

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT**

[Volume 7]

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

87th Sitting

2 p.m.

Wednesday, 28th January, 1976

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Speaker

Cde.Sase Narain, J.P., Speaker

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

Prime Minister (1)

Cde. L.F.S. Burnham, O.E., S.C.,
Prime Minister

Deputy Prime Minister (1)

Cde. P.A, Reid,
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Development

Senior Ministers (9)

Cde.H.D. Hoyte, S.C.,
Minister of Economic Development

* Cde. H. Greene,
Minister of Co-operatives and National Mobilisation

* Cde. H.O. Jack,
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources

***Non-elected Minister**

- * F.E. Hope,
Minister of Finance
- * Cde. S.S. Naraine, A.A.,
Minister of Works and Housing
- * Cde. G.A. King,
Minister of Trade and Consumer Protection
- * Cde. G.B. Kennard, C.C.H.,
Minister of Agriculture
- * Cde. C.L. Baird,
Minister of Education and Social Development
- * Cde. F.R. Willis S.C.,
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Justice

(Absent)

Ministers (5)

- Cde. W.G. Carrington,
Minister of Labour
- Cde. S.M. Field-Ridley,
Minister of Information and Culture
- Cde. B. Ramsaroop,
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs
and leader of the House
- * Cde. O.M.R. Harper,
Minister of Health
- * Cde. C.V. Mingo,
Minister of Home Affairs

Ministers of State (9)

- Cde. M. Kasim, A.A.,
Minister of State for Agriculture
- Cde. O.E. Clarke,
Minister of State – Regional
(East Berbice/Corentyne)

***Non-elected Ministers**

Cde. P. Duncan, J.P.,
Minister of State – Regional
(Rupununi) **(Absent – on leave)**

Cde. C.A. Nascimento,
Minister of State,
Office of the Prime Minister

Cde. M. Zaheeruddeen, J.P.,
Minister of State – Regional
(Essequibo Coast/West Demerara) **(Absent)**

Cde. K.B. Bancroft,
Minister of State - Regional
(Mazaruni/Potaro)

* Cde. W. Haynes,
Minister of State for Consumer Protection **(Absent)**

* Cde. A. Salim,
Minister of State – Regional
(East Demerara/West Coast Berbice)

* Cde. F.U.A. Carmichael,
Minister of State – Regional (North West) **(Absent)**

Parliamentary Secretaries (8)

Cde. J.R. Thomas,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of National Development

Cde. C.E. Wrights, J.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Works and Housing **(Absent)**

Cde. M.M. Ackman,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Office of the Prime Minister and Government Chief Whip **(Absent – without leave)**

Cde. E.L. Ambrose,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture

***Non-elected Ministers**

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

Cde. J.P. Chowritmootoo,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Education and Social Development

Cde. R.H.O. Corbin,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Office of the Prime Minister

Cde. M. Corrica,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Works and Housing

Deputy Speaker (1)

Cde. R.C. Van Sluytman, Deputy Speaker

Other Members (16)

Cde. J.N. Aaron
Cde. L.M. Branco
Cde. E.H.A. Fowler
Cde. J. Gill
Cde. W. Hussain
Cde. S. Jaiserrisingh
Cde. K.M.E. Jonas
Cde. M. Nissar
Cde. L.E. Ramsahoye
Cde. J.G. Ramson
Cde. P.A. Rayman
Cde. E.M. Stoby, J.P.
Cde. S.H. Sukhu, M.S., J.P.
Cde. C. Sukul, J.P.
Cde. H.A. Taylor
Cde. L.E. Willems

Members of the Opposition – Liberator Party (2)

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

Officers

Clerk of the National Assembly – F.A. Narine

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

PRAYERS**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER****Leave to Members**

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to the Cde. Nissar from the 6th to the 29th February, 1976 and Cde. Ackman for today's Sitting.

Welcome to Cde. Harper

May I also take this opportunity of welcoming back the Minister of Health, Cde. Harper. I am sure we are all happy to see him and wish him continued progress in his health.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS – FIRST READING

The following bill was introduced and read the first time:

Customs (Amendment) Bill 1976 – Bill No. 4/1976

[The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House on behalf of the Minister of Finance]

PUBLIC BUSINESS**MOTION****APPROVAL OF PROPOSALS ON EQUALITY FOR WOMEN**

“Be it resolved that this National Assembly approves of the proposals outlined in the State Paper on Equality for Women which was presented to the Assembly on 15th January, 1976. **[The Prime Minister]**”

28.1.76

National Assembly

2.05 -2.15 p.m.

The Prime Minister: Cde. Speaker, there is a Motion standing in my name seeking the approval of this National Assembly of the proposals outlined in the State Paper for Equality for Women which was presented to the Assembly on the 15th January, 1976.

It seems anachronistic that as late as the fourth quarter of the twentieth century it should be necessary, in many countries of the world including Guyana to have a discussion on this question of the equality of women. We have read of attempts of nations and of peoples to secure equality with other peoples and other nations during this century, and even before. But it is sometimes said that you can take a man out of the bush but you cannot take the bush out of the man. For many of us who have been the strongest and most heroic proponents of human equality have, subconsciously at least, always considered equality as between men and have ignored the fact that the term "human beings" includes women.

Today, in keeping with an undertaking which I gave approximately a year ago, I seek to outline to this House and to this nation what the People's National Congress Government of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana proposes to do about ensuring the equality of women. And this is not a question for women; but we would hope, over the process of time, to educate them, to convert them, to explain to them the error of their ways and to prove to them in what way they may be hampering the progress of this our Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

2.15 p.m.

There are supposed to be other speakers on this Resolution, and, significantly, the debate will be wound up by a woman whom I have no reason to flatter at all, but who is an example of the potential that there is in our womenfolk in this country, if full opportunities are given. I, in view of the fact that there will be other contributors to the debate, do not propose to deal with many of the legislative proposals, but merely with those subtler forms of sexual discrimination.

I remember that I was the beneficiary of sexual discrimination when I was a boy. My father who was not blessed with much of this world's goods, decided in those colonial days to make a sacrifice that some of his children should get what was then considered a better type of education. Naturally, he identified his two sons. His two daughters – or three daughters – were not considered. The sacrifices had to be made for the sons and more disgusting in retrospect is the fact that my mother, whom I knew to be a woman connived in or agreed with this discrimination.

We may pass all sorts of laws but what we have got to understand as a central point, is that we have to get rid of the automatic discrimination which one finds in families and in homes. If an educational opportunity is to be given, the boys used to get that opportunity first. It was only when the women were truly outstanding that the parents ever thought of giving the women the opportunity for proper education.

Of course, in these days of the ascendancy of the socialist party, the People's National Congress, that problem does not, or ought not, to arise because of the personal sacrifice of the parent is no longer required and the States seeks to give equal opportunities for training and education to all; man and woman, boy and girl. But I would seek to plead with parents who, in spite of the opportunities that are offered, because of the legacy of the past, would still advise their girls to remain home in the hope that some Prince Charming would come and marry them or help in the house work or whatever one calls it, or to assume that there is no need for them to encourage the girls to take hold of the opportunities that are offered.

This, as I said, is a question which could hardly be remedied by legislation. It would require such a bureaucracy as to put it beyond the means of this Government to enforce, if we always had to go to every parent and day: Are you giving the girl or the girls the opportunity to be educated which you are giving to the boys? On this matter, therefore, I hope I am speaking not merely to my comrades in the Parliament but also to my comrades outside of this Parliament.

Then we find the other type of discrimination within the home, where a man, for some obscure reason, believes that he is the lineal descendant of Solomon, clothed with all the wisdom and therefore he must rule the home; takes little or no note of the advice that may be given by the wife; ignores, in fact, completely her point of view on certain matters – most matters to be precise. He seeks to salve his conscience by saying this is not a woman's matter, this is a man's matter. How on earth this can be justified in terms of logic, is difficult to discover.

Some of my friends, Cde. Speaker, have said that my present public position is either indicative of a growing softness or the acceptance of reality because of my particular marriage. It is not for me to dispute softness on my power. It is not for me, either, to disclaim that I am making wisdom of necessity. Time, events will prove whether that analysis of my attitude is accurate. But what I would say is that I have personally found in my own life that: First, the woman is not inferior to the man in terms of physical strength and endurance; and secondly certainly in intellectual competence her potential is as great and, in many cases, her actual, is greater.

Sometimes I am led to believe that the bullying tactics employed by some of us men is a confession of our own inferiority. And I remember someone saying that “force appeals but to the feeble mind.” It is out of the feebleness of their minds that some men reject the intellectual capacity and physical capability of women.

I said I was not dealing with many of the legal provisions that will be introduced but I recall its being attracted to my attention just over a year ago that I who had been a lawyer for a long time had read and re-read a certain chapter in some of the leading textbooks headed “Lunatics, infants and women.”

28.1.76

National Assembly

2.25 -2.35 p.m.

(The Prime Minister continued)

2.25 p.m.

All of them were the victims of incapacity – lunatics, infants and women, and here were we socialists talking about equality, here were we nationalists fighting for freedom and for liberty and unquestioningly accepting a legal code which treated our mothers, our wives and our daughters in the same category as lunatics and new born babes. But the law at any given time, according to what I have read, is but a reflection of the society and its thought, women like children and lunatics must be put in a special category.

And then, of course, the men have tended so far by mere superficial acts of courtesy to prove in their own feeble minds that the women were inferior and had to be helped. But we men showing further flights of fantasy have tended to treat our women as dolls and we think that we flatter them, “Oh, she is beautiful! She is a fine thing!” I am conscious of the fact that I am being recorded and therefore I will not use all the descriptions familiarly given to women – and we think that we can get rid of our sins of discrimination by referring always to the physical appearances of our womenfolk, their prettiness, their forms or those parts of their anatomy which attract us in our sensuous lust most. Women held up as objects of lust in most cases and the situation is exacerbated by a lot of nonsense about beauty queens, where you , make them pose in everything from the amount of clothing which just falls short of breaching the law to the most fantastic pieces of finery. In the same way as my little daughter satisfies her ego by dressing up a doll, even so we men have sought to satisfy our ego by dressing up our women and having beauty queen shows. I may be offending some but I hope that I shall find the agreement of the majority.

It is not good enough, I contend, in any part of the world, let alone in a socialist society, to hold up women as dolls, beautiful little beings, and sights to make old men hopefully young.

Now let us discuss certain further attitudes which we find in the home. “This is my house,” says the man, and like a Sampson, Hercules, he expands his shoulders “and you either do

what I say or you get out". That is, of course, if he is not given the emulating Muhammad Ali. Let us examine this house which the man claims is his. He gets up in the morning and turns, he says, "Darling, what have you got in mind for my breakfast?" Or he says, "Dear what have you got for breakfast?" Or, if he wants to display his knowledge of a language other than English, he says, "Ma cherie, I'd like my eggs scrambled." The poor woman either has to do that or have it done. Then he comes in, if he is not like me, for lunch and he raises Cain about whether the lunch is tasty or attractive and he blames the woman. Therefore it is her duty to see that the lunch, like herself, is attractive. In, many cases he cannot afford in all the circumstances to employ paid help. If he employs paid help he does not have to manage the paid help, if he does not employ paid help, well then the wife does it.

Then he gets a house. The property has a transport in his name and he says, "This is my house". No value whatsoever is attached to the services rendered by the woman. I am not suggesting that sometimes after a tiring day you may not ask you wife, who is you equal, "Dear, would you be good enough to prepare such and such a favourite meal of mine?" In the same way she is entitled to do the same. But, Cde. Speaker, is it not the very height of discrimination that when this woman has, by rendering services which would otherwise have had to be paid for, which payment would have reduced his capacity to purchase the house that he calls his house, he then says, "Woman, you have no rights!"

Cde. Speaker, we who have practised in the courts have been impressed by the humanity sometimes of the Courts, bending over backwards when there is litigation, about ownership of the matrimonial home, to give the woman some rights. But that must no longer be, and it is going to be a law that this property that is acquired during marriage is the joint property of man and woman. **[Applause]**

2.35 p.m.

But, Cde. Speaker, it is not out of a sense of cynicism that I remind my comrades that I said that the property acquired is the joint property, even the property acquired by the wife is the

(The Prime Minister continued)

joint property of the husband and the wife. Otherwise, Cde. Speaker, it would be discrimination against men and, as I understand it, what we are talking about is the equality of all of our citizens and there must not be discrimination against men or women. We are referring in the instant case to discrimination against women because that is more general in our society and in our community.

Then, Cde. Speaker, we come to little questions like divorce proceedings, which will be dealt with, I take it, by the comrade who is winding up the debate. As one not entirely unlearned in this area ... **[Interruption]** I am reminded by her who is to wind up the debate that my expertise is not singular or unique. **[Laughter]** We find in divorce proceedings there is this presumption that custody properly lies in the father. I do not think that the right to custody should be taken away from the father but I think, the P.N.C. thinks and, the Government thinks that when this question cannot be solved by agreement between the two parties, it should be decided by the Court, which is the upper guardian, on the basis of facts presented and with no presumption whatsoever. In fact, in many cases, if we were to rely on the facts, the mother, the woman, is more capable of carrying out the duties attendant on custody.

That is one thing that has to be corrected and, of course, at the same time, since we are insisting on equality and we want to insist that women are not mere things, they are human beings, we will have to abolish the concept of awarding damages against correspondents... **[Applause]** because the mere concept of awarding damages – as we who used to practise in the Courts know – is based upon an injury to property. It may be tangible property, like a house, a bicycle, a car, or it may be the property that arises out of contractual rights.

A woman is not a thing. If a question like that arises, then I am not suggesting for one moment, at least at this moment – but I hope for all moments – that adultery should not be a ground of divorce. But, certainly this question of giving damages for loss of a thing is

unacceptable to civilised people, especially if, as is the case here, the majority of them in Guyana accept socialism.

Another little thing we must look at, Cde. Speaker, is the whole question of bastardy and its concomitants. The history I know records only one occasion on which there was conception without a male human being. But what is our process? We take the mother of the child to Court; we expose her to the most rigid cross-examination about the most intimate details in open Court. And then, when we are through, a mere pittance is awarded. It seems to me, that is to show utter disrespect and disregard and discrimination for and discrimination against women. We shall have to do something about our Courts where enquiries are being made into the question of who is or is not the putative father. Juvenile cases are no longer public and I do not see why bastardy cases should continue to be public. **[Applause]**

It is not the stigma of having an illegitimate child because there is no stigma to that; it is the embarrassment that we cause a section of our society and community. So great is the embarrassment that I have found from my personal investigations that many women have struggled alone to rear children without any financial assistance and the woman and the children have suffered. In fact, what we are contemplating at the moment, is that having ascertained – whether we ascertain or not – the State would take care or help to take care of the child and then the State will take proper measures against the putative fathers. **[Applause]**

I may become a little unpopular amongst those of my own sex, but let me say this: the P.N.C. is not motivated by a desire to be merely popular and, even if we were, we have found in our Party that our most active supporters in every sense of the word have been the women. **[Applause]**

2.45 p.m.

And let me say, Cde. Speaker, that when we come to deal with this question it will not be a question of saying: “I will go to gaol rather than pay.” We are not going to send them to gaol;

(The Prime Minister continued)

we are going to put them to do productive work so that they will repay the State for what the State is going to pay to the bastard children. There are other sanctions in a socialist society apart from mere imprisonment.

Citizenship. A woman can acquire her husband's citizenship but a man cannot acquire his wife's citizenship under our law. I did raise that question in 1964, but I was told this is the format for all Commonwealth Constitutions. [Mr. Singh: "August, 1965."] Yes, you ought to know. You were there. [Mr. Singh: "Let us have a free vote."] In the P.N.C., on a question like this, there are no free votes. This is not the United Force. The party has debated it democratically and we have arrived at a consensus, and we face the world with our consensus. That is why we are thirty-seven and you are two. [Interruption] you care a neophyte in seeking to win support from other parties. Let the master teach you. Look here and see how many former United Force members are here. Let me be your Gamaliel. Will you sit at my feet for teaching? But, Cde. Speaker, this is a more serious matter. [Interruption] My name is not Benedict. I believe in everything I say.

There will be dealt with questions like capacity to marriage, etc. What I would like to deal with at this level is discrimination in employment. [Interruption] A party card cannot help you, but there are a sufficient number of party-card holders to give us a wide area of choice for competence. There must be discrimination on the basis of sex. [Interruption] No, Cde. Speaker, I must not say it. It would be ungentlemanly for me to tell the public.

This discrimination against women in jobs, only recently, for instance at the insistence of the P.N.C. Government, a post like messenger has been made available to women. Only recently. Under the P.N.C. Government, of course, we have abolished the incapacity of women to rise in the Service to the highest posts, and I have reason to believe that in less than two weeks we will find two Permanent Secretaries who are women.

Cde. Speaker, and here I am addressing myself to employers in the private sector and in the public sector, even when nominally women are given an equality of opportunity to hold posts, when there is a choice for preferment, there is a sort of automatic reaction: which are the best fellows, which are the most senior fellows? Never: which are the best persons, or which are the most senior persons? But which are the most senior men? Which are the best senior men?

And our legislative provisions pay tribute to this hegemony of men. Wages Councils are appointed. Tribunals are appointed, men so much, women so much. Administratively, that has been abolished in the Public Service. I see here the Vice President of Guystac, and Guystac will take note that it will be abolished in the public sector; and it must also be abolished in the private sector. We can bring the legislation, we probably will, but we would prefer if the private sector were to understand. I speak particularly of the sugar industry where one finds payment for tasks, and then one finds payment for sex – men this, woman that.

If a particular woman is incapable of doing a particular job, she should be paid for the job she could do, but neither should the job be considered a peculiarly woman's job nor should a woman not be paid the same as a man if she is carrying out the same tasks. We who were colonials used to be disgusted at the fact, when the expatriates were brought here and paid more for doing what we were doing and yet there are so many men who fail to understand that we are carrying out a similar type of discrimination against our women folk, against our mothers, against our wives, against our daughters, against those whom we claim to love.

As I said, I hope that the private sector will take note. I know that the Permanent Secretary and those who advise on promotions in the Public Service Commission, the Vice President of Guystac, the President of Guystac, and the Prime Minister will take note. I hope that the private sector takes note.

I want to deal if I may, Cde. Speaker, with the matter of income tax and I do so because if the reliable *Daily Chronicle* is to be believed, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, who I hope

would speak on such an important question as this and not shelter behind the coat-tails...
[**Interruption**] I have always said that English is a foreign language to us. We are talking about equality. My learned friend is talking about superiority. They have as much brains and sometimes more. I was beaten at the Guyana Scholarship by a woman and many women have won Guyana Scholarships. I am not saying that they are all superior.

On the question of income tax, I understand that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has claimed – and I do not seek to dispute his claim – that his Party has always called for separate taxation. I have absolutely no objection and the People’s National Congress supports that fully. It is part of our legacy that a woman should attract the qualities of a chattel, that it is always the husband who has to make the return and then it is the husband who is liable to pay the tax. I suppose that is the price that these so-called “dominant men” must pay for their domination, but that domination must come to an end if we are to develop Guyana. It is proposed that, on their election, the returns can be made jointly or separately and if they are made jointly they can either be made by the wife or the husband. For my part, I prefer my wife to make it. I think she shows a greater ability at calculation than I.

But let me say very clearly, this is a socialist party. If there are to be reductions in the level of personal taxation, those reductions will be generally. This provision which is being introduced does not mean that the amount of tax paid by the two persons together or separately would be less than what they are supposed to pay now. I do not want there to be any

2.55 p.m.

(The Prime Minister continued)

misunderstanding. I know there will be all sorts of arguments borrowed from the capitalist countries, that unless you ease up the tax on the woman’s salary you aint going to get them to work. That has not been my experience and I have had, in succession, two working wives, very hard-working wives, let it be said. What we are doing is treating the woman on the level of

equality for purposes of making the income tax returns but in the final analysis, it is not proposed that the amount paid by a working husband and wife, in tax would be less than it is now. I would like to make that perfectly clear lest there be any misunderstanding.

As I said, we are seeking not to write a Magna Carta for women. We are seeking to remove the inequalities which have been practised against women. We are seeking, as a vanguard party and the Government, to give leadership to the rest of the society and community as to how women should be treated. We, as a Government, are not sending our girls to be trained as pilots and our women in the G.D.F. have to combat courses and jungle training because when the enemy comes he does not discriminate between man and woman when the slaughter begins. Some of us are familiar with a certain lady, now dead, who was the best chucker-out in Georgetown.

I said before that our women are not physically inferior. In fact, to be honest, I sometimes wonder whether women are not capable of more physical endurance than men. As a matter of interest, I wonder how many of us men would, with the same equanimity, bear children as the women do. I doubt whether all these socialists here, starting from here (indicating himself), would show the same equanimity and endurance. One Member whispered that the Lord has been kind to men. Indeed, he has. But we are setting the example in the Party, we are setting the example in the Government. There is no field in the Government to which women cannot enter. If a particular woman cannot enter a particular field it is because of her particular qualities; in the same way as a man who does not get a particular post fails to get it because of his particular qualities or lack of qualities.

We, as socialists, feel that we are allowing too much of our human resources to go to waste. The development of Guyana would be hastened if we were to make full use of the human resources in our women. But let me say two things: Some slaves – and they are indeed slaves – have to be liberated, but some slaves cease being slaves intellectually and liberate themselves.

I would like to call upon the women to help in this liberation of women. The house-slave was fooled by his masters. He got the old clothes instead of the rags, he got the crumbs instead of the hog-wash and he thought that slavery was not such a bad thing. The field slave, however, who had to bear the sun, the head and the whip-lash, recognised that there was no improvement for him but complete liberation. I am afraid I must concede, however chivalrous I may want to be, that many women are the architects of their own serfdom. They accept a flattering remark here, a flattering remark there. They have imbibed the mores and ethic of a past generation and a different economic ideology, and they are satisfied. Some of them fear this freedom which we are talking about. May I say to them that when Guyana was to become independent there were some who feared independence, and we have prospered. When Guyana was to become a Republic there were some who feared and we have gained international prestige.

3.05 p.m.

In other words, as a nation and as a people when we have taken these sometimes courageous steps forward, we have always lived to be thankful that we did. Similarly, I would say to such women who are afraid, there is nothing to fear, If I may quote, but fear itself. Your equality cannot injure you. I can do nothing but good to you. It can give you an opportunity to develop your personality and your abilities and to be of even greater service in the Community.

And let me say to our men, my brothermen, he who keeps slaves is a slave himself. And a society like ours which wants to move forward cannot talk about freedom and liberty and limit those to men. I am sometimes disgusted by those who prattle with such facility at the street corners about political discrimination and racial discrimination and that discrimination and when you go home to them you could only find their wives in the kitchen; when you go home to them you could only find their wives as substitutes for maids. Sometimes they actually hide their wives, not because they fear your Don Juan propensities but because they felt that their wives are inferior.

It is inconsistent for us men to talk about equality, to talk about freedom, to talk about

socialism being something that causes you to be interested in the advancement of people; it is inconsistent for us to go before international forums and talk about new economic order and to talk about the oppression of the poor by the rich and the victimisation of the weak by the strong and in any way, in our conduct, vices against the greater section of our community.

Cde. Speaker, the final word. There still are in our society men who would accept in theory the equality of women, men who would support a resolution like this, but men who exercise a peculiar type of discrimination against women of which there have been many allegations. We had one proved in the Public Service recently, and he is no longer with us, discrimination that takes the form of asking a favour for a job or preferment. No words can adequately describe the disgust which I feel for such brutes. They said that the Lord created us a little lower than the angels. They are a little lower than the beasts and this Government, and this Party, will use every instrument at its disposal where such cases are proved, to bring down all the weight, not merely of public opinion and the law, but everything, the whole book. We shall throw the full weight of the law and everything against men who seek favours for employment or preferment of women. It is despicable.

I have great pleasure, Cde. Speaker, in commending this Resolution to the House. I hope that it will be unanimously and sincerely unanimously adopted. And I hope that we can properly regard it as one more measure taken by this Government in its thrust towards socialism. Thank you. [Applause]

Question proposed.

The Speaker: Cde. Willems.

Cde. Willems: Cde. Speaker, we are dealing with a State Paper on equality for women and I must admit that I find that I have the time to bring something to be able to contend to speak after our Cde. Prime Minister and Cde. Leader. But since we are dealing with equality for women I will do my best to support the paper that is before us.

This Paper deals with many facts that have been set out in it. I think that it acknowledges that the People's National Congress Government and Party, throughout the preceding years, have sought to bring a certain amount of equality, respect and regard for women.

We find that in the Police Force women recently have been accorded promotions that have been well deserved. We also find within the Guyana Defence Force, as the Cde. Leader said, we will soon have women pilots. We also find that there are many other areas in which women have contributed and continue to contribute. For instance, we have teachers, nurses, doctors and without these women contributing we could not have fulfilled our obligation to go through with the policy which this State Paper seeks to put in front of us.

There are some areas in which we find that we would need to have a further look. For instance, mention has been made of the sugar industry. If I do not quote word for word what is embodied in the State Paper, it is because I have been assured by the speaker who is going to wind up, that we can deviate slightly. We know that the women in the cane fields have been doing a first class job. We know that we have women gardeners, women agriculturalists and women farmers. We have a lot of women who have been doing, let us say, the dirty things to which the Cde. Prime Minister has referred. We also know that we have many distinguished lawyers and all those various other people but, comrades, there are some other areas which we would like examined.

(Cde. Willems continued)

3.15 p.m.

For instance, there is the Road Safety Association in which we feel that women can play a more predominant part. We are asking that when this State Paper has been gone into thoroughly that those concerned would see that women teach road safety because I think that mothers and teachers and other people can be involved in this because this is an issue of great concern to the country and to the nation.

I was glad to hear the Cde. Prime Minister mention attitudes. We would definitely have to look at the fact that he has mentioned certain abuses. It is a known fact that there are abuses when we domestics shop girls, waitresses, and sometimes stenographers apply for jobs. We would sincerely hope that these will be part and parcel of the matters which will be looked into. We know that we have many women who have recently been employed as mechanics, and welders. We know that in Guybau we have women welders and we know that women are being trained in every field. It is a positive fact that unless we the women, as the Cde. Prime Minister says, are prepared to get ourselves involved in the thrust, learn what is going on, take the necessary training and acquire the knowledge, we cannot possibly build the status of women and equality for women.

So Cde. Speaker, as I said, I do not intend to say very much, but I do hope that some of the points here made will be taken into consideration, and also that when the subsequent legislation is passed on the different points that the Prime Minister mentioned we would see a more progressive and united Guyana because it is definitely women who are the greatest human resource and those are the ones that we would have to maintain, they are the ones for whom we will have to appeal. Perhaps some of them are sitting on the sidelines and do not want to come in and help to build the country. Sometimes they are not socialists in the true sense of the word as we know it in the People's National Congress but social people who feel that they have no part and no contribution to make to this country. Therefore, with these few words I should like to support whatever has gone before and whatever is going to come later on and I am hoping that

status and equality for women will no longer be just a phrase, but something that will be fulfilled. I hope that we can sometimes make use of people like, for instance, senior citizens who may still be able to contribute in some fashion or the other to the welfare of their communities. We trust that this paper goes through with absolutely no problems, we know we will have no difficulties. I thank you.

The Speaker: Cde. Ramsahoye.

Cde. Ramsahoye: Cde. Speaker, I feel very humble speaking on this occasion after the inspiring and exhaustive address by the Cde. Prime Minister. Indeed, one feels there is little left to be said on this very important issue. We have come here to take a small step in the emancipation of women. We have come to remove from the statute book of this country those clauses which discriminate against women. But as has been pointed out, one does not achieve this task of emancipation by legislation. It is for society to create conditions under which women can use and can make use of the equal opportunities which we are trying to afford them.

When we speak of equality for women I feel we are really dealing with two related aspects of the problem. We are dealing on the one hand with the differences in treatment between men and women as individuals, and we are dealing, on the other hand, with the inequality in the partnership between man and woman as husband and wife. The former inequality derives directly from biological ancestry; the second is as a result of our social evolution.

I can think of no single topic which would allow us to apply the principles of co-operative socialism to which this Party adheres than this particular topic, for, in trying to remedy the inequalities between man and woman, we invoke the principles of an egalitarian society. In dealing with the unequal distribution of benefits from the husband-and-wife partnership we talk about the justness of co-operative effort and the rewards.

Now the Cde. Prime Minister wondered why, in the last quarter of the 20th century, we are still talking about equality for women. Here again, the reasons which have brought us to this particular situation have a very sound foundation in the past; they no longer hold validity. But it will be wise for us to consider how it is that man gained this ascendancy.

We are told by the great naturalist Charles Darwin that in the battle for survival the early species could only survive because of two qualities, the quality to be able to survive until the reproductive years and the quality of increased fertility. It is not surprising, therefore, that woman was considered as a bare producer of children. The species could not have survived otherwise and so it was left to the man to be the provider and the protector. This was the traditional distribution of functional values.

3.25 p.m.

In his role as protector, man acquired the use of implements and I feel that it is at this stage that he asserted his superiority when he acquired facility in the use of weapons. I do not intend to deal too much on this, but it is quite clear that, even today, superiority is judged by the superiority of your armed forces. When man learnt to make use of the fire, he assigned the duty of cooking to the woman. The duty of child-bearing naturally involved house-keeping. So, we have the women assigned the duty of child-bearer and domestic, a situation that, you will agree, exists even today.

But in this evolutionary struggle, man acquired other values. He acquired the values that make him the dominant species in all living beings. In particular, he acquired the human values of what Darwin calls “Sympathy and Intellect”, later called by Muller, one of the greatest proponents of biological control on human evolution, “Co-operativeness and Intellect”. The vocabulary might be different but the thought is identical, that it is because of these two human values “Co-operativeness and Intellect” that man could dominate the rest of the species and be master of his environment.

(Cde. Ramsahoye continued)

It is because of this that the bonds of the family unit became cemented because of this co-operative spirit that allowed the family to be the protective unit for the rearing of children. That letter was extended to co-operation on a tribal scale and even today is the basis for the loyalties to the State. But, because of this co-operation, Cde. Speaker, the functions originally assigned to the male, that of protector and provider, are not being gradually whittled away. It was no longer necessary in the realm of social organisation for the man to have to defend, at least, not to the same extent. And, in order to provide, it was not necessary for him to use weapons. He had to acquire agricultural skills; he had to become a craftsman in order to provide in the social organisation that followed.

We see, therefore, that it is no longer necessary for the man to insist on his superiority because he has weapons but the woman was still occupied, to a large extent, in child-bearing and it was not until later, with progress in pharmaceutical sciences that we were able to see a reduction in the period of childbearing. There is birth control. We can decide now on the size of the family. There is not that struggle for survival any more. So, in both instances in the functions ascribed to man and woman, we are deviating and tending towards a different criterion for superiority. And, indeed, I feel that man has only continued to be superior now because he still has the edge on acquiring skills in a statistical sense. He has been afforded opportunities for acquiring skills more than woman, a system that is now breaking down and it is not necessary for us to legislate; human nature itself is going to break down. In this society, where we have provided equal education for all, where women will be able to acquire all the skills than man has hitherto acquired, there will be no necessity to beg for equality; they will be *de facto* and *de jure* be equal.

And so, Cde. Speaker, in looking back at our historical development, I ask: What can we do to assist this process? I mentioned the role of education but there is also another factor. Woman has been assigned relative drudgery of household work. It is for us therefore to provide more kindergarten schools and organisations of that nature to relieve her of the drudgery. I am

not, for a moment, advocating that the family unit should be abandoned. Indeed, the mother-child bond is a bond which man cannot break. No artificial provisions can enable us to defeat that law because when the laws of nature and the laws of man are in conflict, there is no doubt as to which will prevail. But the family unit, as we have known it, except for the mother-child bond, is quite artificial and there is no reason why there cannot be more communal activity. It is a question of degree rather than kind.

I hope I have been able to point out how the positive factors which led to the superiority of males have been removed and, therefore, should be no reason why equality cannot now progress at a rapid stage. But, Cde. Speaker, we must bear in mind the economic factors which circumscribe our efforts. We are a young developing society and we cannot for economic reasons do all the things we would like to do.

3.35 p.m.

I feel, for instance, that there is at the moment gross discrimination against domestics. They have been forced by society to have the most menial jobs with the very minimum of rewards. They have been forced by society to have the most menial jobs with the very minimum of rewards. It would be nice to know that we could suggest at this stage that we pass a minimum wage for domestics. I daresay the Cde. Finance Minister would say we cannot afford it but I should like to refer to the Cabinet, for its deliberation, a proposal. If we consider that we want to mobilise the brain power of our trained women, in society as we now find it, we cannot remove a woman from the home without replacing her by someone else, a domestic, for instance. But in this act of replacement, we find that our laws, perhaps, deter. I should like to give an example.

If a wife decides to go to work and she were to earn \$200 a month, and if the combined income of wife's and husband's salaries makes tax payable at fifty cents in the dollar, then of that \$200 the woman would receive a net amount of \$100, which may or may not be enough to pay the domestic to take her place. So there is a lack of incentive. The suggestion I should like to make is this that if we pay the domestic and if the amount we pay the domestic is deductible

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(Dr. Ramsahoye contd.)

from income tax, then there would be a greater incentive. Right now, the amount we pay to our domestics is not deductible from income tax. That is what I should like the Cabinet to consider, that we allow payment to domestics to be deductible from the income tax. In order to see that no abuse is made of this, domestics must register with the National Insurance and a person must produce these records if he requires this deduction.

In this way, I feel, Cde. Speaker, we would be going a far way in mobilising our skilled talents, because if we are a socialist society, it is for the State to ensure the maximum and optimum use of its resources including female skilled resources. A trained woman who is assigned to the drudgery of a domestic is a very great loss to society.

So Cde. Speaker, I should like to close by saying that in his efforts to analyse the equality of women, there has been, I feel, quite a lot of confused thinking on the part of man. I am reminded of a verse which I read very long ago when I was in the fifth form of Queen's College.

3.45 p.m.

I believe the Cde. Minister Harper was my teacher at the time. It was written by Chaucer. The Chanticleer, the cockerel, was courting Pertelote, the hen, the Chanticleer said to Pertelote, and I am quoting from the end:

“Mulier est hominis confusio;

Madam, the meaning of this Latin is – Woman's the joy of man and all his bliss.”

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member Mrs. DaSilva.

Mrs. DaSilva: Thankyou, sir. [**Hon. Members:** “We want Feilden.”] That is discrimination.

The Speaker: Hon. Members, please permit the hon. Member of the Opposition to speak.

Mrs. DaSilva: Thank you, sir. This is equality. Two of us, 50 per cent man – 50 per cent woman. [**Laughter**] This State Paper on equality for women which we are now debating might be looked upon by some people as a victory for the women of Guyana, especially those who have emerged as latter-day suffragettes. But unlike the suffragettes of the 1920s, Sylvia Pankhurst and Company, they do not have to chain themselves to the Prime Minister’s railings to make their point. We have got the vote for women. These women campaigned strong and vigorously and worked feverishly for equality for women especially in wages to be earned and jobs to be attained.

Speaking as a woman on behalf of women, even the P.N.C. women, I am very sure that we want all the men here in Guyana to be assured that we are not discussing superiority; our aim is not to be deemed superior. All we are asking is that we be allowed to work jointly and together as human beings with dignity and honour to build our country. Our men are no less men because we are campaigning for equality for women. They are just as virile, they are just as much men; we love them the way they are and we do not want them to change. Neither do we want to be changed as women.

Let us deal with this State Paper. It is a Paper that is supposed to set out the policy statement. We of the United Force feel that is a little vague on such important matters as I will deal with shortly. More explanation should have been given here. We feel that this Paper is the beginning of the opportunity, of the attempt to redress any wrongs that might have existed on the question of equality for women. As a matter of fact, to quote from the bottom of page 2 it states:

“Without intending to exhaust the field, it is the object of this Paper to refer briefly to some branches of the law which require examination and may need to be modified.”

It states “some branches of the law.” We realise that it is not intended to be all-embracing and from time to time we look, hope and feel, from the general tone of this Paper, that if and when other examples of discrimination appear they will be dealt with and the wrong put right.

Whilst examining these Papers, I will deal with some aspects of the law as contained here. But there are other aspects, not necessarily of a legal nature, which must be examined and where possible and if necessary, laws be drafted to rectify the position before we can truly say that there is equality for all the women of Guyana.

How can you formulate laws to deal with men whose attitudes and actions all within the law, still place women in an inferior position? They set a woman up, and her sole purpose in life is to be the bearer of children and an unpaid domestic in the home. I do not refer here to those men who merely see a woman as a means of sexual pleasure and abuse because there are laws to deal with those types of men and there are laws to deal with such practices. What I want to talk about are the attitudes and the actions of some men in our community. We have had examples. The hon. Prime Minister has quoted one example. I did not quite agree with him all the way when he talked about his breakfast, his scrambled eggs and his lunch, and his going home and demanding that it was done. What I should have said was not demanding it to be done. They should do it together. Together they must scramble those eggs. He said that if his wife could not do it she must get somebody to cook, if I understood him correctly. Maybe they cannot afford domestic help. I will deal with that in a little while.

My hon. Friend and fellow Parliamentarian, Dr. Ramsahoye, spoke just now about women. He was referring to income tax and we could not agree with him more. I will deal with that in a little while. When he said that women in households needed kindergarten schools, I did not quite see what he was getting at. Whilst I agree all the way that we need more kindergarten schools and day-care centres I do not think that a kindergarten school alone would serve the

purpose of a woman who has to do domestic work in a household. What a woman who is doing domestic work in somebody else's home needs is help in her own home when she returns from work. If she can afford to pay a domestic, good enough. But in the majority of homes people cannot afford a domestic. That is one of the reasons why we have problems in bringing the Bill dealing with Domestic Help before this House.

What women need in a house is joint help, herself and her husband. This is where the attitudes of our Guyanese husbands, brother and sons must come in because I feel – and there are many people who feel like me – that Guyanese men, husbands and sons must change their attitudes. This is not something that can come by law. When some of our Guyanese immigrate to North America, England, United States and Canada, they quickly hustle off to the kitchen and help their wives do the dishes. Many of them in Guyana think it is beneath their dignity. This is one of the attitudes women talk about. When husbands and wives come home from work together some husbands feel they can sit in the Berbice chair and read the newspapers while the wife, who has worked equally hard in the field, the factory or the office, has to see that the children are fed, see that they do their home-work, see that they have their bath, see that they say their prayers and see that they go to bed and the husband sits down and does nothing. This is one of the biggest fields of discrimination in Guyana and this is where we have to educate our men. As the Prime Minister feels strongly on this, as it is part of our teaching in the egalitarian society,

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we must have a massive propaganda campaign. The P.N.C. alone has the power, mechanics, money etc., to do this. The P.N.C. never did anything about this before but now it is time to redress the wrong and, by a massive programme of education at National Service, at the Co-operatives, in the Schools, we must teach the young boys coming up to share equally with their mothers in the responsibility of running the home.

We are talking about domestics and domestic chores and jobs in the house. My friend the hon. Member Dr. Ramsahoye spoke about the low wages. I agree. The hon. Prime Minister said

it permits a gap which permits the employers to impose discriminatory terms of service on working women; low salaries, poor working conditions and long hours of work. But at least the domestics in most cases have an 8 hour day. But the poor housewife leaves work at 4 o'clock and God knows when her hours are going to end, particularly, if she has the type of husband who goes in and reads his newspaper, or goes out to have a few drinks with the boys and what have you, and just as the poor woman sits down to rest and says "Thank God not I can rest" in he comes and says "Darling can I have my dinner"? That is the sort of thing she has to put up with. This is discrimination against women in the home.

With respect to discrimination in the domestic field and among domestic workers, it is time that an end be put to this. There is only one way to get the matter cleared up and that is to bring the Campbell Committee Report. I cannot remember the exact year the Committee sat but I think it was in 1972. This Committee was headed by Lucille Campbell and was appointed to report on conditions of work and employment of domestics. The report has not come to this Parliament. Why? Because when it comes it is going to cause a revolutionary change in attitudes towards domestics. Many will be out of work. Some who have domestics and treat them worse than slaves will not be able to afford them. And it may not be popular for the People's National Congress. But if they really mean that they say they must bring this Report before the House – the Campbell Committee Report on conditions of employment for domestics. It is so old that the hon. Prime Minister may have forgotten it. The hon. Minister of Labour Mr. Carrington knows it.

Now that we have everybody airing his views on the question of man and woman sharing the duties in the home, we will soon have the men in Guyana being proud to say: "Oh I helped my wife wash the dishes last night. I broke a cup. I helped her make the bed. I helped her put Jonny to sleep." The husband should be as proud to say that as to say "Look at my kitchen garden! My bora is longer than the neighbour's next door. I have lovely large tomatoes." It will become a sort of status symbol where he will be just as proud to say that he is helping his wife in what he formerly considered woman's work.

In seeking equality, as I said, women are not seeking to make themselves superior to the men. They are merely asking to share jointly at all levels and, according to their ability, with their own folk. Surely, this is not something unreasonable or difficult to come by. Women must share in the economic responsibilities and the men must share in the responsibilities of the home. It is part and parcel of the joint relationship that the men share with the women in the mundane routine chores of everyday living.

This attitude cannot be changed by law. It is one of the subtle modes of discrimination. You cannot take a law and pin it down and say this must be done. Because you will certainly be infringing on the people's basic rights. But this is a matter that can be brought about, as I said, by massive propaganda. I hope that the Government will use its machinery to bring it all about.

Incidentally, CASWIG, the Council on the Affairs and Status of Women in Guyana, reports from its research that 25 per cent of the labour force in Guyana is women and girls. Half of the women are married and living with their husbands. So you see the joint responsibility.

There are some other matters with which I wish to deal before I get on to the various sections of the State Paper. In some instances I feel that they should form a pre-requisite for the law if it is to be really meaningful, particularly in the field of employment. I quote now from the Women's Newsletter prepared by CASWIG. No date is recorded on it but there is a foreword by the hon. Minister of Labour date 22nd December, 1975. On page 5 under the heading "Earnings" it is stated:

"Women in Guyana in positions of skilled employment, get equal pay for equal work. The high rate of unskilled labour, among women, however, has given rise to the many cases of unequal remuneration especially among those in the domestic and restaurant service and also in some industrial concerns."

And on the same page:

“Unemployment rates remain higher for women than for men...”

For a working mother to be able to give of her best, whether she be skilled, unskilled, semi-skilled, or professional, she must have peace of mind about her children; she must be satisfied with the conditions under which they will live and be taken care of whilst she is at work. It is therefore of the utmost importance that facilities such as Day Care Centres be high on the list of Government priorities. Both the Central and Local Government authorities must make this a number one priority when they are planning their budgets.

In any particular industry in commerce or agriculture, where women form a large percentage of the work force, employers should be urged to provide Day Care Centres, either in the work place itself or, if not possible, adjacent to the building. And by way of encouraging these people to do this, Government should consider some form of relief in taxation. This is not the place or time for me to go into the mechanics of how this is to be done but Government has, at its disposal, many highly qualified people who are capable and whose duty it can be to go into this matter of what will be fair to allow a company by way of tax relief. And, whatever they do, consideration must be given to the establishment of Day Care Centres up and down the country.

Now, Day Care Centres – pre-suppose that the woman has a job. But let us start at the beginning – the creation of job opportunities. Unemployment in Guyana is very high. Some say it is as high as 20 to 25 per cent; the Government admits it is 15 per cent and, as I have already said, the unemployment rate remains higher for women than for men. What, therefore, is clearly needed, is more job opportunities.

4.05 p.m.

We are told that our egalitarian society the gap between the haves and the have nots must be narrowed and the ultimate aim is full employment for all. We agree with this fully and accept this particular aspect of socialism one hundred per cent. But what is Government doing about providing job opportunities? Where are the new jobs and the job opportunities? Self help,

(Mrs. DaSilva continued)

Co-operatives and National Service cannot and will not provide the answer. It is true they will absorb quite a large portion of our people. Maybe you can teach them a trade, or a skill, but the very nature of the undertaking this cannot provide an adequate income paying a woman a salary as she would get if it were run as a business organisation. [**The Prime Minister:** “But the woman and the man get the same.”] I am disputing that. No, I did not say so. I am talking about the opportunities for jobs.

This is one of the reasons why on this side of the House, time and time again we have had to state our disapproval when vast sums of money are spent on self-help, co-operatives and national service. It is not that we disagree with the principle or the concept, but we believe that money voted for these projects could benefit a greater number of Guyanese and provide more job opportunities if it were re-channelled and re-directed. Anyway this is not a debate on National Service, co-operatives or self help, and I do not propose to carry that point any further.

What we do feel, too, is that some of this money, a greater portion of it, should be put in education and health. Incidentally I believe 1976 has been designated Education and Health Year. Unless we prepare our children, unless our children are educated they will not be able to get worthwhile jobs. I remember that at the beginning of the debate the hon. Prime Minister said how there was discrimination in his family because he was chosen to be educated and not his sisters. I wish to cross swords with him. I do not think he is being fair to his family because you should not take the right away from a family to decide what is best for it. If is a question of finance, if you have to decide whether to educate you boy or educate you girl and you cannot afford to do both, you will naturally have to think is then most likely to make the best returns. At the time when the hon. Prime Minister was a small boy it was the male who had the better opportunity. You cannot take away the right of the family to decide. This is what this Government is trying to do, to take away the rights of the citizens to decide for themselves. In everything practically we have been told what to do. We are told we cannot do this and we must not do that. But sorry, sir, I am digressing a bit.

Going back to education. I said this money should be channelled into education especially into our primary schools. I have said this before, and I say it again I make no apology for saying it. Our primary schools are woefully overcrowded and the Government knows this. We are building multilateral schools all right, but if the child does not have a basic primary education it is frustrating the work of the multilateral schools. **[Interruption]** I am glad to hear the hon. Prime Minister say that he agrees that we need more primary schools and he is looking into the matter. He also agrees that if we do not have a sound basic education for our children, secondary, technical and university education are all being frustrated. I am pleased and look for positive results from it. But the Government has to find this money somewhere so the hon. Prime Minister has to watch where he is establishing his priorities and be sure he puts them in the right places. We waste so much money in channelling the money into the wrong areas. We have to establish priorities. Self help, co-operatives and National Service may be very laudable projects and enterprises. But we cannot afford the luxury of them. We have to establish our priorities and get them in the right order. I am glad to see the Prime Minister is turning over a new leaf and adopting a new attitude.

We support 100 per cent the statement that we are all create equal and there must be equal opportunity for all. But before we can talk about employment let alone full employment for all we must have the opportunity for all to learn, so that they can be equipped to earn a living and contribute to the building of our nation. As well as channelling money into education Government can and must create job opportunities in the field, in the factory and in commerce for our people where they can earn a living wage according to their ability in the skilled, semi-skilled and profession fields. What is needed is a good hard look at the way Government's money is being spent and being wasted. A proper assessment of our needs should be made and the means of proper priorities arrived at. We cannot afford a luxury. As I said, no matter how well meaning self help, co-operatives and National Service as a basis of the economy of our country and at the expense of the education of our children cannot be allowed.

Mr. Speaker, I realise I digressed a bit and I thank you for not stopping me and allowing me to amplify on this because we think this applies very much to the debate on women.

To turn to specific areas in the State Paper. We are in agreement with all the heads in the State Paper. But on this we feel there are certain heads that need some more clarification and a few additional points should be raised.

I should like to deal with property rights. It is presumed that this particular aspect of property rights is needed when a marriage down, there is no hope of reconciliation, and the parties are seeking a divorce. The hon. Prime Minister told us that the law is going to specify joint property rights for men and women and we are very pleased to hear this. Because I really wanted the Prime Minister to tell us how he was going to work out the value of the services of a wife in the home. [**The Prime Minister:** "Half and half."] It cannot be half and half. with all due respect, if you, sir, even with your income had to employ a woman to be a wife, a mother, a lover, a hostess, a nurse, a cook, a seamstress, a launderess, a gardener – I could go on, you have to get nine of them to take the place of what your one wife is doing. You could not afford it even on your income, sir. I want to know how Government is going to assess the services of a wife in a home. Or how is it going to arrive at how much she is worth? [**The Prime Minister:** "Half and half."] Half and half fair and reasonable in sharing the work, but the point you made before you spoke about half and half: "The Government takes the view that the services of a wife in a home should be taken into account when considering and determining the rights of each party to a marriage in property acquired during the subsistence of the marriage." How can half and half possibly be fair in view of the various roles she has to play? You could not possibly assess what the woman is worth.

I understand we are going to get half and half. Well, at least that is something and I do appreciate the difficult in trying to assess the work and all these various jobs that we do and try to pay us accordingly.

(Mrs. DaSilva continued)

4.15 p.m.

We are coming to the question which deals with illegitimacy. Now, we want to make it abundantly clear that we uphold the concept of the dignity of marriage. We do not condone promiscuous living but we recognise fully the position that exists in the world today. It is a fact that is before our eyes and, as it happens, one has to give it due recognition. We wish to record that we want no slur or stigma to remain on or to be attached to a child who has had the misfortune of being born illegitimately. Why should an innocent child have to suffer for the sin of his parents? We say that we want to have removed from our statute book and documents such as birth certificate etc., the word “illegitimate”. We also recognise the child’s right as a human being to share in the father’s property and we support the section of the Paper that deals with this.

We would like to urge the Government to remember that every story has two sides and this is something one has to be very wary about. Let us take the case of a man and a woman – and this would apply when we come to the common-law union – who get married. He is around twenty-two; she is around twenty-one. The two of them have been together for many years. He is now maybe in his early fifties. The wife has probably helped him to get on in life, to get where he is in his job. She has borne his children; she has looked after his home. She has probably gone out to work to help bring these children up and to maintain the home. Then, along comes some bright little thing about seventeen or eighteen and the husband is attracted to this pretty little butterfly and he forgets this poor wife who has helped him over the years, who has borne his children, who has looked after his home, who has helped him to get where he is in life today.

So, he leaves her, goes off and takes up with this young girl. In some religions he can get a divorce. Others do not hold with divorce. Some men do not even bother to have a divorce. They go off and they just leave their wife and take up with the young girl or whilst normally being a husband to their wife, they have their – as we say in Guyana – “outside women”. These men go and have their illegitimate children and now these children are going to share jointly with

the children of the legitimate wife. This, we uphold, is fair to the child because of the human dignity that the child should have the right in it. But, we have to remember the feelings of the man's legal wife and be very careful. I do not know how this law is going to be formulated. We have to be careful and be quite sure that by trying to put one wrong right, we do not create another wrong.

Of course, we have the other situation where we have some men who would have lived with a woman years and years, twenty years, or as it says further down in the State Paper "unions... possessing a character of permanence." This man would have lived with this woman; there is no reason why he should not marry her; she has looked after him to his dying day, and has borne his children as a good common-law wife. She has not got any legal status. And this man, through sheer worthlessness or laziness or because he just cannot be bothered, does not make this marriage legal. And he dies. There she is, she has given him all her life and she gets nothing. Her children get nothing. That is what makes it fair to have this law on legitimacy. But then, as I said, one has to think of both sides of the story. We have to see that we are not hurting one wife while helping the other. At all times we have to uphold the dignity of marriage.

I think I made the point on common law union when I was dealing with legitimacy and I think that point was dealt with except that I would really like the hon. Minister of Information and Culture who is going to reply to tell me how they are going to arrive at and determine a union "possessing a character of permanence." I should like to read the paragraph which deals with common law unions.

"In the context of the proceeding section, Government proposes to consider the general position of parties to a common law union, particularly with respect to the possible need to provide for mutual obligations of maintenance and for division of property and succession, at any rate in relation to such unions as may fairly be regarded as possessing a character of permanence."

How does the Government propose to arrive at what may fairly be regarded as "possessing a character of permanence"?

One cannot even be sure about legal marriages. A couple may be married for thirty or thirty-five years and one swears that they will be married until they die, then suddenly one hears: “John and Mary have had a divorce.” Everyone believed they were the most loving couple, yet they have had a divorce. One cannot even establish permanency in a legal marriage, let alone one that is not legal. And, what about the state that is very common in our country – this may be talking against the point I am making – we have the situation where a man and woman have been living together very happily for years. He has been a good man to her, supported her and the children; he has kept his part of the bargain. She has been a good wife; she has looked after him. They suddenly decide to legalise it and they get married and a couple of days after that they are divorced or the marriage breaks up. I heard an amusing story of a man to who this happened. The wife said: “Well you’ve married me now. Why don’t you provide a maid for me?” this is the sort of attitudes our people have.

In fairness though I do not wish to speak against my own sex, some men might be willing to marry the women but she does not want to get married until they can have a great big splash and she can have a white wedding, complete with the children as train bearers and the lot. We have a lot of work to do in our country where attitudes are concerned.

Now, sir, we come to taxation and this is one area where we feel very strongly that the proposals as set out in the State Paper do not provide the answer. I should like to quote first of all, what was said on income tax on page 7 of the State Paper:

“Under the Income Tax Act, Chapter 81:01, a husband is liable to pay out of his own income the full income tax due on the joint income of himself and wife. The wife’s portion of the tax can be collected from her only where it is not practicable to collect it from her husband. Government is examining the situation to see whether it is possible, without affecting the quantum of taxation, for spouse to be allowed the option of deciding whether the total tax liability will be borne by one spouse or the other or be divided between them in reasonable proportions.”

The hon. Prime Minister has said earlier on that the Government was examining that possibility, as is said in the State Paper, but the solution proposed is not the answer and the reason why we

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have not got the answer is that the quantum of taxation will be affected.

The option of allowing one spouse or the other to decide whether the total tax liability will be borne by one spouse only or divided between the two in reasonable proportions is still discriminatory. Either one person is going to pay all the tax or one will pay more than the other, so where does this question of equality come in? The only fair way is for separate assessment when each party pays its own position. Surely, as a good socialist government they should accept the saying: to each according to his need from each according to his ability.

We have spoken over the years of the need for separate assessment for tax purposes and have fully realised that the Government's reluctance to accept this is not that it does not see the point we are making, but it lies in the fact that the quantum of taxation will be affected. It has come out now in the open. Now that it is admitted, let us see what we can do to find a fair solution to the question. We appreciate that by separate assessment the Government stands to lose, but we are talking about discrimination and equality. If Government really means what it says, and it wants to bring an end to discrimination against women and give them equality, this aspect of the amount of money which the Government will lose by a joint assessment will have to go by the board. Government will have to find some other means to recoup its losses.

In an effort to compromise, I should like to make a suggestion. It is not the answer because there still will be a certain amount of discrimination, but I understand that this obtains in Jamaica. I think it is a reasonable compromise until we can do better because we realise the nation needs money. We are not trying to deprive the Inland Revenue Department of what it should have. What we suggest is this.

(Mrs. DaSilva continued)

As the law in Jamaica stands, the law makes provision for separate assessments provided the combined income does not exceed a certain amount. We suggest to work along those lines. We would have to decide what is a fair amount for Guyana, but we suggest that a law for separate assessment be provided, provided that the combined income does not exceed a certain amount. In this way it will give assistance to the small man whose wife is working to help the family to make two ends meet. Surely, this is in keeping with the socialist policy. This should only be on a temporary basis and the matter reviewed from year to year because if discrimination against women is to cease, it must cease at all levels of society, at all income brackets, and all classes etc. therefore, for the time, we suggest that we could help the smaller person first, and later on, look into it to give relief to the other people.

I should like to read, if I may, a paragraph from a book called, *Women in Britain*. It is put out by the British Information Services, Central Office of Information, London, and I should like to read it because it is very relevant to what I am saying. We are not following anybody's law slavishly. We are applying them as they suit ourselves, and many things that we are doing, we are getting from the British law. I put this out to show how they handle it. Jamaica has copied it and I hope, in a way, we can do it for ourselves. The figures quoted here are for Britain. I am not advocating that this amount be the amount for Guyana. I am merely using it as an example.

“For income tax purposes, a single woman taxpayer is normally entitled to the same allowances as a single man in the same circumstances, including a personal allowance, earned income relieve and dependent relative allowance. In the assessment of the tax payable by a married couple living together, the incomes of husband and wife are aggregated and treated as one income, but a higher allowance is given than for a single person. In law the husband is liable for the whole of the tax...”,

This applies to us too,

“(it is to the husband that the married tax allowance is made); in practice a wife’s earned income is generally taxed at source under the PAYE (pay as you earn) system.”

It happens here.

“A wife’s earned income attracts special reliefs and allowances so that, broadly speaking, it is liable to income tax in the same way as if she were single. The effect of the tax arrangements for married couples is that, so long as a woman and her husband do not between them earn more than about £4,005 a year, the woman pays no more tax than if single and the husband continues to receive the full married man’s tax allowance; and up to a joint income of about £5,810 a year, a married couple pays less tax than two single people with the same earnings. Some married couples with joint incomes above that level will benefit from an alternative system which from 1972-1973 will allow, if husband and wife so elect, the wife’s earnings to be taxed separately as if she were a single woman with no other income. If they choose this alternative system, the husband will receive only single person’s allowance instead of the married man’s allowance.”

That, sir, is taken from this book, *Women in Britain*. I commend it particularly to the hon. Minister of Finance. Maybe he could study it and he may then be able to give us a fairer deal for the working married women in regard to this matter of income tax.

To go back to the same matter of income tax, there are two forms of discrimination against women that do not affect the quantum as such at the moment. There exist in our income tax laws and should be removed immediately or, failing that, as soon as possible, if we really talk about equality.

The first concern the deductible tax of the man and a woman. We know a husband gets \$800 and his wife \$600. If his wife is working she gets this additional \$400. I am not talking about the position of a working wife. I am not talking about the position of a single woman working and paying her own tax. I am talking about the wife in the home, who is not employed

in business, the one the State Paper referred to when it spoke of assessing her services in the home.

Surely, it is discrimination to allow a man \$800 and his wife only \$600. She should be given \$800 too, in equality with her husband. This is a very glaring case of discrimination which I am sure surely slipped the hon. Minister of Finance and the Cabinet members. This could easily be put right. I am talking about a wife at home. [**Mr. Hope:** "She gets the same."] From this year? I take your word. I am talking about up to the end of last year. I have not done income tax for this year. However, if you have brought it into line, I apologise and I am very pleased. The wife at home will be allowed the same \$800 as the husband. Please make sure that the form is corrected because it can easily be overlooked and the men will be claiming the wrong amount. Will a working wife be allowed \$600 plus \$400 in certain conditions? [**Cde. Hope:** "A woman, whether she is a wife at home, working wife, or single woman, will receive \$800."] Please see that it is clearly stated on the tax forms too.

4.35 p.m.

The other discrimination that I would like to talk about is the question now of the joint income tax returns and the question of tax clearance. As it stands now, if a man applies for tax clearance and his income tax is not in order and he cannot satisfy the Commissioner of Inland Revenue, as to what will be done, he cannot get a tax clearance. A wife gets her tax clearance on her husband's return. I would like to know if it is fair for women to be dependent on their husbands. The wife may be paying her own P.A.Y.E. and is up-to-date but because she is assessed with her husband her tax clearance is based on her husband's return and she cannot leave Guyana to spend the gracious \$200 she gets for a trip to Barbados. This is something I would like to know about. I wish to find out what is being done about it. The question of tax clearance should not be difficult because any working woman would be paying her P.A.Y.E. She would be clear but the poor wife at home would be penalised because if the husband has not paid his income tax she cannot get her tax clearance.

(Mrs. DaSilva continued)

I would like to deal with the question of employment. I dealt with it earlier on but I should like to deal with the third paragraph on page 7. It states:

“The law distinguishes between male and female workers in certain respects, particularly as regards permissible categories of employment, permissible hours of work, and approved rates of pay. There are restrictions on the employment of women in certain types of factories and industrial undertakings. In some cases restrictions also exist on the hours of work, including overtime, which were available to them.”

It is the question of overtime with which I wish to deal specifically so far as it applies to women, that is, overtime hours going into hours of darkness in spite of our daylight saving time. Overtime could mean working until 12 o'clock midnight or 1 o'clock in the morning. I do not want those people to say: “Well, they want equality, they must take the good with the bad.” I wish to refer to a state of affairs which exists in our country which causes our citizens, men and women, to live in fear. This particularly affects the women because, physically, they are not as strong as men unless they are karate experts. The normal woman is not physically built to be able to cope with the men who choke and rob. I am speaking to the question of choke and rob which causes fear to our citizens, and which is giving Guyana a bad name. There is even a calypso about it. I am sure the hon. Members know “Chiney Brush”. Imagine a song like that going around the world. It talks about Guyana and all that Guyana has is choke and rob. Is that not a disgrace for our country and something we should be ashamed of? Never mind we are becoming famous from a calypso, they put it in “Chiney Brush”. [Cde. Prime Minister: “What’s that?”] I am not talking about “Chiney Brush”, I am talking about the name of a calypso “Chiney Brush”. Mr. Speaker, I would like to explain to our hon. Prime Minister who has just come in that we are achieving notoriety in the world because of our choke and rob fellows. There is a calypso called “Chiney Brush”. The use of the “Chiney Brush” is irrelevant to this debate. What is relevant to this debate is choke and rob which is giving Guyana a bad name and causing our people to live in fear. Hon. Members are all laughing and making fun but I wonder if any one of us in this House has been choked and robbed. It is all right for those of us who have cars. We get into our

cars and drive home. For those who have to walk or ride bicycles, those who have to ride into the Housing Scheme at 2 o'clock in the morning, it is a serious matter and a matter of great concern. Whilst we laugh and make silly jokes we have got to remember that these are the majority of our people that we are striving to work for in this egalitarian society and we must protect them.

The Speaker: Hon. Member Mrs. DaSilva how much longer have you got?

Mrs. DaSilva: Maybe about 15 minutes more.

The Speaker: Well then we will take the suspension now. I had not anticipated this when I agreed to continue the Sitting right through. It is now 4.40 p.m.

Comrades and hon. Members I am sorry that I had to keep you exactly forty minutes longer than the time when we should have taken the suspension. I was led to believe, quite erroneously, that the debate would have been finished at least about half past four. Perhaps, we will not take the suspension for half an hour. The Sitting of the House is suspended for thirty minutes.

Suspended accordingly at 4.42 p.m.

5.15 p.m.

On resumption - -

Mrs. DaSilva: Mr. Speaker, when the suspension was taken at tea time we were referring to the notoriety that Guyana was achieving in a calypso correctly called "Wang Ping" but, in Guyana, referred to as "Chiney Brush". In this calypso Guyana is being definitely given a bad name because of choke and rob incidents. **[Laughter]** I do not know what hon. Members are making all this fuss about, *honi soit qui mal y pense*. For those who do not understand, it means

“Evil to him who evil thinks”. Sir, I am referring to the calypso “Wang Ping” and the notoriety Guyana is achieving. I am talking about choke and rob.

The Prime Minister: On a point of order, Cde. Speaker, the particular calypso has nothing to do with “Chiney Brush” and has nothing to do with choke and rob.

The Speaker: Please proceed, hon. Member Mrs. DaSilva:

Mrs. DaSilva: Mr. Speaker, I will leave the point. I am sorry I cannot sing and bring the words out. It really refers to various things the countries achieve. The hon. Prime Minister is referring to the joke against himself about the Prime Ministers. I am sure most of us know that. It is the joke about the three Prime Ministers and the President of the United States flying home. The President put his hand out, touched the skyscraper and said, “Drop me out here”. Barrow in Barbados saw the blue sea and sky and said, “This is Barbados, drop me out here”. Castro saw can fields and he said, “Drop me off here”. Our hon. Prime Minister put his hand out the window and his very expensive watch was taken and he said “Stop here, boys I’m home”. I beg your pardon, he said “Bye bye boys, I’m home”. They are two completely different things. The only thing that the calypsos have in common is the fact that they both refer to choke and rob. I think I have made my point. I do not want to belabour it.

There is robbery with violence. We had, amongst others the incident last week where

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there was a robbery in the Insurance Company. **[Interruption]**

The Speaker: Hon. Member, please proceed. I am very tolerant but not over tolerant sometimes.

(Mrs. DaSilva continues)

Mrs. DaSilva: Yes sir. The point is we have these cases and people must be protected. Women must be protected. This is where it links with the relevancy of the debate. It happens that the men must be protected too. And at the risk of starting another uproar, of getting gratitude from some and abuse from others, I think it is time that this House turned its attention to the question of whether the 'cat' should not be re-introduced in Guyana again. We admit that the 'cat' is barbaric and uncivilised. It is degrading to human dignity that it should have to be used in our country as a means of preventing crime, that is, to act as a deterrent. But I am reminded of the debate we had in this House last year when the iniquitous blackmarketing Bill was brought to this House and my Leader and I objected to the taking away of licences after the second offence was committed for blackmarketing. And the hon. Minister of Trade said that it was necessary to provide something that the people really would feel and understand because the fines meant nothing, goal meant and is not deterrent.

We heard from the lips of the hon. Minister of Trade and from the Prison Officers, that offenders have no respect for anything except the 'cat'. It would be the only thing to act as a deterrent to stop choke and rob, robbery with violence and robbery under arms. It is time for the House to give consideration to this matter.

In Jamaica, crime is getting out of control and they are talking about bringing back the gun court to deal with it. They want something that criminals would respect and fear. Then they will really obey the law. When women compete with men and work into the hours of night, into the darkness, they are more likely to be choked and robbed. And if there is nothing that these people fear, we will never get a solution. The Minister says we have got to find something drastic to combat the ills in our society. He was referring to things like blackmarket; we have to do the same thing here and find something drastic to combat choke and rob, robbery with violence and robbery under arms. This is a question where the end justifies the means.

In conclusion, sir, I wish to assure all here present, indeed all Guyanese men, that the women of Guyana in their bid for equality, have no desire to be superior to them in any way. The question of superiority does not arise. It is not a slur on their virility; it is not a slur on their manhood. All we ask for is fair and equal treatment and to be given an opportunity to live and work together with them in harmony to make a better life for all. God created women differently from men for a special purpose. We like being women and we like you being men. We appreciate the difference and as the French say *Vive la difference*.

The Speaker: Cde. Field Ridley.

Cde. Field Ridley: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. And it seems to me that I cannot make a contribution to this debate unless I first pause to acknowledge in this House today, with your permission, Cde. Speaker, the presence of some of the women who have pioneered the efforts which we see being put into such a dynamic form today. **[Applause]**

We have with us today, listening to something that they by practice have spoken to Guyana about, people like Auntie Esther –Cde. Esther Dey; we have people like Dorothy Bailey; we have with us Shirun Edun. I know, Cde. Speaker, it is invidious sometimes to call names but I thought that I would identify these women because they are here with us and they have been pioneers.

Having said that, Cde. Speaker, I think I would like to re-emphasise the point made by the Cde. Leader in his opening of the Debate on this Motion, in that we are not talking about an issue that concerns women. We are talking about an issue that concerns people, the people of Guyana today. It is good that we have had one member of the Opposition coming out firmly in support of this measure. I myself would have wished to have heard the Leader of the Opposition. I am sure it is not lack of courage that inhibited him from making his contribution but rather an acknowledgement that the female member of his party should speak for him on this as perhaps on every issue.

Another reason which led me to identify those women is that they functioned and performed in spite of the system in which they performed and it is... **[Interruption]** Cde. Speaker I wonder if I shall have to ask your protection from my own leader in this matter. They interpret “winding up” a little differently from the way this honourable House does. But it is a system that I would like to speak about because really the efforts of those women are finding their culmination in these days because we are now in position to really tackle the fundamental issues that must be faced. The system which has led to this state of inequality which has made it possible for us, as late as in the last quarter of the 20th century, only now to be talking about equal status and an equal role for our women, this system in which we live identified as the base of all status the economic interest of groups. That system we call capitalism. In that system everything stemmed from the economic interests that were at work within. And because that was so, because a system such as that must needs have groups being exploited, we have found that the economic strength, the economic power that was placed in the hands of the men could lead to a situation where women were kept in a subservient position because they looked to the men to provide for them all their economic needs.

The family system, Cde. Speaker, what is it in effect but a reproduction on a small scale of that capitalist system that permeated the entire State structure, a system where the woman was completely dependent on the man, a system which in England grew out of the concept of primogeniture where the first born male inherited? And so from birth his sisters served him against the day when he would have control over their lives because he held the purse strings. And even when that system was abolished it yet ruled us from the grave so that even today the woman in Guyana on the whole is economically dependent on the man and her behavioural patterns are conditioned by the kind of duress he can exert upon her because he holds the purse strings.

Therefore, if we are serious about talking about equality for women, we have to talk about destroying completely a system of life which said that he who controls the purse strings, he

(Cde. Field-Ridley continued)

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who has benefited from the class interest involved is the one who will decide who will be equal, who will not be equal, who will be exploited.

The whole machinery of state was geared to support that situation. The man was identified as being the wage earner, and to him was given the training, the education, the support that was needed to continue and maintain that status and all the agencies that operated in society operated to buttress that position. The educational system was fashioned so that the woman, if she ever entered the formal system, was geared right at the start to take a place in the home situation functioning, as the Cde. Leader described and Cde. DaSilva described, if she will permit me to describe her as comrade, as just a chattel serving the interest of the man and the family.

The educational system was geared like that, the mass media did the same thing, and reinforced those values. Even now as we look around we see advertisements selling us some hard liquor. But is it the liquor they are selling us? “Have a good weekend”, they say, and there is a woman portrayed before us upside down. What is the good week-end? Is it the liquor? Or is this another example of the lack of respect towards our women that has been handed down by this system we have inherited?

It is the whole system, education, the mass media. What about our religions? The religious authorities also had a role to play in the buttressing of these values that ensured the male supremacy. What are the myths that all the important religions have handed to us? They are male oriented. What are the practices that they portrayed before us? The model of the man in command so that even now when it is legally possible to have a female marriage officer – and, indeed, I am very proud to be a member of the church which has the first female marriage officer in Guyana. Even though that is so there are still religions and denominations of the very

Christian religion which makes it impossible for a woman to be able to exert that influence through holding that kind of position.

Unless we tackle these fundamental issues we are not serious about the question of equality of women. If we look at those who comment on the social structure which we have inherited in a way we cannot blame them because they interpret what is there, they interpret that system which we are seeking to destroy. They are interpreting it when they say to us in the mouths of our calypsonians “Every now and then beat them up. They love you long and they love you strong.” **[Interruption by Prime Minister]** shall I continue, Cde. Speaker? It goes on “Bus up deh eyes so deh friends can see, then deh love you eternally.” And that refers not to a beast, not to some strange animal that has descended upon our planet but to a woman that we describe in words as a human being. **[Interruption by Prime Minister]** Cde. Speaker, we shall ignore any intervention from anyone in this House. I rely on you for protection.

Today is not only a day of great interest to people in this honourable House, to people in Guyana; it is also an extremely significant day in that we are talking about a measure that is perhaps the most important, in terms of cultural progress, that we have seen during this entire century in Guyana, because we are dealing with a measure, a motion, that tackles the whole question of relationships between the sexes, and the relationship between man and woman is so fundamental that from that relationship many of the other relationships that we cherish in our society gain validity.

This Motion that we are debating today puts another nail in the coffin of the whole system of capitalism. As the introduction to the Motion states, the law alone will not give us equality. There are many other important areas, some of which we have been tackling and we have been seeing a breakthrough, but the law will buttress those efforts. This is why a Committee was set up by the People’s National Congress and the executive arm of the Party, the Government, to investigate all the legislative enactments which will have to be replaced, and this Paper before us reflects the important elements which came out of that discussion.

Cde. DaSilva... [**The Prime Minister:** “Not Comrade.”] She has given me permission in this debate to regard her as a comrade. [**Applause**] She mentioned many areas of concern where she thought that money had been ill-spent. She identified self-help, co-operatives and National Service, because she felt that one of the problems in the way of women achieving equality was the question of unemployment. She put forward the thesis that the money spent on self-help, on co-operatives and on National Service could have been better spent generating jobs for the girls. I am very pleased that Cde. DaSilva was able to support this Motion. But I cannot but take issue with her on her fundamental approach to the problem, because she fails to recognise that the problem lies in the system and can never be answered by piecemeal attempts to generate jobs for the girls or, for that matter for the boys.

Men have been educated towards their role of supremacy. If we are serious about women sharing a role of equality with men then they too must be educated to perform in that way. I am sure that Cde. DaSilva will acknowledge that our educational system was completely unsuited for the new society we are building and I am sure that if she were honest with us she would recognise that National Service in fact does exactly what she is asking us to do. It provides the ground-work to enable our women and our men to generate for themselves productive activity that will not just give them a livelihood – it might not give them salaries – but it will certainly give them livelihood and as well contribute to the development of the country so that others by themselves share in that productivity that is becoming the hallmark of life in Guyana under the People’s National Congress.

Self-help, co-operatives: how can the hon. Member – I refer to her at this stage as hon. Member – criticise us for spending on self-help and co-operatives? One does not generate jobs in our society by putting money to create bit business. Even people’s capitalism is still capitalism. One generates activity, employment, through teaching people in a theoretical situation and a practical situation to build of themselves self-reliant individuals and no matter what their origin, no matter who their parents were, their ancestors were, to give them that ability and opportunity

through self-help, through co-operatives, to play a meaningful part in developing their country, their families and themselves in that way.

5.40 p.m.

She spoke about the deficiencies in the educational system in the sense that schools do not have enough places. We know that. That is why this year is “Health and Education Year.” We recognise the limitations. But, think about the system that we inherited and think about the school places that we were able to build during our years in office through that same self-help which she criticises. **[Applause]** Cde. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. Member is aware of how many small people have learned to respect themselves and each other by becoming members of all kinds of co-operatives? And, if that is to be a fact of life, then Government must provide the infrastructure, must provide the help which will enable that small man to become the real man.

Our priorities have been set. Members have heard of them right here in this House; not today, not yesterday, not yester-year, but for a very long time. When we became the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, that was clear. Budget debate after budget debate we have said that our emphasis is on making that small man a real man. Many have said to us: “It’s a slogan; it’s a cliché.” But, we in Guyana are living to see that slogan a reality and everyone of us can identify people coming from a low economic base who have learnt, because of the facilities that have been made available, to run their businesses as co-operative businesses, to become real men, to raise their families.

The hon. Member spoke about freedom and I think that point is so important that I must take it up. If I remember correctly – and she will correct me if I am misquoting her – she said: “Government is trying to take away the right of the citizen to decide what he should do.” Cde. Speaker, the system that made woman a second-class citizen in her own country was the system that gave all of us as Guyanese, every one of us in this House, the right and the freedom ourselves to wake in the morning and not know where the next meal was coming from. All of us

(Cde. Field-Ridley continues)

have that kind of past. I, as a Minister, have had a past where I saw my mother cry at midday because she did not know where the meal was coming from. That was the freedom that we had.

We have had the freedom to have a little children dropping like flies because they had malaria. We have had the freedom to have a high death rate for our little children; that was the freedom the capitalists gave us. We had freedom of the Press so that they who owned the Press could use that Press to reinforce the values of the capitalist system which depressed us as women at two levels: the first level, a depressing situation which we shared with our men-folk, that we, as a nation of men and women, were discriminated against at every level. And, as have been said by an important writer, "Europe under-developed us." As women, we shared that situation. But, as women, we had another problem in that even in that depressed state of affairs, we were further depressed by being, even in that situation, further exploited because that system of imperialism does not allow the woman to gain a position of equality and that is why our sisters in the so-called "developed world" are now crying for freedom.

It is true that our cry for freedom, for women's liberation, is not the same as that of the women of the developed world. They see their thrust for liberation as being an exercise in a situation of warfare against their men. We in Guyana do not want that position, have never wanted it and cannot afford to have it, because we have the twin problem of liberating our country in partnership with our men and, in that process, to ensure that woman is free. It is a joint and double-pronged approach on the problem.

Therefore, to say that citizens are not free, illustrates a complete misconception of what is happening in Guyana today. At least people have freedom to choose for themselves and their children the kind of future they will carve for themselves in this great country of ours. At last we have a system where, because of the changes that have been going on in education, we at last have an educational system that is beginning – the process is not complete – to mould citizens, if I may borrow a word from the Guyana Teachers' Association, for this country of their birth,

Guyana, and not mould citizens for some country overseas that they never say but have been taught about. That is the kind of freedom that is relevant. If people would like to misguide the citizens of Guyana by saying there is no freedom in Guyana, they show complete misconception of the situation.

In Guyana, if we are strong in what we want, there is much opportunity to create the employment the comrade was worried about, for our citizens. We have a whole hinterland to develop. We have potentials still on our coasts. We have mineral potentials; we have hydro-electric potentials. Guyana has been a land of potentials and it is not that we are seeing that potential realised but, it will never be truly realised unless we allow our women the opportunity to share in that development.

This State Paper seeks to set out policy positions on legislative matters. It does not seek to cover the whole area of what has to be done in terms of achieving equality; nor does it seek to even point out the important areas where Guyana has made great strides. We who debate this measure are politicians and if we look at our achievements in the area of politics, we good reason to be proud.

The hon. Member made a point which related to the fact that in Guyana there are a majority of women but in the House there are not a majority of women. I agree with her that we need to do more but if we look at our record in this House, ...[**Mrs. DaSilva:** "I did not say that."] Forgive me, if I am wrong, I did write it down. There are nine of us and not only are there nine of us but as far as my research has been able to reveal – and I spent some time on this – that record is surpassed by no other country – capitalist or socialist. [**Applause**] Perhaps since the comrade did not say it, I would like to say it and to use a phrase that my Cde. Leader has used several times: "But we can do better." But, I think we have reason to be very proud.

If one departs for a moment from this level where decisions are taken and looks further afield in the same political area, we find, as our Cde. Leader has pointed out, that women have

been the bulwark not only of the People's National Congress but of all political parties in Guyana, including the fifty per cent of the United Force.

The hon. Member identified some areas where she said there was need for further clarification. This whole question of how we achieve a position where women are in fact equal is one that has to be carefully approached. Fundamental to the problem, really and truly, is not legislation. Legislation is really a reflection of what is happening in the rest of the country because the attitudes that are part of the system we inherited, the attitudes that are bolstered and

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fostered to support that economic system are expressed in many ways and one of them is legislation. Others of them are expressed in our homes, in our work situations, in our learning institutions. So, to deal with the legislative problem only solves part of the problem. And it has to be carefully approached. This is why the State Paper seeks to put out policy positions and this State Paper has to be followed by legislative activity because, in itself, it does not legislate for the provisions here.

Let us look at the areas where the hon. Member needed clarification. Of course, the hon. Member identified the whole question of taxation and income tax as being one of the areas on which we have heard her speak. She is right in the sense – I do not know if it is female intuition that the men say we have – in going to the economic components of the situation, to identify the root of the problem. But it is not the economic situation of the individual; it is the economic structure of the State to which she has to go. Even taxation is only a regulatory exercise within the context of the total development of the State.

I have spoken of the dependency of the woman on the man, and this is one of the reasons why the family structure is so autocratic in its nature. The man hands down the decision and the woman dare not disagree. The question of inheritance again reinforces that position. The son

(Cde. Field-Ridley contd.)

dare not disagree with the father lest he be cut out of the will. And that perpetuates the *status quo*.

If we look at the economics of the situation, what we are really talking about is not who bears the taxation today and who bears it tomorrow. Those are really interim measures. What we are talking about is restructuring the society so that the people of Guyana, men and women alike, control our productive exercises, control our distributive exercises, and control our exchange. And unless we tackle that problem, then really we show a misunderstanding of what is happening to women.

This State Paper, therefore, buttresses all the activity that has been going on, the nationalisation of industries, the drive to productivity, the new emphasis on agriculture, the thrust towards developing our hydro-electric potential. This only buttresses that because when those things happen and the economic structure is re-arranged, then, if we are serious we can achieve equality of woman and man.

Within the situation that we inherited, we recognise that the question of ownership of property must be tackled, and the question of taxation has to be dealt with. The hon. Member wanted to know how we divided property, but I think she accepted the Cde. Leader's explanation that there will be joint ownership. I would ask her not to sit down and count whether the washing is worth "X", and the other activities that she was describing are worth "X", and put a quantity on each separate activity, but to think of the unit as a whole, as being made up of the joint efforts of husband and wife. If she works outside the home, fine. If she works inside the home, because that is her choice, excellent. We recognise a partnership and because we recognise that partnership, the property follows the partnership and so is jointly owned.

If, therefore, that is so, then there are other things that follow, because the concept of partnership takes into account the Cde. Leader's recommendation that some evenings the wife

would say to the husband: "Darling, you do the dinner." I think at the present moment that would be the most effective way for the woman to slim. But that situation will change because our men as well as our women in the school system, now today, in the home economics department, are equally learning to handle the implements of housekeeping, I am sure we have seen many pictures of our boys performing beside our women, learning to cook, learning to sew, learning to manage our houses, and our women, young ones, learning in a working situation the skills of carpentry, of welding, of metal work.

It is the most important cultural act that we are taking during this century because the relationship of woman to man is being changed; but man to woman is also being changed. Their relationship then to their families, to their home situation, is being changed so that the man too has a new role to play in bringing up the family, in having a responsibility for the children, in having a responsibility for running the home.

There are many areas of possible problems that have to be thought out very carefully. The whole question of legitimacy, the whole question of what we call bastardy. And I am sure every woman in this country welcomes the Cde. Prime Minister's statement that that humiliating process of law which is now in practice which calls upon a woman to stand before the public, in a way that does not brook of a recognition of her as a human being, to establish paternity will no longer be part of her life.

It goes further than that. It also implies that there is shared responsibility not just for housework but for the upbringing of children and for all the tasks which go into making a house into a home. In that situation of shared responsibility, it seems to me that we have to take into account the fact that many stable relationships in our society have not been accorded the status of a legal union. It has been asked, not just by the hon. Member but by many women in the community, just how will we identify what is a legal, firm, and permanent union that has not gone through the process of law. This, to my mind is a question of fact and one can identify means to establish that fact.

As an example, one can say that where one recognises a stated and firm intention to practice by living together for a period of time defined, then one can recognise that as a stable union. But I do not think it is the function of this House to cope with those details. I think those details will continue to be debated upon, as they have been debated upon by the Party, by the women's arm of the Party, and by the public as a whole.

There is no easy solution to correcting injustices that have been part of our life for centuries. There might even be mistakes made, but, to my mind, it is better to make a mistake in the interest of establishing the equality of the citizens of Guyana regardless of sex, colour or creed rather than to sit by afraid of the stakes and do nothing. In any case, although this does not apply to the comrade on the other side, no socialist man or woman could stand up and say he is a socialist and still discriminate in any way against his fellow human being because she is a woman. That is the essence of the thought that brought forth this State Paper.

The comrade on the other side said it took a long time to come. The State Paper has taken a long time to come but it has to be seen in the context of it buttressing the other changes that have been going on in our society from the moment that we declared, first, that we are independent, second that we were a Co-Operative Republic, and, third, that we would unflinchingly pursue our goal to establish a socialist society in Guyana. Even without legislative changes, if our attitudes were correct, we would have had as women, equality. Our attitudes are not correct. And our attitudes will not be changed overnight. Our attitudes will be changed by corrective measures in the form of education, educated experiences.

Because of the problems of our society, we have had groups exploited and woman is only one of them. We have had disorientation. We have had unemployment. We have had choke and rob. I am not at all sure that the hon. Member herself is sure that in terms of percentage the amount of choke and rob now is more than any other time in our history. That research has not been done. In terms of numbers, it might be so, but our population too is growing. But what I would like to say is that the problem of choke and rob is just one of the social problems that the

system of capitalism, in which that party believes, will inflict on a country, and the solution to that is to inflict or re-introduce the cat.

6 p.m.

I thought that the cat went out with the inquisition when you burnt a person's body for the sake of his soul. The solution to that problem is one of fundamental change which changes the structure of society, which removes any opportunity for exploitation in our society, which uses the system of education, re-education and reform to change that person. In a situation in 1976 when countries are moving to experimentation with open prisons, with programmes of rehabilitation, I am ashamed that there is even one voice in this House that would seek to suggest in the "cat". At our point of life we all have hand-ups of one kind or another from a society which we are trying to leave behind.

I remember reading some documents from the time just after emancipation of a debate in the House of Parliament in which it was said that the Africans who had been newly emancipated did not like fresh meat. They liked only saltfish, therefore, black people did not like fresh meat, they only liked saltfish. One can be conditioned to accept and to like all kinds of things. Our society has been conditioned to feel that the answer to violence is violence. Our society has been conditioned to operate on the periphery of problems rather than tackling them at their roots. To tackle them at their roots will dispossess those who have been exploiting us. That is where the change has to come and that is where the change on this very measure for equality for women has to come.

In a way, it is unfair for us in this House, it is unfair to the public, to seek to debate the question of equality for women apart from the other issues of equality generally that are part of our concern at this time in our life. The whole concept of the role in the world of Third World countries, like our own, comes into question. The whole question of what is the role of communities of non-white people, of black people, comes into question. The whole role of the economic world system is coming into question. The issue of the women of Guyana is only one

(Cde. Field-Ridley continued)

of these inter-related concerns, inter-related with other fundamental issues that must be tackled when one seeks to change a society from a capitalist one to a socialist one.

Every woman in this room and in the Lobby is aware of many of the harsh problems that have to be faced in this situation. If the woman in that union that has not, so far, been recognised as legal is to be protected, one has to think of the relationship of that union to the union with a married wife and what the implications are. If one has to give the protection that the children we call “illegitimate” so badly need, one has to ensure that the children of the marriage are themselves protected as well. Really, what I am saying is that in all of this the State has a fundamental and important role to play and many of these issues on the State Paper that concern taxation and property rights are there only until the fulfilment of the socialist state is achieved.

At the present moment we seek to put something for our children’s education, for health services to our children, to ensure that they themselves get a start in life. But if we look at the direction in which this country is going, we are solving those problems without the need for an individual to put aside a nest egg, we are solving those problems by making education free, we are solving those problems by improving our health services and making them free, we are solving those problems by making available to the people of the country financial institutions which will give them the support to enter the Co-operative areas in whatever field they are interested in. When these things are solved, then the concern that individual parents have about looking after their children’s welfare and working hard to save and to put aside, no longer have meaning because the children will be cared for.

Now we have the problem, when the woman is encouraged to leave the home, as to what happens to the children. Cde. Ramsahoye made a suggestion for serious consideration about what we do in relation to giving a good wage to our domestics. Let me assure the hon. Member on the other side that I have had the pleasure of looking at the Campbell Report and I think that because of all the things that have happened since that Report, we need to completely scrap it

and look again at the whole issue of living for domestics as we are looking for living for everybody else.

I was saying, there is concern as to what happens to the children when we encourage women to leave the homes. Clearly, the State, directly or indirectly, has an important part to play here in terms of providing the day-care centres that the hon. Member mentioned, not as things in themselves, but as a part of the whole arrangement of the State which removes from a man the right to have a privileged position for his children merely because he has economic wealth. In this area, the women's arm if the People's National Congress has done a great deal of work and they are the strongest advocates of the establishment of day-care centres. In fact, fairly recently, an additional one was established in the Ruimveldt area by the City Council which I feel is a model of what day-care centres could be. This is a recognition of the role that the State has to play in terms of supporting that family unit which we have recognised.

The role goes further than just the provision of day-care centres because the whole question of the child's education for the new state of Guyana comes into play, for that child must be given every opportunity to get the skills and the orientation relevant to Guyana. And it is not just the women's children but all the children. This is why the Government has articulated the policy of establishing more and more residential schools. Of course, the individual woman has an important role to play. At this moment it is the mothers who are responsible for the home education of the children. If those children are brought up with a stereotyped view of what the man's role is and a stereotyped view of what the woman's role is, then the mother is as much to blame as the father and the society generally because many times the children look to the mother for guidance and for models as to the role each party should play. But as I keep on saying, we are talking about fundamental change and this State Paper is only part of that effort of fundamental change.

Even though the hon. Member supports many of the measure identified here, that support does not go a far way. The hon. Member must recognise that this is only supporting the general

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effect to reform the very structure of the society. For so long as society is based on inequality, then somebody will be exploited and the last thing we want to achieve is a situation where the woman now becomes another privileged group. We want to ensure that we respect the woman as a human being, we respect her right to live with dignity, we respect her right to be treated as an individual for what she is, what her potential is and what she can become, not a mere cipher to dance to the whims of the system which gave birth to our values and our attitudes.

Cde. Speaker in winding up the Motion on this State Paper, I would like to say that this effort, significant as it is, must be followed by other measures; it must be followed by the concrete introduction of the actual legislation which will put into practice the policies we are accepting here and I trust that the hon. Member on the other side will give us the same kind of support for those measures that they have given today.

It must be followed though by an all-out thrust to reform the very fabric of our society and change all the institutions that were built to support the old capitalist system. All those agencies must change and must be made to serve the new thrust of our society. It is only if we commit ourselves to that fundamental change that we can stand up and proudly say, as does the People's National Congress, we support the concept and realisation of equality for the women of Guyana. [**Applause**]

6.10 p.m.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

PUBLIC BUSINESS
BILLS – SECOND READING
PUBLIC HEALTH (AMENDMENT) BILL, 1976

A Bill intituled:

“An act to amend the Public Health Ordinance.”

[The Minister of Co-operatives and National Mobilisation]

The Minister of Co-operatives and National Mobilisation (Cde. Green): Cde. Speaker I beg to move that the Public Health (Amendment) Bill 1976, Bill No. 1 of 1976 be now read a Second time.

The Amendment is a simple provision to adjust the existing Public Health Ordinance and, in fact, to bring it in line, with the Municipal and District Council Bill and to bring it in line particularly, with sections 299 and 300. At the moment the Minister responsible for Local Government has the power to vary the demarcations of lots and give permission for the issuance of a transport, particularly with respect to lots less than a quarter lot.

The Amendment seeks to give that power in addition to the Minister responsible by an Amendment of the existing legislation under the Public Health Ordinance No.155. This Ordinance at the moment suggests that no lot of land situated within the limits aforesaid, referring to the particular area as defined in any plan, can be approved unless it is sub-divided in no less portions than quarter lots. They refer to those quarter lots to be not less than 20 square rods.

We have had problems in some areas. A recent one was the Riverview area in Ruimveldt. It is felt that in fairness to the persons concerned in the Municipality we need to move this Amendment so as to avoid further problems.

As I said, this is a fairly straightforward matter and I hope that this Bill which seeks to amend the Public Health Ordinance and to bring it in conformity with the Municipal and District Councils Act to allow the land to be sub-divided into less portions than quarter lots, will be supported. Thank you.

Question proposed.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Singh): Mr. Speaker we do agree with the hon. Minister that this is a necessary piece of legislation and we do support it.

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.

INCOME TAX (AMENDMENT) BILL 1976

A Bill intituled:

“An act to amend the Income Tax Act. [**The Minister of Finance**]

The Speaker: Cde. Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Cde. Hope): Cde. Speaker in moving the Second Reading of the Income Tax (Amendment) Bill, 1976, I wish to point out that this particular Bill deals with a very important difficulty which needs to be solved with respect to the administration of income tax.

From time to time there have been complaints that the review of assessments made by the

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Commissioner has taken unduly long periods for completion in individual cases. In order to expedite the review of these cases, the proposal is that whereas now there is just one Board there should be three Boards each with a Chairman sitting independently and separately with a view to expediting the consideration of the views.

The Bill before us, Cde. Speaker, seeks to bring into effect that Amendment to the present procedures. I therefore move that the Bill be read a Second time.

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy that at long last something is being done about what has been for some time now a most unsatisfactory state of affairs as regards the Income Tax Board of Review. Indeed, this has been recognised by the Minister who admitted that just now. We have been talking about it for years and I think the Minister formally recognised and admitted it also in his Budget Speech for 1975 given on the 9th December, 1974, because there on page 31 he did say:

“Thirdly, in order to determine taxpayers’ objections to assessment expeditiously, the Board of Review will be expanded to enable an increase in the rate at which appeals are finally disposed of by members of the Board.”

One does recognise the hard work being put in by the law officers that these things will take time. Perhaps, again, shortly after 9th December, 1974, were it not for the fact that this Government seems to have so many of its priorities all cock-eyes and wrong. Let us recognise that it has come before this honourable House and we do support it and welcome it.

I spoke in December last year during the budget debate and I think that I should reiterate some of the points I made on that occasion. It is admitted by all of us that there is a very formidable backlog of appeals from the Commissioner's ruling on objections to assessments made by taxpayers. Now with this proposed legislation I think we need to look at how the present Board operates, what the problems of the present Board are. We are merely increasing the number of boards and we must ensure that we do not make any of the mistakes that are being made right now by the present board. We need to look at this in respect of the additional boards that will not be appointed.

I said last December, - and I reiterate now – that it is so legally oriented that it is just like a legal high court trial. The taxpayer invariably has to take along a lawyer to represent him and then we get decisions like the one I have here which I seem to recollect having mentioned before. There was an appeal from the ruling of the Commission, the Board of Review sat; it heard legal arguments and produced a decision that occupied 13 foolscap pages.

The point I want to make is we want to get away from this sort of thing. We must recognise and appreciate that the Board of Review is intended to be an inexpensive and expeditious way in which a taxpayer could have his objection heard and determined, and if he is not satisfied then there is, after that, the full legal procedure of going to a judge of the high court for a full drawn-out legal battle. But the Board of Review is intended to be expeditious and inexpensive. It is operating along those lines at the moment.

There are problems in this. I should say that I do appreciate that if you have a Board and you have a legally trained Chairman then because of his legal training, because of his background, there would obviously be the tendency, quite understandable, for that person to adopt as the procedure the legal procedure which he has always been accustomed to, and which he has known all his life. This is something we need to think about. Under the existing law, it is the Chairman who decides on procedure, and if you have a legally trained Chairman who has all his life being going according to legal rules and procedures, then you have the problem of having

the Board of Review operating just like a court. Now that we are thinking about additional boards we must think about these things and let us get back to the system which was intended which is, as I said, and inexpensive and expeditious way of disposing of these matters.

One ancillary point is that until an objection is decided, if it takes years to be decided, then it means that a taxpayer who has put in an objection which has not been decided will continue to include in his tax returns the same thing that he is claiming, which may have been objected to by the Commissioner. Until that appeal to the Board of Review is heard he will have to be lodging an objection to the Commissioner's assessment. If after three or four years the appeal is finally determined and perhaps determined against him, then he will have to go back for all those years and readjust. That is the problem with having appeals taking so long. For that reason I said that I would urge that very serious attention be paid to this matter.

Another problem, as I understand it, is this: at present the members of the Board of Review get paid. I think it is – I am subject to correction - \$30 for attendance per day whether they go there half an hour in any day, three-quarter of an hour, two hours they get paid \$30 and human nature being what it is, the report I have is that these appeals are piling up. The hon. Minister did say so. What I should like the hon. Minister to give consideration to is perhaps treating the members of these Boards of Review in the same way as the Members of the Police Service Commission, the Public Service Commission and the Judicial Service Commission. Give them a flat salary. There is a lot of work to be done, therefore give them a salary. I am not going to suggest a figure. Let the hon. Minister decide what figure he will give them, let them know that they are having a straight salary at the end of the month, and let them do their job and just reduce the backlog. This legislation will give us the power to reduce the backlog; this legislation will give us the power to see that the system works properly. What we need to do is to make sure that everything is done after we have passed this Bill in terms of appointments of the members of the Boards of Review, in terms of the procedures to be adopted by the Boards of Review so that we can achieve the original objective, which is to have an inexpensive and an expeditious way in which appeals from the Commissioner can be heard and determined. We still have here the

further step of going to a judge of the High Court. But let us make this at least the simple matter as it was intended to be. Thank you.

The Speaker: Cde. Minister of Finance.

6.30 p.m.

Cde. Hope: Cde. Speaker, I wish to point out to the Leader of the Opposition that there should be really no need for the very judicial nature of the proceedings before the Review Committee. Actually, the Commissioner is himself represented there not by a lawyer but by an Assistant Commissioner who himself has no training whatsoever in law, and there really is no need for a person whose objection is being reviewed to be represented by a lawyer. It is really a matter of that person's choice.

One takes the point that perhaps, if the Chairman is legally trained there may be a tendency for the proceedings to be carried on as in a Court. But, I think what is proposed is that in the Review Boards that we are going to now set up, there is no necessary reason that the Chairman would be a lawyer or one trained in law. As a matter of fact, we have deliberately, as the draft will point out, left the position open and there is no necessary position that the Chairman would be a lawyer.

The fact that objections to the same things the taxpayer has objected to will recur from year to year, I agree, lies in the fact that the Review Committee did not complete the consideration of the objection but the whole purpose of the Bill before the House is to do just that, to facilitate the speed with which the reviews can take place and therefore avoid the problem of having the matter go undetermined for a number of years.

(Cde. Hope continued)

I would say that it is our intention to look at the system of payment as well. I am not sure what that system will be: whether we will retain the old system or make some modifications but I think I can say that they system of payment is in fact under review.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

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

MOTION

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 46(2)

“Be it resolved that paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 46 be suspended to enable the Assembly to proceed at its sitting on Wednesday, 28th January, 1976 with the second reading and the remaining stages of the Customs (Amendment) Bill 1976. (Bill No. 4/1976).

[The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House]

The Speaker: Cde. Leader of the House.

Cde. Ramsaroop: Cde. Speaker, under paragraph (2) of our Standing Orders No. 46, a measure cannot be taken to finality in this House unless two provisions are satisfied. It is with respect to the latter that I seek suspension of the Standing Orders. Under the rule, there must be a period of three clear days between the first and second reading of a Bill. The measure that we

seek to take to finality today was only introduced this afternoon, the Customs (Amendment) Bill. This enabling Motion, therefore, is to clear the Parliament of that requirement and to facilitate the completion of this measure this afternoon.

The Cde. Minister of Finance who will take this Bill through its remaining stages will explain to the House the reason for the great urgency that surrounds it and I am happy to say that my learned Friend has agreed in principle to the suspension of this Standing Order and indeed, chides the Government on its inability to proceed with this matter with greater dispatch and expedition.

With those few words, I commend this measure to the House for acceptance.

Question proposed, put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

**BILLS – SECOND READING
CUSTOMS (AMENDMENT) BILL**

A Bill intituled:

“An ACT to amend the Customs Act.”
[**The Minister of Finance**]

The Minister of Finance (Cde. Hope): Cde. Speaker, in moving the Second Reading of the Customs (Amendment) Bill, 1976, I wish first of all to explain some background for the Bill which is now before the House. In the tariff, on the basis of which our imports and exports are conducted, there are two sets of tariffs or two sets of duties. One is a general rate applicable to all parts of the world except those countries which form the Commonwealth and the second was the preferential tariff which is applicable to countries of the Commonwealth.

During 1974, Guyana, as one of the ACP countries (the ACP being certain countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific) entered into a Convention with the EEC countries. That Convention was signed in Lome´ in Africa and is commonly known today as the Lome´ Convention. That Convention called for certain changes in the tariff of the ACP countries. The changes referred to will relate essentially to a requirement by the EEC countries that they should be in a most-favoured nation condition with regard to the tariff which the ACP countries have *vis-a-vis* third countries.

In fact, the essence of the requirement was that in the trading relationships between the E.E.C. countries on the one hand and the ACP countries on the one hand and the ACP countries on the other, there should be one tariff. The implications and the significance of that was that Britain had by then joined the E.E.C. and Britain, as a Commonwealth country, was one country that really had the advantage of the preferential rates of duties. Therefore, the requirement that the ACP countries should have a single tariff with respect to all E.E.C. countries meant that the preferential tariff which was applicable to the United Kingdom was no longer possible and the fact that the ACP countries were also required to maintain a tariff which ensured that the E.E.C. countries did not suffer *vis-a-vis* any third country with respect to the level of duty charged on their imports, also meant that there had to be just one tariff, applicable to all countries.

6.40 p.m.

The end result was that the Council of Minister of the Caribbean Community held a meeting in Jamaica and decided that in order to honour the commitment which Guyana and the Caricom countries, with other ACP countries, gave the E.E.C. as part of the Lome Convention, that we had to revise our tariff to ensure that there was just one single tariff applicable to all countries.

The Bill before us, therefore, Cde. Speaker, seeks to amend the Customs Act in order to permit the Minister by order to make a change in the Schedule in order to ensure that the

(Cde. Hope continued)

question of the preferential tariff no longer exists; in effect, that there should be just one tariff applicable to imports and exports to and from all countries.

This change does not in fact affect the intra-Caricom trade. The relevant rates of duties applicable to Caricom imports and Caricom countries will still remain and those duties, as you know, for goods which qualify for entry into Guyana as an import from a Caricom territory would carry zero rate of duty. Of course, where the goods do not so qualify, they will in fact carry the rate of duty shown on the single column which will now supersede the double column which we have at the moment.

This, Cde. Speaker, is the simple change, though it has involved a great deal of work in the sense that the whole Schedule giving the rates has had to be modified. This is the simple purpose of this Bill. As I said, the effect of it is to honour a commitment, which the A.C.P. countries have given to the E.E.C. countries as part of the Lomé Convention, to put the E.E.C. countries in a position where they are not discriminated against in terms of the rates of duty applicable to goods coming from them. With that explanation, I would wish formally to move the Second Reading of the Customs (Amendment) Bill 1976.

Question put.

Mr. Singh: As the hon. Minister pointed out and as I understand it, this Bill is really to implement agreements reached at international level. We have to honour our commitments. We agree with this Bill as we do support it, but as I understand it – I want to point this out, because if I am wrong I want to be corrected – one of the factual results of this Bill, when it is made into law, would be that the prices of some articles at present being important into the country would increase. Obviously, if prices of articles increase, then the cost of living would be going up also.

We have just passed in December last year a Budget which we called the tax-free Budget for 1976 and we made a lot of song and dance about no new taxation being imposed. It does appear to me that this would result in further indirect taxation. If prices of articles increase, then obviously that is going to be passed to the consumer who would have to pay for the articles.

We agree with the Bill but we want to point out. If it is not so, I would be very grateful for the hon. Minister to tell me that it would not be so. As I understand it, the preferential tariff will go and everything will fall under the general tariff. The preferential tariff was a lesser rate and the general tariff is a higher rate. If I am wrong, then I would be very happy if the hon. Minister would let the House and the nation know that this measure will not in fact result in any increase in the prices of articles. We would be very happy to have that assurance from the hon. Minister.

As we are talking about a matter which involves the Customs Department, the Customs Act, and the administration of the Customs Department, may I mention something that was brought to my attention. Again, I am subject to correction, but I was told that there is a very serious staff shortage in the Customs Department. The figure quoted to me was 72 vacancies for customs officers. As a result, the waterfront is so poorly served with customs officers that it results in a lot of delays, it results in frustration, and it must result in increased costs all around. I would ask the Minister to tell us something about this, if he can, or to look urgently into the matter because it is something which is causing concern to lots of people who have to use the waterfront in respect of importation and, indeed, export of goods generally.

Since we heard today so much about women and equality, perhaps this would be a good opportunity to get the women more involved. I think there are two female customs officers right now. Perhaps this number could be increased and these vacancies could be filled by women so that we can have more female customs officers. Of course, there is an imbalance at the present moment as there are not very many female customs officers. Let us involve the women in this.

Let us fill those vacancies, have some more customs officers, if necessary, female customs officers, so that the job can be done.

Cde. Hope (replying): I would wish to make it clear at the outset that the measure we are debating at the moment is in no way a taxation measure. What the Bill is seeking to do is to introduce a single tariff system. In the process of setting up that single tariff system, the officials proceeded by examining the direction of trade, where the emphasis of trade was, in terms of a particular item. If the emphasis of trade on that particular item was in favour of a country which was on the general tariff, then the general tariff rate was used, and if the emphasis or direction of another item was in favour of a country which was part of the preferential system, the preferential rate was used. In fact, the rate that we have at the moment is a judicious combination of the old preferential rate and the old general rate.

The effect of that will be that there will be in some items increases in the duty, but in a number of other items there have been reductions. The overall effect is almost a complete balancing of the situation. Taken globally, there will be no accretion of revenue in terms of tax consumption, in terms of customs taxes, as a result of this measure.

With regards to the question of vacancies, I do not think the hon. Member's figures are correct but we do admit that there are a number of vacancies in the department. The Public Service Commission is actively and currently looking at this question in terms of getting these vacancies filled. In fact, there are a number of trainees on the job, and trainees for these very posts. The facts are that trainees do not count against the vacancies but they are under training.

6.50 p.m.

The procedures we are following at the moment to reduce these vacancies are:

(Cde. Hope continued)

- (1) To have the vacancies filled by the Public Service Commission, which the Commission is doing at the moment, and
- (2) To increase the intake of trainees who will eventually occupy these positions.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported to the Assembly without amendment, read the Third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

RESOLVED, “That this Assembly do now adjourned to a date to be fixed.

[Mr. Ramsaroop]

Adjourned accordingly at 6.54 p.m.
