





Other Members (23)

Cde. M. Ally, M.P.  
Cde. M. Armogan, M.S., J.P., M.P.  
Cde. B. Beniprashad, M.P. (Absent – on leave)  
Cde. J.B. Caldeira, M.P.  
Cde. A.A. Chin, M.P.  
Cde. J.P. Chowritmootoo, J.P., M.P.  
Cde. O.E. Clarke, M.P.  
Cde. E.B. Davidson, M.P.  
Cde. H. Doobay, M.P.  
Cde. A.B. Felix, M.P.  
Cde. E.H.A. Fowler, M.P.  
Cde. P. Fredericks, M.P.  
Cde. E.F. Gilbert, M.P. (Absent)  
Cde. J. Gill-Mingo, M.P.  
Cde. A. McRae, M.P.  
Cde. E. Melville, M.P. (Absent)  
Cde. J.M. Munroe, J.P., M.P.  
Cde. R.N. Primo, M.P.  
Cde. P.A. Rayman, M.P.  
Cde. C.G. Sharma, J.P., M.P. (Absent)  
Cde. B. Tiwari, M.P., Government Chief Whip  
Cde. C. Vandenburg, M.P.  
Cde. R.E. Williams, M.P. (Absent)

Members from the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs (2)

Cde. R. Bishop, M.S., M.P.  
Cde. B. Latchminarayan, M.P.

Members from the Region Regional Democratic Councils (9)

Cde. K.N. Jones, M.P. (Region No.1-Barima/Waini)  
Cde. K.V. Jairam, M.P. (Region No.2-Pomeroon/ Supenaam)  
Cde. C.A. Singh, M.P (Region No.3-Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)  
Cde. W. Bipat, J.P., M.P. (Region No.4 Demerara /Mahaica)  
Cde. H.I. London, M.S., M.P. (Region No 5- Mahaica/Berbice)  
Cde. I. Chowritmootoo, M.P. (Region No. 6- East Berbice/Corentyne)  
Cde. N.R. Charles, M.P (Region No.7- Cuyuni/Mazurni)  
Cde. D. Abraham, M.P. (Region No. 8- Potaro/Siparuni)  
Cde. D. Hinds, M.P. (Region No.10-Upper Demerara/Berbice)

Members of the Opposition (12)

( i ) Peoples' Progressive Party (10)

Minority Leader (1)

Cde. Dr. C. Jagan, M.P., (Absent)  
Minority Leader

Deputy Speaker (1)

Cde. Ram Karran, M.P.,  
Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly

Other Members (8)

Cde. J. Jagan, M.P.  
Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, J.P., M.P.,  
Minority Chief Whip  
Cde. N. Persaud, M.P.  
Cde. C.C. Collymore, M.P.  
Cde. S.F. Mohamed, M.P. (Absent)  
Cde. I. Basir, M.P.  
Cde. C.C. Belgrave, M.P.  
Cde. H. Nokta, M.P.

( ii ) United Force (2)

Mr. M.F. Singh, C.C.H., J.P., M.P. (Absent – on leave)  
Mr. M.A. Abraham, M.P.

OFFICERS

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

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

PRAYERS

National Assembly

14:10 hrs

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to Cde. Reid, Cde. Hoyte, Cde Ramsaroop, Cde. Chandisingh, Cde. Johnson, Cde H.L.B. Singh and the hon. Member, Mr. M. Feilden Singh, for today's Sitting.

Appointment of Cde. B. Tiwari as Government Chief Whip

The Speaker: I have also been informed that Cde. Bidiawattie Tiwari has been appointed Government Chief Whip with effect from 1st January, 1984. I am sure you will wish me to extend our congratulations and best wishes to Cde. Tiwari.

Deaths

The Speaker: Comrades, since our last meeting two Members have lost their father and mother, Cde Seeram Prashad and Cde. Nellie Charles. On your behalf and on my own I wish to extend our deepest sympathy to the two Members.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Paper was laid:

“Timehri International Airport (Amendment) Regulations 1984 (NO. 6) made under section 3 of the Timehri International Airport Act, Chapter 52:01, and published in the Gazette on 3rd March, 1984. /The Minister of Energy and Mines on behalf of the Minister of Transport within the Vice-Presidency of Social Infrastructure/

REQUESTS FOR LEAVE TO MOVE THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY ON

DEFINITE MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Cde. Nokta: Cde. Speaker, under this heading I wish to bring to the notice of this Assembly the critical state of transportation in the country today. In Georgetown alone, thousands of persons spend hours waiting for transportation. Water transport is worse. The North West District steamer service is virtually reduced to once a fortnight and frequently scheduled trips are postponed, causing great inconvenience, financial embarrassment to commuters and loss to farmers. The Parika Essequibo steamer service takes eight to nine hours with passengers crowded together in appalling conditions. The "M.V. Kurupukari" is being towed by a tug and has become a pontoon. Ten private vessels with minimal safety equipment are now operating from Supenaam to Parika charging \$25 per person single fare-

1984-04-26

14:10 – 14:15 hrs

The Speaker: Yes. Cde. Nokta, I can read. I read this letter you sent me. I am afraid it does not qualify. It has been going on for some length of time and therefore it is not something that is now happening for the first time. Unfortunately, I regret that I cannot entertain the Motion.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS – FIRST READING.

The following Bill was introduced and read First time:

Mining (Amendment) Bill 1984 – Bill No. 6/1984 /The Minister of Energy and Miners/

14:15 hrs.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

WORKING CONDITIONS OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

Whereas the Campbell Committee was set up and reported some 17 years ago on conditions of domestics and made positive recommendations for improvement of pay, hours of work and conditions of work;

And whereas since 1977, former Labour Minister W. Carrington had promised to recommend an 8-hour day for domestic workers, improved pay and other conditions of work;

And whereas the Government of Trinidad and Tobago on December 20, 1979, published an order for "Minimum wage and terms of service for household Assistance" which provides for a 44 hours - 6 day week, vacation and sick leave and wages for full-time, part-time and itinerant household assistance reaching \$70.00 per week for full time employees in 1981, with provision for overtime pay:

"Be it resolved that the National Assembly recommends the immediate drafting of legislation to provide for minimum pay, maximum hours and other matters relating to working conditions of domestic workers." /Cde. J. Jagan /.

The Speaker: Cde. Jagan.

Cde. J. Jagan: Cde. Speaker, I beg to move the motion standing in my name. May I proceed.

The Speaker: Yes, please proceed.

Cde. J. Jagan: I want to go back some years to get the full picture of the problems of domestic workers in Guyana. Some thirty-odd years ago the then British Guiana Labour Union under Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow worked in the direction of organising domestic workers. In that effort I worked with Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow - we had many sessions in which we attempted to organise domestic workers so that they could fight for better conditions. As you can imagine conditions now are bad but then they were appalling. I would say that through these thirty odd years there has been efforts off and on from different Associations - for domestic workers had been formed. One or two Unions have attempted to organise the workers but because of the nature of the employment, because domestic workers are employed by single employers and generally they are the only employee, it has been a situation where the risk of domestics in

1984-04-26

14:15 - 14:25 hrs.

taking militant action and working together has never properly materialised. Therefore, it has helped to fall unto those interested in the welfare of such workers to seek legislation in this direction and there has been efforts throughout the years, but very little has actually materialised.

Some legislation - for example when I was Minister of Labour, we passed legislation including domestic workers under the Workers Compensation Act and later in the holidays with pay. In 1966 following shortly on the heels of the General elections, when the PNC as one of their election pictures had said that they would deal with the question of domestic workers. A Household Service Workers Advisory Committee was set up on November 6, 1965. The Committee headed by Lucille Campbell and including May Rodrigues, Magna Pollard, Clementina DaSilva and representatives of workers and representative employers gave their report in 1966 and it was laid on the table of this House on March 14, 1967 and therefore onwards it was stuck on a pigeon wall and all efforts from 1967 onwards to get any action as regards the implementation of this report had to a greater extent thanks <sup>to</sup> a lesser extent failed.

The terms of reference of this Committee were to enquire into conditions of employment and wages of domestic workers in private homes, Guest Houses and Hotels and to make recommendations for improvement of same. I would say they were relatively good recommendations, at least on which there was an area to work for the betterment of conditions, pay and hours of work for domestic workers. They had recommended an 8-hour a day exclusive with time off for meals.

I wish to make this point in relation to the legislation that was later moved in 1980 which does not make that small point that the 8-hour a day should be exclusive of time off for meals. I do not think that is explicit. The problem with this legislation of 1980 is that there are many things which are not explicit. The recommendations of the Campbell Committee also included overtime, annual leave and one that has also been neglected by the same legislation of 1980. The question of sick

leave, no one has taken into consideration the need for sick leave for domestic workers, but yet in 1966 this committee was advanced enough to suggest that there should be 14 days sick leave a year after one year's service. The committee also recommended maternity leave, four weeks with pay exclusive of the twelve days for vacation leave and that would be after three years' continuous service.

They also made other proposals which again did not fit into this. If I may just make a brief reference to an amendment where he says that this Bill dealt with conditions of service. It does not deal with conditions of service, it does not deal with matters like uniform, protective clothing, accommodation etc.,

There are other aspects of conditions of employment which this committee dealt with but which the Bill did not deal with and therefore it would not be correct as he puts in his amendment to say that they dealt with conditions of work. There are many other things which it should have dealt with but did not.

On the question of wages of course they are totally irrelevant at this stage - they bear no relevance to the present, so all I can say is that they made efforts to set out wages for domestic workers and they took into consideration the hotel rates.

There was another recommendation that I find very interesting. They suggested a National Insurance Scheme and I quote from the words they use because it gives much food for thought in view of the lack of such provision in our present scheme of things "to secure themselves against temporary unemployment". In other words the Campbell committee saw the need for a National Insurance Scheme that would assist persons who are in unemployment and as they put it here 'temporary unemployment' because we know the fact that domestic frequently move from one employer to another. Yet our own NIS does not provide for unemployment relief of any type, so that the Campbell report which was finished eighteen years ago. I have here seventeen years because I submitted my motion to the Speaker

1984-04-26

14:15 - 14:25 hrs.

on March 18, 1983 which was a year ago and it was published in July, 1983. So actually, it is eighteen years since the Campbell Committee reported.

I wish to reiterate a point I made when the legislation concerning Household Service Workers came up. I made the point that it was not for want or lack of reminding the PNC regime about the Campbell report over and over and over again. Repeatedly in this House and in other forums the call for the implementation of the Campbell report was made but there was absolutely no response. However, in 1977 according to a report I have, the then Labour Minister Winslow Carrington said this:

Cde. J. Jagan continues

1984-04-26

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

14:25 - 14:35 hrs

14:25 hrs

He spoke to a one-day Conference of the Women's Advisory Council of the Guyana Trades Union Congress at Critchlow Labour College. He said that shortly he would be making recommendations to improve the wages and conditions of employment of domestics in this country. That was a promise he made at a Conference of Women Trade Unionists in March 1977. So, again, a public promise made by the P.N.C. Government was thrown by the wayside or put into cold storage.

In October 1980, on the eve of the elections, when the Parliament had already been dissolved and when there was a Transitional National Assembly, the Minister of Labour brought forward the Household Service Workers (Hours of Work) Bill and quickly got it through Parliament because it was published in the Official Gazette on the 11th October and it was immediately brought to the Assembly and passed on October 24th.

This Bill, although it had some good features, was not really adequate, as I pointed out when I spoke on the issue. It dealt only with hours of work. That is good, yes, but the hours of work should have been tied up with the question of minimum wages and other conditions of service. As I pointed out before, the question of sick leave, the question of uniforms, the question of accommodation, whether meals are provided or not, what is the value of meals, the legislation should have covered these. All these details are not included in the Bill and therefore, in the opinion of my party, the legislation was inadequate. As the election campaigning was going on, it was merely an effort to show that was being made by the People's National Congress to do something for the domestic workers who had been neglected all the previous years.

Some of the weaknesses of this piece of legislation are apparent. I would ask the Minister to give us some positive information when he speaks on some facts which put the bite into the legislation, facts that make it real legislation and not just paper legislation. The law calls for a register to be kept by every employer. The register is to contain a record of the wages and hours of work of every household service worker and is supposed to be examined by officers of the Labour Department. I would like to ask the Minister approximately how many registers actually exist in Guyana and how many inspections have

been made since the law was introduced in 1980. If he tells me that several thousand inspections have been done I would accept that as reasonable but I have doubts because I have not yet heard of any prosecutions under this law. I have not yet heard, through the grapevine, of people being visited by members of the staff of the Ministry of Labour. I could be wrong. I hope the Minister has some very good statistics to give us on these weaknesses.

I also notice that the Minister has the power to put meat into the law by passing regulations. I cannot recall seeing any regulations having been made in relation to this. In my Motion I have referred also to the situation in Trinidad. I am not suggesting that we do exactly what Trinidad is doing as regards legislation for domestic workers, but I am suggesting it as a very fine model of what can be done in a very simple way. When I spoke in 1980 on the Household Service Workers (Hours of Work) Bill I made the point that on one single page the Trinidad and Tobago law is fulfilled. It explains fully what are household workers, which this Bill does not even deal with. It sets out very clearly the wage structure which they gave for 1980 and then they also gave an increase in 1981. For example, for a full-time household assistant for 1980 the wages set out in the law were \$55 a week and for 1981 the wages would have gone up to \$70 a week. I regret I do not have any up-date on this to know if they have gone progressively up every year or every othey year. The Trinidad law also set out the wage structure for part-time employees and for itinerant household assistants. It also includes the hours of work very simple without a whole lot of paper. It is stated in a couple of lines. In the case of Trinidad there is a different schedule of hours. There is a 44-hour week instead of a 48-hour week. For a six-day week the law sets out very clearly the vacation leave entitlement, which is 14 days. The law does not use a lot of words. The sick leave entitlement is 14 days. Other matters are listed. On one single page the Trinidad law ensured the rights of domestic workers, without a lot of fuss, and that is the reason why I introduced it.

I am not suggesting that we do what Trinidad has done. I am saying it is a very fine model. If you ask me I could sit down and in two hours give you the whole legislation on this pattern without waiting for another umpteen years which will happen if you say that your officers in the Attorney General's Chambers are...preparing other legislation. It will not take much intelligence to draft legislation if one follows the Trinidad formula. The main

thing to be done is to protect the workers and not to wait year after year before anything is done about it.

The Motion that I have presented today seeks to tie up wages and hours of work as a total entity. I am quite aware that we had this piece of legislation in 1980 but I think the correct way is to adopt the method used by the Trinidad Government, that is, to tie up the total thing of wages, hours of work, sick leave, conditions pertaining to accommodation, meals, uniforms so that everything is in one package. Then you see that the law is enforced. That is one of the main things. We have to remember that, in a society like ours with very high unemployment, the women will find it most difficult to obtain employment. Therefore more and more women are relegated to the type of work which is not considered in a favourable light. Women are then relegated to domestic work, to working in the sugar fields, to working in shops, to doing work that other people do not want to do.

(Cde. J. Jagan continues)

1984-04-26

14:35 – 14:45 hrs

National Assembly

14:35 hrs

Because of the high unemployment in this country, generally speaking – I am not saying that some women do not reach the top in their profession and all that, a single example will exist in any field – the conditions of women seeking employment are rough. Nowadays with the frozen wages and the unbelievable high cost of living and services, every single thing has gone up. Particularly with the devaluation of the dollar, everything has gone up. It, therefore, means that households now have to have more than one wage earner. Workers cannot live on one income. I think that is an acceptable fact. I do not think anyone will challenge it. They cannot live on the income of one worker, and therefore, it means that the wife has to go out and find work. Many women end up, whether they like it or not, whether they have greater talents or training, as domestic workers. Perhaps because that is the easiest work to find. But they are not really protected in this work. I have sought for many years to try to get this Assembly to pay attention to the ... Report and to use it as a basis of starting to give maximum protection to this category of women.

The State Paper on the Equality of Women which was presented to this Assembly in January 1976 has severe shortcomings because when we are dealing with the rights of women, the most fundamental right of a woman is the right to earn a decent living. Her economic conditions come first. All the others can come later. But her right to eat and her right to live come first. We also have to take into consideration that many women head single households for various reasons. It may either be because of death, divorce, sometimes out of her free will or whatever it may be, many women have to head households. How can they live unless they have the right to earn a living? Our women are not being given this right. The State Paper does not properly deal with the basic economic problems facing Guyanese women. We are nearing the end of what is called the Decade of Women. Ten years ago the United Nations set out the prospect of devoting more and more attention to the rights of women, and we come now to the end of that decade and I would like to ask if the Guyana Government can honestly say that it has done something to lift the status of women, to lift them out of the burning poverty in which they are found?

I would say no! The women of Guyana are worst off today than they have ever been. Cde. Johnson: "No, that is not true."/I think you are wrong. I think women are suffering as they have never suffered before and I think it is time that we introduce reasonable minimum wages. I should use the word 'living' minimum wage, which at this stage does not even exist for male workers. But I say let us see at this period, at the end of the United Nations Decade for Women if something positive can be done for domestic workers who form a very large segment of Guyana's working women.

The Speaker: Cde. Belgrave.

Cde. Belgrave: Cde. Speaker, in seconding this motion I am hopeful that the points raised by my colleague will be carefully understood. What it sets out to do is to call upon the People's National Congress administration to put in order the necessary documentations to ensure that the women in this country who work as domestics are properly protected. I thrust that in pursuing a reply our dear friends on the opposite side will not attempt to tuck their chests and give the Parliament the impression that they are doing anything for our women. We admit that there were a few things done for the protection of women. But for domestics it is clear that irrespective of what legislations have passed over the number of years, our domestics in various areas of employment are very much ill treated. I could remember several years ago – perhaps this would give the Trades Union Congress some inspiration – one Bidolf, a very close neighbour of mine, had started a Trade Union Movement in the interest of the domestics. I know it was crushed because in my opinion at that time, the big deciders of the country were the ones who had domestics working with them. All measures were used and the Movement was crushed. Some of them are gone and I thrust that the locals who may have taken over their positions will understand that it vitally important that this movement must be revived. When my colleague was speaking she made an important point that there was legislation to some measure. There have been some movement in this Parliament towards the protection of women. But those legislations are honoured in the breach. They are now using a system they call live-in domestics. I am wondering if we had a close look over the number of years as to what happened to live-in domestics. What protection live-in domestics are given? They are not using the system now where you come, you work and you leave.

1984-04-26

14:35 – 14:45 hrs

There are three types of domestics, half day domestics, full-time domestics and live-in domestics where you are called upon to live on the premises, you are given meals and a little room. But your take home pay, your connection with your families is restricted. In some cases male counterparts have limited time to visit their wives and in some cases wives are not employed at all. They want little girls who have no responsibility and even their little friends will have to seek them over the fence sometimes at midnight to have a chat. They are now hemmed in. They are now in the days where we had slave values cushioned between the walls of employers. Maybe the Minister in pursuing this matter can have a close look at what happens to live-in domestics. It may help somewhat.

Cde. Speaker, the next part I would like the Minister to have a look at is, a great deal of the law have been infringed in terms of National Insurance Scheme. There are several domestics who have been approaching me claiming that their employers are not covering them with N.I.S. Now I would like to know what system the Ministry of Manpower and Co-operatives has set up to ensure that each one of these workers within Guyana are covered or protected by that important part of the law, in case of accidents and so on.

14:45 hrs

(Cde. Belgrave continues)

I am positive that my very good friend across the table is going to have a look into this question.

Domestics form an important part in this country. Domestics help those individuals who, unfortunately, may not be able to help themselves as they ought to or who have been earning salaries and wages in other places and cannot carry out the chores that they would like to carry out during the day. In other words, they play an important part in some people's homes. The gap between the rich and the poor exist within the walls and the thinking of domestics. Domestics have to be protected in a manner close to what we feel by way of this Motion.

I do not support the amendment. I know my very good friend would want to indicate that the regime has done something or is doing something or is prepared to do something. But I think they got caught here because the P.N.C. has been thumping their chests so long about their work and women, and has forgotten that a report is in their possession. That report has got some values within the same rights by which they are speaking for the benefit of women. I do not think we have male domestics, they are a few. Generally, when we speak of domestics we speak of women and I anticipate that they ought to look at this thing very seriously.

When this question was raised by the P.P.P. in this Parliament in 1978 the question of minimum pay had not been answered. I am hopeful that when the Minister is replying he would be able to indicate to this Assembly positively either the intention or maybe order may have been contemplated that a minimum wage for domestics ought to be a reality in this country. I am hopeful that our points will strike home to our friends on the other side and they will see no need for the amendments they have tabled but to accept the Motion which Cde. Janet has able presented and represented in this Assembly this afternoon.

Motion proposed.

The Minister of Manpower and Co-operation (Cde. Denny): Cde. Speaker, I think that the Motion presented by Cde. Janet Jagan maybe has good intentions but I would be failing in my responsibility to this nation if I did not attempt to set the record straight. The Motion as presented does not give the full facts. It is true that the first Whereas Clause is

true. It is true that the former Labour Minister, Winslow Carrington, did make that promise at a forum outside this Assembly. But in the view of this Government, in the view of the Ministry of Manpower and Co-operatives, the third Whereas Clause is irrelevant. If, indeed, the Member of the Assembly wants the Trinidad and Tobago circumstances to be a model, nothing is wrong with her presenting it to us for us to have a look at it. But that has not been done as yet.

We are submitting that that third Whereas Clause is not relevant because the circumstances of Guyana are quite different from the circumstances of Trinidad and Tobago and we are not prepared to lift lock, stock and barrel; hook, line and sinker that pertains in the Trinidad and Tobago circumstances. We are saying that the Resolve Clause is not accurate in terms of what is contained in the legislation Act No. 17/1980. That is the raison detre that is the rationale for the amendments. We are saying, therefore, delete the third Whereas Clause and substitute the following:

"AND WHEREAS by the Household Service Workers (Hours of Work) Act 1980 (No. 17), legislation to cover overtime (after eight hours per day and forty-eight hours per week), off-day, Register of Wages, hours and conditions of work was enacted.:

AND WHEREAS legislation to cover vacation leave for full time and part-time household service workers is in existence."

As a matter of fact, Cde. Jagan, I think, knows and will remember – she was Minister of Labour at a time when Jai Ramphal was Commissioner – the HWP law, holidays with pay, leave calculated on the basis of one days' pay for each completed month of service and the question when you are calculating pay in lieu of leave where the value of meals would be considered, the value of meals would be computed. She will remember that. So that has been in existence for some time.

What we are saying is that we agree to the drafting of legislation to provide for minimum pay and other matters relating to working conditions of domestics not covered by the legislation of 1980. So I believe this amendment is not problematic. It is something that she should accept. Prior to this Sitting I had discussions with her and she expressed her reservations in accepting the amendments.

If I am permitted to continue, the Campbell Committee which was headed by Lucille Campbell who was a teacher of Geography, a woman, was appointed sometime in November 1965. It investigated conditions of employment and wages of domestic workers.

The word "domestic" come from the Latin "domot" meaning home; private homes, guest houses and hotels. This Committee made a number of recommendations. It was an Advisory Committee. I want to indicate at this stage the difference between an Advisory Committee and an Arbitration Tribunal. When an Arbitration Tribunal sits it makes an award which is binding on the parties or binding on the Government, as the case might be. In the case of an Advisory Committee, it merely makes recommendations and it does not follow ipso facto that all the recommendations have got to be accepted simultaneously. What we are discussing is very significant today. This is Critchlow week, Labour week, when Cde. Jagan has on her red dress.

What did the Campbell Report recommend? It recommended sick leave, maternity leave – but is it not true that Cde. Jagan said that she worked along with Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow in those early days trying to organise domestics into trade unions? She also spoke of the difficulty they encountered because of the nature of the employment. Domestics are easily findable, to put it like that, and so when you have private dwelling homes they easily get rid of these people. She spoke of the difficulty to organise them into trade unions and so even though you put legislation for sick leave, etc. sometimes the enforceability of it is not as easy.

Let us understand the realities. Many of these domestics are employed by people who work full-time. Since they work full time the domestics are the ones who have the right to the homes of the people and sometimes they, the domestics themselves, leave the jobs. I am not saying they are dishonest. There have been a few cases which came to the Ministry, cases where domestics have stolen a number of things from their employers.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

14:55 hrs

(Cde. K. Denny continues)

I was making the point that as a Government we are prepared to examine those areas especially the area of minimum pay. I want to give that assurance and more than that, what we have put in place. We have put in place, let me itemise them because I don't want to repeat the thing adnauseam. We have put in place hours of work. We have put in place overtime. We have put in place sick leave and maternity leave as provided for by NIS Chapter 36:01 no 15 of 1969 – it covers all of them under the NIS. We have put in place day-off provided for by the legislation of 1980. That day off is based on twenty four continuous hours in any one week. Instead of giving every other Sunday and every other holiday what we have done is to put in place every week that they get a day off. We have put in place the record card. We have put in place a register of wages which has been provided by the Act of 1980. We have in place since her time the holidays with pay provided for by the legislation Order no. 72 of 1959 when the P.P.P. was in office, that is true.

As regards the question of uniform, protective clothing and accommodation, I am submitting it can be examined. With relation to the minimum wage we have to look at that.

She spoke of the rise in cost of living. It is a fact but I don't think she has in mind the unrealistic wage which Dr. Jagan referred to on Friday 16th March of nine hundred and something dollars as recommended by the Melville Committee. I don't think that is what she is talking about because what is going to happen if this Government were to put in place a national minimum wage, when you talk about a national minimum wage it will have to cover all categories of workers including domestics and if your national minimum wage is so high it can result in unemployment among the category of workers known as domestics to whom Cde. Jagan speaks. So that is the point that we have to be very careful about.

I am saying we are prepared as a Government to effect legislation on the question of minimum wage. We are prepared to do that and we are prepared to look at the other areas. I am not saying we are prepared to effect legislation, we are willing to examine it and I am prepared to maybe have the P.P.P. involved in examining it.

1984-04-26

14:55 – 15:05 hrs

I want to make some other points Cde. Speaker about live-in domestic. Some of them we need to put in place this minimum wage – the thing is on both sides. There are some wicked employers where domestics are concerned, by the same token there are some domestics – that we as a Government concerned with the interest of the working people and the working class and domestics in particular who are women and it is unfortunate to hear Cde. Jagan say that the lot of the women in this country, their lot is worse than it used to be. That is not factual. The facts do not reveal that. The facts reveal that the position of women in this country has improved significantly and phenomenally. Have you not seen the various skills that women are getting today? Skills that they did not have. Ask Agnes Bend-Kirton-Holder:

Cde. Speaker, I am making the point that the Ministry of Manpower in collaboration with the NIS – I want you to hear this Ram – when the Labour Officer investigates a report, when he inspects premises under the Labour Act Chapter 98:01 he looks at the question of NIS and if there are breaches he brings it to the attention of the NIS Inspector, but you will agree that there are some people who have domestics that we can never know about. How the country is spread and the nature of the jobs in some cases you will not know. Cde. Jagan asked me if we have been visiting homes where domestics are employed. Yes, we have been. The Labour Officers have been but I have not come armed with statistics and I don't want to give you statistics that are not realistic and not true but what I am saying as far as I am concerned, I know we have been for many years carrying our inspection and investigation in the homes – not by telephone, where the Labour Officer visits and they see the circumstances and the environment in which the domestics work. So it is true to say that we have visits. You will agree however, that no matter how good your police system is there will be some who will escape. So I am not saying there has not been a few employers who have been able to escape but by and large we in the Ministry, we have a policy where we deal with all of them that we get and then people come to the Ministry and complain. Complaints are made to the Ministry and when these complaints are made the Officers go and they investigate the thing objectively and they try to bring it to a settlement.

1984-04-26

14:55 – 15:05 hrs

At one time not only the Guyana Labour Union was trying to organise domestics but the CCWU, a union that has great affinity to another union GAWU but even that union failed. Having said that, I am submitting to this House that we ought to accept the amended motion standing in my name but if Cde. Jagan examines the amended motion she will recognise that it does not do violence to her motion. It does not really do violence if she accepts it because I as Minister have given the unambiguous undertaking what we will do but why we want the amendment is because her motion does not set out the facts accurately. That is the reason but in broad terms we are committed to look in at minimum pay and other matters that have relevance that have not been mentioned in the 1980 Act and we are even prepared to involve the P.P.P. in this examination because a committee can be set up to look into it so Cde. Speaker, I really commend the amended motion to this honourable House.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

15:05 hrs

Cde. J. Jagan: (replying): Cde. Speaker, having given consideration to the amendments moved by the Minister of Manpower and Cooperatives, I would say that some of them could be acceptable. There are two points I want to ask the Minister to consider. I want to know why in the Resolve Clause the word 'immediate' has been removed. That is sinister. We waited from 1966 to the present for some consideration to be given to this matter. Another Minister, Cde. Carrington, in 1977 made a promise and did not fulfill it until many years later. I think he was out by then. One does not know. The present Minister may not be a Minister and if he does not use the word 'immediate' the promise may not be fulfilled. I think he should be man enough to leave in to the word 'immediate' or include the words 'very early.' He should not leave it bald because it suggests that it is going to be ducked again and that it will sit for a number of years. The fact that the word 'immediate' is being deleted is significant. I would suggest that if he does not want to use the word 'immediate' at least he should use a word that recommends that drafting should begin very soon.

I still do not agree with the statement that the Household Service (Amendment) Bill deals with the condition of work. He says there is legislation to cover hours of work, overtime, the register of wages and conditions of work. Perhaps he can tell me what conditions of work he had in mind when he used the phrase. I suggest that the words 'conditions of work' in that last line be deleted and that the words 'some other conditions' be inserted.

I reply now to some of the points the Minister made. I do not think it is seemly for the Minister of Labour to give that sick old excuse about introducing laws to protect domestic workers, the excuse that there is difficulty in enacting it and that there are problems in that respect. The fact is that the Minister has a duty to domestic workers to give them the protection of legislation.

In relation to the questions I asked about the use of registers and about the hours of work being implemented, I give notice now, since the statistics could not be given today, that I am going to table a Question in this Parliament asking for specific information.

I do hope that it will be dealt with within a short space of time as should be the case with Parliamentary Questions. My colleagues Cyril Belgrave had to refer to a Question which he submitted to Parliament in 1978. In 1978 he asked: When will legislation for minimum wages for domestics be implemented? I think he is still waiting for an answer. I give notice that I intend to ask specific Questions because legislation without teeth is just paper. It is just fooling people and means very little. That is why I have doubts that the 1980 law is for real. I wish it was but my instincts and my observations tell me it has not been for real. I give the Minister an opportunity to prove himself by giving specific answers as to how many visits have been made, how many registers they estimate exist and if any prosecution have been made.

The Minister boasts about the interest of his Government in the conditions of women and he says much has been done. However, I would take it not as a personal matter of any abhorrence of me personally, but as a sign of disinterest on the part of the leading members of the Government that there is only one Minister sitting here on the whole Front Bench and that Minister has to be here to table some Motions. That indicates a lack of interest in women's affairs, in fact, in the affairs of poor women because who are domestics? Domestics have no social status, domestics are ordinary working women but not one of the Ministers of this Government who sit on the Front Bench has enough interest in what is going on today to be present. That gives me an indication of how the Government respects the problems of working women.

I should like, in closing, to read an excerpt from a report by the Women's Progressive Organisation to the World Congress of Women which was held in October 1981 in Czechoslovakia where they were speaking of conditions of women in this country. The report repeats some of the points I have made and makes them clear:

"On the whole, job opportunities for women are limited to the menial and the lowest paid. The main reason for this is the general high unemployment which exists in Guyana, and which hits women workers the hardest. Equality for women at work and equality for job opportunities are always limited by unemployment with the general formula that women are the 'last hired and the first fired'.

Thus the high unemployment in Guyana, which ranges up to 30% - the government will not divulge the real figures – severely limits job opportunities for women. The main employment of women then is in the most undesirable fields – domestic servants, shop clerks, waitresses and hotel employees, field work in the sugar industry and sweat labour in the garment industry. In the professions, women dominate in nursing, and, arising out of historical reasons, in the teaching profession. Women office workers, mainly typists, in the government service and in the private sector, also predominate".

1984-04-26

15:05 – 15:15 hrs

It makes the point that the basis of women's rights is the right of women to earn a living, the right of women to have good economic conditions, to be able to buy the necessities of life, to be able to have running water, to be able to cook with stoves where the fuel is available, to be able to have a steady supply of electricity and all the amenities of life which we expect at this time.

I would say that the Government of Guyana has a long way to go. The yeah, yeah, yeah and the claps do not make the real point that women do not have a fair share of what is in this country today.

The Speaker: I will now put the Motion as moved by Cde. Janet Jagan.

Motion put and negatived.

The Speaker: I will now put the amended version of the Motion as moved by Cde. Denny.

Amended version of the Motion put and carried.

#### ADJOURNMENT

Resolved: "That this Assembly do now adjourn until Thursday, 1984-05-03 at 14:00 hrs." /The Minister of Energy and Mines/

Adjourned accordingly at 15:15 hrs.