hon. Minister will be treating everybody in the same way. But if a man wants to buy a serge suit and he takes a loan from the commercial bank, he must pay the commercial rate. If a man is given a loan to build a house, whether it is from this bank, or that bank, or anybody's bank, he must not have a disadvantage. That is the point I wish to make, and I am sure the Minister will see some relevance in that recommendation. I don't think that anyone is swayed by the idea put up by him that on deposits the banks pay 5 percent and for interest rates they demand 12 per cent.

Sir, it would appear to me that the government has been sitting for a very long time, for 15 years, and while it is now prepared to close the stable doors, I can assure it that the horse has gone very far afield, and this little twitch here and there is not at all going to save the economic situation which has run to rock bottom. Indeed, it needs a change of the Government to have some situation where Guyana will be able to save itself.

The Speaker: Cde. Minister, do you wish to reply?

2.40 p.m.

Cde. Hope (replying): Cde, Speaker, I do not know to what I must reply. The hon. Member displayed total misunderstanding or lack of understanding of the whole Bill and what it seeks to do. All I wish to just to say one or two things, one, that the Government cannot tell the commercial banks to lend money at a lower rate of interest than they pay out to people, in other words, the Government cannot tell a commercial bank to subsidise but the Government can do it

itself. That is why the Government has set up the Guyana Co-operative Mortgage Finance Bank where it can, on its own volition, subsidise the interest rates so that all that people need to do is to go to the Mortgage Bank to get the subsidized rates of interest. incidentally, the commercial banks do not lend on long-term mortgage on the Government does now.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Assembly in committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without Amendment, read the Third time and passed.

MOTION

APPROVAL OF GUYANA INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION (DISSOLUTION) ORDER 1979 (NO.95)

“Be it resolved that this National Assembly in accordance with section 63(10) of the Public Corporations Act, Chapter 19:05, approve of the Guyana International Telecommunications Corporation (Dissolution) Order 1979 (No. 95), which was made on 18th December, 1979, and published in the Gazette on 22nd December, 1979,”

[The Minister of Works and Transport on behalf the Prime Minister.]

The Minister of Works and Transport (Cde. Naraine): Cde. Speaker, I beg on behalf of the Prime Minister to move the Motion standing in his name with respect to the Guyana International Telecommunications Corporation (Dissolution) Order 1979.

In moving this Motion, I would like to give this House a short background into some of the factors which were considered in arriving at this position. GUYINTEL, or the Guyana International Telecommunications Corporation, was established on the 26th May, 1977. Cable

and Wireless had proposed a few years earlier certain improvements and an expansion programme with respect to the International Telephone Service but when these proposals were not forthcoming, the Government decided to take over the assets of that company, and so, GUYINTEL saw its birth on 26th may, 1977.

I would like to explain that GUYINTEL Communications System, consisting of a tropospheric Scatter Radio to Trinidad, was incapable, as it stood, of being expanded beyond a certain number of circuits and what is more important, such a link caused Guyana, a sovereign territory, to be dependent exclusively upon the Trinidad installation. This became very evident when the installation in Trinidad was damaged and Guyana was disconnected from the rest of the world for a short while.

In the meantime, GUYTELCO, that is, Guyana Telecommunications Corporation, had established a minor telecommunication link with Suriname and this route showed significant prominence. The Government soon after taking over GUYINTEL set out to establish an earth and in February 1979 this earth station was put in use whereby direct telecommunication routes were established to the United States of America, United Kingdom and Canada and thus laying the foundation for more viable, dependable and safer communication links with the rest of the world. Very quickly it was seen that the overseas traffic tended to increase on the GUYTELCO installation and there was a reduction of traffic on the GUYINTEL installation which was used primarily to service the Caribbean region.

The Government, therefore, asked GUYSTAC to look into the question of having the two companies rationalize the telecommunication system and to see whether we should continue having the two companies operating or whether there should be single company. The two companies were carefully studied with this view to rationalisation and the result of that study brought out a number of factors which I feel this House ought to know. It was found that, in order to produce a good and reliable service, the primary need is for common and uniform interest, strategy and standards in the Guyana national telecommunication system as a whole,

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that is, the domestic and overseas service. The rationalisation process would create relative savings in cost thus providing to the nation the ability to improve the services and to expand on them. Rationalisation, therefore, of GUYTELCO and GUYINTEL aimed at achieving greater efficiency and reduction of costs while at the same time ensuring that the national security interest was served by ensuring constant international communication links with the outside world.

2.50 p.m.

Consequently, after the investigation by the management of both organisations, it was observed that there were common and related activities by both organisations to provide a common service to the public. These were as follows: data processing, billing, credit control and collection of money for the service, supervision of all local and overseas connected calls, general accounting, maintenance of diesel generating systems, and the maintenance of air conditioning and electrical systems, maintenance of micro-wave radio system, maintenance of multi-plexing equipment, maintenance of buildings and compounds, the procurement of supplies for maintenance of the network, personnel services including industrial relations and welfare, corporate secretarial services training both at technical and non-technical levels, security, having regard also to the importance of industrial and national security.

A look at the above, Cde, Speaker, suggests that if rationalization between the two organisation, became a reality, savings in manpower and manpower cost, financial and other costs would ensue and could be applied to improvement and expansion programmes. The rationalization process would also allow greater flexibility for the improvement and maintenance of the entire Telecommunication system when considering the entire portfolio of the development over the entire network. As I was explaining, Cde. Speaker, the Guyana Telecommunication Corporation has already started the improvement and modernization of the entire network, both domestic and some major areas of overseas services.

As I pointed out, the earth station which was put into operation on 23rd February, was not part of GUYINTEL, but became part of Guytelco. The rationalization amalgamation of the two companies would also put to better use scarce technical personnel who are available to the two services and in terms of negotiation for satellite space – we are dealing with international telecommunications systems – instead of having the two organisations being represented individually at such meetings, this could now be done by the single company.

Cde. Speaker, after looking at all these factors and after examining the administrative, the technical and the international ramifications of telecommunications, the security aspects of telecommunications, both within the country and overseas, the very important role which the system of telecommunications is playing in the life of the individual today, and the dire need for maintaining an efficient service, it was felt that the amalgamation of these two companies would cause many benefits to accrue to the Government in terms of providing such services, and so, the decision was taken by Cabinet to dissolve GUYINTEL and to amalgamate its activities in GUYTELCO.

I have the pleasure of processing this Motion on behalf of the Prime Minister and recommending it to this House for approval.

Question proposed.

Cde. Ram Karran: Sir, it is not the purpose of this side of the House to oppose the measure introduced by my friend the hon. Minister of Works and Transport. When we examine the amalgamation of these two corporations – one is to be dissolved – in the light of the background given by the hon. Minister and having regard to our past experience, we are not assured that all that was said here today will be followed. I think everyone agrees that if we have one organisation looking after diesel generating sets, that it is a good thing, we will be saving some money there. If we are going to have one organisation looking after the Telex equipment and the motor vehicle, that is good, no matter one expects to have some detailing of the empires

that would have been built as the result of the setting up of this. But the same argument goes, while the Government does this with GUYINTEL and GUYTELCO, the same should also apply to Works and Drainage and Irrigation and all those empires that have been built around the individual. But that argument is not being really urged upon the government because they had to build empires around certain people.

3 p.m.

Everyone agrees that one organisation treating with personnel services and so on is the better but this I envisage, and I warn the hon. Minister at this stage that he is not going to try to switch the Guyana Telecommunication union and put Gordon Todd and the C.C.W.U. out. I know that is one of the reasons why this measure is here, rather than all the very eloquent arguments – [**Interruption**] it shows the fertility of the brains of the Government that uses round-about ways in order to get at its enemies, and I want to give some advice that this measure – [**Interruption**] I read the Order, Your Honour. I read the Order and it says here that – [**Cde. Naraine**: “Read it.”] No, I don’t want to read it. It says here in paragraph (6) that – [**Cde. Chowritmootoo**: “Functional literacy.”] Boy, I don’t drink kerosene oil. You know you create a shortage of kerosene oil in the country? There is shortage now. You can’t get it.

Yes, sir, what it says here is quite different from what the hon. Prime Minister himself used to urge in days gone by when the Government took over the Guyana Airways and the electricity works. The Government seems to say here that these interests which are enjoyed by the people who are working in these corporations, taken by and large, should not be inferior to those which they now enjoy but that has a lot of meaning in the sense that the same thing was said in the case of the sugar workers. The profit-sharing, which we often talk about, has been removed, while and conditions, it might be argued, remain the same by and large. We hope that in this corporation, the benefits that the people have won from the expatriates as a result of struggle by the workers are not going to be taken away by this Government.

Another observation I want to make, and this is a fact which the hon. Minister can himself investigate, is that while these concerns were in private hands, expatriate hands, we saw no discrimination. Not so long ago, only a few weeks ago, two telegrams came, one for the P.N.C., one for the G.A.W.U. the one was delivered to the P.N.C. but the one for the G.A.W.U. remained in the office there until called for. We would expect that if these are public corporations serving all interests in Guyana that this nonsense must stop and that the public would get the same service to which it is entitled. You deliver the telegram to the man who is from the P.N.C. and hold up the other one for the G.A.W.U. because if the G.A.W.U. man had gone to Mexico, then a different picture would have been presented. That is rascality, no matter how you look at it, and the Guyana Corporation which deals with these things must be told that it must act fairly. Don't act like the P.N.C.

There is another matter I would like to draw to the Minister's attention. In fact, I had to call him on several occasions, so, why is it that the telephones owned by the P.P.P. at 41 Robb Street fall down every other week? You can't get out. People cannot get in. Why it is the same thing happens at G.A.W.U.? We have to go across the road to be able to get people outside on very important business. The Ministry or the corporation should not come and say every other day that our equipment needs changing. We are tired of changing it. But the level of maintenance about which we are talking here is different. The hon. Minister said, perhaps this will help, that the two corporations coming together to maintain these items of equipment may be beneficial, I only hope so. But we suspect, and I have told the Minister this, that they are manipulating the thing in order to frustrate the efforts of these organisations. I sincerely believe so because if I leave my office and go across the road then I can get telecommunications service but I can't get it in the office there.

Sir, a corporation, a public utility ought not to have excuses that this is wrong or that is wrong. In fact, it is enjoying a monopoly and that monopoly is given to it because it is expected that it will maintain the services adequately, and it is no excuse, in my opinion, for the corporation to say or the Minister to say that this is wrong and that is wrong. People pay for

services just as how we pay for light and we get darkness. You pay for water and you get none, and it is no use talking about all these things and the services degenerate. That is why my friends on the right are always able to get up and say that Government corporations are inefficient. Things run by government always run badly, always lose money. It is because of the incompetence. I am not talking about the civil servants. I know they are working under very harsh conditions. It is because of the incompetence of my friends around this Table, who seem to stick their fingers in everything which they don't understand, and they are perhaps responsible for the utterly ridiculous situation that has developed in this country where, notwithstanding the fact that you pay more and you continue to pay more – my friends will be raising rates of interest – the services fall below the standard of any other region in this area.

I hope, sir, that the hon. Minister will take into account these criticisms and that the services which we are joining today in marriage will fructify into something more efficient than what we have had, particularly from the telecommunications section of this service in the past.

Cde. Naraine (replying): Cde. Speaker, with respect to the points raised about C.C.W.U., all I would like to say is that discussions have taken place between the two unions, the one at GUYINTEL, that is, C.C.W.U. and that one at GUYTELCO, that is, P.T.W.U. The administration met the unions and it has been agreed that the unions will continue to represent the workers whom they have been representing. I do not know whether Cde. Ram Karran is representing the cause of the C.C.W.U. but neither the Government nor the administration take part in inter-union rivalry. It is for the President of the P.T.W.U. who is present to listen to this debate and apparently is more interested in what is talking place for the development of the country, to know whether he would fructify that thought into action. It is not for me. It is for him. So, there is little I can say about the accusation on discrimination. All I can say is that presently it is a little political gimmick for the consumption, maybe of the press, because if the Minister was required to go into this matter very seriously then it would have been brought to his attention a very long time ago. But now he has drawn it to my attention and, if he can give me more information on the matter I would have it investigated. It is true that Cde. Ram Karran had

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drawn to my attention, from time to time, certain problems which he had with the telephones at Freedom House, and I believe at G.A.W.U. in Regent Street, once. I did not want to say this but since he has drawn it again to the attention of the House, I must say that every time he has drawn it to my attention action was taken, and he knows this. But on one occasion action could not have been taken because the arrears had to be paid first.

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I think he raised a very important point and that is one maintenance of the service. I would like to point out, Cde. Speaker, and I would like to request the public to be somewhat patient in this matter because GUYTELCO is presently undertaking a programme for the expansion of the service by 7,400 lines and some of these line have already been put into use. The analogy I would have to make is like this. If you have a four-lane highway and you are expanding it, or you are rehabilitating a bridge or something like that, it sometimes becomes necessary for you to close half the road while you are improving the other half but, ultimately, when both sides are repaired, or rehabilitated and improved, then one would expect to have a bigger service. While this expansion programme is taking place, then the irritation that presently takes place will have to be borne by all users of this service. I am reliably informed that this will not be for too long and many people who have been waiting for a considerable time for new lines will get this service very shortly.

But, back to the important issue which he raised on maintenance, as we put in a bigger service, an expanded service, and, as we use an international service linked with the domestic service, then one becomes dependent on the other. It is no point having a satellite service and then when you get into the internal system you cannot reach the person to whom you wish to speak. Therefore, in so far as telecommunications are concerned, our target, our aim must be focused on a very high standard of maintenance, a standard which may broadly be described as an international standard.

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I propose within the first or second week of the New Year, to have discussions with the management of GUYTELCO on this very burning issue, the maintenance of the services. From preliminary discussions I have had with them, I have got the assurance that they are doing as much as they can with the limited resource of manpower while undertaking at the same time this major expansion programme, but my meeting with them would be to make sure that that programme which they have already started can be further strengthened and the completion of the capital works and the continued and improved maintenance will be assured to the users of the telephone services here and from overseas.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

NEW YEAR GREETINGS

The Speaker: Comrades and hon. Members, I believe today is the last sitting for the year. I hope that you had a very joyful and pleasant Christmas and I wish to thank all of you for your co-operation in assisting me in carrying out the duties of Parliament.

I also wish to thank the staff for the hard work they have done this year, particularly in relation to the activities of the Committee which this Parliament appointed in framing the Constitution of Guyana. [Applause] They have worked under very strenuous and difficult conditions but nonetheless the work was efficiently and very quickly accomplished.

I believe that next year will see the promulgation of this new Constitution and new elections. Some of us may be here; some may not. I wish, however, to wish all of you good luck in new elections and I am confident that those who are returned will continue to give the hard service they have been giving in the past. A pleasant New Year to all of you and good luck in the elections. [Applause]

The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House (Cde. Ramsaroop):

Cde. Speaker, may I on behalf of the Government Benches, thank you for the wishes of good luck which you have extended to all of us, those of us on this side of the House, my friends to my immediate West. It has been, as you have observed, a mixed difficulties; there have been moments of triumph, I think.

I wish to join with you in the sentiments you have expressed and I extend good wishes for the healthy, productive and prosperous New Year to you, Cde. Speaker, to your charming wife, to your family, to the Clerk of the National Assembly, the Deputy Clerk, to the staff of the Parliament Office, particularly members of the reportorial section, to members of the media, both the Press and the Radio, to members on the opposite side, to our technician friends, to the messengerial staff, to our caterers. I see they are here and in a short while they will ensure that our hunger does not continue too long. I wish them all a good year, Cde. Speaker.

3.20 p.m.

As you have rightly remarked, looking at the crystal ball, next year many of us may be here, many of us may not be here. Your position, Cde. Speaker, fortunately, is a less hazardous one, but we know we are in this game, and we accept the trials, the vicissitudes of fortune that surrounds us. I also wish to extend our good wishes to our friends in the Security Force, those who are here and also to those who man the traffic signs to see that here is actual silence as our proceedings continue, although there are disturbance every now and then.

I observe too, lest this nation has forgotten, the demise this year, of that institution. Cde. Law and Order. He is no longer with us. I remember him from my teenage years. Although rather belatedly, may I extend my condolences to his family. **[Applause]**

Cde. Ram Karran: I would, sir, on behalf of my colleagues on this side of the House, like to thank you, to thank my friend across the Table, for your very warm wishes for the New

Year. We are fortunate in this Parliament to have two opportunities to speak, to express good wishes on the occasion of Christmas and again on the occasion of New Year.

I note Your Honour's optimism about election and probably a new Constitution next year. Perhaps Your Honour is speaking from inside knowledge, but as far as – **[Interruption]** Yes, I have no doubt. I know that you are the Chairman of the committee, but whether the recommendations of the committee will be put into effect is something that I don't think – Perhaps, you know, but many people don't know. There is a lot of distance between the cup and the lip. However, we will be very happy to have elections, fair elections, and free elections with all Guyanese above the statutory age with the exception of those who, for good reason, cannot participate in the elections. We hope that the dead will be removed from those lists, and that the people who are below the age will not be there. So we are waiting and hoping that the boxes will get there all right.

I note that Your Honour referred to the fact that he staff and yourself, no doubt, and certain members have had a lot of work. Well, I have been trying to check the number of meetings to which I have been and they number only about forty for the year. I think it has been a very lean year for parliamentarians, particularly for those who sit on this side and I was even trying to calculate how many dollars we receive per minute for the work we produce here. I think its much more than \$14, the minimum wage that has been indicated by the Government for 1979.

Sir, I notice that the P.N.C., the party of which my friends are members, is now celebrating fifteen years in office. Well, the period of fifteen years reminds me that it is the term a prisoner serve for life. **[Interruption]** I am sorry that my friend the Attorney General is not here, but I am sure Your Honour can confirm that, and it would seem to me to be a good time for those responsible for our being kept in this term of imprisonment to release us.

With that feeling in mind I do wish to thank you most sincerely for your kind wishes and

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reciprocate them both to yourself and to my friend on the other side, and to extend them to all members, to all of those who have had to participate in the work of this House. Even though the year is ending in such a bleak way, we, nevertheless, hope and it is our feeling, and I think it is in the mind of every one of us, that 1980, that the next decade, will be bright and that we will work towards a brighter 1980, not only for ourselves in this House, but for all Guyanese generally.

PAGES OF THE TRANSCRIPT ARE MISSING