

**THE  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**[VOLUME 7]**

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

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**30<sup>th</sup> Sitting**

**2 p.m.**

**Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1974**

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**MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**Speaker**

His Honour the Speaker, Mr. Sase Naraine, J.P.

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

**Prime Minister (1)**

The Hon. L.F.S. Burnham, O.E., S.C.,  
Prime Minister

**(Absent – on leave)**

**Deputy Prime Minister (1)**

Dr. the Hon. P.S. Reid,  
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of  
National Development and Agriculture

**Senior Ministers (7)**

The Hon. H.D. Hoyte, S.C.,  
Minister of Works and Communications

\*The Hon. S.S. Ramphal, S.C.,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Justice

**(Absent)**

**\*Non-elected Minister**

\*The Hon. H. Green,  
Minister of Co-operatives and National Mobilisation

The Hon. H.O. Jack,  
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources

\*The Hon. F.E. Hope,  
Minister of Finance

\*Dr. the Hon. K.F.S. King,  
Minister of Economic Development

\*The Hon. S.S. Naraine, A.A.,  
Minister of Housing

### **Ministers (6)**

The Hon. W.G. Carrington,  
Minister of Labour

The Hon. Miss S.M. Field-Ridley,  
Minister of Information and Culture

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

\*The Hon. Miss C.L. Baird,  
Minister of Education

\*Dr. the Hon. O.M.R. Harper,  
Minister of Health

**(Absent)**

\*The Hon. G.A. King,  
Minister of Trade

### **Ministers of State (9)**

The Hon. M. Kasim, A.A.  
Minister of State for Agriculture

The Hon. O.E. Clarke,  
Minister of State – Regional  
(East Barbice/Corentyne)

**(Absent)**

### **\*Non-elected Ministers**

The Hon. P. Duncan, J.P.,  
Minister of State – Regional (Rupununi) **(Absent)**

The Hon. C.A. Nascimento,  
Minister of State, Office of the Prime Minister

The Hon. M. Zaheeruddeen, J.P.,  
Minister of State – Regional  
(Essequibo Coast/West Demerara)

\*The Hon. C.V. Mingo,  
Minister of State for Home Affairs **(Absent – on leave)**

\*The Hon. W. Haynes,  
Minister of State – Regional (Mazaruni/Potaro) **(Absent)**

\*The Hon. A. Salim,  
Minister of State – Regional  
(East Demerara/West Coast Berbice) **(Absent)**

\*The Hon. F.U.A. Carmichael,  
Minister of State – Regional (North West)

### **Parliamentary Secretaries (8)**

Mr. J.R. Thomas,  
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Housing

Mr. C.E. Wrights, J.P.  
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Works and Communications

Miss M.N. Ackman,  
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the  
Prime Minister, and Government Chief Whip **(Absent – on leave)**

Mr. E.L. Ambrose,  
Parliamentary Secretary, (Agriculture),  
Ministry of National Development and Agriculture

Mr. K.B. Bancroft,  
Parliamentary Secretary (Hinterland),  
Ministry of National Development and Agriculture

### **\*Non-elected Ministers**

Mr. S. Prashad,  
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of  
Co-operatives and National Mobilisation

Mr. J.P. Chowritmootoo,  
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education

Mr. R.H.O. Corbin,  
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of  
Co-operatives and National Mobilisation

**Deputy Speaker (1)**

Mr. R. C. Van Sluytman, Deputy Speaker

**Other Members (17)**

Mr. J.N. Aaron  
Mrs. L.N. Branco  
Mr. M. Corrica  
Mr. E.H.A. Fowler  
Miss J. Gill  
Mr. W. Hussain  
Miss S. Jaiserrisingh  
Mr. K.M.E. Jones  
Mr. M. Nissar  
Dr. L.E. Ramsahoye  
Mr. J.G. Ramson  
Mr. P.A. Raymon  
MR. E.M. Stoby, J.P.  
Mr. S.H. Sukhu, M.S., J.P.,  
Mr. C. Sukul, J.P.  
Mr. H.A. Taylor  
Mrs. L.E. Williems

**Members of the Opposition**

**Liberatory Party (2)**

Mr. M.F. Singh, Leader of the Opposition  
Mrs. E. DaSilva

**(Absent – on leave)**

**OFFICERS**

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

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly – Mr. M.B. Henry, AMBIM.

**PRAYERS****ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER****LEAVE TO MEMBERS**

**The Speaker:** Leave has been granted to the hon. Prime Minister, to the hon. Members Mr. Mingo, and the hon. Member Mr. Corbin, for today's sitting and to the hon. Member Miss Ackman for one month from the 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1974. An extension of leave has been granted to the hon. Member Mrs. DaSilva to the end of April, 1974.

**RESIGNATION OF THE DEPUTY SPEAKER**

Hon Members, I wish to inform you that on the 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1974, I receive a letter dated 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1974, from the hon. Member, Mr. Marcellus Feilden Singh, resigning the office of Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly with effect from the 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1974. The office of Deputy Speaker has, therefore, fallen vacant and the Assembly will be required to elect another Member to the office.

**ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER**

**The Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the House.

**The Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House** (Mr. Ramsaroop): Your Honour, if it may please you, I beg to nominate the hon. Member, Mr. R.C. Van Sluytman, as a fit and proper person for the office of Deputy Speaker of this National Assembly.

*Mrs. Willems seconded*

**The Speaker:** Are there any other proposals? [**Pause.**] There being no other proposals I declare the hon. Member Mr. Van Sluytman to be Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. [**Applause**]

On behalf of all Members of the National Assembly and myself I would like to offer congratulations and best wishes to the hon. Member, Mr. Van Sluytman, on his election.

### **APPOINTMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION**

**The Speaker:** Hon. Members, I also wish to advise that by an instrument given by His Excellency the President on the 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1974, the hon. Member Mr. Marcellus Feilden Singh has been appointed to the Leader of the Opposition. [**Applause**] I am sure that all Members would wish to join with me in extending hearty congratulation and best wishes to Mr. Singh on his new appointment.

### **PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS**

#### **Private Bills**

#### **THE CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**The Speaker:** Hon, Member, Mr. Corrica.

**Mr. Corrica:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay a Petition on behalf of Evangelist Alfred McCurchin of 200 Almond Street Queenstown, Georgetown, seeking to have introduced in the Assembly a Private Bill to incorporate the Church of Christ.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Clerk will read the Petition.

The Clerk read the Petition as follows:

**PETITION**

To: His Honour the Speaker and the Honourable Members of the National Assembly.

The humble Petition of Evangelist Alfred McCurchin of 200 Almond Street, Queenstown, Georgetown, respectfully sheweth as follows:-

(1) That your Petitioner is the duly appointed President of the Church of Christ in Guyana;

(2) That the said Church was established in Guyana on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of August, 1968, at Buxton Village, East Coast, Demerara, by the Reverent Carroll Pitts of the Parent Church of Los Angeles, California, United States of America, assisted by your Petitioner;

(3) That the said Church has a total membership of Three Hundred and Twenty five (325) persons who believe in and accepted the authority of the New Testament and recognise Jesus Christ as their only Head. In the circumstances, there is no need for them to enunciate a specific creed. Members assemble in congregations which are autonomous but each such congregation has a leader known as an elder;

(4) That there are five (5) places of worship in Guyana, as follows

A. COUNTY OF DEMERARA

(1) 200 Almond Street,  
Queenstown,  
Georgetown.

(2) Haslington,  
East Coast,  
Demerara.

## B. COUNTRY OF BERBICE

(3) Springlands,  
Corentyne.

(4) Kildonan Village,  
Corentyne.

(5) No. 64 Village,  
Corentyne.

(5) That the Objects of the Bill are inter alia to incorporate the Church of Christ in Guyana, with a right to determine its own affairs through or by a Board of Trustees, to acquire and dispose of property and to provide for other matters relevant to the administration of the said Church;

(6) That the Church describes to the philosophy that its members should worship God in a manner similar to that which obtained in the first century of the Christian Church and proposes that all person who immediately before the incorporation now petitioned for were members, should not be prejudiced in their membership in any way whatsoever;

(7) That your Petitioner has the unanimous approval of the members of the Church to promote the instant Bill, a copy of which is annexed hereto;

(8) That your Petitioner humbly request that the Honourable Members of the National Assembly be pleased to permit the introduction of the Bill and to enact the same.

Wherefore your Petitioner as in Duty bound will ever pray.

Dated this 14<sup>th</sup> day of August, 1973.

(Sgd.) Alfred McCurchin  
Evangelist  
The Petitioner.”

**The Speaker:** In accordance with standing Order No. 57(4), I will now put the Question.

*Question –*

“That the Promoter be allowed to proceed”,

*Put, and agreed to.*

**The Speaker:** The Promoter may proceed accordingly.

### **THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVANTIST CHURCH**

**Dr. Ramsahoye:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to present a Petition on behalf of the Guyana conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, seeking to have introduced in this honourable House a Private Bill to incorporate the Board of Trustees of the Seventy-Day Adventist Church in Guyana.

**The Speaker:** The Clerk will read the Peitition.

The Clerk read the Petition as follows:

**PETITION**

To: His Honour the Speaker and the Honourable Members of the National Assembly.

The humble Petition of the Guyana Conference of Seventh Day Adventist respectfully sheweth as follows:-

(1) That your Petitioner is a body corporate incorporated under the Seventh Day Adventists (Guyana Conference) Ordinance, Chapter 222, (1953 Edition);

(2) That all property in Guyana vested in your Petitioner are held for the use and benefit of The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Guyana;

**2.15 p.m.**

(3) That your Petitioner is desirous of promoting a Bill to establish a local Board promoting a Bill to establish a local Board of Trustees to hold all the aforesaid property and for purposes in connection therewith;

(4) That the objects of the Bill are to incorporate the board of Trustees to replace you Petitioner and to provide for other related and incidental matters thereto which are considered desirable and expedient in the interests of the Church;

(5) That the provisions of the Bill have been approved by the Governing Body of the Church;

(6) That a copy of the Bill is hereto annexed;

[The Clerk contd.]

(7) That your Petitioner humble requests that the Honourable members of the National Assembly be pleased to permit the introduction of the Bill and to enact the same.

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONER AS IN DUTY BOUND WILL  
EVER PRAY

Dated the 27<sup>th</sup> day of September, 1973.

THE GUYANA CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS

(Sdg.) Robert Pierson

President

(Sdg.) K. H. Emmerson

Treasurer

(Sgd.) J.C. Kozel

Secretary

Being the President, Secretary and Treasurer respectively, of the General Conference Corporation of Seventh day Adventists of the District of Columbia in the United States of America.”

**The Speaker:** In accordance with Standing Order No. 57(4), I will now put the Question.

*Question –*

“That the Promoters be allowed to proceed,

*Put and agreed to.*

**The Speaker:** The Promoters may proceed accordingly.

### **PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS, ETC**

The following papers were laid:

(a) Customs Duties Order 1974 (No. 40), made under section 8 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 1974, and published in the Gazette on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, 1974.

(b) Consumption Tax Order 1974 (No. 42), made under section 4 of the Consumption Tax Act, Chapter 80:02, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, 1974, and published in the Gazette on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March, 1974.

(c) The Public Accounts of the Government of Guyana for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1968 together with the Report thereon by the Director of Audit. [**The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House**  
**on behalf of the Minister of Finance]**

### **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS – FIRST READING**

The following Bills were introduced and read the First time:

Defence (Amendment) Bill 1974, Bill No. 10 of 1974, published on 30.3.74.

[The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Development and  
Agriculture on behalf of the Prime Minister.]

**PUBLIC BUSINESS****COMMITTEE OF SELECTION**

**Mr. Ramsaroop:** Your Honour, permit me under this item to nominate the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member Mr. Marcellus Feilden Singh as a Member of the Committee of Selection.

*Mrs. Willems seconded.*

**The Speaker:** Hon. Members, is that agreed to? [**Hon. Members (Government):** “Aye.”] I therefore declare the hon. Member Mr. Marcellus Feilden Singh to be an additional Member of the Committee of Selection.

**BILLS – SECOND READING****RICE FARMERS (SECURITY OF TENURE) (AMENDMENT) BILL**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Rice Farmers (Security of Tenure) Act.”

**[The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National  
Development and Agriculture]**

**The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Development and Agriculture** (Dr. Reid): Mr. Speaker, in moving the Second Reading of the Rice Farmers (Security of Tenure) (Amendment) Bill 1974, I wish to state that when the original Bill was formulated, it was not unforeseen that there would have been difficulties at times, and provision was made so that suitable relief could have been granted to tenant farmers who are in the majority of cases

small rice farmers – two acres, three acres, ten acres, and fifteen acres of land. But, in practice, to bring any relief to them, it became a very expensive exercise to the small farmer and in the majority of cases he was not financially capable in order to proceed in court. In several cases, he was at a disadvantage and, hence, further consideration has been given to the small farmers.

I am certain both sides of this House will definitely support this Bill, because in recent years, conditions have been adverse, especially conditions of drought and floods, and the small rice farmer had to ensure that this land rent was paid or else he was taken to the courts to go through a long and expensive procedure of the law and, as I mentioned before, in many cases he was at a disadvantage.

Last year, particularly, was a very unusual year where we experienced rains not only in the rainy season but we experienced rains in the dry season at the time of reaping. What was even worse, during what should have been the rainy season, when it was necessary to have water in sufficient quantity to assist in the development of the crop, there was a drought and many small farmers had to go through the expensive exercise of pumping water into the crop would have been one of the largest in the history of the country, the rains came during the reaping season and all their hopes were shattered.

And so, because of this very unusual year, this Government has decided to come to this House so that these farmers would not have to suffer the embarrassment of going to court, because in so many cases, the landlords, even though some of them may be aware of the situation, do not really accept the fact that the small rice farmer is in no position to pay. Already, some of them are being given notice. We therefore believe that this is a just piece of legislation so that our small farmers will continue to work the land. We hope they will be able to recover some of their losses and in time will be able to pay the usual rents.

[Dr. Reid contd.]

2.25 p.m.

Moreover whatever happened at crop time adverse to the crop, that loss had to be carried by the small rice farmer.

Sometimes it is of interest to question the small farmer on the number of years he has been occupying a small piece of land and paying rent. It would be amazing to know what a large amount that total sum is yet he has to continue to pay.

What is even worse is the fact that so many landowners show no appreciation of the needs for facilities in these areas. In recent times there were many private estates the Government had to provide them with better drainage and better dams.

The Rice Farmers (Security of Tenure) (Amendment) Bill 6/1974 is brought to the House to ensure that these small farmers do not go through the long procedure of court proceedings and the embarrassment of not being able to pay legal fees and not having the time at their proposal to spend weeks at court. These two amendments are now before the House to amend section 29 of the Principal Act giving the Minister authority to declare areas because of adverse circumstances, areas that require relief and to name them “agricultural emergency areas”.

It is quite clear that before any area is declared an agricultural emergency area the circumstances must be of such that not one or two farmers are affected but the majority of farmers as happened last year. It would be an unusual event if severe heavy floods should come into a district, floods as we experienced last year, and one farmer among hundreds of tenants should be the only one to suffer while all the others reap good crops. So in declaring an area an agricultural emergency area the circumstances would be very clear and I doubt whether any farmer would be able to present a case of great distress if the majority of the farmers in the area occupying the same estate or settlement have done well.

In presenting the Second Reading of this Bill I would ask the House to support this needful cause. [**Applause**]

*Question proposed.*

**The Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Singh.

**The Leader of the Opposition** (Mr. M.F. Singh): Mr. Speaker, may I first apologise for being late? I was unavoidable detained – not by the police – in the circumstances I am sorry I was not here for the election of the hon. Member, Mr. Van Sluytman, as Deputy Speaker. With your leave, sir, I should like to congratulate the hon. Member, Mr. Van Sluytman, on his elevation to the office of Deputy Speaker.

It is a very challenging office particularly in the context of Guyanese politics at the present time. If the hon. Member is called upon to sit as Speaker – and I have no doubt that he will be because Your Honour cannot always guarantee that you will be well enough to preside – he will have to hold the scales evenly between the Government and the Opposition.

This is certainly not any easy task particularly, as I said, in the context of Guyanese politics at the present moment. But the hon. Member, I know, has a long history of politics. He has been in Parliament for a long time, he knows the difficulties. He has seen Parliament for a long time. He knows the difficulties. He has seen Parliament in operation. He knows the pitfalls.

I may not agree with his politics in the past but I have always had a very high respect for him as an individual, as a gentleman. I look forward to his occupying the seat of Speaker when called upon to do so with dignity and with decorum putting aside whatever may be his own personal convictions at that particular time. Again, may I congratulate the hon. Member on his elevation to this office?

I am speaking in this august Chamber for the first time as Leader of the Opposition. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your kind remarks; for your congratulations and I think also with your leave I should like to make a few remarks about my acceptance of the post of Leader of the Opposition.

When I first entered this Parliament after the last Elections I did so because I felt that I had a duty to represent all those people who had put their “X” at the last Elections against the “Sun” symbol of the United Force. And I indeed I felt that I had a duty to represent all Guyanese who wanted representation through me.

My reason for accepting the office of Leader of the Opposition is that it appears clear that after eight months Dr. Jagan is still determined to continue his stupid boycott of this Parliament thereby denying Guyanese particularly those people who voted for him, the kind of high level representation which the constitutional office of Leader of the Opposition.

Because of the facilities which are offered by this constitutional office, the Leader of the Opposition would be able to provide a much higher level of representation than that provided by any ordinary Member of Parliament.

I am a firm believer in the western system of parliamentary democracy, of parliamentary Government, which is the system under which our present Parliament operates. I believe that in spite of the complaints made about the last Elections the doors of Parliament should still be kept open by us. I believe – and this is really a very serious and considered belief – that once these doors are closed or ignored by the Opposition then we may well find it difficult, if not impossible, to open them again. There we must continue dialogue with a *de facto* Government.

**2.35 p.m.**

Every Guyanese, no matter what his political persuasion, be the PPP, P.D.M. Communist

[Mr. Singh continued]

or otherwise, is entitled to have his grievance aired in this Parliament if he so desires. I promise that my office will be open to all Guyanese regardless of colour, creed, race, political persuasion, or otherwise. I am indeed happy to state that before my appointment as Leader of the Opposition, and more so now, the United Force, the P.P.P., the Liberator and even P.N.C. supporters have been coming to me with their problems. Now that I will have the facilities of the Leader of the Opposition I will be better equipped to represent these people both inside and outside of Parliament. I know that I have a difficult job to do but I am determined to it regardless. I know that my hon. and learned colleague, the Minister of Works and Communications, is actively looking for an office for the Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Green: "It is available."] I am happy to hear him say from his seat that he Office has been identified, and I look forward to moving into that Office and occupying that constitutional office as early as possible. Again, I promise that my services will be open to all Guyanese. Again, may I thank you for your kind remarks about my appointment.

I turn to the Bill now before the House, the Rice Farmers Security of Tenure (Amendment) Bill, 1974. The hon. Deputy Prime Minister has quite rightly pointed out that this Bill is aimed at recognizing that therefore could be rice crop failure through no fault of the farmers as we have seen in the past, and that in those circumstances, after an Order has been made by the Minister as is proposed in this Bill here, the landlord would be denied the right to take possession from the tenant on the grounds of non-payment of rent or failure on the part of the tenant husbandry. So we see that to some extent the landlord here is called upon to share the burden of a crop failure. This is as it should be.

We have absolutely no quarrel with this kind of legislation. We know what our weather in Guyana is like, we know how unpredictable it has been, particularly within recent times, and certainly rice farmers and indeed any person who may suffer from these kinds of adverse condition, acts of God, are all in need of recognition. The farmers along the Pomeroon are also in need of some recognition for the sacrifices that they have to make when there are floods in the

areas. But this Bill deals particularly with rice farmers and therefore we will have to confine our remarks to rice farmers.

We have absolutely no quarrel with the provisions of this Bill. But then we must also look at the ancillary things; we must look at the over all attitude to the rice industry. We have to recognise that rice farmers are still complaining bitterly and the question arises: When will rice farmers really get a realistic increase in rice prices, in the price of padi? It is true that an increase has been given recently but is it not also true that this increase is rather insignificant in relation to the current prices being paid on the outside markets? When will the rice farmers really get a realistic increase in comparison with outside prices?

Let us face it. Millions of dollars have been borrowed to erect rice silos. That money has to be repaid and one may well liken that loan to a millstone around the neck of the rice industry. What about these rice silos? Are they all in use? The fact of the matter is that they are not even all erected, and those that have been erected are not in use 90 per cent of the time. They have been likened to white elephants in the rice industry.

On two sites which were identified for the erection of rice silos, materials for the erection have been lying there for almost two years. An American Company seems to have been able to make rings around the Government. The money allocated has been used, it has disappeared into whose pockets it has gone we have not been able to identify precisely. But the money has disappeared. At Somerset and Berks, an area which our hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister knows very well, the materials are lying there deteriorating and people from the capitalist American Company are still roaming around Georgetown somewhere in Hadfield Street across there, and nothing has been done as far as the nation knows to bring them to task. We must not allow this type of behaviour to continue without some action. We should not care who they are, be they Russian, American or otherwise, they must not hold the Guyanese people to ransom. If they have done a wrong they must be made to pay the penalty. If they have not fulfilled their contract we must take action against them no matter which country they may be nationals of.

Who will have to pay for this kind and type of inefficiency? Obviously the rice farmers will have to pay. How will they pay? They will pay through their noses. They will not be able to enjoy the benefits, the profits which would normally have accrued to the rice industry if it was being run along proper and efficient lines.

**2.45 p.m.**

We are not even hearing about Blue Belle rice. At one time we heard of the glories of Blue Belle. It was the greatest thing out in this country. Where is it now? What has happened in Blue Belle? At that time the Government propagated that you were able to get many crops s from Blue Belle and suddenly it has gone into oblivion. This kind of oblivion is very reminiscent of many things which the Government has been propagating and doing within recent times. Where is Madam Blue Belle? Let the hon. Deputy Prime Minister tell us where she is. At one time we heard so much about her, we were to have so many crops per year we have not heard anything about here within recent times. How many crops are we getting from Madam Blue Belle? The poor rice farmers do not even have Blue Belle to help them to supplement their meager earnings from the rice industry.

What about the Rice Farmer's Association? A few years back the grant was taken away from the Rice Producers' Association because of political reasons. It was said quite clearly and openly that there would be no grant for the Rice Producers' Association because it was political. But we remember in this very Chamber the hon. Prime Minister gave a promise during the debate on the nationalization of DEMBA. It was a promise which was tantamount to reviewing the situation and giving the Rice Producers' Association representation in the Rice Industry. What has happened? Nothing at all! The Rice Producers' Association, which I am reliably informed still speaks for the rice producers, is still left out in the cold.

Will the hon. Deputy Prime Minister say whether the Government is considering restoring the grant to the Rice Producers' Association? In keeping with the tenor of the promise

[Mr. Singh continued]

made in this honourable House on the occasion of the nationalization of DEMBA, I is not time that he grant be restored to the Rice Producers' Association/ we talk a great deal about co-operatives' and this leads me into another question. Why does the Government not made the rice industry into a co-operative. The Government's entire philosophy seems to be based on co-operatives? Then extend that philosophy to the rice industry. Let us make the rice industry into a genuine co-operative, not like the Greenland Co-operative. Let us make it a genuine co-operative so that the profits from the rice industry can accrue to the farmers rather than have the profits flowing into areas like the Rice Action Committee as is happening at the present moment. What is the Rice Action Committee? It is a political arm of the ruling Party. That is what it is; let us face it. The Rice Action Committee is comprised of political appointees. There are some people there who, I understand, do not know anything at all about the rice industry but they are there because they are loyal supporters of the P.N.C., and if you are a good party man you can get a loan.

Is this fair to the rice farmers? In the final analysis, it is the rice farmers who has a subsidize all of this. It is not "John Public" generally. The rice farmer and the rice industry have to subsidize this playing of political football and I thought that the time had been reached by now when we should decentralize the politics from the rice industry. Let us make it really realistic. Let us really try to make the rice industry a success.

After all, Mr. Speaker, it is recognised that we are in difficult times at the moment. We are facing a financial crisis. Rice earns very, very much needed foreign currency for us at the present moment. It should be one industry that we should pay particular attention to. Take the politics out of it and let us recognise that Guyana needs to survive. Let us recognise that Guyana is facing a serious financial crisis. Let us recognise that to battle with this crisis we must cut the politics out of the rice industry so that it can realistically be a thriving industry and earn the much needed foreign exchange so that Guyana can survive. The survival of Guyana is something

which all of us, regardless of our politics, must agree with. Survival is necessary; therefore it is my appeal that we cut out the politics of the rice industry.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, let me point out – it may be a small matter – what, in fact, can happened as a result of this Bill. I am not sure that we should anything about it is something that we must bear in mind and it is something which we must recognise. The provisions of this Bill are such that the Minister, if he is satisfied, because of the prevailing circumstances in Guyana, could issue and declare any part of Guyana an “emergency area” with these consequences flowing. It is quite possible, because of the politics in this country – let us recognise that too – that a political group can say “Look, we are indulging in civil disobedience; we are indulging in civil resistance, therefore our people must not plant rice; they must do no planting at all”. It is also quite possible that in a particular area the majority of the people will ignore that call but a small minority will observe the call. So that we may well have the state of affairs where in that particular area the majority of people, like good rice farmers, plant their rice, then the rains come, the floods come, they are flooded out and there is no crop. They have no money to indulge in what is called the rules of good husbandry.

Therefore, under normal circumstance, without the provisions of this Bill, these people could be brought before the Courts and get an Order from the Rice Assessment Committee. But if the Minister makes the Order they are given relief and they, therefore, cannot suffer. But what about that small minority who did nothing at all. They did not plant, they did not suffer, they did absolutely nothing, therefore, they suffered nothing. They responded to the call for civil resistance and disobedience and did nothing at all. They did not suffer but because they are within that areas they will bet the benefit of the Order made by the Minister and their landlord will not be able to do anything about arrears of rent, they will not be able to do anything about non observance of the rules of good husbandry.

1. So that these farmers, albeit a small number – because I am sure the hon. Minister will not make any Order unless he is satisfied that the majority of the people in

the area were suffering – with perhaps anti-national, anti-Guyanese feelings will also reap the benefit of an Order made by the Minister. They have suffered nothing but they also will benefit.

**2.55 p.m.**

It may well be that in order to give some relief to the majority, we have to allow the minority to benefit also. If this is the rationale, fair enough. If this is accepted, fair enough. The hon. Deputy prime Minister may well have recognised this, but it is still my duty to point out that there may well be a group of people who will benefit as a result of this.

It could have been possible to add to clause 2, where it states “Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any law ...”, and put at the end of it: “except with the consent in writing of the Minister.” Then we may well be told that we are vesting the hon. Minister with powers which he can abuse in that if he so feels, he may grant exemptions according to political considerations.

I merely put it out for the consideration of the hon. Minister to see what he thinks it and indeed to highlight the fact that others may be able to benefit even though they have suffered absolutely no loss.

As is said, we have no objection to the Bill itself, but there are many other questions about the rice industry that need to be answered, and I sincerely hope that the hon. Deputy Prime Minister will answer these questions.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

*Bill read a Second time.*

28.3.74

National Assembly

2.55 – 3.05 p.m.

[Mr. Singh contd.]

*Assembly in Committee.*

*Bill considered and approved.*

*Assembly resumed.*

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

**HOUSING OF LABOUR WORKERS ON SUGAR ESTATES  
(AMENDMENT) BILL 1974**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Housing of labour Workers on Sugar Estates Act.”

**[The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of  
National Development and Agriculture]**

**Dr. Reid:** In moving the Second Reading of the Housing of Labour Workers on Sugar Estates (Amendment) Bill 1974, I wish to point out that this is a very simple matter. All through the years, this concession was granted to the sugar estates, particularly when they provided lands for housing. In recent times, some of these lands have passed to Government and we wish that those people who have enjoyed this concession, this special arrangement with the recording and filing of their leases with the Deeds Registry, will enjoy this same privilege, thus, we bring to the House this Bill to ensure that those people do not in any way suffer with the passing of these lands into the safe keeping of the State. They will enjoy the same number of years of lease, they will enjoy the same facilities, and all these leases will be viable for the operation of all of them.

In moving the Second Reading, I wish to point out that this is just to ensure that those who are leases with the sugar estates would not suffer in any way with the passing of these lands to the State, and I am certain that this Bill will have the full support of the House.

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. M.F. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly agree that this legislation is necessary as a result of the changing times. It is merely giving the same benefits with the Government as owner of former sugar lands, but at the same time as we support this Bill before the House, there are matters which need to be clarified contemporaneously now that we have the country divided up into local authorities.

We have mentioned here of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund and what obtained before that time, and what is sought to be the position now. As I understand it, the situation was that areas which were isolated from the local authorities were developed with all the amenities by the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund, and the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund got its money from a statutory source, by law. One every ton of sugar sold, “X” dollars had to be paid into the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund. So that the money was received as a result of a levy on every ton of sugar sold. The sugar estate lands were take over and were developed at the expense of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund, and the lands were allotted to sugar workers who qualified on a certain basis, along certain lines set out by the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund Committee.

The point I want to make is that it was always the understanding that eventually the workers who had been given these lands would receive freehold title to them. Initially, they got them on a leasehold basis, but my understanding is that there was a promise that, eventually, they would receive them freehold.

[Mr. Singh contd.]

We know that the People's Progressive Party Government believed in leasehold when they were in office. We have an example in Black Bush Polder and in the other land settlement schemes. What does the present Government believe in? Do they believe in freehold as against the People's Progressive Party's leasehold? If the present Government believes in freehold then the question is: When will these sugar workers get freehold titles to their lands? These sugar workers can get freehold titles to their lands now and still have them mortgaged to the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund Committee. The sugar workers should not be precluded from receiving freehold titles because they received loans from the Sugar Industry labour Welfare Fund Committee. They can get freehold titles but until they pay off their loans those freehold titles can rest with the Sugar Industry labour Welfare Fund Committee. This seems to be a very vague state of affairs at the present moment. The situation seems to be further complicated by the coming into operation of the local authorities.

This leads one to ask the question: What really is the position of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund Committee which did all these things that this present Bill is trying to pass over in respect of Government lands to give them the benefit of? Presumably this fund will continue to get monies from the sale of sugar. What will be done with this money? Will the Sugar Industry labour Welfare Fund Committee cease to use this money for the development of extra-nuclear areas recognizing as we do that these areas have been absorbed by a large committee of local authorities? This is a very confusing state of affairs. What will the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund Committee do now? Will they continue to operate under the umbrella of the local authorities? Will they still develop lands formerly owned by the sugar estates or perhaps even lands which have now been taken over by Government? We have heard it announced that all the of former sugar lands on which so much squatting took place recently have now been taken over by the Government. We need to be told will be the future role of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund Committee and the money in the Fund.

Within recent times we have read and heard of complaints made that there are appreciable numbers of people living in village areas who are also sugar workers. There has been a lot of dissatisfaction and complaints that these people have received no benefits living as they do in the village areas whereas others living in the sugar estates, who on the estate authorities wanted to move out from the houses which they occupied on the sugar estates, have received benefits.

It seems to have been suggested in some quarters that monies from the Sugar Industry labour Welfare Fund should go towards providing benefits for these sugar workers who live in the villages. Has the Government given any consideration to this? Will they use some of the money of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund to make, for example grants or donations to the local authorities to develop the villages? We would like to know what is the situation. Nobody has told us what will happen. All we have is a confused picture of the Sugar Industry labour Welfare Fund Committee abrogating responsibilities and handing over extra-nuclear areas to local authorities. No one is telling us what will happen. But it appears as if money still be paid into the Sugar Industry labour Welfare Fund. We would like to know what will happened to this money and how it will be used.

We note also that sugar workers who are living in the extra-nuclear areas – which areas were the responsibility of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund Committee but they have now been absorbed by the local authorities will be called upon to pay rates whereas they paid nothing previously. After absorption into the local authorities they will be required to pay rates and taxes. Nevertheless we have heard very serious complaints about a deterioration of the services offered in these areas since they were given up by the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund Committee. To bear me out I will quote from an article appearing in the Daily Chronicle on Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> March, 1974. We have no reason to believe that this article did not come from the person from whom it is purported to have come.

The article states:

“MPCA General Secretary Cleveland Charran has charged the Guyana Water Authority with showing ‘very little interest’ to a number of pumping stations and other equipment taken over from the Sugar Industry labour Welfare Fund Committee.

He disclosed that at a recent meeting of the SILWFC’s Housing sub-committee he had criticized the ‘care-free’ attitude of Guywa to equipment which had been acquired at thousands of dollars to provide adequate and good water supplies to residents in the extra-nuclear and surrounding areas.

According to Mr. Charran several pumping houses have been left unattended and this has resulted in the disappearance of valuable equipment.

It had also been brought to his attention that it takes several days before repairs were carried out to breakages and leaks in the main water lines. Mr. Charran declared that this was not good enough since the residents concerned were accustomed to prompt action being taken in such matters when the SILWC was responsible.”

I have made inquiries and it seems to be the general complaint that since these areas have ceased to be the responsibility of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund Committee. There has been a definite general deterioration in the services being offered. This is more reason why Government needs to clarify the position. What will this Committee do now? Where will they spend the money? How will they spend it? Will they make grants to local authorities? Please, we are asking the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to give us the answer.

**3.15 p.m.**

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, the Government has a programme to feed, clothe, and house the nation by 1976. We are all agreed that there are not very many areas round and about Georgetown which can really be developed into housing areas so that housing could be expanded. We need to go, on the outskirts of Georgetown; and immediately we start going further we meet up what is known as the Green Belt. These were former sugar estate lands. I am

[Mr. Singh continued]

not sure what the title or status of these lands is at the present moment but we know that they were former sugar estate lands, we know that the lands are there; we have heard it said that they have been bought up by speculators. There has been an allegation that some of these speculators are members of the Government. I do not know how true it is.

But Members of the Cabinet who seem to be so authoritative on this issue should tell us exactly what is the Government's policy towards this Green Belt area. It has been a big question mark for years. We understand that contracts have been signed, a lot of legal arrangements have been made and all are lying dormant. **[Interruption]**

I have absolutely no monetary interest in the Green Belt, I merely think that it is time that the Government tells speculators, if there are speculators, once and for all, in the interest of the Guyanese people "We will not allow you to speculate; we will take over the lands; we will do this, that or the other," but let them know exactly where they stand. Do not be indecisive about it; let them know where they stand. Let them know to get out so that the Guyanese people can have the benefit of these lands if that is the decision of the Government. Let us have a decision on it. If the Government would like it reserved as Green Belt open space with no development, let it make a pronouncement on it so that we can untie all these alleged legal arrangements that have been made. We need to regularize the position. There is need for a clear and an unambiguous statement to be made on what the Government's policy is in relation to the Green Belt.

What is there to hide? Has the Government got something to hide? Is there some reason why it does not want to make a pronouncement about these former sugar lands? The nation is entitled to know and that is why I invite the hon. Deputy Prime Minister to tell us about these lands, about the inter-relation or lack of inter-relation between the S.I.L.W.F. and the Committee as regards the local authorities and indeed the general policy of the Government in these areas.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

**Dr. Reid** (replying): Mr. Speaker, the first thing that is of interest is the leasehold and freehold ownership of a property in the country. It is already quite clear in this country that for agricultural lands the only way to go is to have leasehold. This is important since the development of agriculture depends on the type of tenure and the type of ownership that workers have. When there is freehold have experienced difficulties when people do not occupy the lands beneficially and thus leasehold is instituted. It gives enough security to the person who wishes to occupy the land beneficially. It is not a short-term lease that is granted; it is not a provisional lease; it is a firm lease covering in some cases over twenty-five years with the right to renewal once the conditions are observed.

As far as homesteads are concerned, this Government has already given freehold title to people own homesteads. Even though at this time the sugar workers have leasehold, in time, I am certain they too would enjoy freehold property for their homesteads. But as far as agricultural lands are concerned the policy is leasehold. Both give security of tenancy.

As of now the Sugar Welfare Fund is already contributing not only to areas that were formerly known as extra-nuclear areas – that term is now going to become part of our history; it is not being used any more, we talk of the district, unorganized, or, if it is organized, a local authority district. A contribution is made to local authorities to assist in some of these areas, because there is still substantial work to be done.

This goes not only to people who are resident in these areas, formerly known as extra-nuclear areas, but to sugar workers in any part of the country including the villages. We have done all this work without making too much noise. The people who enjoy the benefit are quite aware of this happening in the several areas. It is hoped that in time, when the valuation is completed and the titles are firm, other arrangements will be made as in any other part in the country where people have to pay for the services in rates and taxes; there is no other way to this.

Water supply for us is very important, so important that a lot of money is now being spent to provide water supply in areas that previously had no water supply at all. For example, even in the district of Linden, where people made millions of dollars from the mining industry, no care was given as far as water supply is concerned. Now people are seeing evidence of the interest in their welfare by the implementation of programmes to have proper water supply. So it is strange to hear that in these areas care is not taken of the property that has been handed over to the Water Authority. I am certain that Government has great interest in all its citizens being properly taken care of.

If there is any negligence, as the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, we would wish for a little more details so that the matter can be pursued. I am certain that the Minister responsible for that Authority has given the direction that water supply is vital and every care must be taken with the equipment.

At the same time we have to remember that in some areas if people, through their own neglect or vandalism, would destroy what they have then it is difficult to treat them very promptly. We hope that they too in the areas would take care of whatever facilities they have. They should not think that the Water Authority has a responsibility but that they too have a responsibility to ensure that water pipes and water taps are not destroyed.

**3.25 p.m.**

The Green Belt is an old story and some people have speculated on it. It is not unwelcome news to hear that those speculators are now suffering because of their concern about what will happen. If people would wish to speculate some kind of penalty is needed for them and if this penalty is having its effect I think it would be quite a warning to other people who wish to speculate. I should think, if I am satisfied that they are really suffering because of this indecision, that this indecision should go on a little longer so that they would have more sleepless nights about the Green Belt.

[Dr. Reid continued]

Since my friend has raised the question of the Green Belt, it is in an areas which it is very suitable situated for open space. In developing old Georgetown sufficient care was not taken in allowing for open space in the city. As we spread out into these areas great care is being taken that we will have large open spaces. This is a country with a lot of land and we should have large open spaces so that our young people would have open grounds to play and would not be found encumbering streets trying to play bat and ball here and there. We must allow them these open spaces and those good citizens – wealthy ones, I would think – who are great speculators should let their conscience prick them a little and so relieve themselves by telling the Government that they would leave these pieces of land to be used for the benefit of the children, not for old people like me, but for the young people the growing population of the country, so that they can have those plots of land as open spaces, so that children would have large recreation fields. I am certain that the people in the areas who would benefit from this Bill would be very much relieved because they would not be encumbered in any way with the type of leases they now hold.

I am informed that negotiations have already started so that in time they will get freehold property for their homesteads. But I wish to report, when it comes to agricultural lands for commercial purposes, that the policy is leased hold for long periods and with the right of renewal.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

*Bill read a Second time.*

*Assembly in Committee.*

*Clause 1, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 2.*

**Dr. Reid:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to move the following amendment to clause 2. That we insert immediately after the words “Deeds Registry Act” appearing at the end of that clause the words, “save however, that notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any law the failure to file such a lease, surrender, assignment or transfer, made prior to the coming into operation of this section, shall not affect the validity of such lease, surrender, assignment or transfer.”

*Question proposed, put, and agreed to.*

*Clause 2, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 3, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Assembly resumed.*

*Bill reported with an Amendment: as amended, considered: read the Third time and passed as amended.*

## MOTION

### CONFIRMATION OF THE CONSUMPTION TAX (AMENDMENT)

#### (NO. 2) ORDER 1974

Be it resolved that this National Assembly, in terms of section 5 of the Consumption Tax Act, Chapter 80:02, confirm the Consumption Tax (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 1974 (no. 18), which was made on the 30<sup>th</sup> January, 1974, and published in the Gazette on the 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1974.

**[The Minister of Finance]**

**The Minister of Finance** (Mr. Hope): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the Motion standing in my name which seeks confirmation of the Consumption Tax (Amendment) Order 1974. The effect of the Motion is to change the system of taxing gasoline, diesel oil and aviation spirit from a specific form of duty to an *ad valorem* form of duty.

The change does not necessarily bring about an increase in the duty because there was a previous order which this one amends and which, in fact, changed the rate of specific duty and brought it up to 79 cents per gallon in the case of gasoline and aviation spirit and \$5.50 per hundred gallons in the case of diesel. What this Order seeks to do is to change the system from specific to *ad valorem*.

In fact, the two orders – the one which this Order amends and this one – bring about an increase in the price of gasoline with effect from about January this year but I think one word of explanation is due here. It ought to be generally known that in Guyana we have deliberately kept the price of gasoline down to a relatively cheap level. We remember that in 1967 when the Guyana dollar was devalued the companies had requested an increase in price for gasoline and we had refused to permit an increase in price. Again in 1971 the Government maintained its position against the insistence on the part of the companies for an increase and prices were not increased.

We know that subsequent to that, in late 1972, the situation of petroleum products had reached a point where there was no doubt at all that some increase had to be given. The situation that occurs now is that the price which we have, in view of the fact that we have been able to hold the price down for so long, compares very favourably with prices in other parts of the Caribbean except, perhaps, Trinidad.

3.35 p.m.

In fact, it compares favourably with prices in the United Kingdom and in Europe, all of which are oil-importing countries. So despite the fact that the price of gasoline now is very much higher than it was in the past, we must recognise that the Government had taken action to keep the price low until this became impossible in 1972. Despite all of that, the prices which we have not are still comparable with prices in other parts of the Caribbean and other parts of Europe.

In addition to that, I think, one must see the higher price for gasoline in terms of a mechanism for ensuring that people generally keep the level of consumption down to the level that supplies will permit. We have been very fortunate in this period of difficulty, in terms of petroleum products, to be assured to adequate levels of supplies, so that, in fact, we are not experiencing shortages. But certainly, a shortage could arise if person were to consume gasoline as if gasoline was still a cheap product. The price that we have now has done, we think, the proper thing, that is, it has enable, to a large extent, a reduction in the consumption. I think we must understand this: that there has been a reduction in the consumption of gasoline. This isobviously a desirable think in view of the difficulty in maintaining supplies. These difficulties we have not experienced in full because our suppliers have been able, fortunately for us, to assure us of supplies which, though not excessive, are sufficient for ordinary purposes, purposes which do not include extraordinary use of gasoline.

We think the price that we have now has been able to assist in keeping consumption down because most of the most of the gasoline, not all certainly, but most of the gasoline goes into consumption, and what we have done is to keep the price at a level which would ensure that consumption is very close to the supplies that are available to us.

With that explanation I should like formally to commend the Motion for the approval of the House.

28.3.74

National Assembly

3.35 – 3.40 p.m.

*Question proposed, put, and agreed to.*

*Motion carried.*

### ADJOURNMENT

**Resolved**, that this Assembly do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

[The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs (Leader of the House)]

**Adjourned accordingly at 3.40 p.m.**

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