

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATESOFFICIAL REPORTSVOLUME 11

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE FIRST SESSION (1987) OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

44th Sitting

14:00 hrs Wednesday, 1987-07-22

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (7*)Speaker (1)

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

Members of the Government - People's National Congress (62)Ministers in the Cabinet (10)Prime Minister (1)

Cde. H. Green, M.P.,
Prime Minister

Other Vice-President and First Deputy Prime Minister (1)

Cde. Dr. M. Shahabuddeen, O.R., S.C., M.P.,
Vice-President, First Deputy Prime Minister
and Attorney General

Other Vice-Presidents and Deputy Prime Ministers (2)

Cde. R. Chandisingh, M.P.,
Vice-President, National Mobilisation,
and Deputy Prime Minister

Cde. Viola V. Burnham, O.R., M.P.,
Vice-President, Education and Social Development,
and Deputy Prime Minister

Other Deputy Prime Ministers (2)

Cde. W.A.L.H. Parris, C.C.H., M.P.,
Deputy Prime Minister, Planning and (Absent - on leave)
Development

Cde. R.H.O. Corbin, M.P.,
Deputy Prime Minister, Public Utilities (Absent)

Senior Ministers (4)

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

*Cde. C.B. Greenidge, M.P.,
Minister of Finance

Cde. S. Prashad, M.P.,
Minister of Manpower and Housing

*Cde. W.S. Murray, C.C.H., M.P.,
Minister of Trade and Tourism

Other Ministers (1⁴)Senior Ministers (7)

Cde. J.R. Thomas, M.P.,
Minister of Regional Development

Cde. Dr. R.A. Van West-Charles, M.P.,
Minister of Medical Education, Environment and (Absent - on leave)
Food Policy

Cde. Yvonne V. Harewood, M.P.,
Minister of Information and the Public Service

* Non-elected Member

*Cde. Dr. P.L. McKenzie, A.A., M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture

*Cde. D.M.A. Bernard, M.P.,
Minister in the Ministry of Education

*Cde. J.R. Kranenburg, M.P.,
Minister of Communications and Works

*Cde. Dr. N.E. Blackman, M.P.,
Minister in the Ministry of Health

Ministers (5)

Cde. Urmia E.H. Johnson, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of National
Mobilisation

Cde. C.G. Sharma, A.A., J.P., M.P.,
Minister within the Office of the President (Absent - on leave)

Cde. D. Sawh, M.P.,
Minister of Forestry

*Cde. V.V. Parvatan, M.P.,
Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture (Absent - on leave)

Cde. J.T. Kisson, M.P.,
Minister in the Ministry of Medical
Education, Environment and Food Policy

Ministers of State (2)

*Cde. Dr. Faith A. Harding, M.P.,
Minister of State within the Ministry of (Absent - on leave)
Planning and Development

Cde. Stella Odie-Ali, M.P.,
Minister of State in the Ministry of
Home Affairs

Parliamentary Secretaries (2)

*Cde. Jean M.G. Persico, A.A., M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary, Education

*Cde. L.E. Scotland, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the
Prime Minister

Government Chief Whip (1)

Cde. Jennifer A. Ferreira, M.P.,
Government Chief Whip

Other Members (23)

Cde. Agnes W. Bend-Kirton, M.P.

Cde. A.K. Habibulla, M.P.

Cde. E.H.A. Fowler, M.P.

Cde. Joyce Gill-Mingo, M.P.

Cde. M. Ally, M.P.

Cde. Elaine B. Davidson, M.P.

Cde. H. Doobay, M.P.

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

Cde. Edwina Melville, M.P. (Absent - on leave)

Cde. Anna Ally, M.P.

Cde. L. Arthur, M.P.

Cde. J.R.L. Bovell-Drakes, M.P.

Cde. N. Calistro, M.P.

Cde. F.M. Cumberbatch, M.P.

Cde. M.I. Deen, M.P.

*Non-elected Member

Cde. Cyrilda A. DeJesus, M.P.
Cde. Edith Deygoo, M.P.
Cde. Clarice A. Edwards, M.P.
Cde. C.L. Geddes, M.P.
Cde. G. Marshall, M.P.
Cde. B. Persaud, M.P. (Absent - on leave)
Cde. E.W. Trotman, M.P.
Cde. K. Sankar, M.S., M.P. (Absent-on leave)
Members from the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs (2)

Cde. Rose I. Semple, M.P. (Absent)
(One Vacancy)
Members from the Regional Democratic Councils (10)

Cde. Nellie R. Charles, M.P. (Region No. 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)
Cde. R. Bishop, M.S., M.P. (Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica) (Absent - on leave)

Cde. Y. Khan, M.P. (Region No. 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)
Cde. Enid E. Abrahams, M.S., J.P., M.P. (Region No. 3 - Essequibo
Islands/West Demerara)
Cde. I. Ally, M.P. (Region No. 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne)

Cde. B.L. Domingo, M.P. (Region No. 1 - Barima/Waini) (Absent)
Cde. S.I. McGarrell, M.P. (Region No. 8 - Potaro/Siparuni)
Cde. M. Stephens, M.P. (Region No. 9 - Upper Takutu/Upper
Essequibo)
Cde. Joycelyn Thom-Lindie, M.P. (Region No. 10 - Upper Demerara/Berbice) (Absent
(One Vacancy - Region No. 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)

Members of the Minority (11)

(i) People's Progressive Party (8)

Minority Leader (1)

Cde. Dr. C. Jagan, M.P.,
Minority Leader

Deputy Speaker (1)

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, J.P., M.P.,
Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly

Other Members (6)

Cde. Janet Jagan, M.P.
Cde. C.C. Collymore, M.P.
Cde. S.F. Mohamed, M.P.,
Minority Chief Whip
Cde. H. Nokta, M.P.
Cde. I. Basir, M.P.
Cde. C.C. Belgrave, M.P.

(ii) United Force (2)

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

(iii) Working People's Alliance (1)

Mr. E. Kwayana, M.P.

OFFICERS

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

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly - Cde. I. Hartman

14:00 hrsANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKERLeave to Members

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to:

Cde. Parris up to 23rd July;
 Cde. Jackson up to 30th July;
 Cde. Van West-Charles up to 9th August;
 Cdes. Stephens and Thom-Lindie from 1st June to 15th July;
 Cdes. B. Persaud, Sankar and Bishop for today.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS, ETC.

The following papers were presented:

- (1) Annual Report of the Teaching Service Commission for the year 1986.
Minister of Regional Development, on behalf of the Vice-President,
 Education and Social Development and Deputy Prime Minister.
- (2) Annual Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the year 1986.
Minister of Regional Development, on behalf of the Minister of
 Foreign Affairs.
- (3) Annual Report of the Ministry of Health for the year 1986.
Minister in the Ministry of Health.

REQUESTS FOR LEAVE TO MOVE THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY ON DEFINITE
 MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Inadequate water supply on the East Coast of Demerara

Mr. Kwayana: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move, under Standing Order 11 the suspension of the Assembly to raise a matter touching on water supply. It is a definite matter. On some parts of the East Coast 22,000 persons at least are now without water supply.

**TAKE
14:05
TO
14:25 HRS
MISSING**

14:25 hrs

I must congratulate the Minister of Health for his recent "first-of-a-kind" operation. We are sure he has done a good job. Was it the first-of-a-kind operation or was it for the first time they did the operation with light from a torch? I am not sure which. If I am not mistaken he, too, has suffered quite a bit from the fact that the electrical generating equipment and the normal (?) electricity are not working as they should.

Nurses are a basic factor in any medical institution and I do not think that we are treating our nurses as they should be treated. I understand that their morale is low, that they have to do many things that they should not have to do. Some of them even have to fetch water; some of them have to run from ward to ward, borrowing equipment, borrowing drugs, trying to keep their own wards functioning. I was surprised to learn - and I would ask the Minister to seriously go into this - that many nurses who have been working for very long periods - some for as much as 30 years - and who are fully trained nurses and midwives are not on our pensionable list. I find that very difficult to understand and I would suggest, if this is so, that every effort should be made to help secure their future. I think they should be part of those in the service of the Government who are entitled to pensions.

The operating rooms, as I mentioned, are having problems and cannot function as before for several reasons, including the fact that the air-conditioning units are not always working and the sterilised equipment and linens and gauzes are not always provided. Also there are shortages of things like oxygen. All these matters are creating problems for surgery. We are happy that the Minister has succeeded in re-opening the obstetrics theatre but I understand it cannot yet be fully utilised. Let us hope that it will be fully utilised. Even with the existence of a shortage of patients and the fact that there are many empty beds I saw two patients in a bed at the hospital.

What are we doing about seeing that we have Guyanese to fill the important medical positions? It is true that the Cuban Government has given us tremendous assistance. Without their assistance I doubt we would be able to run the public hospital. While it is true that they are giving the assistance generously, I think every effort should be made to find persons to fill these posts because Cuban doctors have their own lives to live in their own country. They have contributions to make and also they have to take leave. We have only one pediatric:

in the hospital and he is a Cuban. We have only one anaesthetist who is a Cuban. We have only one general surgeon, who is a Cuban and we have only one psychiatrist and one dermatologist, and both are Cubans. We have one Guyanese gynaecologist and two We have Guyanese in other fields but the ones I mentioned are very vital to the functioning of a hospital and certainly we should see that there are Guyanese to fill the posts. Also, we should not be so dependent on another country for providing us with these services.

I want to mention that, on orders from the Minister of Health, patients who come from rural areas are sent back to their areas for treatment. This is no doubt based on the concept of decentralisation of our medical services, but we have to look at the reality. Is it working? I am told that while the medical personnel have to fulfil the directions of the Minister of Health and send away patients who come to the hospital for specific treatment, the reality is that the patients cannot be properly treated in the district hospitals or by the district doctors because they do not have the specialised attention there and, even though our public hospital is not supplied with the essentials, it is even much worse in the rural areas. So how are these people going to be treated? It comes to this, that many of them get worse and have to come back to the public hospital. In turn this increases the medical costs for Government because it is costing us more in the long run.

Are we having the administration of the public hospital that is needed for our situation? In the past I can remember there were periods when we had pretty good administration, but it does not look as though we have this going on now. We have, I understand, problems. I mentioned the fuel vote being 'busted'. Certainly those in charge of the administration should have looked at this long ago. I understand our bill for LIDCO for milk supplied is in arrears and, as a result, we are not getting milk all the time because our bill is so much. I understand the Ministry borrows different things from various private hospitals in Georgetown and Linden. I understand that G.P.C. has supplies of drugs but perhaps because they are not getting paid, and they want to show profits, they sell to private concerns. I understand too - I do not have proof but I urge that there be an investigation and this should not be taken lightly - that the bond in Kingston belonging to the Ministry of Health is packed with a lot of important items but no one has gone through them properly and no one knows what is there. Some of the things are rotting, some are expiring and some are stolen. I think that the bond should be

thoroughly examined and a proper investigation made.

The old problem, which still exists, is the quality of food served to our patients. This is still a bone of contention. As one doctor mentioned to me, the meals are sub-standard, but not only in quality are they sub-standard. The patients are not given the quantity of food they need. There must be a reason for this. I understand that from the kitchen and even before the kitchen - from the supplier to the kitchen and to various places to which the food moves there is a loss and by the time the food reaches the plates of the patients a lot of it has gone. A lot of theft is going on. As I mentioned in the beginning, corruption is a sign of life in Guyana over the last two decades. Corruption permeates every aspect of our society. The choice parts of the patients' food are taken away before the food reaches their plates. Maybe the Minister should pay surprise visits at meal times and see if he himself could sit down and eat the food served to patients. I doubt he would be able to manage it. Anyway, he could try.

In administration and in management we have to be very concerned about persons who work in institutions. We have to show concern and we have to be prepared to make the medical personnel at hospitals feel as though they are wanted and that they are respected.

**TAKE
14:35
TO
14:55 HRS
MISSING**

14:55 hrs

This hospital was asking for such things as - table model fans, a garden fork, a wheel barrow, water pitchers, a wardrobe, occasional tables, a clothes horse, a cabinet, a door mat, ware plates, teacups and so on. I am prepared to give tea cups. I am going to make my contribution. We have been doing it in the past. But the question is: What is happening in our central hospital? I am not saying this just because I want to speak. I have been a patient in the hospital and I am worried about what is going on there. This State must guarantee the health of the nation and therefore this Motion asking for a Commission of Inquiry is a very simple, honest, dedicated Motion which asks for something that will benefit every single Guyanese, including the President, Prime Minister and myself. This Motion is not asking to investigate any particular project which might be a measure of fraud and corruption. This Motion is asking that a Commission of Inquiry be set up, by means of which all of us jointly could find out what are the problems affecting the hospital doctors, nurses and others. Jointly we could execute the findings of this Commission. That is what this Motion is about. Therefore, I want to ask this Assembly to reverse the trend in this Assembly and give support to such an Important Motion.

The Minister in the Ministry of Health (Cde. Dr. Blackman): Cde. Speaker, I have to respect a statement from Mr. Feilden Singh when he admitted that he does not know anything about medicine. I think with that statement he clearly admitted that he does not understand the Motion which has been presented and which is supported by various Members of the Minority. However, I must caution him not to support Motions in a blind manner.

First of all, I would like to comment on Mr. Feilden Singh's remark and concern. He said that he went to a particular agency to purchase a particular drug and was told that that drug was not available. I think this could happen in any pharmacy. We found it necessary and more efficient in this country to follow the rules suggested by the World Health Organisation for importing essential drugs. I must point out - and this information is also for other Members of Parliament - that if a physician orders a particular drug by name and the pharmacist tells you it is not available but he has similar types of drugs that will perform the same action - we are concerned with what the drug does rather than with the name of the drug - we have instituted a system. We have asked pharmacists, when this occurs, to inform the patient, after consulting the

physician who wrote the prescription that similar drugs are available. That system is already in place to take care of that.

It happens that Members of Parliament who come to this institution, an institution as highly respected as this, present complaints. They present them in a manner as if they are not sure that they understand. When they come to this body they have to know. If they cannot understand they can be advised by somebody else. I think we must know what is going on. I have never seen one of the Members who spoke near a hospital and I have personally spent four man hours at the Georgetown Hospital. If you combine the Members of the Minority Party who supported this Motion and multiply that number by ten - I know what I am talking about. At present the Georgetown Hospital is my responsibility.

The Mover of the Motion talked about 're gents'. What word is that? She never took the time to look in a dictionary to find out exactly what it means. I think she meant reagents.

I would like to tell Parliament today that at present we have more departments in the hospital. The Mover of the Motion mentioned three departments to which attention must be paid because of complaints. I have nothing against complaints. They are necessary but they must be constructive. She talked about three departments and then related them to quality of health care. There are more than eleven departments in a hospital. I would like to tell her that many of these departments are directly related to quality of health care. I would like to mention those that are. I would like to mention the parameters that are used to determine the quality of health care. It is very important to know this. The quality of health care is determined by how many people die in a hospital, how many people have complications. It is also determined by infection rate. The Member never mentioned any of these parameters. These parameters are accepted by the World Health Organisation. I did not make them up. She did not talk about them. She talked about complaints. We urge her to be objective.

**TAKE
15:05
TO
15:25 HRS
MISSING**

15:25 hrs

But some of these Motions, or some of these suggestions, eventually come back on the Order Paper in another form. They are put there by the Government and the Government then hopes that they will see the light of day almost immediately. They come in Bills, they come as Orders or they come as suggestions. Can we not sit down as human beings in this honourable Chamber and discuss and debate as adults, without any ill-will, just viewing the situation in all its reality?

Who will say that the hospital is not a death-trap? Every citizen in this country will say it is. The eminent doctor is trying his utmost. I am hoping that he will stay with us for a very long time, because I know that some of the things that he may contemplate doing will not see the light of day. I think he is thinking about what it ought to be. I am asking the doctor himself to let us sit down sometimes. [Interruption] You laugh at people's health.

The Speaker: Cde. Belgrave, if you do not proceed with the debate I am going to --

Cde. Belgrave: I am hope ful. [Interruption by Cde. Johnson]

The Speaker: Cde. Johnson, I spoke to you once before.

Cde. Belgrave: I hope that when the Mover has replied some sense will prevail in this Assembly and that we will see how important this is. People are involved and people are important. It is not for the Government to decide and then nobody else has a right to speak.

Cde. J. Jagan (replying): Cde. Speaker, the Minister in speaking to this Motion did not properly deal with the points that were put to this Assembly. I am not interested in the question of pronunciation. He has pronounced a word one way and I did not. I did qualify my statement when I mentioned that it was a chemical used in laboratory tests. This is a trivial thing and it was trivia he was dealing with. I wonder if the Minister could seriously stand up before his colleagues and say that the quality of care in a hospital is not dependent on its laboratory and X-ray services. I would like to see him stand with his peers and say so. I am not a doctor but a doctor does need to have common sense to know that if the essential factors of diagnosis are not there the doctor is going to have a hard time to give the essential care for the essential care is based on this correct diagnosis. For the Minister to say that they can continue the treatment without sophisticated services, shocks me. I am not a doctor, but I read. It was Madame Curie who led us to the great invention of X-Rays in the last century. That is the oldest of all services. It is not sophisticated; it is essential to medicine. To say that laboratory services do not affect the quality of care makes me shiver. If our

medical services are in the hands of a person who can say such things, we are pretty badly off.

I am not interested in trivia or in the advice of the pharmacists. The representative of the United Force, Mr. Feilden Singh, mentioned that he could not get drugs and the reply was, "You know, the doctor may ask -- "

The Speaker: Cde. Jagan, do not deal with that. That was an irrelevant remark.

Cde. J. Jagan: That may be so, but the fact is that he stressed that I did not deal with facts. I said that there were serious shortages of drugs in the hospital and I made a positive statement that this has led to the death of people. I say it is serious. He has not dealt with the seriousness of it. He has not dealt with the question of the blood bank services, to which I referred. He has not dealt with the shortage of reagents that are necessary for certain tests to go on. You cannot continue without such services. I did mention the fiasco of thallium sulphate poisoning and that led us to other things.

I did not give the Minister complaints: I gave criticisms. I was analysing what was wrong. I was not making complaints. I analysed what was wrong and I stressed three aspects of the public hospital which were in a serious crisis. I also mentioned the fact that the poor supplies of electricity have led to very serious problems including even the sterilisation of linens, gauze and instruments required for surgery. The Minister has criticised me for not giving what he would call a correct analysis, which he said should include the mortality rates and infection rates, but where am I going to get those figures? In fact, only today I received the Report of his Ministry for 1986. Why could I not have received it earlier. I may have found something that would have helped in this debate.

I hate to mention this because it is an unpleasant thing to say. The fact is that this Government is not providing the correct mortality rates, particularly the infant mortality rate. That is another subject. He is saying I should provide the mortality rates and the infection rates. I mentioned that patients are acquiring diseases in the wards, that there is an excessive amount of post-operative infection. Let him deal with it specifically and let him tell me how many cases of post-operative infection there are.

The Minister boasts that they have done 1500 surgical cases. I presume he means this year and if he means that they were done this year, that works out to an average of 10 a day, which is not a very heavy load for a big hospital like this. because that would include minor surgery as well as major surgery. So I don't know what that really means. Every hospital of the size of the Public Hospital, Georgetown, should carry a load like that. I don't think it is excessive. I would not want

to accuse the Minister of arrogance, but there is a certain arrogance that he is a doctor and I, the Mover, am not a doctor. I am a politician. I am here to fight for people's interests and people are interested in having a public hospital that they can feel secure in.

I did not talk about a bed shortage. I corrected myself. We all make errors of speech. I said that first and then I said "shortage of patients". I said I saw a large number of empty beds in the hospital and I was wondering why. I don't think that it is because people are not sick. I think a lot of people have lost confidence in the hospital and they are filling up the private hospitals. Secondly, the Minister is forcing doctors to send cases back to the rural areas and that is also removing the number of patients who would otherwise be in the hospital. As I mentioned, many of those persons who are sent back to rural areas are not being properly taken care of.

The Minister has to be able to listen to people and not be arrogant that he is a doctor and I am not. The fact of the matter is that I am not a doctor but I was a Minister of Health and there were few people who offered very strong criticism against me. I was able to function as Minister of Health in the same way that the Minister would no doubt function if they put him in another Ministry. It is a question of application, intelligence and interest in people's welfare.

I would like the Minister to erase from his mind that I am making complaints. I have investigated the hospital and I have come up with certain strong criticisms which he has not answered. I maintain that there is a serious shortage of drugs and this is affecting the welfare of the patients. There is also a serious shortage of facilities in the hospital and these are necessary. I am also saying that the morale of our professional staff is low because of the way the hospital is administered

The Speaker: Cde. Jagan, you are repeating all that you said previously. This is a reply.

**TAKE
15:35
TO
15:55 HRS
MISSING**

15:55 hrs

The fundamental basis of this Committee is to have all the parties on it, a permanent committee to ensure an equitable distribution system. Supplies are not reaching areas and persons who are not in co-ops are really suffering. They are in the majority. Many areas do not have co-op shops. I want to make the point that even co-ops that are set up are miniature bodies. They are not open to the entire population. I can point to any part of this country if you wish. I have travelled in this country and in many areas, even where there is the presence of a co-op shop, the public in that area is not aware of it and there is a kind of inclination among those who contribute to the co-op not to let in more people and to dominate, so to speak, the situation with a view to having supplies go only to a small number of people.

Why should we make the consumers of this country mendicants? The hours they spend in search of essential items can be put to more productive use. I would like to see and I genuinely believe that the Minister and the Government would like to see an end to all the queues, particularly queues for food supplies. No system, I assume, is perfect. If that is a fact, then it is an objective and scientific fact. There is always, and always will be, evidence for improvement so that wherever there is evidence of loopholes and weaknesses, those can be looked at and the weakness or weaknesses removed, bearing in mind that production is an important consideration in the present context of the state of our economy. But, if production is an important consideration based on the present state of our country, we must ensure that those who are to keep the wheels of production going do not have to spend unnecessarily long hours searching for food items. Talk to any head of a department and he will tell you that he consistently has to give time off to workers.

The Speaker: Cde. Persaud, I do not wish to curtail this debate but the Minister has explained to you that he has another appointment. I am prepared to sit continuously until past 4 o'clock with the expectation that the debate will be finished. If it is not going to be finished, there is no sense in prolonging my agony. I am going to adjourn but I am prepared to sit. I shall try to be very co-operative irrespective of what others may say, but if you cannot finish I am going to take the suspension now.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: I can assure you that my presentation will be finished by 4.30.

The Speaker: You will need to have a seconder. There are many others to speak. I will suspend. The sitting is suspended until 4.30.

Sitting suspended accordingly at 4 p.m.

16:20 hrs

On resumption --

The Speaker: Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: The Minister may set up a system with very good intentions and taking all factors into account with the expectation of ensuring fair distribution, but then the Minister does not operate the system as such and, if I may make bold to say, generally he is isolated from the scene of activity. He may receive some complaints, he may find out what is going on, but he himself is not involved in all streams of distribution. People work the system and it is public knowledge that there is grave dissatisfaction. Persons who operate the system are being enriched. There is corruption. Many regions complain of not receiving their full quotas, while others get more than they should. Retailers claim that they have to pass their hands - that phrase is well known so I don't think there is any need for a definition - to get regular and adequate supplies. Of course, all is passed down to the consumers. The problems seem common.

TAKE

16:25

TO

16:45 HRS

MISSING

16:45 hrs

I was saying --

The Speaker: What has it got to do with distribution? He is saying that if you have information of that kind of exercise it may be brought to the attention of the Minister who may then not want it to occur. I think that is what he is saying.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: I just want to say that some of the facts are known. I knew they would have been but I want to appeal to the sense of good judgment and reason. We are dealing with something national, something in which the Government is involved. This afternoon we are calling very particularly for an end to this kind of distribution.

I want to conclude by just adding one point. I have a lot of other information. The P.C.U's --

The Speaker: I am not allowing that.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: -- would have been a good distribution area but they are not.

The Speaker: Mr. Kwayana:

Mr. Kwayana: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to rise under these circumstances where you have to use the guillotine.

The Speaker: I will wind up five minutes before your time is up.

Mr. Kwayana: I will not be very long. I hope the Assembly will notice this afternoon that I am very short.

The Motion deals with goods, supplies and commodities. I wish to give very strong support to this Motion and to say that, following what the hon. Member said, these allegations of discrimination against sugar workers should be taken very seriously. They can do no good. I myself have gone to the sugar belt areas and the assumption is that other people in other areas are being well looked after and that is not going to help things.

I want to deal with wheat, water and newsprint, but on wheat I will be very brief because the mover of the Motion spoke a lot on the distribution of flour. I was very disappointed that wheat flour returned to the market and has taken as long as this to settle down to normal distribution. I defy anyone to say that distribution has been normal. I defy anyone to say that all the shopkeepers have been supplied equally and that the price has been even. People have paid as much as \$5 and \$7 for a pound of flour and there has been no governmental instruction to that effect. It is still going on up to today. There are people

in the countryside who are able to collar off supplies. I do not know at what price. The figure I heard was \$265 a bag and also as much as \$600 a bag to persons who, in turn, sell at illegal prices and the Ministry of Trade has been silent.

On the question of water, which is one of the items of supply for which people pay water rent, the situation is very grave on the East Coast. I think the last to join the band was Victoria which supplies neighbouring areas. At Buxton, Friendship and Annandale, we are in the fifth week without a pure water supply. I took the trouble to write to the Regional Chairman and to copy the letter to the Minister of Regional Development. I also wrote to another Minister pointing out that it was he who said that a crane was needed to correct this fault. I sent the Regional Chairman a telegram some days after the date when the letter was delivered, that is, on July 9th. I sent him a telegram about four days after. To this day there has been no response. I invited him to say to the public what the trouble was. Mon Repos, Triumph and Beterverwagting are in a similar situation and have been in that situation for almost one month. Usually when these pumps break down there is in reserve water in the storage tanks and villagers will walk to these storage tanks, sometimes more than one mile, to draw water and take back to their homes. It is worse than in the days of old because in days of old there were stand pipes at intermediate points. This water is now at a very critical level and may not last long. It is only rain that has been bringing relief.

The Regional Chairman has disdained to give a reply. Possibly it is too trivial a matter. There are one or two persons in these areas who get the facility of water being supplied, paid or not paid. I do not know. Whoever is doing that is putting himself or herself in a very enviable position. I would not like to be in that position. The point is either to supply the entire district with water tenders, as I saw happening on one day only, or to hasten with the restoration of the supply. I gather that so far the Regional Chairman, to whom I hinted where this piece of equipment might be available, has not so far made a request. When I visited the place on Saturday morning they were expecting, after one month, a crane from Coldingen next door. That crane should have arrived on Friday. It did not and I doubt whether it has arrived up to yesterday. This puts a tremendous hardship on people because water is very basic. I do not know what word we can use to explain the importance of water. I am using this occasion to call on those concerned for immediate action to restore water to these

stricken areas.

On the question of newsprint, printers have spoken to me about it. They are at the mercy of the Guyana National Newspapers Limited, which only sells them what they call "ends". The printing industry which contains some of the most highly trained skills in the country traditionally is now begging. My hon. Friend with his usual eloquence is offering me the word "mendicant". I deliberately avoided it. The supplies like printers ink, glue, some of which I am told are manufactured in Trinidad, Caricom, are still on the table and also other printers items. If the printers industry goes down it is a very bad sign. It means that communication is reduced. We cannot afford to exist at the mercy of one or two in the system of printing, when we know that this was a country with a very vibrant printing industry. I make a plea not only for the printers and the fact that they employ staff of various sizes. Some can employ larger staff if they are allowed to for the printing trade itself.

I should like to confirm that there are shops that are discriminated against. I have brought some of these complaints from time to time to the Regional Chairman's attention and on one or two occasions to the attention of the Ministry of Trade.

What I would like to deal with now is the question of this Committee.

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17:15 hrs

Those very monitoring committees are mandated to identify shops that are indulging in malpractices and to feed the information up to the centre so that we could take the necessary action to have their names deleted from that list. It is my humble view that that is the epitome of democracy and I do not wish to see superimposed on democracy at that level, emanating from the people themselves, any committee emanating from this Assembly or from any other quarter. It is my humble judgment that the people can make the best decisions regarding a system for themselves. [Applause]

Cde. Persaud in his presentation admitted that no system is perfect and I share with him that sentiment. Indeed, what we are seeing in the system are, in fact, some imperfections born not out of the perception of the Government or any policy that the Government has put in place, but born out of the fact that the system has to be run by people and by agencies.

Insofar as people and agencies run the system, we have to rely on their integrity and ^{there} is proof, as Cde. Persaud has said. We have found many instances of persons not following the approved guidelines and I would like, as I earlier invited, to invite Cde. Persaud and any other member of the Minority to draw to my attention or to the attention of anyone in my Ministry, or, for that matter, to the attention of any of my colleagues, any impropriety that they observe and I would guarantee them that first we would investigate it and wherever and whenever we find any abuse of authority or a divergence from the laid down policies, we will take the necessary action to remove such persons and such agencies from the distribution system.

There has been specific mention of flour and flour distribution and I do not think I should leave that without some reference to it. I think I explained in this Assembly some time ago that last year - in fact, when we planned on bringing wheat into Guyana, we assumed a certain level of consumption of wheaten flour which was not borne out subsequently by what actually happened.

In fact, we had programmed to produce and, therefore, to bring wheat in at a rate consistent with the production of 20,000 bags of flour a week. It turned out that, in fact, consumption was at a level of about 14,000 bags a week. This time we have planned to maintain production, at least in the initial weeks and for as long as necessary initially, at a level that would ensure that we supply as much flour as physically possible from the mill on a weekly basis.

What have we found since we re-introduced flour? I don't have an answer and

I am willing to listen to any remarks that any Member of the Minority may wish to make on this matter. We have found that the flour mill, over the past four weeks since it has been in production and has been distributing flour, has been putting out at the rate of 21,000 bags per week. In fact, in the last but one week, it distributed 26,000 bags of flour. That is wholly out of step with what the experience had been during the first programme of re-importation.

We do not yet have an answer as to what has caused this surge in demand, but I wish to assure this Assembly that the flour mill is under explicit instructions from the Ministry to produce at the highest possible capability. We have all assurances that that is what it is doing and we shall continue to distribute at a level that it has the capability to deliver. If it is 25,000 bags, we will put it out, because we want to build public confidence and to make them see in a tangible way, not merely by the words we say, that wheaten flour is in fact available and will continue to be available in adequate quantities well through to the end of this year and beyond under the current arrangements we have with the Government of the United States of America for importation of wheat. So we intend to do that.

If, as Mr. Kwayana observed, it has taken somewhat longer on this occasion to settle, that is, the ready availability of flour has taken a little longer, I agree. I myself have observed that. All I can say to him at this stage is that we are putting out at a very substantial rate, way in excess of what we have been putting out under the previous arrangement, and we will continue to do that and we can only hope that as the confidence of the consumer comes back fully to him that there is in fact wheat, he will cease to do any panic buying as he is doing now or any buying for the purpose of hoarding, as may be going on now, which I think may be a natural way for a consumer to behave when he has a perception, but we wish, through what will happen on the ground from now in the distribution, that that perception will change and hopefully it will settle.

As for the question of the three distributors we have in the distribution system for flour, let me explain something. The PL480 arrangement which we have with the Government of the United States of America is a loan, not a grant. It is a loan that has to be repaid and the Government of Guyana has the obligation to repay that loan. The distributors are the people who in turn make flour available. The flour mill does not want to receive money from every possible shopkeeper in Guyana at the flour mill and, for ease of administration, they have asked us to limit the number

of people with whom they will relate in terms of receiving money and dealing with bills. So we have appointed three distributors, but they are not the people who are the end users of flour. They are not the shopkeepers who actually make the flour available to the public. They sell flour to people like Geddes Grant and to all the other private shopkeepers in this country who are the people that sell the flour to the consuming public.

The Government has selected the distributors in whom it has its responsibility to repay the money and to ensure that the flour mill in turn is paid the Guyana dollars for the flour itself and it has chosen those companies in whom it has confidence that the moneys will be made available. That is why. We have no apology to make. As far as we are concerned, the Consumer Supply Company is a private company. And talking about private companies, I want to say something. Geddes Grant, in fact, is the sole distributor for the wheat millings (?) Here we have taken a private company and entrusted it with the sole distributorship. I did not hear any mention of that. You see how we present the facts and statistics to suit the particular slant we want to take. Applause That is why I talked about the absence of objectivity and sincerity that was so much talked about at the beginning of the debate on this Motion.

I can go on and on to deal with this question but I want to end on this note. I want to tell the Members of the Minority, particularly the Mover of the Motion, if perchance he may be unaware of it that there is a Committee set up under the auspices of the State Planning Commission with responsibility for, among other things, consumer affairs and, as this Assembly/^{may}know, and as he in particular may know, the representation on that particular committee is very widespread. It catches many interest groups and I would like to suggest to the Mover of this Motion that he and the supporters of it may find a forum in this Committee in the State Planning Commission for airing their views, such as they are, that may be relevant and may be useful.

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TO
17:40 HRS
(ADJOURNMENT)
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