

T H E
P A R L I A M E N T A R Y D E B A T E S
O F F I C I A L R E P O R T S
/ V O L U M E 1 0 /

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE THIRD SESSION (1983) OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FOURTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

29th Sitting

14:00 hrs

Friday, 1984 - 06 - 22

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (70)

Speaker (1)

- * Cde. Sase Narain, O.R., J.P., M.P.,
 Speaker of the National Assembly

Members of the Government - People's National Congress (57)

Prime Minister (1)

- Cde. Dr. P.A. Reid, O.E., M.P., (Absent - on Leave)
 Prime Minister

Other Vice-Presidents (4)

- Cde. H.D. Hoyte, S.C., M.P., (Absent - on Leave)
 Vice-President, **Production**,

- Cde. H. Green, M.P., (Absent - on Leave)
 Vice-President, Social Infrastructure

- Cde. B. Ramsaroop, M.P.,
 Vice-President, Party and State Matters

- * Cde. Dr. M. Shahabuddeen, O.R., S.C., M.P., (Absent)
 Vice-President and Attorney General

Senior Ministers (6)

- Cde. R. Chandisingh, M.P., (Absent - on Leave)
 Minister of Education, Social Development and Culture

- Cde. R.H.O. Corbin, M.P.,
 Minister of National Mobilisation

- Cde. H. Rashid, M.P.,
 Minister of Energy and Mines

- * Cde. R.E. Jackson, M.P., (Absent)
 Minister of Foreign Affairs

- * Cde. J.R. Thomas, M.P.,
 Minister of Home Affairs

- * Cde. C.B. Greenidge, M.P.,
 Minister of Finance and Economic Planning

- * Non-elected Member

Ministers (7)

Cde. U.E. Johnson, M.P.,
Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister

Cde. Sallahuddin, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Agriculture

Cde. R.C. Fredericks, A.A., M.P.,
Minister of Youth and Sport within the Ministry
of Education, Social Development and Culture

Cde. S. Prashad, M.P.,
Minister of Transport within the Vice-Presidency
of Social Infrastructure

* Cde. Y.V. Harewood-Benn, M.P.,
Minister of Information and Public Service

(Absent – on Leave)

* Cde. Dr. R.A. Van West-Charles, M.P.,
Minister of Health and Public Welfare

* Cde. K.W.E. Denny, M.P.,
Minister of Manpower and Co-operatives

Ministers of State (2)

Cde. M. Corrica, M.P.,
Minister of State within the Ministry of Internal
Trade and Consumer Protection

Cde. H.L.B. Singh, M.S., M.P.,
Minister of State within the Ministry of Regional
Development

Parliamentary Secretaries (3)

Cde. A.W. Bend-Kirton-Holder, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary, Housing, within the
Ministry of Health and Public Welfare

Cde. D.A.N. Ainsworth, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary within the Ministry of
Education, Social Development and Culture

Cde. B. Bhaggan, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary in the Office of the
Prime Minister

(Absent – on Leave)

* Non-elected Member

Other Members (23)

Cde. M. Ally, M.P. (Absent)
Cde. M. Armogan, M.S., J.P., M.P.
Cde. B. Beniprashad, M.P.
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. (Absent)
Cde. E.F. Gilbert, M.P.
Cde. J. Gill-Mingo, M.P.
Cde. A. McRae, M.P.
Cde. E. Melville, M.P.
Cde. J.M. Munroe, J.P., M.P.
Cde. R.N. Primo, M.P.
Cde. P.A. Rayman, M.P. (Absent - on leave)
Cde. C.G. Sharma, J.P., M.P.
Cde. B. Tiwari, M.P., Government Chief Whip
Cde. C. Vandenburg, M.P.
Cde. R.E. Williams, M.P.

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 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/Mazaruni)
Cde. D. Abraham, M.P. (Region No. 8 - Potaro/Siparuni)
Cde. D. Hinds, M.P. (Region No. 10 - Upper Demerara/Berbice) (Absent)

Members of the Minority (12)

(i) People's Progressive Party (10)

Minority Leader (1)

Cde. Dr. C. Jagan, M.P., (Absent - on Leave)
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. (Absent - on Leave)
Cde. H. Nokta, M.P.,

(ii) United Force (2)

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

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

14:00 hrs

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to Cdes. Reid, Hoyte, Green, Chandisingh, Bhaggan, Rayman and Belgrave for today; to Cde. Harewood-Benn until the 5th of July; and to Cde. Dr. Cheddi Jagan for five weeks from 20th June.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The following Bill was introduced and read the First time:

General Local Loan (Amendment) Bill 1984 – Bill No. 10 of 1984 /The Minister of Finance and Economic Planning/

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

FINANCIAL PAPER No. 1 OF 1984

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

The Minister of Finance and Economic Planning (Cde. Greenidge): Cde. Chairman, in accordance with article 171(2) of the Constitution I signify that Cabinet has recommended for consideration by the National Assembly the Motion for the approval of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 1 of 1984, Schedule of Supplementary Provisions for the Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$21,403,260, for the period ended 1983-12-31 and I now move the Motion.

Question proposed.

The Chairman: We will now consider the Paper as usual. The items will be taken from both the Capital and Current Estimates in the order for which the Ministers are responsible.

Page 1, items 1 to 7; page 2, items 8 to 11 and on the Capital Estimates item 1, page 1.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Chairman, item 4, Guyana Defence Force. The legend reads:

"To meet cost of salaries to Matarkai employees and other outstanding liabilities."

But this amount is placed under the Guyana Defence Force. I would like to know who are these employees and what work they do. Those are my first questions. If this is a project now operated by the Guyana Defence Force one would expect that the members of the G.D.F. would receive their normal salaries from the regular source.

The other thing that bothers me about this particular subhead is that from time to time we have been allocating and voting money for the Matarkai project but up to this moment, as I am speaking in this Assembly, there has been no report on that project. The Parliament should be told what is going on there. Further, what has been the total expenditure on that project? Has there been any revenue accruing from it and, if so, in what part of the Estimates is that revenue shown? We feel strongly on this item. We think that money is being wasted here and the return is negligible. In the circumstances, I think it is timely for a thorough investigation to be carried out on the Matarkai project from its inception to the current time so that a proper report can result from such exercise showing in clear terms what has been the input, if at all there has been any income accruing from it and what has been planted over the years there, if it is purely an agricultural project, bearing in mind that that project emerged from the closure of the manganese plant.

On page 2, item 8, the sum of \$42,000 is allocated and the legend reads "Voted Provision inadequate." What is listed here is "Services Purchased." What kind of services? Whose services have we purchased? We wish to have the detailed amount for each service so that we can clearly know what we are voting for this afternoon.

Mr. M.F. Singh: Page 1, item 4. The last speaker raised the same questions that I have listed here to raise. So I support him but I want to supplement his questions by asking whether salaries for the employees at Matarkai were not provided for in last year's Estimates. We knew they were there: we knew there were employees. We knew that we had to pay them salaries. Surely their salaries would have been provided for somewhere in the Estimates. Is it that we are now, according to the legend, being asked to provide money to meet the cost of salaries? I would like to add that as a supplementary to the last speaker's questions.

With respect to the Capital Estimates, item 1, Division – President, Subhead – Guyana Defence Force, the supplementary provision now sought is \$650,700 "To meet cost of freight on transport equipment." I suppose I can ask what kind of transport equipment has been bought. I do not know if it is a military secret. However, I would like to say that for some time now I have seen transport equipment for the Guyana Defence Force travelling along the road and in my opinion their drivers are the wildest drivers in this country. The other day I was coming back from the airport and I saw a G.D.F. vehicle in the trench.

Their vehicles pass me on the roads as though they are flying, flying low.

The Chairman: I cannot let this go on. You may ask a Question on it.

Mr. M.F. Singh: This concerns transport equipment. They are destroying the vehicle.

The Chairman: Cde. Ramsaroop.

The Vice-President, Party and State Matters (Cde. Ramsaroop): Cde. Chairman, with respect to item No. 4, Guyana Defence Force, Expenses Specific to the Agency. Since last year July the Matarkai complex, following the instructions of the Cde. President, became an agricultural garrison and it is consequent upon that decision that expenditure of funds was required. The funds spent were intended for the payment of the civilian population who still remain under this garrison and who hitherto worked with Matarkai. The amount therefore sought in item 4 would be needed to defray the advances that were taken from the Contingencies Fund last year in pursuance of that decision by the Cde. President.

This area, since it was taken over as a garrison, would, by its very nature, be under the command and superintendence of the military and para-military forces. Consequently, that is the explanation of its being under the G.D.F.

The forces have been doing a remarkable job in this respect since they took over the area in terms of transforming it and the civilian population which has supplemented the forces. Among other things they have been doing are repairs to the buildings in that area, repairs to essential services like generators needed for the supply of electricity in the area, the provision and serviceability of water pumps, the repairs to train that commute in the area, telecommunication facilities, the opening of a consumers' outlet, the maintenance of railroad and airstrip facilities and services.

With respect to the question specifically asked by Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, in the light of the fact that this new arrangement has only materialised since last July, I would wish to recommend to him that he put it down as a Question to the Assembly, so that there can be more detailed particulars on these matters.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY14:10 hrs

(Cde. Ramsaroop continues)

On page two Cde. Chairman, with respect to item 8, Services Purchased, the nature of the services there contemplated would be services rendered by Plant Maintenance and Hire Division and the Guyana National Trading Corporation essentially for pieces of equipment and typewriters, air conditioners, maintenance of vehicles and so on.

On the capital side the money that is now sought at item 1 to be approved by this Assembly was used for the acquisition of vehicles. This legend is slightly incorrect. It has nothing to do with freight; it is for the acquisition of vehicles and other pieces of transport equipment.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Chairman, my first supplementary question would be on item 4 on page 1. Before the President ordered the change, did they carry out an auditing exercise to ascertain what was the status of Matarkai when they closed that chapter and before they handed it over to the Garrison? My experience in another forum has taught me the lesson that many of these bodies are abruptly closed down; there is no record to show what transpired subsequently and when you reach at another stage to really pursue financial investigation, you are in a state of absolute disarray. In the circumstances, I think the Parliament ought to know whether an investigation was carried out, cum-auditing, to ascertain what was the total status of Matarkai at the time when that Order was made.

The Chairman: I will not allow that. The question that we are dealing with is the payment of salaries in respect of the Garrison. If you want to deal with Matarkai that is something else.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: I was only asking, sir, based on the Minister's answer. With the greatest respect, I thought it was very pertinent. I would like to suggest that if the Government is coming to Parliament with a Supplementary Estimate, it should be better armed with information so that the Assembly could be told exactly what is the position. It is easy to say that we should submit questions, but I do not think...

The Chairman: The problem is that you submit but you don't get answers.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Thank you very much, Sir. So that is our problem; we don't get answers here and when we submit questions they are not placed on the Order Paper. With respect to the services rendered too, there are different Heads, there are different departments. To bulk them, in my opinion, is irregular. Those things should have been specifically stated. The Assembly is left to guess exactly what has in fact transpired.

Cde. Ram Karran: With respect to the Hon. Minister's statement that His Excellency the President has directed, I would like to know if the Hon. Minister who advises His Excellency the President did not recall that in changes of this nature the Constitution requires His Excellency the President to send messages to the Parliament so that the Parliament could be aware of what is taking place. Is the Hon. Minister saying that His Excellency the President is acting as a dictator? Can he change departments at will without this Assembly being told about it? It is ridiculous.

The Chairman: Page 4 item 6, page 4 item 26, page 1 item 5 to 8.

Cde. N. Persaud: Cde. Chairman, under item 8, Plant Maintenance and Hire Division the sum or.../Interruption/

The Chairman: We are dealing with Capital.

Cde. N. Persaud: Plant Maintenance and Hire Division, the sum of \$341,000.00 is being sought to purchase motor vehicles, according to the legend. As we are aware, this sum has already been advanced from the Contingencies Fund. My questions therefore would be:

- (1) What types and how many of each type of vehicles are purchased?
- (2) What was the cost of these vehicles?
- (3) Whether the relevant Minister would be in a position to tell us out of that fleet of vehicles, how many are still in working order today and where are they being used?

Cde. Prashad: Cde. Chairman, the answer is that this money was used to purchase motor vehicles from Guyana National Trading Corporation and ten Datsun cars. They are all in working condition.

Cde. N. Persaud: Cde. Chairman, I asked the questions (1) What are they being used for? and (2) Where are they being used? If the Minister can't answer those questions, I think he should say so. But I think there are answers to them.

The Chairman: I don't think this is the kind of way we should behave. Probably he may not have recalled.

Cde. Prashad, they said you did not answer two questions: (1) Where are the vehicles? and (2)

For what are they being used?

Cde. Prashad: The vehicles are being used for Government purposes.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY14:20 hrs

The Speaker: Page 5, items 35 – 43 and page 6, items 44 – 47; page 2, item 9; page 6, item 48; page 2, items 12 – 14, page 3, items 15 – 24, page 4, item 25 and on the Capital Estimates page 1, item 3.

Cde. J. Jagan: Mr. Speaker, on item 14, page 2, I would like more information on the \$300,000 which have been allocated for "increased costs of food-stuff for prisoners and handling and storage fees to funeral parlours." We have had frequent reports that prisoners are suffering from beri beri, which is a result of inadequate diet. To this effect, Questions have been put by the Opposition in this Assembly but so far they have not been answered. We would like further information on the type of food the prisoners are getting and if it is sufficient to prevent the prisoners from getting dietary diseases. We are very concerned about that. We also note that the question of funeral expenses is also involved and we would like to know if the funeral expenses are increasing as a result of the poor nutrition being given to prisoners.

Mr. M.E. Singh: Mr. Chairman, page 1, item 13 – Benefits and Allowances. At the beginning of the year it was felt, after due consideration, that the sum of \$6,803,000 would have been sufficient under this subhead. Later in the year a supplementary provision of \$1,782,000 was granted. Now we are told that out of the Contingencies Fund \$1,537,593 was advanced "to meet cost of increased Laundry and House Allowance." This is a fantastic sum of money. It is over \$1-1/2 million. Can the honourable Minister tell us how much was for increased laundry allowance? I do not know how increased laundry cost could be anything like \$1,000,000. How much is increased laundry cost? How much is increased house allowances, what were the personal increases for house allowances? The figure seems far too fantastic. Could we get a separation to show what the house allowances and the personal increases are?

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Items 24 and 25, there was a provision of \$17,000 and now the sum of \$50,000 is being sought. The increase in salaries is three times the original amount.

I would like to know if the Minister could tell us whether there has been an increase in the number of staff or whether this amount represents payment to staff that was already there?

I am seeing that there has been no registration exercise. The Minister probably will be disposed to tell us what these people are doing at the office there currently or if he is preparing for a registration exercise and this is preparatory work in preparation. Is it a hangover in preparation for a registration exercise and if so when will he announce the period for registration?

Item 25 – Service Purchased "to replace registers and forms and to provide for the binding of books." I want to say that the Minister has recently taken certain action. I want to commend the action, save and except to say that it was too late. You will recall, Sir, that I have before alluded to areas of irregularities, fraud, scandal in that department resulting in serious hardships to the public. The department has been closed; the hardship is still continuing because people would like to get marriage forms, birth certificates and what have you. This department is operated in a restricted way. One can understand that in view of the general evaluation and what have you but as I said the action is late. Will the Minister say when the department will be opened? May I advise the Minister that there is need for a lot more cleaning up in the place. At the moment, I simply want to say that I'll be prepared to talk to him.

I want also to ask the Minister if he is considering reducing the size of the birth certificate? That will save cost. All you need on a birth certificate is date, month, year, place of birth and the names of the parents. Probably the name of the informant. I hope that the Ministry will give some consideration to my suggestion. It is based on tremendous experience. There have been countless cases of erroneous entries. I am asking whether consideration could not be given to a reduction in the size of those forms, to lessen the information. This is a very important department. Is the Minister aware also that generally people are being told that books are in a bad way, no information could be seen, with the result that some people do not get birth certificates at all. What consideration is being given in this area so that some investigation could be carried out to ensure that there is some kind of arrangement, whether filming or what have you, to ensure that the department is always fortified with information to issue birth certificates without any delay to members of the public.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY14:30 hrs

(Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud continues)

I want to repeat my earlier question: When will that department be re-opened fully?

The Minister of Home Affairs (Cde. Thomas): Cde. Chairman, permit me to respond to the questions asked by the Member, Cde. Janet Jagan, in the first place. The explanatory note says exactly what the request is for, but since the Member alluded to the question of feeding of prisoners and to her attempts to get answers to those questions tabled in the Assembly, perhaps it would be good if I point out that this sum is required to feed prisoners who are in police custody. These are not people who are in our jails. As a result of the efforts of the police, we have been unable to satisfy the feeding requirements from whatever little agriculture the police are involved in at the Georgetown prisons and in other prisons the situation is different because of the efforts of the prisoners in producing food for themselves.

I think I ought to remark that the Comrade made suggestions that prisoners are dying from beri beri and things were not well in the prisons. I suspect that she made those comments because she herself has not visited the prisons over the past few years. On March 13th James Ivor Duxberry, who is a member of the executive of Amnesty International, visited the prisons and permit me to quote from a report that he submitted for the benefit of the Parliament. Insofar as the Georgetown prisons are concerned he had this to say and I quote:

"I did speak to quite a number of prisoners. They had nothing bad to say about their treatment. The only thing they had to say was that it took too long to go for trial. The officers were most helpful at this prison. I could not find anything wrong."

About the Lusignan prison he had this to say:

"Again I spoke to the prisoners and they had nothing to say about the treatment they received. Again the officers were most helpful and the place was very clean. The prisoners can have visitors. They have a very good supply of books etc. They said the food was very good. I had words with the prisoners and officers and they seem to get on well together. I found nothing wrong at the prison camp. The prisoners can smoke and even have visitors."

He went to the Belbaag prison also and he had this to say about that camp:

"It is indeed a place that is so beautiful that I feel it is a showpiece for the world to see.

Indeed, it is so nice. All prisoners were visited by the Church representative from Georgetown.

I found nothing wrong in the prisons I visited and I do not believe that a show was put on for me."

I can make a copy of this report available to the Comrades. As you know, Cde. Chairman, Amnesty International does not speak for this Government and for the prison authorities.

Mr. Feilden Singh asked about the increases which had to do with item 13, Head 21 – Police, subhead 203 – Benefits and Allowances. The percentage increases really escape my memory this time but my recollection is that laundry allowances, for instance, were doubled. The allowance was increased by 100 percent. I think it went from \$20 to \$40 a month which is a tidy sum if you take it over the year. Housing allowances also were increased.

The Chairman: Items 24 and 25, Cde. Thomas.

Cde. Thomas: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud had some questions to ask in relation to the G.R.O. Office. He wanted to know whether there was an increase in staff and what are the people doing at the office currently. The money requested was intended to meet the cost of increases payable to members of the staff at the Registration and Elections Office.

The Chairman: What he is saying is that the increase is about three times the sum provided.

Cde. Thomas: Let me explain. As you are aware, Cde. Chairman, in late 1982 and early 1983, senior public servants benefited from substantial increases. Unfortunately, for one reason or the other, the senior people attached to this office were not considered. As a result, there was no provision made for an increase of salary for them. This request is really to satisfy that need which will allow them to benefit like other public servants.

On this same item, item 24, Head 24 – Registration and Elections, subhead 101 – Administrative, the second question asked was: What are they doing currently? Obviously they are issuing registration cards, taking information and doing the usual routine work which must be done between elections.

On item 25 Head 25, Births, Deaths and Marriages, subhead 306 – Services Purchased, the Member Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud asked when the department will be re-opened and whether we are thinking of reducing the size of birth certificates. Originally the intention was to re-open the office on the 16th of this month because it was closed on the 16th of May. Unfortunately, the officers who are involved in the re-organisation were unable to meet that deadline. They have asked that we do not tie them down to a date at this point in time because part of the re-organisation has to do with some of the matters he raised, the re-design of forms and birth certificates, looking at the question of systems, the introduction of micro filming and a whole host of other things notwithstanding renovation to the plant, that is, the environment where they operated. This will take some time. Nevertheless, we are aiming to recommence operations there long before the end of this year. In the meanwhile a lot of help has been given to members of the public through the Ministry of Home Affairs where a skeleton staff is operating at present.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Chairman: Capital estimates, page 2, item 10.

Cde. N. Persaud: Cde. Chairman, under this item, we note that an additional sum of \$4,920,00 is now being sought. The legend says "to pay outstanding liabilities as at 1982-12-31 incurred by Government Ministries, Departments and Regions."

I want to submit that this really doesn't help us. I would like to enquire first of all, what are the liabilities incurred? What is the sum for the Ministries? What is the sum involved for the Departments? What is the sum involved for the Regions? In the case of the regions, which are the regions? The whole sum here, \$4.9 million is vague. One would not be able to understand clearly what is meant here.

The Chairman: Cde. Greenidge.

Cde. Greenidge: Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman. I am sorry to hear that the distinguished member finds that the note is not very helpful. Let us therefore see if we can help him.

The bulk of the liabilities indicated here are for liabilities incurred by Guyana Transport Services Limited. It amounts to something like \$4 million. Those liabilities were incurred as a result of the reductions in the phase for the transportation of pensioners and school children. That is the largest single element there. The other elements – the sum is \$920,000 – apply to a range of items, a range of regions and they are really small items here and there. If you want a comprehensive list Cde. Chairman, I can perhaps pass it to the member in private. But there are so many that I do not think it is worth reading them out now.

The Chairman: Page 1, item 2 – Capital Estimates; page 4, items 27 – 33; page 5 item, 34 and Capital Estimates page 1, item 4; page 4, items 27 – 33; page 5, item 34 and Capital Estimates page 1, item 4.

Comrades, this completes consideration of all the items.

Mr. M.F. Singh: Thank you sir. I was standing.

The Chairman: The fact that you stand does not necessarily mean that I see you.

Mr. M.F. Singh: Page 4, item 32. I do not want to be sensational; I did have a private chat with the Minister outside. The legend says that the supplementary provision sought, \$1.230 million is, "To meet costs of drug and field materials for hospitals." I am not questioning the amount being sought; I am not saying it is too much.

What I am saying is that there are a lot of allegations being made. I had a private chat with the Minister and I will continue to talk with him privately. Since so many allegations are being made about shortage of drugs at the hospital, I do think that perhaps the Minister would like to make a statement as regards the state of the supply of drugs in respect of the hospital. The other matters I will raise with him privately.

The Chairman: There is a Head, Mr. Singh, under which Ministers could make statements, Statements by Ministers. If he so wishes, he could always do that under that Head, but I have not been informed that he is so desirous of doing today. If you want to ask him some question under that item, certainly.

Mr. M.F. Singh: The legend says "To meet costs of drug and field materials for hospitals." Is this enough to meet the cost of drugs?

The Chairman: Cde. Van West Charles.

Cde. Van West Charles: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. This is the amount voted last year. It does not reflect the sum voted this year. The drugs imported last year were adequate and this is the expenditure we have had. Therefore, there is no difficulty as far as we are concerned.

The Chairman: This completes consideration of all the items. I will now put the Motion.

Question –

That the Committee of Supply approve of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 1/1984 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$21,403,260, for the period ended 1983-12-31 (Advances made from the Contingencies Fund in 1983).

put, and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

Cde. Greenidge: Cde. Speaker, I beg to report to the Assembly that the Committee of Supply has considered Financial Paper No. 1/1984 and passed it without amendment. I now move that this Assembly doth agree with the Committee's Resolution.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

BILL – SECOND AND THIRD READINGSGUYANA NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS BILL 1984

A Bill intituled:

"An Act to provide for the preparation and promotion of standards in relation to commodities, services, processes and practices by the establishment and operation of a Bureau of Standards, to establish the Guyana National Bureau of Standards and the National Standards Council, to vest the management of the Bureau in the Council, to define the objects of the Bureau and the powers and functions of the Council and for matters incidental thereto.

The Minister of Finance and Economic Planning (Cde. C. Greenidge): Cde. Speaker, I beg to move that the Guyana National Bureau of Standards Bill No. 7/1984 be now read a Second time. The Bill is intended to establish the Guyana National Bureau of Standards to be managed by the National Standards Council which is to be, in the jargon of the lawyers, a body corporate.

The Bureau's objectives are set out in the Bill. Perhaps I can distinguish four or five functions for them: the promotion of standardization in industry and commerce, the preparation of specifications and codes of practice, the testing and calibration of precision instruments and the issue of certificates in regard thereto. In addition, there is the examination and testing of local and imported manufactured commodities.

The Council under which the Bureau falls will comprise of up to fifteen members, each of whose tenure may be for as long as three years. The structure of the Council will be similar to that of any normal board, that is, it will have a Chairman and Committees, etc. The appointment of the members of the committees and the determination of their remuneration and the termination of their appointments in certain circumstances shall be the responsibility of the Minister and these are set out in the Bill.

The responsibility of the Council itself will include the formulation of National Policy. In a sense, the Council will be the custodian of the National Standards of Weight and Measure. The importance of this particular function, on which the whole Bill is premised, should need no elaboration in this forum whose primary business is similarly to protect and safeguard the interest of the public at large.

Suffice it to say that as long ago as 1979 the Caricom Council of Ministers agreed to establish bureaux in their respective states and there are now bureaux in all the other M.D.C.'s. We are in the process, therefore, of implementing that decision in line with those of our sister states.

Another function of the Council will be to advise the Minister on matters relating to standards, those matters that fall under his purview under the Act and, in the course of doing this, it will be establishing laboratories, preparing standards, specifications and its codes of practice and all those things normally associated with the functions of such a bureau.

The Council may appoint officers and other employees and fix their remuneration and other terms and condition of their employment. It will exercise disciplinary control over those employees. The Minister by order may declare a compulsory standard specification and prescribe a distinctive mark associated with it.

The administration of the Bureau itself will be the responsibility of a Director and that Director will be appointed by the Minister. The Director in turn may appoint a Chief Inspector as well as other Inspectors to enforce the provisions of the Act.

The financial resources of the Council will include sums voted for it by this Assembly. The accounts will be audited annually and the income of the Council will be exempted from the payment of income tax.

The unauthorized issue of standardization marks is an offence under the Bill and the contravention of certain provisions of the Bill is an offence. These offences are punishable both by fine and imprisonment and the penalties range from \$500.00 and imprisonment for six months to \$2,000.00 and one year's imprisonment.

Question proposed.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY14:50 hrs.Question proposed.

Cde. N. Persaud: Cde. Chairman, there can be no doubt that the import restriction and the banning of certain essential items have forced a number of people locally to start manufacturing, processing and producing certain of those items. This has its advantages and also its disadvantages, advantages in that they create employment and they try to follow and keep as far as those banned or restricted items are concerned. The disadvantages are that the public at large find themselves buying substandard goods, be they manufactured or otherwise, and so the primary function of this Bill will ensure that certain standards are met and a certain quality is preserved.

Undoubtedly we have among us some of those people who have turned to doing trade, manufacturing etc, as a result of the banning and import restriction some unscrupulous ones take advantage of the situation and, in a rush to make huge profits, supply or produce items of a substandard nature. We the consumers, the public at large, have absolutely no alternative but to buy those items that they offer for sale. We also know that some of these people – not only those who have just started because of the economic crisis, but some who existed before – have been cheating the public at large by short weight and short measurement. Therefore I would think that since the Bill provides for Inspectors to check on the measurements and weights we can only hope that some of these malpractices will be prevented.

On the other side, Cde. Speaker, I want to warn that this Bureau of Standards should not be allowed to become a white elephant perhaps like the Metrication Board which has not really gone into operation because, perhaps, the Government does not have the foreign exchange to import scales, to import the measurements and so forth to put that system into operation. The Bill provides for the furnishing, the maintaining and perhaps the establishing of laboratories. I only hope in the case of laboratories that they will be properly furnished, properly supplied and properly maintained and not be like the Metrication Board where the necessary things are not available. Therefore I said I want to warn against this Bureau of Standards becoming a white elephant like that Board.

The System, Cde. Speaker, I would urge must be properly monitored. It must be properly monitored before the Bureau can play a meaningful role. We have, for example, the Price Control Squad. Notwithstanding that, we know that blackmarketing continues all over the country, all over the pavement, all over the markets and even at some of the shops, yet the Price Control Squad is there. The Bill provides for the appointment of Inspectors. Like the Price Control Squad, I do hope that these Inspectors who are going to be appointed do not fall into the same trap and still permit the public at large to have poor quality of goods, to have short weight, short measurement etc., since the Bureau whom we are moving to establish, would not achieve its purpose.

I notice that one of the functions of the Council will be inspect factories so as to enforce conformity to the declared standards. I want, Cde. Speaker, to quote an example where there was a war between the Analyst Department and the Ministry of Health as regards the seizure of substandard and contaminated curry powder from a firm in Charlotte Street. The matter was highly publicised and a number of packets of curry powder, Indi Special Curry Powder, were seized from this place in Charlotte Street. Some packets were destroyed. Some manipulation took place from the top and there appeared a full page advertisement by the manufacturer that all the items seized were returned to them giving the impression that the goods were really not substandard or not contaminated.

This confidential letter that I have in my hand, from Mr. Woo Ming to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health, however, disputes that fact and urged the Ministry to put a correction advertisement.

For example it says:

- (2) "recommends that the Ministry of Health issue a statement correcting the inaccuracy of the advertisement as I suggested in the attached and that the Company amends the advertisement with my prior approval and
- (3) that the Analyst Department makes its own release and this should be signed by the Government Analyst Mr. Woo Ming."

I just brought this to light, Cde. Speaker, so that I can warn this House this afternoon against a recurrence where the Analyst Department moved to protect the public at large and items to the value of a million dollars were seized from one place but, as I said, there was manipulation from the top and the goods were returned after some were destroyed and the quarrel then started between the Ministry of Health and the Analyst Department.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY15:00 hrs

(Cde. Narbada Persaud continues)

Let us hope this department will not be a white elephant since the public is involved. We know for a fact that in this mad rush to make huge profits, taking advantage of the serious economic situation in which we are, a number of small people are not becoming large. They have been exploiting the people with substandard and poor quality manufactured and processed goods. Therefore I do hope, as I said, that the Bureau will not be a white elephant, that the necessary equipment, the necessary furnishing and whatever is necessary for the laboratories, will be quickly purchased and that the Bureau will get into operation.

Right now we know of certain things. Two weeks ago I was at the airport. Two persons who were going away bought a bottle of beer and in that beer was discovered a cockroach. We at the "Mirror" on numerous occasions are confronted by people who come with clothes pegs found in closed aerated bottles.

The Speaker: Cde. Narbada Persaud, did you not tell them to seek legal advice?

Cde. N. Persaud: I did. A man working at the City Council came recently with some substandard vodka. At the moment there are a number of items on sale that are not up to standard and I do hope that this Bureau gets into operation as early as possible so that the public at large can be safeguarded.

Mr. M.F. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I commend the Government for bringing this Bill to the Parliament. It is long overdue. We have been calling for it for a long time, but I suppose it is better late than never. I am also happy to hear that our sister Caribbean territories have already established Bureaux of Standards and that we are following suit.

A lot of what I would have said has been said by the last speaker so I have only little to add. It is true that for some time now too many shoddy products have been put on the market. The consumer is being short-changed, as we would say in Guyana, by being supplied with inferior goods at exorbitant prices. Also, he is not getting the correct weights because there does not seem to be an efficient system for checking scales. The attitude of the seller is "Take it or leave it," because invariably the consumer does not have a choice. There is no substitute on the market. In fact, I can name a few products now that are substandard, but I shall not. I will let the Bureau do its job.

I hope that the Bureau will be set up as expeditiously as possible after the passing of this piece of legislation and that it will begin to deal with and remedy the problems which we know exist. /Interruption/You talk about the biscuit company. That is still of a very high standard. It will not come under the Bureau as food will still be under the Government Analyst.

I would also like to plead with the Minister that there be no political interference, that the Bureau be allowed to do its work independently and impartially so that we can all benefit from the high ideals that are set out in this Bill.

The Speaker: Cde. Greenidge.

Cde. Greenidge: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. It seems that I am invited to make a brief response. I was very pleased to hear Cde. Narbada Persaud indicate his pleasure at the increase in the production of local commodities. I would like to join him in his hope that the Bureau functions effectively and also, to endorse the statements expressed by Mr. Feilden Singh. I look forward to the support of both of the members when I have to come back to the Assembly for funds, for amendments to the legislation, or when the Bureau is in fact implementing the functions that we have outlined for it today.

The quality of the execution of the functions of the Bureau is going to be a matter to which I will try to pay some careful attention. I am sure that during the course of the next few months they will be happy with the way the Bureau is established and with the execution of its tasks, but in the event that they have difficulty with advice, I would be happy to meet with them or to have a word with them at any time to address their concerns.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Assembly in Committee.

The Chairman: Comrades and hon. Members, I propose to call the numbers of the clauses instead of going through the routine with each clause. If you wish to speak on any clause, kindly indicate by standing.

Clauses 1 to 18 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 19.

Clause 19 was agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill with the following correction:

Insertion of the following which was omitted after subsection (2) (b):-

"(c) makes, in connection with the sale of any commodity, any reference, directly or indirectly, to a standardisation mark in a manner or under circumstances."

Clause 20 to 27 were agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 28.

Cde. Greenidge: I am not clear as to the method of inserting the correction.

The Chairman: We will now do that. These are typographical errors.

Cde. Greenidge: Thank you very much.

Cde. Ram Karran: I think that is out of order. The only way you can enter a change is by a formal amendment. It is the Bureau of Standards Bill. We must keep the standard up. /Laughter/

Mr. M.F. Singh: I was going to raise the same point. I did speak to the legal adviser and he has the corrections. I know that he has the corrections.

The Chairman: The corrections can be announced by the Chairman. We move an amendment only if there is an amendment.

Cde. Ram Karran: There is an amendment.

Mr. M.F. Singh: There is an omission too.

The Chairman: Not in the Bill that was sent to the Assembly.

Mr. M.F. Singh: It is in the one I have.

The Chairman: Your observations are noted but they do not affect the Bill that is before me.

Mr. M.F. Singh: The one I have has an omission.

The Chairman: That is unfortunate.

Clause 28 was agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill with the following correction.

Insertion of the words "that person concerning" between the words "question" and "any" in the third line of subsection (29)."

Clause 29 to 42 were passed.

Clauses 29 to 42 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported with corrections as corrected, considered, read the Third time and passed as corrected.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

15:10 hrs

MOTION

AFFIRMATION OF THE PUBLIC LOAN ORDER 1984 (No. 21)

The Minister of Finance and Economic Planning (Cde. C. Greenidge): Cde. Speaker:

"Be it resolved that this National Assembly in terms of section 2 (2) of the Public Loan Act 1973 (No. 11), affirms the Public Loan Order 1984 (No. 21), which was made on the 9th March, 1984, and published in the Gazette on the 17th March, 1984.

The Speaker: You will have to go ahead and say that you are increasing it from what sum to \$1.5 billion and give the reasons, if you wish to.

Cde. C. Greenidge: May I have a minute please?

The Speaker: Yes. Cde. Greenidge.

Cde. C. Greenidge: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. The Amendment is intended to increase the borrowing limits from \$100 million to \$1.5 billion and it is intended to accommodate the activities of the public enterprise and their borrowing activities from the banking system.

Cde. N. Persaud: Cde. Chairman, I am not too sure whether I understood the Minister correctly that we are now moving from \$100 million or from \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion. As far as I understand, Cde. Speaker, this is the International Loan Act or what we call the General Loan Act and it deals primarily with debentures. A Notice appeared in the Gazette of the 9th of June, 1984, inviting persons to take up an issue of debenture totalling \$50,000,000 at 14-1/2 percent interest.

Now, according to the 1984 Estimates, we note that the sum of \$709,000,000 is outstanding as far as internal loans are concerned at the 31st December, 1983. According to the Order, I gather that this money is going to be used for general development purposes.

The 1984 Estimates disclosed an overall deficit of \$951,000,000 and in the explanation given in the Estimates as to how the deficits gap would be financed we are told that the sum of \$486,000,000 was going to be raised internally and primarily through debentures.

Now, \$50,000 is the second issue for this year and they hoped by the by the end of this year to raise \$486,000.00. Who are the people who take up these debentures? Not the poor man. The corporations, the insurance companies, the millionaires and the billionaires, etc. Therefore, the 14-1/2 percent interest will be going not to the benefit of the ordinary man, but to the very big man who have the half a million, one hundred thousand, fifty thousand dollars to go and buy the debentures.

The I.M.F. as we know Cde. Speaker, has been pressing this Government, and many other Governments, to close that deficit gap. What they're saying? Reduce your expenditure. We know in this country that if you are to reduce expenditure, the ailing services that we are enjoying at the moment – if I may say “enjoying” – would further deteriorate in that money will have to be withdrawn to balance the budget. The Government, for some reason or the other, decides not to do that, telling us, however, in the newspaper that if they were to do that, then it would be at the expense of the people. But where are they going to get the money to apply the 14-1/2 percent? Is it not from the toiling masses of this country? So, where are we? Back to square one. Why fool the people to say that we are not going to take the IMF order and withdraw services in order to reduce the expenditure to balance the budget. But they hope to raise \$486,000,000 by loans this year and to pay 14-1/2 percent interest. With a rough calculation, I gather that of this \$50,000,000, over \$7,000,000 will be interest charges alone to be paid out. It is not the poor man, Cde. Speaker. The poor man is not going to get the interest, but he has to pay the interest.

Now, we are asked to approve this Order this afternoon. As I said, it is wrong for the Government to reduce the expenditure as the IMF wants. I also say it is wrong to borrow such large sums of money, pay such exorbitant interest rates. The workers have to pay it to sharks at the top.

I do not want to answer Cde. Corbin, but we have been making the call and we've been making the point here over and over again how to solve the crisis in order that we can do without borrowing and pressing the hard pressed people with all these interest charges. We have put out a 13 point plan, a 17 point plan on how this economy can be recovered. We have – the recovery of the Economy. We have talked about a political solution; they are not interested.

We have shown how they can get increased production and productivity; they are not interested. But while they are not interested in that, what they do is press the people by all means and this is one of the means. They are moving it from \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion. We are talking about borrowing locally, not external borrowing. With external borrowing, as you know, when the devaluation comes or the “re-adjustment,” as they claim comes, automatically the debt goes up and if the debt goes up, the ceiling has to go up. Cde. Speaker, you know that for the past two to three years that ceiling went up about five times as far as external loan is concerned. I want to appeal to the Government this afternoon; this is more pressure on the people. This is extending the ceiling, giving them the right to borrow more. Borrowing more will mean more interest paid at the expense of the poor people who are finding hell to live in the country today. I said I want to appeal to them; let them realistically analyse what is going on in this country.

We all agree that increased production and productivity is the key to the recovery of the economy. We have been telling them for the past five years, that unless they democratize the system in this country – does it mean that the ten of us are representative, that our support in this country is only 10 percent? No. When they democratize the system to allow our people to choose their representatives freely at free and fair elections, so that we can be properly and adequately represented in this Assembly, then of course, we are going to have increased production and productivity. We will solve most, if not all, of the economic problems and we will have no need to continue to increase the ceilings, to borrow more money, to pay more interest at the expense of the poor people.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY15:20 hrs

The Speaker: Cde. Greenidge.

Cde. Greenidge: Thank you very much Cde. Speaker. I listened with great interest to the contribution of Cde. Narbada Persaud and I think I am interested to have some further exchanges with him later on the question of how one could democratize borrowing. The problem we are looking at here is this: Every Government in order to carry out its activities in an orderly manner needs to borrow. This is a problem of an imbalance between the inflows of its revenues and its expenditures and it is easy to say one can keep one's house in a tidy order – but it is not really a practicable arrangement to allow expenditure to fluctuate just as revenues fluctuate. So normally one borrows in order to smooth that out and it is a case here that the \$1.5 billion is a ceiling rather than the absolute amount. It is a ceiling that allows us some room without the need to come back every week to adjust the ceiling.

As a matter of information to Cde. Narbada the amounts to be borrowed will not all be going into the pockets of those categories of persons that he has identified. One might as well say that of every purchase that you make of soft drinks or biscuits or of anything else, a capitalists or whoever produce are the recipients or your expenditures and I am not really sure that he wanted to make that sort of distinction between those who make their money from earning interest on capital and those who are producing, but another and perhaps more important point is that the Central Bank will itself be extending about \$336 million of that issue. It is a loan from the Central Bank in part and therefore the bulk of the increase will be reflected there rather than be held by large businesses, insurance companies and so forth. Thank you Cde. Speaker.

Question –

That this National Assembly in terms of section 2 (2) of the Public Loan Act 1973 (No. 11), affirms the Public Loan Order 1984 (No. 21), which was made on 9th March, 1984 and published in the Gazette on 17th March, 1984.

put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, "That this Assembly do now adjourn to a date to be fixed."

/Vice President, Party and State Matters/

Adjourned accordingly at 15:25 hrs.