

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2011) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

156TH Sitting

Thursday, 23RD June, 2011

The Assembly convened at 2.15 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Report was presented:

The Ministry of Public Works and Communications Annual Reports for the Years 2007, 2008 and 2009. *[Minister of Home Affairs]*

REPORT FROM COMMITTEES

The following Report was laid:

Minutes of Proceedings of the 24th Meeting of the Committee of Selection of the National Assembly held on Monday, 20th June, 2011.

[Speaker of the National Assembly – Chairman of the Committee of Selection]

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[Oral Reply]

PROGRAMMES TO ALLEVIATE THE PROBLEM OF INADEQUATE MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE TEACHERS IN GUYANA

Ms. Ally: I beg to ask the Hon. Minister of Education Question No. 1 on the Order Paper standing in my name:

- (i) Could the Hon. Minister of Education inform this National Assembly what programme his Ministry is engaged in to alleviate the problem of inadequate Mathematics and Science teachers in Guyana?

Minister of Education [Mr. Baksh]: The question is correct in a sense that there is an inadequacy of mathematics and science teachers in the education sector, and in the school system, and this has been impacting somewhat on the quality of the results in these areas. Notwithstanding the shortages, there have been improved results. For example, in mathematics, the pass rate for Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC), in 2008, was 30.6 per cent. In 2009, it was 31.5 per cent and in 2010, that is last year, it was 34.5 per cent. So we have been having improvements in the areas as we progress. Clearly, we would like to say, and the public expects, significant improvements in these areas, and the Ministry has been engaged in a number of programmes and initiatives to deal with this critical shortage in these areas.

Firstly, the Ministry of Education has launched a non graduate certificate course in mathematics and the single sciences - biology, chemistry and physics. In mathematics, it was launched in 2007. So far, fifteen students have graduated and twenty-nine are in training in the area of mathematics and this is being conducted at National Centre for Educational Resource Development (NCERD). In science, there are thirty-six students in training and they are to be graduating in September. So this will improve the human resources in the system. Importantly, we have incentivised the system, so that when teachers complete the non graduate certificate course they will receive increments in the scale, and it is the intention to continue with this programme in the coming years.

Secondly, Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) has been encouraging students to opt for science and mathematics as majors for the Trained Teachers' Certificate. So while CPCE has been doing that, many students have not really opted in. These seem to be very difficult areas. It

has been encouraging students, but some students prefer to take the other areas. But this is ongoing, because priority has been given at CPCE for these areas for admission. Also what we have done, from the year 2010, is that we are accepting Grades I to III which are the grades for entry into the University of Guyana. Previously, CPCE would have only allowed a person to opt for science as a major if that person has Grades I and III in the science subjects. That has been reviewed so that a person can have Grades I to III. So, we expect that a larger number of students will now opt and be eligible. Previously, they would not have been eligible if they had a Grade III in any of the science subjects.

Thirdly, the Ministry has waived the requirement for the students from CPCE who have graduated and who would like to proceed to the University of Guyana. Normally, students, that is, the teachers, will have to wait for two years. The science graduates from CPCE, and the Mathematics graduates, are been allowed to proceed immediately. The Ministry has waived that requirement so that there can be a larger number of students doing the Bachelor of Education Degree (BEd) with an option to major in science and mathematics. Again, in order to alleviate the problem, the Ministry has been recruiting students with the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) level to teach in the secondary schools, some of them on a part-time basis.

Mrs. Backer: Do you remember the question, Minister?

Mr. Speaker: I was wondering.

Mr. Baksh: These are initiatives, Mr. Speaker. The question is: What programme the Ministry is engaged in to alleviate the problem?

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but a question is not an excuse for a long speech, Hon. Member.

Mr. Baksh: Well, Mr. Speaker, I taking this opportunity...

Mr. Speaker: Well, you cannot take an opportunity of a question to make a lengthy speech.

Mr. Baksh: Well, I will be unable to comprehensively deal with the question.

Mr. Speaker: Well, you have to abide with the rules, whether you are able to abide by those rules or not. I have stopped many Members on the Government side, to their great annoyance, I must say, from listing two hundred roads, and in Mr. Benn's case, another hundred.

Mr. Baksh: Well, I only have six, Mr. Speaker. There are only six but I have completed four, last one I will mention in this regard. The Ministry has been expanding also science education in the schools and the numbers have been growing so that there will be more students coming out of the school system, qualifying at CSEC, and opting to go in to the University of Guyana and the CPCE.

Mr. Speaker: I will allow you as many follow-ups as you may like, Ms. Ally, and if it exceeds the forty-five minutes I will grant you an indulgence to give you more time.

Ms. Ally: Thank you very Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister of Education, first supplementary, the question of the non graduate programme. I would like to ask the Minister, what is the situation with the trainers in this programme? Are you, Minister, satisfied that the trainers for this programme are well equipped – that they are trained; they have the requisite skills and expertise - to deal with this programme? That is my first supplementary.

Mr. Baksh: Yes, Mr. Speaker. All of the lecturers are graduates and they are considered as well trained to deliver the programme.

Ms. Ally: I wonder if a first degree from the University of Guyana is the requirement for these trainers. Could the Minister also tell us what are the areas, are the skills and expertise, that these trainers possess that will really alleviate the problem in mathematics and science?

Mr. Baksh: Yes, Mr. Speaker. They all possess a degree and they have several years of experience. They are the cream that is there who are contributing to this programme - the best that we have. The best who are involved in this training and they have many years of experience.

Ms. Ally: Mr. Minister, what initiative are these trainers employing to help to alleviate this problem?

Mr. Baksh: These trainers have skills, special skills in the methodology, in delivering the mathematics curriculum.

Ms. Ally: Could I ask the Hon. Minister what monitoring mechanism is employed by the Ministry to check on, as you know, the progress of these trainers which we hope will yield even

better result than the thirty-four per cent which he adverted to earlier - what monitoring mechanism?

Mr. Baksh: Well, in the administration of the programme, it comes under the NCERD. There is very close monitoring, not only in this programme, but all the programmes which are being executed by the Ministry. There is a strong monitoring and evaluation component.

Ms. Ally: Follow up: Mr. Minister, are you saying that the Monitoring Evaluation Reporting and Development (MERD) team, or the MERD unit, is responsible for the monitoring of this section? I mean, I understand you said NCERD, but is this special MERD unit involved or is it that you are just having reports from the trainers?

Mr. Baksh: By now the Hon. Member should have known about the role and function of the MERD. It has nothing to do with the running of this specialised non graduate certificate in mathematics. The MERD unit, I must explain that, goes to the schools, monitors the performance and submits reports and supports the schools in improving the teaching and learning programmes. This programme comes under the NCERD, that I mentioned, and there are officers within it who will monitor the programmes and sometime it does employ special persons to supervise, if it is a specialised area which it does not possess.

Ms. Ally: Follow up: Is the Minister saying, therefore, that - I understand the function of the MERD unit in schools and so - the MERD unit has nothing to do, in terms of monitoring and evaluating, with the non graduate programme?

Mr. Baksh: Yes. I am saying that. There was one person who was at NCERD but is no longer there. That person has been transferred out to the MERD unit. When that person was at NCERD that person was involved in the monitoring of the programme.

Mrs. Holder: May I ask a supplementary, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. Holder: Thank you very much. I would like to refer the Minister. In answering your question you said that the decision has been taken to accept Grades I to III for mathematics at the

University of Guyana. Have you discussed this with the University of Guyana and got the impact that it is likely to have on the University's courses?

Mr. Baksh: Grades I to III, at CSEC, have always been recognised by the University as the basis for admission into the University. This is nothing new.

Mrs. Backer: Just one question, Sir. Mr. Minister, given all of this that have been put in place, what are the expectations of your Ministry *vis-à-vis* the percentage pass mark? In other words, having put this programme in place, at the cost of whatever million, we anticipate that in 2012, 2013, our mathematics will go to forty. What is your projection for the next four or five years given the investment that you are making, in terms of percentage?

Mr. Baksh: It is very clear. I will give the Hon. Member a copy of the Strategic Plan because it clearly states, if you read the plan, that we are expecting, at the end of the plan period, to have a forty per cent pass rate in Mathematics.

Mrs. Backer: When is "the end of the plan period"? We really want to get a sense.

Mr. Baksh: It is 2013.

Mrs. Backer: Is it 2013?

Mr. Baksh: Yes.

Mrs. Backer: You will be out of office by then.

Ms. Ally: Could the Hon. Minister say whether there is any incentive offered to encourage more science and mathematics teachers separate and apart from the ongoing programme?

Mr. Baksh: There in no subject area in the secondary schools in which there is a special incentive offered. We are mulling over that, but we have to discuss with the union whether, in terms of scarcity of skills, we pay for a certain area for a given period of time. It has to be discussed with the Guyana Teachers' Union.

Ms. Ally: The second part of the question. Could the Hon. Minister say:

- (ii) If this programme includes the employment by his Ministry of foreign based teachers, could the Hon. Minister say what conditions, salaries and benefits will these teachers enjoy?

Mr. Baksh: The Ministry of Education has been reviewing policies and programmes every year and there is a proposal to boost up the system in the short run, as the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer has stated, what is timeframe? We are in a hurry and therefore we have to find other innovative ways to give us the results in a shorter timeframe than four, five, or six years from now. The current Education Strategic Plan states forty per cent, but we are thinking about fifty and sixty per cent. We are not satisfied with that. So we are looking at a proposal. The Ministry is still working on this, to see... One of those proposals is whether we could bring in, for a short period of time, some qualified graduates, trained graduates, to help boost up the system, the education system and the school system, in science and mathematics. However, this is still in the proposal stage. We have to discuss with principal stakeholders following the normal procedures employed by the Ministry, that is, the Guyana Teachers Union, the Teaching Service Commission and others. So we will not embark on this until we do that, and so we have not really put on the table conditions and salaries, and benefits, at this point in time.

Ms. Ally: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the Hon. Minister, though, can say whether there is any consideration to address the issue of salaries and conditions as they relate to the foreign based teachers and the current teachers in Guyana.

Mr. Baksh: Clearly, there must be a comparative assessment and that will be done.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The following Bill was introduced read for the first time:

PROTECTED AREAS BILL 2011 – Bill No. 11/2011

A BILL intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the protection and conservation of Guyana’s natural heritage and natural capital; the creation, management and financing of a national system of protected areas; maintenance of ecosystem services of national and

global importance including climate regulation; the establishment of a protected areas commission; the establishment and management of a protected areas trust fund; the fulfillment of Guyana's international environment responsibilities; public participation in protected areas and conservation; and related purposes.

[Minister of Agriculture]

COMMITTEES BUSINESS

MOTION

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE CONSUMER AFFAIRS BILL 2011

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly adopts the Report of the Special Select Committee on Consumer Affairs Bill – Bill No. 7/2011.”

[Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce – Chairman of the Special Select Committee on Consumer Affairs Bill 2011]

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Mr. Prashad]: Before I move the adoption of the Report I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who served on this Special Select Committee. It must be noted that during the debate both the People's National Congress Reform - One Guyana (PNCR-1G) member, Hon. Member Mrs. Clarissa Riehl and Alliance For Change (AFC) member, Hon. Member Mrs. Sheila Holder supported this Bill. Nevertheless, at the request of Hon. Member Mr. Carberry, this Bill was sent to the Special Select Committee where we met twice and it was passed, as it was approved in principle, with no changes. So once again, I would like to thank all those who sat on this Committee.

I beg to move that the Report of the Special Select Committee of the Consumer Affairs Bill be adopted.

Mr. M. Williams: The Consumer Affairs Bill 2011 – Bill No. 7/2011, having been published on the 27th of April, and later debated, as the Hon. Minister said, and read for the second time on the 19th of May, in the course of the debate the participating parties supported this Bill, as it was

early been said, after which it was sent to the Special Select Committee. That opportunity was taken by the PNCR-1G to raise a few issues with the interest of the ordinary working class Guyanese, and our working poor in particular, in mind. In the process, it became clear, unfortunately, that the Government was unprepared to amend any provision contained or to add any new provision to the Bill under review. The Report, Sir, if it is examined, will confirm this. In the circumstances, Sir, the PNCR-1 G's representation remains confined to three principal issues of concerns to the Guyanese consumers.

Firstly, we advocated that there ought to be provisions specifically crafted to address the issue of the quality of service offer to the public by public transportation service providers of this country. The contention is that public transportation is a vital service purchased everyday by the working class and poor people of Guyana. Further, since it is a service which is measurable in terms of cost versus what one gets, measures which can protect the consumer from exploitation ought to be easily drafted and could have been included in this Bill before this Hon. House. It does not require rocket science to determine that the average public sector employee residing in a new housing scheme at La Parfaite Harmonie, for example, on the West Bank of Demerara, or Tuschen on the East Bank of Essequibo, and working in Georgetown has to, as my old aunt used to say, cut and contrive to make ends meet. To be left halfway on the homeward bound journey in the evening or to be otherwise short-changed, or made to endure hardship instead of journeying in comfort towards home after a hard day work are matters best understood by those who experienced them. One cannot expect Members of the Government side to be able to personally identify, Sir, with matters such as these. [Ms. Shadick: Why not?] After all, Hon. Member Ms. Bibi Shadick, life is kinder to some than others. Naturally, therefore, Sir, the Government's position was that matters such as these would be dealt in legislation which would come to the National Assembly in the near future, not in this Bill. Further, the Minister reported that bringing public transportation service provider under the purview of the Public Utilities Commission is being actively considered by the Government. In that regard, therefore, the Bill remained unaltered.

The second issue raised, at the level of the Committee, is another sore issue which affects the working people of Guyana. That is, the issue of hire purchase and laws governing hire purchase agreements. It was recommended that safeguards could have been included in this Bill to deal

with the issues allowing for fair and equitable treatment to citizens, most of whom could only own certain household items by purchasing them on terms. The Minister advised the Committee that there is no hire purchase law enforced in Guyana at this time. I must confess that I never knew that and I was shocked. Generally, working class Guyanese acquired household appliances, furniture, agriculture equipment, outboard motors and motor cars through hire purchase agreements. Why then do we not have laws which govern hire purchase with the view to protecting our citizens? Why could we not agree to include this in this Bill, provisions which address this very important issue?

The Minister offered that Government is currently addressing this matter and will soon bring to the National Assembly legislation which will deal specifically with hire purchase. In the meantime, if you shop at one large hire purchase dealer you will sign an agreement for appliances and household furniture which is different from the one that you will sign when buying motor powered equipment. You will pay interest rate ranging from twenty-seven to 31.3 per cent per annum. If per chance you require a chainsaw to do some land clearing for agriculture expansion a lease document will be asked for to be furnished as measure of security. You want to clear your account quickly to recover the lease document and to save on interest, please do it within thirty days or interest will start ticking and only a computer programme could say what rate of interest savings you will enjoy, if any. At another hire purchase dealer you can enjoy one hundred and eighty-day interest free facility. That is, if the account is paid off within one hundred and eighty days the customer will pay the cash prices. Could we not standardise matters such as these in order that our ordinary working class citizens enjoy access to credit under more favourable and equitable conditions? What about repossession of items for which consumers have paid seventy-five per cent or more of the purchase price?

Mr. Speaker: Hold on Hon. Member. Did we have a second reading of this Bill?

Mr. M. Williams: Sir, I am speaking to the Report.

Mr. Speaker: You are not speaking to the Report.

Mr. M. Williams: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: You are not speaking to the Report. You are debating a Bill as if it was second reading. What we have before us is a Report...As you know, Hon. Member, that I am generous with my rulings. You saw me giving the Hon. Minister fifteen minutes when he should have had two. You know I am generous, but you cannot be debating, in a second reading manner, the arguments which ought to have been made in a second reading on a report. The issues of hire purchase, the Government failure to institute hire purchase legislation, and all of that, are matters properly raised in a second reading on this Bill.

2.45 p.m.

You said, “You said you brought a Consumer Affairs Bill, what about the hire purchase legislation relating to the consumers’ interest that you promised so long ago?” Anyway, continue but bear in mind what I just said.

Mr. M. Williams: Thank you Sir. I am guided by your ruling. However, I would just like to point out that these issues...

Mr. Speaker: Continue Hon. Member. Do not let me interrupt you but for the rest of your presentation, take into account what I said.

Mr. M. Williams: I was just going to point out that these issues are contained in the Report. Before I take my seat, I just want to say to the Hon. Minister that we, of the People’s National Congress Reform 1 Guyana (PNCR-1G), intend to hold the you accountable for the commitments you made, on behalf of Government, at the level of the Special Select Committee which considered the Consumer Affairs Bill and I would like to point out these three particular commitments which you made.

1. You committed to bringing legislation which addresses the issue of public transportation service and/or address, if considered necessary, the bringing of the public transportation service under the purview of the Public Utilities Commission shortly.
2. You committed to bringing to the National Assembly legislation which addresses the issue of hire purchase.

3. You committed to ensuring that wherever there are shortcomings in the monitoring of sub-standard goods which enter Guyana, you will ensure that these matters are dealt with, in particular the question of quality assurance checks prior to importation of goods into Guyana in the interest of protecting our consumers in circumstances which only our average, working-class citizens endure almost daily in terms of sub-standard goods coming into Guyana.

On that note, I would like to ask that the National Assembly adopt the Report of the Special Select Committee which considered the Consumer Affairs Bill 2011. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Does any other person wish to speak?

Mr. M. Prashad (replying): The comments of the Hon. Member, Mr. Mervyn Williams, have been noted but to tell a People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) Administration about concerns for the poor is like telling the sun that it must shine. The Hon. Member, Mr. Williams, said just now that he was unaware. In fact, most of the times in the Committee he was unaware of almost everything.

Even though I took the time to explain to him what the Bill is all about and what we have been doing, I am surprised that he still came here and rehashed the same old thing. Maybe it was just for grandstanding because, basically, he did not address the Consumer Affairs Bill. I pointed out to him that prices for public transportation, which I have been dealing with since I was the president of the Chamber of Commerce and Chairman of the Private Sector Commission (PSC), has been addressed by me for years and I am still addressing it on a daily basis. That issue, based on the minibuses associations, will be addressed in the future by this National Assembly and the decision will be made on whether or not we will take it to the PSC. That is the first area that I wish to comment on.

The second area is the hire purchase legislation which he mentioned. I explained to him in detail that because of the importance which is being paid to hire purchase and because consumers are being ripped off, the PPP/C Administration is bringing a separate Bill to address that issue. It is unfortunate that he did not say anything new on the Consumer Affairs Bill which was debated in this National Assembly and which the Hon. Member, Mrs. Clarissa Riehl, so eloquently

supported. With those few comments, I beg to move that the Consumer Affairs Bill 2011 – Bill No. 7/2011 be read a third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: We are still on the Report and it is a motion.

Question put, and agreed to

Motion is carried

Mr. Speaker: You are now reporting to the National Assembly that the Bill was considered Clause by Clause in Committee. It was referred to a Special Select Committee and that Report has just been adopted by the House. You will now move that the Bill be read a third time and passed in accordance with the amendments suggested in the Report.

Mr. Prashad: There are no amendments.

Mr. Speaker: Are you asking that the Bill be read a third time and passed as printed?

Mr. Prashad: Yes

Mr. Speaker: Thank you

Question put, and carried

Bill read a third time and passed as printed

Mr. Speaker: That concludes our brief business for today. Hon. Members, the National Assembly is adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned accordingly at 2.53 p.m.