



Request for Leave to Move the Adjournment of the Assembly on Definite Matters of Urgent Public Importance

138th Sitting dated December 23, 2010

THE STATE OF CRISIS THAT THE SUGAR INDUSTRY IS IN

Preamble

A request by Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P., for leave to move the adjournment of the Assembly on a definite matter of urgent public importance, to wit, the present untenable and deplorable situation in the Sugar Industry, was disallowed by the Speaker because it did not satisfy all the conditions of a definite matter of urgent public importance.

Verbatim

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, a couple of days ago, the Alliance For Change came out with a press release in which it articulated the state of crisis that the sugar industry is in. A couple of days ago, I notified the Clerk and yourself, through a letter, requesting, understanding Standing Order No. 12, that I wish to notify you to propose to move the adjournment of the National Assembly, at this Sitting, today's, to discuss this matter as an urgent matter of public importance which is the present untenable, deplorable situation of the sugar industry, as seen in the Government-owned sugar company, GuySuCo, in a belligerent confrontation with its workers, threatening to decertify the sugar workers' union, GAWU, and refusing, in this season of goodwill, to offer those sugar workers the increases they sought.

The objective of this Motion, on my behalf, is to call upon the Ministers responsible, namely the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Labour, to provide the adequate and credible explanations to the people of Guyana on the true state of affairs in the sugar industry and industrial relations therein, which is one of the important pillars on which the entire economy of Guyana rests – that is, the sugar industry – and on which the livelihood of twenty thousand, or so, families depend. I have no doubt that the fact about the above matter, that is, the debate on the sugar industry, at this stage, qualifies for such deliberation in this August Assembly because it does reach the qualification as a matter of surely definite, urgent and national public importance.

The situation, of course, having reached this far and having been rapidly deteriorating, right up to today's date, to the extent that there have been over two



hundred strikes in this industry, there are big shortfalls in projected targets for 2010, and which are all in direct contradiction to the Strategic Plan, 2009-2013, that there is now a public admission that there are major designed flaws at the Skeldon Factory, that there are massive sums of taxpayers' moneys being given to bail out the incompetence of GuySuCo's management, and Board included... There are tactical manoeuvres to strengthening derecognition of the sugar workers' union, GAWU. There are colossal adverse, financial and social impacts which this state of affairs will have on all Guyana.

In addition – a couple more points and I will only take one or two minutes more – the Strategic Plan, which is the point I have just raised, being approximately eighteen months old, is obviously failing. We need a debate as to the attempt here, now, to commence revising same. That is why it is also a matter of urgent public importance. We also want, at this august Assembly, to have this debate so that we will know the total financial commitment to sugar, in view of the President's statement in today's *Stabroek News* that the sugar industry is becoming, quote, "less important in the economy", Iana Seales writing at page 8 of the *Stabroek News*, quoting the President. Are we going to get, within two to three years, another \$8 billion that would be pumped into the industry or how much more, knowing very well that there is a \$7 billion deficit that the President made very public recently?

Since, also, there is the Strategic Plan, there is going to be what is called a productive motivated team of workers in the industry, is it going to be the seven hundred and twenty-five per cent payout that he is going to do which is going to be taxed, by the way, and is going to come down back to only about \$411 million being taxed at a pace of thirty per cent and more? Is that going to increase worker productivity by having this productive workforce? Additionally, what is going to be the new regime of management, knowing now that the roles of GuySuCo are somewhat in disarray?

The Board is now saying that management could have tactically threatened the workers to derecognise and decertify the Union, as stated by my good friend, Mr. Ramotar, who seems to want some funding from me. The management which had issued calls for derecognition stated, in combination with the Board, that they do not have moneys to pay. Then there is the President who has found \$720 million to pay. What is this new regime of management of the sugar industry? Who is the boss? Is it the company? Is it the President? Is it the Board? Is it the management?

Mr. Speaker (Hari N. Ramkarran): You need to wind down, Hon. Member.



Mr. Ramjattan: I wish to conclude by saying that this is obviously a crisis. Mr. Speaker, for those reasons, there is a crisis in the sugar industry. I want to make the point that because the Minister of Agriculture had to make a personal statement is also evidencing the fact that, indeed, it is matter of urgent public importance.

Finally, I want to make this statement: notwithstanding that there will be one Director of the Board coming out publically today to state that there is no need for a national debate and that state sponsored presidential candidate must not influence you in one way or the other...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I tried to decipher what really you were saying because it is quite a lot but much of it is basically contained in the letter which you sent to me, dated 21st December, 2010. I am trying to decipher from this letter what it is that you are asking me. I figure it is saying that you are urging me to suspend the business of the House to discuss the threat to decertify the sugar union and the refusal, in the season of goodwill, to offer sugar workers an increase in wages and salaries. You went on to say that this should be used as a basis to provide adequate and credible explanations of the true state of affairs in the sugar industry and you referred to several problems which have existed over quite a period.

Hon. Member, I gave a ruling on 15th March, 2004 and several other rulings, some written, in which I analysed the basis of an Adjournment Motion. I also remember writing an article in the newspaper after Mr. Corbin had made such an application. The matter must be a clear emergency. It must have arisen suddenly in a manner of an emergency and should not have arisen over a series of weeks. I do not think that, on the basis, the issue of the wages and derecognition are matters which have arisen suddenly - well, maybe for the derecognition issue. However, threatening to derecognise a union does not qualify as a matter of urgent public importance. I am not saying that it might not be definite. I am not saying that it might not be urgent for the union and the Corporation. I am not saying that it might not be a matter of public importance but one has to address this issue in combination with all of these factors. It is not like a hurricane, a fire disaster or things of that nature.

In addition to that, if I may quote Erskine May:

“The matter must not be a grievance that is continuing which does not qualify as a sufficient matter of urgent public importance.”



In the circumstances, Hon. Member, I do not think it is necessary for me to go into a more detailed ruling. I have no hesitation in declining your request for the adjournment of the House.

[Interruption]

[Members of the Alliance For Change withdrew from the Chamber.]

Government Business - Motion

142nd Sitting dated January 25, 2011

BUDGET SPEECH 2011 – MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2011

Preamble

The Minister of Human Services and Social Security, Ms. Manickchand, rose on a Point of Order for Mrs. Holder to retract a statement made that she considered inaccurate. The Speaker, however, decided that Ms. Manickchand's intervention was not a Point of Order.

Thereafter, Ms. Teixeira rose on a Point of Order stating that according to Standing order No. 41 (6) "No member shall impute improper motive to any Member of the Assembly..." The Speaker ruled that the Member, Mrs. Holder, did no such thing.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Holder said that she was prepared to make her study available, and the Speaker directed that she make the Report available to the Clerk of the National Assembly for all Members to have access.

Verbatim

Minister of Human Services and Social Security (Ms. Manickchand): On a Point of Order, Sir, I ordinarily do not interrupt a Member when he or she is speaking about my sector, but this is important. The Hon. Member, Mrs. Holder, just said that there are phantom pensioners receiving money. That leads to a very reasonable interpretation by any person listening that we are saying that we are paying money to people who do not exist...

Mrs. Holder: That is exactly what I am saying.