

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORTS

/Volume 08/

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE SECOND SESSION (1981) OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FOURTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA.

13th Sitting 2 p.m. Thursday, 1981-04-02

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (82)

Speaker (1)

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

Members of the Government – People's National Congress (69)

Prime Minister (1)

*Cde. Dr. P.A. Reid, O.E., M.P.,
Prime Minister

Other Vice-Presidents (4)

Cde. S.S. Naraine, A.A., M.P., Vice-President, Works and Transport	(Absent on-leave)
Cde. H.D. Hoyte, S.C., M.P., Vice-President, Economic Planning and Finance	(Absent on-leave)
Cde. H. Green, M.P., Vice-President, Public Welfare	(Absent on-leave)
Cde. B. Ramsaroop, M.P., Vice-President, Parliamentary Affairs and Party/State Relations	(Absent)

Senior Ministers (10)

Cde. R. Chandisingh, M.P., Minister of Higher Education	
Cde. O.E. Clarke, M.P., Minister of Regional Development	
Cde. R.H.O. Corbin, M.P., Minister of National Development	(Absent)
*Cde. F.E. Hope, M.P., Minister of Trade and Consumer Protection	(Absent)
*Cde. H.O. Jack, M.P., Minister of Energy and Mines	(Absent)
*Cde. Dr. M. Shahabuddeen, O.R., S.C., M.P., Attorney General and Minister of Justice	(Absent on-leave)
*Cde. R.E. Jackson, M.P., Minister of Foreign Affairs	(Absent on-leave)
*Cde. J.A. Tyndall, A.A., M.P., Minister of Agriculture	(Absent on-leave)
*Cde. S.A. Moore, M.P., Minister of Home Affairs	(Absent)
*Cde. J.R. Thomas, M.P., Minister of Education	(Absent on-leave)

*Non-elected Members

Ministers (13)

Cde. J.P. Chowritmootoo, J.P., M.P., Minister, Environment and Water Supply, in the Ministry of Public Welfare	
Cde. U. E. Johnson, M.P., Minister of Co-operatives	(Absent on-leave)
Cde. J.N. Maitland-Singh, M.P., Minister, Consumer Protection, in the Ministry of Trade and Consumer Protection	
Cde. S. Prashad, M.P., Minister, Crops and Livestock, in the Ministry of Agriculture	(Absent on-leave)
Cde. Sallahuddin, M.P., Minister, Finance, in the Ministry of Economic Planning and Finance	
Cde. R.E. Williams, M.P., Minister, Fisheries, in the Ministry of Agriculture	
*Cde. C.A. Nascimento, M.P., Minister, Mechanical Equipment, in the Ministry of Works and Transport	(Absent on-leave)
*Cde. F.U.A. Campbell, M.P., Minister of Information	(Absent)
*Cde. F.U.A. Carmichael, M.P., Minister, Forestry, in the Minister of Agriculture.	(Absent)
*Cde. Y. V. Harewood-Benn, M.P., Minister of Public Service	
*Cde. H. Rashid, M.P., Minister, in the Office of the President	(Absent)
*Cde. Van Sluytman, M.P., Minister, Drainage and Irrigation in the Ministry of Agriculture	
*Cde. R.A. Van West-Charles, M.P., Minister, Health, in the Ministry of Public Welfare	(Absent)

Ministers of State (3)

Cde. M. Corrica, M.P., Minister of State for Culture, in the Ministry of Education, Social Development and Culture	(Absent on-leave)
Cde. R.C. Fredericks, A.A., M.P., Minister of State for Youth Sports, in the Ministry of National Development	
*Cde. C.E. Wright, M.P., Minister of State for Construction, in the Ministry of Works and Transport	(Absent)

Parliamentary Secretaries (3)

Cde. A.W. Bend-Kirton-Holder, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Women's Affairs and Housing	(Absent)
Cde. P.A. Rayman, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister	
*Cde. E.M. Bynoe, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister	

*Non-elected Member

Other Members (23)

Cde. D.A.N. Ainsworth, M.P.

Cde. M. Ally, M.P.

Cde. M. Armogan, M.P.

Cde. B. Beniprashad, M.P.

Cde. B. Bhaggan, M.P.

Cde. J.B. Caldeira, M.P.

Cde. A.A. Chin, 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. Frederick, M.P.

(Absent)

Cde. E.F. Gilbert, M.P.

(Absent on-leave)

Cde. J. Gill-Mingo, M.P.

Cde. A. McRae, M.P.

Cde. J.M. Munroe, J.P., M.P.

Cde. R.N. Primo, M.P.

Cde. C.G. Sharma, J.P., M.P.

Cde. H.L.B. Singh, M.P.

Cde. S.H. Sukhu, M.S., M.P.

Cde. B. Tiwari, M.P.

Cde. C. Vandenburg, M.P.

Cde. H.B. Walcott, J.P., M.P.

Government Chief Whip

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 (10)

Cde. K.N. Jones, M.P. (Region No. 1 – Barima/Waini)

(Absent)

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, 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)

(Absent on-leave)

Cde. D. Abraham, M.P. (Region No. 8 – Potaro/Siparuni)

Cde. A. Dorrick, M.P. (Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo)

Cde. D. Hinds, M.P. (Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Berbice)

Members of the Minority (12)

(i) People's Progressive Party (10)

Minority Leader (1)

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

Deputy Speaker (1)

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

Other Members (8)

Cde. J. Jagan M.P. (Absent on-leave)

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, J.P., M.P.
Minority Chief Whip

Cde. N. Persaud, M.P.

Cde. C.C. Collymore, M.P. (Absent)

Cde. S.F. Mohamed, M.P. (Absent)

Cde. I. Basir, M.P.

Cde. C.C. Belgrave, M.P.

Cde. Dalchand, J.P., M.P.

(ii) United Force (2)

Mr. M.F. Singh, J.P., M.P. (Absent on-leave)

Mr. M.A. Abraham, M.P.

Officers

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

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

PRAYERS

National AssemblyANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKERPERFORMANCE OF FUNCTIONS OF PRESIDENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER

The Speaker: Comrades, I have been advised that the Prime Minister has been authorized to perform the functions of the Office of the President during the absence of the President from Guyana. As this is the first occasion under the new Constitution that the President is absent from Guyana and that Cde. Dr. Reid has been authorized to perform the functions of the Office of President, I am sure that Members of the Assembly would wish to join with me in extending congratulations and best wishes to him.

[The Prime Minister thanked the Speaker.]

LEAVE TO MEMBERS

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to the Comrades Naraine and Green, to Cde. Dr. Shahubuddeen, to Comrades Jackson, Tyndall, Thomas, Johnson, Prashad, Nascimento, Corrica, Gilbert, and Charles, and to Mr. M.F. Singh for today's Sitting. Leave has also been granted to Cde. Janet Jagan for five weeks from 31st March, 1981.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers were laid:

- (a) Consumption Tax (Amendment) Order 1981 (No. 18), made under section 4 of the Consumption Tax Act, Chapter 80:01, on 9th March, 1981, and published in the Gazette on 21st March, 1981.”
- (b) Customs Duties Order 1981 (No. 19), made under section 8 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01, on 9th March, 1981, and published in the Gazette on 21st March, 1981. [The Minister, Finance, on behalf of the Vice-President, Economic Planning and Finance.]

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE ASSEMBLY ANDMOVED BY A MINISTERSuspension of Standing Order No. 23

The Minister of Regional Development (Cde. Clarke): Cde. Speaker, I wish to request your leave under Standing Order 83 to move the suspension of Standing Order 23 to enable the Prime Minister to move as the first item of Public Business at today's Sitting a Motion of Sympathy on the death of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Speaker: Leave is granted.

Cde. Clarke: With your leave, I now move that Standing Order 23 be suspended for the purpose I have just mentioned.

Question put, and agreed to.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION OF SYMPATHY RE DEATH OF PRIME MINISTER OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The Prime Minister (Cde. Dr. Reid): Cde. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion:

“Be it resolved that this National Assembly records its deep regret at the death of Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, T.C. Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and directs that an expression of its condolences be conveyed to his sorrowing relatives and to the Government and People of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.”

Cde. Speaker, it sometimes happens in the life of an individual, that he, or she, approaches a moment and task with a range of sentiments which, though conflicting, are, in the final analysis, complementary. Such a moment has now befallen me. For, I cannot conceive of the task of paying tribute, in this Assembly, to the late Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Eric Williams, without a deep sense of sorrow, which, however, is somewhat belied by the feeling of honour of being privileged to salute this great Caribbean man. I cannot pay tribute to the late Dr. Eric Williams without a sense of pride in his vision and his achievements; that is partially subsumed by the shock over his demise – before he had fulfilled even the greater objective of a Caribbean nation.

I cannot pay tribute without a sense of loss, at having been denied the light and continued inspiration of the creator of the Proletarian University at Woodford Square as I perform my tasks but with a tremendous feeling of hope and confidence engendered by the landmarks which Eric Williams set, and achieved, in his more than twenty-four years as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

Cde. Speaker, these sentiments which assail me are complementary, are natural, in that they are sparked off by a consideration of the life and work of an outstanding scholar; a renowned statesman, indeed, an international personality.

Much has been said and written about Dr. Eric Williams since his sudden death on the morning of March 30, 1981. The local media has given coverage to the tributes paid by Cde. Executive President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, by the Minority Leader in the Assembly, by the Leader of the United Force, by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, our own Shridath Ramphal, by the Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General of Caricom, by other distinguished West Indian and international leaders, and even by myself. The details of Eric Williams' career have been documented and analysed. Guyana is in a state of mourning. Thus, Cde. Speaker, even those Members of this Assembly who perhaps might have been unaware of the significant role which Eric Williams has played in the developing process of the people of the Caribbean, must now be informed of his contribution and of his worth. My task is, therefore, seen as being to highlight but a few aspects of the life and work of Dr. Eric Williams – those deemed of specific relevance to the work of this Assembly and the development of our nation. To do otherwise, Cde. Speaker, would be demanding, of far more time than this afternoon.

2:15 p.m.

Eric Williams must be remembered by this Assembly as an academic who deliberately turned his back on a brilliant academic career, to wage the political struggle with and on behalf of his people. When Eric Williams returned to Trinidad in 1955, he went not only as the author of a book "Capitalism and Slavery" which, in rebutting the traditional theory that emancipation was the result of England's beneficence, opened the flood-gates for a re-assessment of British colonial policy, but, he also went from the important position of Deputy Chairman, Caribbean Research Council of the Caribbean Commission. Eric Williams, thus, holds the important distinction of being one of the first Caribbean nationalist to hold a paramount position in a significant inter-governmental organization. Thus, Cde. Speaker, it is not empty to hazard that in returning to his native country, Eric Williams turned his back on an international career which might ultimately have been crowned by his appointment as Secretary General of UNESCO or as the even more prestigious, Secretary General of the United Nations. The choice which Eric Williams made is, therefore, one which must stand out as a beacon, and as correct guidance to young Guyanese and Caribbean nationalist, for it was a choice of helping to develop his country, and his people, in preference to seeking his own self-glory.

A second pertinent factor is to my mind, Cde. Speaker, concerned with Eric Williams' conception of his people. It is not only true to say that, as pointed out by our own Executive President, Eric Williams never lost the common touch, and was consequently always dear to the nationals of Trinidad and Tobago. It is not enough to point out that the doctor was the well-spring of catalytic action for various and varied calypsos and thus played his role in developing his nation's culture. It must, in fact, be decisively pointed out that for Eric Williams, his people were the people of the Commonwealth Caribbean. He wrote, he lived and he died a committed regionalist.

It was his dedication to Caribbean nationhood which caused Eric Williams in his 1959 publication "the Economics of Nationhood", to advocate a stronger Federation than had been granted by the British. It was this that led him to reach a compromise with Jamaica's Norman Manley, who in the context of Jamaican politics, saw the need for a weak Federation, and as pointed out by Arthur Lewis in

the Agony of the Eight, Dr. Williams kept to this bargain. He consistently supported Jamaica's plan to create a Federation which though weak at the start, might grow stronger with time. Indeed, Arthur Lewis underscores the fact that it was Williams' commitment to regionalism which lay behind his attitude at the time the Federation foundered, when he pointed out that neither Sir Grantley Adams nor the Eight understood the weakness of Manley's position. They continued to hammer at him. To help, Dr. Williams issued a warning. "Don't drive Jamaica out of the Federation for if you do, Trinidad also will leave."

Cde. Speaker, it is known fact that the Federation foundered and that it was left to the initiative of Guyana's Forbes Burnham to set in train the moves which have led to the formation of Caricom and its Allied institutions. Yet for all this a great deal of credit must go to Dr. Eric Williams, especially since Cde. Forbes Burnham, Executive President of the Co-operative Republic, noted in his tribute to Williams that, and I quote "He was my friend. His death has sent a shock throughout the West Indian Nation of which he dreamt, and for which he worked, but a realization of which he has not lived to see."

Cde. Speaker, the West Indian Nation which Eric Williams envisioned was one in which Guyana was to be a component and an important unit, for his study of history, from his purview of economics, from his appreciation of culture, Eric Williams clearly recognized the linkages between Guyana and the Islands of the Caribbean. Thus, he visited this country in 1955, preaching the Gospel of Federation. Thus, too his demand for a strong Federation, mirrored the position advocated by Guyanese politicians. And who amongst us can forget his efforts, born of a genuine concern to mediate, during the dark period of the sixties? Cde. Speaker, Dr. Williams' advice might not always have been considered let alone heeded. His attitude might on occasions have led to justifiable criticism, but none of us would deny that Dr. Eric Williams was a true friend to Guyana. The Protocol of Port-of-Spain speaks louder than my words. Thus, Cde. Speaker, Guyana mourns and mourns deeply.

Let me in closing, therefore, echo the words of our Executive President and observe in this Assembly that unlike Julius Caesar about whom Shakespeare noted through Mark Anthony, that the good will be interred with his bones. Dr. Eric Williams "will live on in history. He will not die; his ideas, his goals, and his dreams will not die, and therefore, he will not die". Permit me, Cde. Speaker, to exhort to this Assembly and the nation of Guyana to work more earnestly and more swiftly for the creation of the West Indian so that like our victorious cricket team, we can usher in a new and more equitable economic and social order in this world where the technology, techniques and resources are still available for the achievement by man of a life of creativity and abundance.

Finally, in the name of the National Assembly of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, our President, Government and people, I bid this deceased man of lasting worth, of lasting value, Dr. Eric Williams, the last Farewell. Farewell! Farewell!

I now ask this Assembly to support the Motion

Question proposed.

Cde. Ram Karran (The Deputy Speaker): Your Honour, I wish to add just a few words of support to the Motion moved by my friend the hon. Prime Minister on the occasion of the passing of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is inevitable, we all know, for us to die. That state of development, call it that, is bound to occur to every one of us at some time or the other, but with the passing of Eric Williams it was so sudden that I believe that everyone who heard of the incident after it occurred was shocked. And that was my reaction too, terrible shocked while ago this man was active – no one heard of any illness – active and alert and then suddenly we heard of his death. It shocked every one of the people whom I heard referring to his passing. Perhaps many of us do not think of that stage that is bound to overtake us. Whether Eric Williams did think of it we do not know but his passing has certainly left a very great void particularly in the society of Trinidad and Tobago and even in the wider Caribbean where so many people, the politicians in particular, looked to him as a sort of example.

I have heard it said that his participation in politics was accidental, that when he left the Caribbean Commission he did so because the blustering politicians of that time, of those days, did not take up the cudgels for Eric Williams in that Commission. Be that as it may, whether it is true or whether it was by accident, as was said, the fact is that Eric Williams was able to show another side of his personality and the Caribbean in general and Trinidad and Tobago in particular have benefited immensely from his participation on the political field.

There is no doubt – my friend has said so and everyone has said – that Eric Williams academically was one of the greatest the Caribbean has produced and I would say that, especially so, his participation in the political life of Caribbean – even though the Federation has failed – and his participation in the politics of Trinidad and Tobago have been monumental.

One thing that one tends to refer to is the fact that immediately after he was elected as Prime Minister he was one of the first of the Caribbean leaders to be admitted to the Privy Council of Her Majesty the Queen. Whether he participated in that body or not, the fact is that he has remained there. One remains a life member of the Privy Council.

But is not only in the very high echelons of Commonwealth office that Eric Williams excelled. His personality, very little of which we know, has been that of a person who more or less lived only for the thing he was engaged in. One had to be very close to Eric Williams, I imagine, to know more about his inner life, but this is what one can say, particularly the calypsonian. They have made many digs against the Prime Minister but one saw nowhere at all any attempt to abridge the so-called “rights” of the calypsonian to try to make something else out of Williams. That is why my friend says that in this particular field there was no limitation and calypsonians had a full opportunity for developing their talent even though Eric was himself the target.

Another observation particularly in this environment, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, we can see very clearly that the hazards we go through in this country are almost absent – almost I say – in Trinidad and Tobago, that is the hazards of rivalry and racial division. One would say that in the community of Trinidad and Tobago that unfortunate development is almost absent. I have heard very many people in Trinidad and Tobago, of various race groups, saying, “We ent got racialism like yuh all have over there.” That is due to a large extent to Eric Williams’ policy in the administration of Trinidad and Tobago.

I need not deal with his academic greatness. My friend has already dealt with that and so many people have already spoken of it, but I want to say that in my own case and in the case of many people, Eric Williams’ Capitalism and Slaver - some people accuse him of having departed from the principles as he entered the political field. Whether that is so or not I would say, perhaps authoritatively, if I can use that word, that it has helped to mould to a very large extent the anti-colonial feelings that developed in the wider Caribbean.

I wish, as I said, to join with my friend in expressing tribute to this great man who has passed on and to identify him as one of the greatest the Caribbean has produced, to join with him in urging this Assembly to take appropriate action to convey to his sorrowing relatives and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and perhaps the Legislature in Trinidad and Tobago, that we too feel a very great loss in the passing of this great man. Thank you.

The Speaker: Mr. Abraham.

Mr. Abraham: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my party, the United Force, and Mr. Feilden Singh, my leader, I would certainly love to share in the sentiments expressed by the hon. Prime Minister and my friend Mr. Ram Karran on the passing of the great Caribbean statesman. He was not only a statesman of the Caribbean but I would say a statesman of the world, the great doctor, the Hon. Eric Williams, and to join in conveying to his sorrowing relatives and the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to the rest of the Caribbean our deepest sympathy.

Question –

That this National Assembly records its deep regret at the death of Dr. the Rt. Hon. Eric Eustace Williams, T.C., Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and directs that an expression of its condolences be conveyed to his sorrowing relatives and to the Government and people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Put.

The Speaker: I will ask Members to stand for one minute.

/Members stood in silence for one minute/

Motion carried.

BILLS – SECOND AND THIRD READINGS

Tax (Amendment) Bill 1981

“A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Tax Act.” /The Minister, Finance, on behalf of the Vice-President, Economic Planning and Finance./

The Speaker: Cde. Sallahuddin.

2:35 p.m.

The Minister, Finance, in the Ministry of Economic Planning and Finance (Cde. Sallahuddin): Cde. Speaker, on behalf of the Vice-President for Economic Planning and Finance, I beg to move that the Tax (Amendment) Bill, No. 4 of 1981, be now read a Second time. You will permit me, Cde. Speaker, to crave the indulgence of the Chair to make the point that I sit at the foot of the Speaker of the Assembly and I seek guidance procedurally, although I have the procedure document before me, because this is the first occasion on which I am expected on behalf of Vice-President Hoyte to pilot a Bill through all its Stages, so I surely seek the further guidance of the Chair in this exercise.

The Speaker: Yes, Cde. Sallahuddin, please proceed.

Cde. Sallahuddin: Cde. Speaker, the Explanatory Memorandum sets out very briefly what is intended in Clause 2 of the Bill. The objective there is to increase the duty paid on beer manufactured in Guyana and taken or sold for consumption in Guyana. Beer is among the items which are mentioned in the Budget Speecher as attracting higher rates of excise duty and while beer as a single item attracts the greatest quantity in terms of the amount of dollars accruing from the excise duty on alcoholic beverages generally, in this instance along with the new measures imposed on alcohol and tobacco, it is intended that another \$14 million will be realized by way of current receipts. This is adequately reflected in the Budget Speech of 1981.

The rest of the Bill, Cde. Speaker, attempts to do three other things on the principle that taxation and tax measures ought to be equitably distributed so that there is some relationship, proportionately, between the measure and the person's economic and financial interest. One section of the Bill seeks to double the amount an applicant for a licence to trade in gold or precious stones must deposit and because there is increasing activity in this respect we feel that this is necessary. It also seeks to substantially increase the licence duty payable by traders in gold and precious stones which licences were fixed 15 years ago. It is rather alarming to note that goldsmiths in this country today pay a licence cost of a single dollar. Now that might not be even worth the process of collection and this seeks to remind me of the time, Cde. Speaker, when we bought a bicycle licence for what was considered less than the cost of the paper and the metal badge that was required to be attached to the bicycle. I recall too that there was a time when we paid a very insignificant sum to have a vehicle examined for fitness.

The measure also has to do with the revenue accruing from these increased levies to be paid to the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission instead of to the State by way of paying it into the Consolidated Fund. It also sees to treble the penalty where a person sells or purchase gold or precious stones without a licence and there is ample justification for the measure to trebles the penalty but I think it is also equally important for us to adopt other measures to ensure that all the precious metals that are mined from the earth of this country are properly accumulated and properly disposed of and not necessarily relying upon the higher penalty. We do not share the view on this side of the Assembly that penalties are a principal source of revenue. The view we share, is that penalties should be so realistic that they serve to deter the commission or in some instances the omission of the act and when we consider the wideness and the vastness of the area over which mining takes place, when we consider the length and the inaccessibility of our borders, one can well appreciate the stringency behind the last point I just made comment on.

We intend to be brief this afternoon dimply because what we are dealing with is a straightforward factual matter, and moreso, because the walls of this Chamber still echo the sentiments we have just expressed on the passing of the Doctor.

Question proposed.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, I have looked at the current Bill before the Assembly and made an attempt to relate it to the Principle Act so that I can clearly understand what is taking place. I think the Minister missed the bus when he made the point that goldsmiths pay currently \$1.00 annually for licences. I would like to convey the thought and feeling that when this legislation was introduced – according to the Minister, fifteen years ago, which would mean during the lifetime of this Government – the intention was not to raise money as such but to provide legislation with the sole objective of monitoring the whole question of gold in the country. If the legislation is examined in its entirety – and that is dealing with the Principle Act – we would see that a goldsmith is required to keep certain records and we will see that in the current Bill that there is a further Amendment for the goldsmith to declare from whom he bought gold. I simply raised the question of the dollar to make the point that I do not think – and I would like the Minister to confirm this afternoon – that the intention of this legislation, the intention of the Bill is to ensure that we get the maximum benefit, revenue-wise, from the production of gold which the people and this country own. And from that angle the Opposition would have absolutely no objection to the legislation.

But, Cde. Speaker, proceed further to say that legislation can be framed and has been framed and when such legislation is examined objectively one finds that the man at the bottom, the smaller man, who is probably one of the links in a long chain, is the man that is hurt more not in terms of increase from \$1.00 to \$100 but the process of invoking the powers of the legislation reaches him faster and with more frequency than those whom the legislation should really reach. Legislation of this type, I reiterate, is to ensure that when the production of gold is declared we have a better view of our production annually. And I wish to make the point, Mr. Speaker, I looked at it. I suppose there was an attempt to rationalise the whole question of deposits as against licences because the Bill has two limbs. One is to increase deposits and the second is to increase licence fees. The last part of the Bill is to increase the licence fee for the goldsmith who does not currently pay a deposit.

But I go further to say that we must be very concerned with craftsmen in this country – and I would like to put goldsmiths in that category – we have very few of them at the moment. I think generally members of this Assembly will agree with me that we have had over the years in Guyana some of the best goldsmiths who were able, without any kind of document, to design on their own and to create a very attractive market for the jewelry we produce. Thus there should be very encouragement to keep those skilled men within the borders of Guyana. The man who sits and who has to make jewelry has to become a king of accountant because he has to keep all kinds of documentation and this Bill gives him an additional burden for him to record each time from whom he purchases gold. And when one looks at that bit of amendment one sees that it is to ensure that those who are dealing in gold report accurately and end illegal dealing in gold, I go a step further, probably exporting our gold illegally.

My, Speaker, the history of this country will show that our six mining districts are the areas to which we must give attention and those mining districts should be properly monitored and supervised. If they are not, what will happen as is happening at the current time, is that the man who has a claim, the man buys the gold, probably from the pork-knockers, goes and voluntarily declares what he has and it is on that basis that he pays royalty. I will not bore the Assembly with the whole question of what is the royalty and all of that.

But I want to make the point that if the intention of this Bill is what I think really it is, it should not simply be a question of licence fees and deposits. It is the intention to move towards that point of better monitoring, better control to ensure greater production bearing in mind the price of gold, then I would say the Government needs probably through the Mining Commission to ensure that we can have better supervision of our mining districts so that not only royalty will be increased but with the increase in royalty there will be an increase in the production of gold and we will know exactly the ounces of gold we produce each year. I do not think any Member of this Assembly – including the Minister who undoubtedly will have been a stranger to the mining Ministry itself because I think, particularly, in fairness to him, that he deals with finance – will say that they have reached the point, or are moving fast enough to ensure that we tackle the right area. The pork-knockers are still at the mercy of the few big men upon whom they have to depend during the period when they are still searching for gold. They borrow from them.

The Speaker: Comrade, lets come back to the Bill

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, I thought that if my analysis of this Bill is right, that is not only a question increasing licence fees, I am with all due respect –

The Speaker: Well I don't think so.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Well, if you so rule, I cannot make a contribution which I think will be helpful to the Government. But let me add to that. This Bill framed as it is by itself will not achieve the objection which I think, and genuinely so, is the objective of the Mining Commission. Much more has to be done. As I said, if those objectives which I placed before the Assembly are correct – and I think they are correct – then I would say the Opposition has no objection to the Bill. For the benefit of the Assembly and in the interest of retaining our craftsmen who will now have to pay not \$1.00 but \$100.00, that is not such a big point, and who can indeed make a tangible contribution in further creation of designs in jewelry, we must not invoke the powers of the legislation in any way to harass them or to involve them in cumbersome exercise for which probably they are not equipped. We all know that the limitations of goldsmiths would be simply to the trade and not necessarily with all the extension of book-keeping and record keeping. There is a distinction between the man who makes the jewelry, the one who buys the gold, the one who trades in gold and the bigger jeweler. That would have been the contribution of the People's Progressive Party on this Bill.

The Speaker: Cde. Minister, do you wish to reply?

Cde. Sallahuddin: (replying): Very briefly, Cde. Speaker. How can one talk about the control and supervision of precious metals to keep records? The speaker attempted to say that it becomes a cumbersome exercise when we seek to have those who work the precious metals record their names and addresses but I cannot distinctly see the connection between the basic contribution of monitoring and controlling and not keeping records. We have an interest purely in the development of craft and craftsmanship in this country and while that does not arise directly from the measures intended in this Bill, we have taken opportunity on other occasions to talk about the need for increased production and the need to upgrade the skills and expertise of those who work in the area of precious metals. I would want to imagine that since the members of the Minority Party have no fundamental objection to the measures we propose, that we get on with the task.

We take the point too that the dollar was not intended to raise revenue but that the dollar was simply introduced as a regulatory mechanism. But surely, fifteen years have gone and objectives and circumstances change and that dollar is now going to be \$100. But it is interesting to note, also, Cde. Speaker, that in 1965 the price of an ounce of gold was, on an average, \$60, and in 1980, the average was about \$1,200 for one ounce of gold. Now here is ample justification for the increase in revenue which the State is seeking to collect by this measure. Or take the example of diamonds. Diamonds in 1965 carried an average of \$20 per carat and in 1980 our information is that it rose to \$150 per carat, by average. Those are the remarks we would wish to make at this stage, Cde. Speaker. [Applause]

1981-04-02

2:45 – 2:55 p.m.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: I have a short question, sir. What I want to inquire from the Minister with respect to this amendment, which affects those persons whom I have clearly defined as the craftsmen, the actual goldsmiths who work, is whether it would not have been enough for the dealers to keep the records instead of passing that burden right down to the men at the bottom – if that would not have assured what the Government’s objectives really are. He has an additional burden where he has to keep a record of the gold purchased and from whom that gold was purchased. He might not have the background. He might have to add to the number of his employees. That is the point.

Cde. Sallahuddin: Cde. Speaker, we take the point. The dealer needs to keep the records. We also take the other point that the man who works the gold also has to keep his records. That remains the position.

Clause 4, as printed, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed

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

DRAINAGE AND IRRIGATION (AMENDMENT) BILL 1981

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Drainage and Irrigation Act.” [The Minister, Drainage and irrigation, on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture.]

The Speaker: Cde. Van Sluytman.

The Minister, Drainage and Irrigation, in the Ministry of Agriculture (Cde. Van. Sluytman): Cde. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, I beg to move the Drainage and Irrigation (Amendment) Bill 1981 and ask that it be read a Second time. Cde. Speaker, this Bill, the Drainage and Irrigation (Amendment) Bill 1981, is simply and non-controversial. It seeks to remove duplication and, in some instances, confusion. For example, when the Drainage and Irrigation Board publishes a rate and subsequently the Minister, in his own right, either accepts or amends the rate submitted by the Board, and after consultation with the Board publishes either the same rate or an amended rate, it leaves the local authorities in confusion. Sometimes the board publishes a rate but not too long after the Minister publishes a rate which might not be the same rate, so we can see it is a waste of time even if the rates were to be the same. The Board publishes. Why should the Minister also publish? And if the Board, in the first instance, publishes a rate, why should the Minister published another rate varying the board’s rate? It’s confusing.

The Bill seeks to amend sections 46, 47 and 48 of the Drainage and Irrigation Act. Section 46 as it now is, states: “Prior to the 1st November in each year the Board shall publish a notice in the Gazette, and in such daily newspapers as the Board may deem necessary, specifying the rate assessed in respect of

each drainage and irrigation area.” And there is an appendage to that which is subsection (2) of a section 46, that “Each such notice shall contain a statement that the rates therein specified are liable to be varied by the Minister.” Parliament now seeks under section 46 to amend it to read as follows: “Prior to 1st November in each year the Board shall submit the rate assessed in respect of each drainage and irrigation area to the Minister for his approval.”

We seek amendment also for section 45. The present law is that “After publication of the notice in accordance with the provisions of the last preceding section the

Board shall submit the assessment of each drainage area to the Minister who may vary any such assessment.”

We seek to remove that by amending section 17 which will provide that the “The Minister may either approve the rate assessed as submitted by the Board or vary it after giving the Board an opportunity of making any representation on the proposed variation.”

In other words, instead of publishing the rates, this Bill is seeking that they submit the rates to the Minister and the Minister can still vary the rates or accept the rates, which is in the interest of all. It will remove confusion and/or duplication.

This Bill seeks also to amend section 48. Section 48 reads as follows:

“All rates as finally approved by the Minister shall be published in the Gazette, and in the same daily newspapers as the notices prescribed by section 46 were published, not later than the 15th December in each year.”

We seek to amend that so that it will read:

“All rates approved by the Minister shall be published in the Gazette and in such daily newspaper as the Board may deem necessary.”

The Bill also seeks to remove specific days for publication by amending the very section 46 which specifies that the Board must advertise by the 1st November and section 48 which says that the Minister must publish by the 15th December. We are seeking approval that there must not be specific days or dates that the Minister must give publication on rates agreed by him or with him and the Board.

As I said, it is a very simple Bill and non-controversial and I seek support from both the Government and Minority Parties.

Question proposed.

Cde. Ram Karran: Your Honour, my friend the Minister seeks the support of this side of the Assembly and claims that the measure is non-controversial. I am afraid that we cannot offer support from this side of the Assembly and I declare that the measure is certainly controversial. It is controversial because in the first sentence the Minister says that after 16 years they have now found that this measure does not work and that the functions of the Board, which Board has been in existence longer than the Minister has been alive, are now required to be varied.

I know that there has been opposition to the Board in the past because of the non-democratic character of it in the pre-ministerial era. At the moment, until the passage of this bit of legislation, the Board is a statutory board with execution authority that publishes rates that are presumed to be realistic rates. If the Board proposes to carry out certain capital works, then those things are included in the estimates. If the Board is of the view that certain maintenance work is to be done in another area, the estimates are prepared in accordance with that but since the board cannot override the Minister since the ministerial system came into being, the Board had necessarily to be subjected to the Minister's ability to provide funds for X,Y or Z as recommended by the Board. It is a good arrangement, especially since we are led to believe by our friends on the other side that it is expanded democracy and we have set up all sorts of democratic organs. If at the same time we are going to take away what little power they have instead of giving them more power to exercise democracy, than we are hypocritical; then the Bill certainly is controversial.

In one breath you are telling us about this alleged new Constitution and you are having prayers said to that god in this Assembly, all and sundry. This new Constitution has come about the first bit of legislation we are getting is to take away that little power that the Constitution allowed the people in the countryside to put it back in the hands of this tyrannical Minister who has to take everything in Guyana.

Certainly that is not democracy in terms of what they have been telling us. What is wrong with the Board saying publicly the – if you do not want to publish it in the newspapers don't publish it if that appears to be unethical. What is wrong with the board saying, "We propose to do X, Y, Z" and submitting it to the Minister. The Minister must look at it and say, "This is very good" or "This is not good", but he must give the reasons for it because he is not dealing with the board alone but with people outside the Board, that is, the farmers and the people in the villages who have to benefit from this action taken by the Board. He can look at it and say "This is all well and good but we ent got the money to do this and therefore it will have to be amended", and he calls on the Board to amend it. That is not undemocratic; it is what is the financial position in the country.

But for you to say in legislation introduced here that a Minister has been the authority is, in my view, a denial of democracy to the Board and to the people who make up the Board. The Board does not go and say out of their brains, their bald heads or their heads of hair that they are going to do this. They have to talk to the people, they have to talk to the farmers, the owners of the estates or the village

authority. You know the practices in the past, sir. The Board puts up proposals. They say in the case of this village, “Your rates, having regard to the fact whether you have a drainage pump, whether you have gravity irrigation or gravity drainage, the cost of looking after your area will be \$10 an acre.”

Over the years, ever since the formation of the Local Government Board and what not they have been looking at some villages that cannot pay. But the Board must put up realistic estimates. In the old days the Colonial Secretary who used to administer all these things said “We have to subsidise Buxton to this extent; we have to subsidise B.V. to so much; we have to go down to Relief and Support which can never pay; they only pay a penny an acre or something like that and we base it on that arrangement.

The situation is that we are taking all that away and I come back to the position that the Board can be actioned. If they fail to provide irrigation and drainage in any area and the people are flooded out we have countless examples where the people take them to Court and win. The Board is a statutory board. What my friend is trying to do is to remove that responsibility and put it on to the Minister so that the people will get peanuts in the future.

This is not an extension of democracy. This is rascality of the worst type. The Minister has responsibility, let him carry out his responsibilities and his ministerial duties but not let him take away from the people what they have already and tell us that there is confusion. Confusion for 15 years? Ridiculous!

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, two short points I wish to make. The first one is to tell the Minister why we say it is controversial.

Under the current legislation, when the rates are published it is only then that the public is made aware of them and after that exercise is completed those persons affected or those who would like to make representations go to the Minister and represent their views. Now the Bill is one to which fundamentally we must object in that the public is now denied the opportunity to know what the rates are. The rates would be published subsequently, when they are finally approved. I hope the Minister understand the legislation much better now.

The Chairman: Cde. Persaud, you can't say that of the Minister.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: I withdraw it. May I say that undoubtedly, what is before him he explained very well, but I am showing him what our objection is, and when I made that remark it was simply that he is now in a position to understand our view. This Board is constituted of technically qualified men and section 4 of the Act sets out the people who constitute the Board. The Board shall consist of the officers for the time being performing the duties of Chief Works and Hydraulics Officer and Supply Officer, Chief Agricultural Officer, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government. You see the kind of membership of the Board. It is after these men who are directly involved at all levels would have examined the situation then they publish what the rates are. Then the public is made aware of that, and the public gets an opportunity to air its views.

I want to ask the Minister the pertinent question what has led the Government to bring before this Assembly legislation to deny the people who are directly affected the opportunity to come to the Government which has statutory rights to intervene after hearing the view of the farmers and to just close the door with the intervention of the Minister in an exercise in secrecy involving the Board and the Minister and then the final rates, once and for all, are published and that is the end of the matter. I hope the Minister now approaches the Opposition's fundamental objection to the legislation.

The second point is, when publication is required by law, that publication takes place on or before 15th December of each year. Village Councils, District Councils, they meet, they have to fix their own rates, and generally the practice has been for these District Councils to wait until the drainage rates are published,

then they prepare their rates, etc. They get an opportunity of looking at the situation in a global way. That opportunity will also be denied, because I think they had beyond 15th December to announce their rates. I would like to feel that this particular legislation is ill-conceived. It is seen in the narrowness, and I think it is more an oversight, of the Government in only looking at it. Well, why not wait until the Minister varies then publish. I will show you the reason why it is necessary to publish first so that the Minister will be in a better position to hear the views of the people and then vary or confirm the rates as presented by the Board.

Cde. Van Sluytman (replying): Thank you, Cde. Speaker, Cde. Ram Karran was saying that the Ministry is overriding the Board. In a democracy, it ought not to be. What I want to assure Cde. Ram Karran is that there is no intention to override the Board. In fact, the Bill says that the Minister will have consultation with the Board in arriving at a rate; and then the Board would publish the rate. What I want also to remind Cde. Ram Karran, is that this is a Ministerial Government, and Ministers are responsible for every activity in the country, and the Minister must have the last say. I want also to remind Cde. Ram Karran –

The Speaker: You are not addressing Cde. Ram Karran. You are addressing the Assembly.

Cde. Van Sluytman: - that Government has been subsidising the Drainage and Irrigation Board to the tune of \$1.5 million so therefore, if the Government has to subsidise, Government must have a say in fixing rates and the disbursement of rates. There is no intention, Cde. Speaker, of overriding any duly constituted Board, to wit, the Drainage and Irrigation Board, but it is Government's strong intention that the measures taken this evening, would avoid confusion and duplication. And I can say this for the Board. The Board also believes that this is the way it would like to operate.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

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

MOTION

Confirmation of Customs (Exemption from Duties) Order 1981 (No. 17)

“Be it resolved that this National Assembly in accordance with section 9 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01, confirm the Customs (Exemption from Duties) Order 1981 (No. 17), which was made on 11th February, 1981, and published in the Gazette on 14th March, 1981.” [The Minister, Finance, on behalf of the Vice-President, Economic Planning and Finance.]

Cde. Sallahuddin: Cde. Speaker, the Motion stands in the name of the Vice-President, Economic Planning and Finance, and on his behalf I wish to move the Motion.

Question proposed, put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, “That this Assembly do now adjourned until Friday, 3rd April, 1981, at 2 p.m. [The Minister of Regional Development.]

Adjourned accordingly at 3:25 p.m.