

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

[VOLUME 1]

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE
FIRST PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE
CONSTITUTION OF GUYANA

26th Sitting

Friday, 9th December, 1966

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Assembly met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Present:

His Honour the Speaker, Mr. A. P. Alleyne

Members of the Government

Ministers

The Honourable L. F. S. Burnham, Q.C.	- <i>Prime Minister</i>
Dr. the Honourable P. A. Reid	- <i>Minister of Home Affairs</i>
The Honourable N. J. Bissember	- <i>Minister of Housing and Reconstruction (Leader of the House)</i>
The Honourable R. E. Checks	- <i>Minister of Local Government</i>
The Honourable E. F. Correia	- <i>Minister of Communications</i>
The Honourable Mrs. W. Gaskin	- <i>Minister of Education and Race Relations</i>
The Honourable L. John	- <i>Minister of Agriculture</i>
The Honourable R. J. Jordan	- <i>Minister of Forests, Lands and Mines</i>
The Honourable M. Kasin	- <i>Minister of Works and Hydraulics</i>
The Honourable W. O. R. Kendall, C.B.E.	- <i>Minister of Trade, Shipping and Civil Aviation</i>
The Honourable D. Mahraj	- <i>Minister of Health</i>
The Honourable C. A. Merriman	- <i>Minister of Labour</i>
The Honourable J. H. Thomas	- <i>Minister of Economic Development</i>

Parliamentary Secretaries

Mr. D. B. deGroot	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary, Prime Minister's Office</i>
Mr. G. Bowman	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Labour</i>
Mr. O. E. Clarke	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education and Race Relations</i>
Mr. P. Duncan	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Local Government</i>
Mr. C. V. Too-Chung	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Finance</i>

Other Members

Mr. W. A. Blair	Mr. T. A. Sancho
Mr. J. Budhoo	Mr. R. Tello, Deputy Speaker
Mr. W. G. Carrington	Rev. A. B. Trotman
Mr. R. G. B. Field-Ridley	Mr. H. M. S. Wharton, J.P.
Mr. H. Prashad	

Members of the Opposition

Dr. C. B. Jagan, Leader of the Opposition	Mr. M. Hamid, J.P.
Mr. A. Chase	Mr. J. R. S. Luck
Mr. B. H. Benn	Mr. H. Lall
Mr. Ram Karraz	Mr. M. Khan, J.P.
Mr. R. Chandisingh	Mr. Y. Ally
Dr. Charles Jacob, Jr.	Mr. L. Linde
Mr. C. V. Nunes	Mr. R. D. Persaud
Dr. F. H. W. Ramsahoye	Mr. S. M. Saffee

Clerk of the National Assembly - Mr. F. A. Narain.
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly - Mr. M. B. Henry.

Absent:

The Honourable P. S. d'Aguiar, Minister of Finance - on leave	
The Honourable S. S. Ramphal, C.M.G., Q.C., Attorney-General and Minister of State	
Mr. J. G. Joaquin, O.B.E., J.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Works and Hydraulics	
Mr. M. F. Singh - on leave	Mr. M. Poonai
Mr. H. J. M. Hubbard	Dr. S. A. Ramjohn
Mr. E. M. G. Wilson	Mr. E. M. Stoby
Mr. D. C. Jagan	Mr. M. Bhagwan - on leave

QUESTIONS TO MINISTERS

SINKING OF WELL AT PRINCESS CAROLINA

Mr. Chandisingh: I beg to ask the hon. Minister of Works and Hydraulics (Mr. Kasim) Question No. 43 standing in my name on the Order Paper: When will Government sink the well at Princess Carolina, Demerara River, at the school site, as promised some time ago?

2.10 p.m.

The Minister of Works and Hydraulics (Mr. Kasim): The Answer to that Question is, the well at the school site at Princess Carolina will be sunk by the end of this year or early next year.

Mr. Chandisingh: As a Supplementary question: Will the hon. Minister say what arrangements have so far been made for the sinking of the well - whether the equipment, rigs, etc. are here?

Mr. Kasim: I do not know whether the rigs were sent, but instructions were given to the engineer responsible for the pure water supply.

Mr. Chandisingh: Would the Minister say if the sinking of the well at Princess Carolina will still begin this year or early next year?

Mr. Kasim: I have answered that question already. I said at the end of this year or early next year.

Mr. Chandisingh: I am not sure that I heard him correctly. Does he mean that the work will begin at the end of this year -

Mr. Chase: "When will it be completed?"]

Mr. Kasim: It is quite obvious that we will be starting it at the end of this year and completing it next year.

Mr. Ram Karran: Would the hon. Minister say who gave these instructions and to whom were these instructions given? I am asking the hon. Minister if the instructions were given by him to the Engineer, to the Permanent Secretary, or to the Chief Works and Hydraulics Officer? This House is entitled to know something!

Mr. Kasim: The Minister does not give detailed instructions for every job.

REPAIRS TO BRIDGES

Mr. Chase: I rise to ask the Minister of Works and Hydraulics Question No. 44 standing in my name on the Order Paper:

(i) Is the Minister aware that the bridges at Tumereng Creek and Enachu Creek are in need of repairs?

(ii) Will the Minister state when the said bridges will be repaired?

Mr. Kasim: The Answer to (i) is Yes, and the Answer to (ii) is: It is proposed to repair these bridges during next year.

RICE DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

Mr. Nunes: With Mr. Hubbard's permission, I should like to ask the hon. Minister of Trade, Shipping and Civil Aviation Question No. 45 on the Order Paper:

- (i) Is the Minister aware that the Rice Development Company demanded interest payment of 10% on seed padi loans to farmers while at the same time it refused to pay interest on padi bought on credit from the farmers?
- (ii) If so, does the R.D.C. propose to continue this practice?

The Minister of Trade, Shipping and Civil Aviation (Mr. Kendall): The Answer is:

- (i) Yes. The Company has been charging interest on private loans to farmers since 1961.
- (ii) The Company is paying interest and Other Service charges on overdrafts obtained from the Commercial Banks for the purchase of farmers' paddy, and therefore proposes to continue the practice of charging interest on loans made by the Company to farmers.

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. Jagan): Is Government aware that no interest is paid to farmers on money which is owed to them by the Company when paddy is bought from them on credit?

Mr. Kendall: As I said, this has been the practice since 1961. The hon. Leader of the Opposition knows fairly well that whenever paddy is sent to the Rice Development Company, either at Anna Regina or at the Mahaicony-Abary Scheme, the farmers have never been paid 100% for paddy delivered.

Dr. Jagan: In view of the commitment made by the Prime Minister a few weeks ago that payments will be made in full to farmers, does the Minister not consider that the recent decision not to pay farmers in full is a contravention of the commitment made by the Prime Minister?

Mr. Kendall: There was no decision made not to pay farmers. Since paddy and rice were taken to the Rice Development Company and the Rice Marketing Board, both organisations have paid out over \$5 million to farmers. As a matter of fact, both organisations are endeavouring to do that with the Autumn crop of 1966.

Dr. Jagan: I do not like to waste the time of this House, but the Minister is evading the question. A statement was made by the Prime Minister that farmers will be paid in full promptly. Is it true or not that the farmers are not being paid in full at the present time?

Mr. Kendall: Any payments made to farmers have been payments made in full.

Mr. Khan: Is the Minister aware that the Rice Development Company is not paying farmers for rice purchased?

Mr. Kendall: I understand that during the fortnight that ended Saturday when some farmers went for payment, there was some delay.

Mr. Khoo: Is the Minister aware that the Rice Development Company is unlikely to pay farmers for any paddy until 16th January, 1967?

Mr. Kendall: I am not aware of that

COLLEGE OF PRECEPTORS EXAMINATION

Mr. Luck: I rise to ask the hon. Minister of Education and Race Relations Question No. 46 standing in my name on the Order Paper:

(i) Is the Minister aware of the grave inconvenience in having the College of Preceptors Examination take place in the month of August?

(ii) Will the Minister arrange for the College of Preceptors Examination to take place early in July?

The Minister of Education and Race Relations (Mrs. Gaskin):
In reply to the Question:

(i) (a) The College of Preceptors Examination is taken by candidates of both Secondary and All-age Schools and all participating schools provide accommodation by offering their school buildings and furniture for the use of their students

of Georgetown, including New Amsterdam, would have to be closed to provide accommodation. The duration of the examination is about fifteen days and if this examination is fixed for early July, All-age Schools would be forced to close for their summer holidays in June rather than the third week in July. The latter closing arrangement provides for equal terms of instruction, especially in All-age schools which now provide the majority of candidates for this examination.

(b) In Georgetown where private halls and club pavilions and chairs may be rented, local fees for candidates taking the College of Preceptors Examination would have to be increased because of the high rates charged for the use of halls and chairs; halls \$3 - \$15 per day, chairs 7¢ - 10¢ each daily

(ii) The staff of the examinations Division could not successfully arrange and supervise the G.C.E. Ordinary and Advanced Level examinations with nine thousand (9,000) candidates (accommodated at 60 centres) throughout the country from early June to within the first week

[MRS. GASKIN]

pare for the College of Preceptors with 350 school Centres to commence early July.

2.20 p.m.

Mr. Luck: I must thank the hon. Minister for the fullness of her reply. All it means is that it is difficult to hold the examination in July. Is the hon. Minister aware that representations have constantly been made because the College of Preceptors Examination is held in August? Is this not a disservice to the country? If the hon. Minister is aware of this, what is she going to do about the matter? Cannot the examination be held in any month other than August? I am saying that she has not answered my question. If she is aware of the representations made, would she take steps to see that the examination is held at a time which, in the opinion of the teaching profession in this country, will not inconvenience the pupils?

Mrs. Gaskin: This morning I met a delegation from the Association of Masters and Mistresses and the Trades Union Council. It was represented to me that the teachers felt that it is a disservice to them in that they have to work during their vacation period in order to take the children to the examination. I pointed out to them, very much as I have answered here, that it is impracticable for the examination to be held in June or July. I said that I would look into the possibility of the examination being held in another month,

and if it is possible it will be done.

Mr. Luck: Is the hon. Minister aware that the College of Preceptors Examination was formerly held in June and July? I want to say - -

Mr. Speaker: Ask a question; there is no need for a speech.

Mr. Luck: Is the hon. Minister aware that the first time that this examination was held in the month of August was during the 80-day strike? Has the Minister received any representations from the teaching profession in connection with this matter? The teachers were not concerned with their holidays, so she is misrepresenting the position. I want to know whether she is aware of the fact that the examination was formerly held in June and July.

Mr. Speaker: You must not take this as an opportunity for speech-making.

Mrs. Gaskin: I am reliably informed that there was a time when the examination was held in December, because it has been pointed out that the vacation period is always the proper time to hold this examination. It is the only examination which is held in schools as such, that is, the entire school is discommoded for this examination because there are so many candidates; therefore, it will have to be held either at the end of the school term when the children are on vacation, or during the vacation.

Mr. Sancho: Can steps be taken to hold this examination in the month of December?

Mrs. Caskin: The hon. Member was amongst those who met me this morning and asked about this matter, and I made a statement that the matter would be gone into and we would advise the Association as to what we felt could be done to hold the examination in December, if it was at all practicable.

Mr. Luck: Would the hon. Minister say whether professional representations have been made about this matter?

Mr. Speaker: Does the question assist you with the original one?

Mr. Luck: She says that she will look into the matter. How long have representations been made regarding this matter?

[The hon. Minister offered no reply.]

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed with the business on the Order Paper.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTIONS

The Minister of Housing and Reconstruction (Leader of the House) (Mr. Bissenber): Mr. Speaker, with your permission, may I be allowed to deal with the second Motion first? It is purely a matter of convenience.

Mr. Chase: Why? Follow the Order Paper.

Mr. Bissenber: I will follow the Order Paper.

ARRIVAL IN GUYANA OF THEIR EXCELLENCIES THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND MRS. ROSE

"Be it resolved that Standing Order No. 9 (1) be suspended to enable the sitting of the National Assembly to begin at 4.30 o'clock in the afternoon on Friday, the 16th of December, on the occasion of the arrival in Guyana of Their Excellencies the Governor-General and Mrs. Rose." [The Leader of the House.]

Mr. Bissenber: The Governor-General Mr. David Rose and Mrs. Rose will be arriving in Guyana on Friday, 16th December, and it has been decided that a meeting of this honourable National Assembly be held to welcome Their Excellencies the Governor-General and Mrs. Rose. The programme of events for the sitting of the House has been circulated to all hon. Members, and I know that there has been no objection to meeting at this hour since the hon. Leader of the Opposition has kindly consented to speak on this occasion.

I now desire to move the Motion standing in my name with one slight Amendment, that is, the substitution of the figures and words "5 o'clock" for "4.30 o'clock", since there has been a change in the flight arrangements. I ask that the amended Motion be approved by this House.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

**CONTINUATION OF THE RENT
RESTRICTION ORDINANCE**

"Whereas the Rent Restriction Ordinance, Chapter 186, came into operation on the 8th day of November, 1941;

And whereas section 33 of the said Ordinance (as it has effect by the Guyana Independence Order 1966) provides that the Ordinance shall continue in force up to and including the 31st day of December, 1951, but that, prior to the expiration thereof, the National Assembly may, by resolution published in the Gazette, declare that the said Ordinance shall continue in operation for a further period of one year and that thereafter may from time to time declare that the said Ordinance shall continue in operation;

And whereas the said Ordinance has been continued in operation until the 31st December, 1966;

And whereas it is considered expedient that the said Ordinance shall be continued in operation for a further period of one year:

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Rent Restriction Ordinance, Chapter 186, shall continue in force for a further period of one year up to and including the 31st day of December, 1967" -
[The Minister of Housing and Reconstruction.]

Mr. Bissenber: Before I move the Motion which stands in my name, I wish to give the historical background of the Rent Restriction Ordinance as it presently obtains in Guyana. It will be recalled that last year when I moved a similar Resolution, I did mention that the officers of my Ministry were looking into the implications of any possible change in the Rent Restriction Ordinance, having regard to the present change in the socio-economic conditions of the country, so that the Rent Restriction Ordinance, if at all it should be changed, should be changed or modified to meet present day conditions.

2.30 p.m.

In 1922 the Rent Restriction Ordinance was passed in this country for the first time. Certain restrictions were placed on increases in rent and on the recovery of premises by landlords. That Ordinance was short-lived. It was abolished in 1925. In 1939, the late Sir Alfred Crane prepared a lengthy memorandum on the Rent Restriction Ordinance. The document went, in detail, into the possibility of re-introducing rent restriction legislation in British Guiana. He recommended a formal investigation into rents charged between 1929 and 1939.

These recommendations were made, but no action was taken on them. I think that hon. Members should have some idea of how the matter of rent restriction developed to the present day. I said no action was taken on the recommendations of Sir Alfred Crane. Then a Committee was ap-

pointed to go into those recommendations and the advisability of rent restriction, but the Executive Council of the time took no action on it.

In March 1941 there was a new development. It would appear that the Governor at the time received certain delegations, including persons from the trade union movement who made representations with reference to the increased rentals which were being charged. This was at a time when there had been an influx of Americans into British Guiana. It was thought that the housing situation had worsened because of this influx of foreigners into the country. Accommodation was inadequate and this, it was felt, would make the rentals of tenement quarters very exorbitant and would increase the already grave shortage of houses for low-income families.

As a result of these representations made by the trade union leaders, and because of the Governor's attitude, it became necessary to re-introduce the Rent Restriction Ordinance. This was done on the 8th November, 1941, and it applied originally to Georgetown, but was later extended to places like Wismar, Christianburg and Bartica. As we know, the Rent Restriction ordinance is today applicable throughout Guyana.

In 1941, the Rent Restriction Ordinance was enacted by the Legislature to control rents of houses erected subsequent to 3rd September, 1939. In that amending legislation, provision was also made for a definition of

"standard rent". Most of us, who have handled possession cases before the Rent Assessor or Magistrates, will know something about the Rent Restriction Ordinance as it presently exists at Chapter 186 and we know that the definition of "standard rent" is there. The Ordinance made provision for an increase up to twelve per cent of the standard rent, which was then allowable by the Rent Assessor, for improvements to buildings. Amending legislation was passed in 1950, and then in 1952 the Legislative Council recommended the appointment of a Select Committee - I am quoting the exact words of the terms of reference - "to revise, review and/or amend, where necessary, the Ordinance", but this was not pursued.

On the 24th February, 1954 a Committee was appointed with these terms of reference:

"To consider the Rent Restriction Ordinance as amended from time to time and in the light of its operation to make such recommendations for its revision as may be desirable."

In January 1959 an interim report was submitted on certain aspects of incentives to house-builders. Hon. Members will remember that the Sharples Committee was appointed in 1955 to examine the effectiveness of the rent restriction legislation, which was passed in 1941 and amended on two or three occasions, and to advise whether there should be any changes.

From my recollection, the Sharples Committee did put up

[MR. BISSEMBER]

some proposals, which were examined further by another sub-committee which was referred to as Moore's sub-committee. It would appear that nothing of a practical nature came out of this examination of the recommendations of the Sharples Committee by this other sub-committee. The sub-committee did, however, attempt to formulate a new type of arrangement whereby increases would be allowed. No action was taken on those recommendations, but after they were made it would appear that the legislation remained on the Statute Book and neither the previous Government nor those before it, did anything apart from looking at the recommendations.

It is my view, and the Government's view, that, because of the tremendous shortage of houses in Guyana today, it is necessary for this Government to look into those very recommendations which were put up by the Sharples Committee. We are in the process of doing so and have reached the point where the recommendations, either wholly or in part, will be put to Government for possible implementation and/or amendment.

I may say further that my predecessor in office, Mr. Chandisingh, will testify how formidable the task is, since he himself attempted on several occasions to see whether the legislation could not be amended or made permanent in order to avoid an annual resolution. I am aware of the difficulties which confronted him, and I am happy to say that the Government of Guyana will shortly be in a position to remedy this, having

regard to what I have said, taking into consideration all the circumstances which prevail in Guyana with respect to the housing situation, and particularly having regard to the fact that many landlords are taking advantage and charging exorbitant rents because of the tremendous shortage of houses in the country.

2.40 p.m.

When we go into this legislation to decide whether or not we should have a completely new permanent Act, or an Amendment to the present legislation and make it a permanent Act, we will have to consider the position of the landlords and house-builders who have to invest tremendous sums of money in building in Guyana. Therefore, the question of incentives will have to be taken into account, and Government will, of necessity, have to take some time to see whether incentives should be offered, and what kind of incentives should be offered.

I should like to mention also, for the information of the general public, that the present Rent Restriction Ordinance, in my humble view, is very comprehensive and, in a sense, gives adequate protection to tenants, since the machinery is already here, in this present legislation, for the landlords who wish to demand exorbitant rents to be taken to the Rent Assessment Court, whereby rent can be assessed. I say this because of the tremendous amount of reports that one reads and the number of things that one hears about landlords and tenants in Guyana.

Wages have gone up over 100%, especially since this Government assumed office. [Mr. Chase: "That is far from the truth."] As I was saying, from 1959 to now, wages have gone up over 100%, especially since this Government assumed office. That being so, we will have to consider whether landlords should not be given the opportunity to get an economic rent and, at the same time, make provision for the low-income earners to be properly housed and to pay a reasonable rental.

Government will continue to subsidize housing in Guyana for some time. Housing is subsidized all over the world because there are, especially in Guyana, a large number of low-income earners who will never be able to own or build their own homes. The Government will, of necessity, have to subsidize housing as it is doing now. The Government's programme on housing was well proposed in this House when we were dealing with the Development Programme and one will remember that Ordinance No. 17 of 1966 was passed giving some relief to those who wish to build houses and own their own residences, since the interest which they have to pay on any loans they take to build is allowable under the Income Tax Ordinance. So we have not been sitting down doing nothing. We have been trying to meet investors and those who wish to build. We are also trying to protect those people whom some people would like to use and ride all the time.

Having given some background of this whole situation, I should like to say that the Government

thinks that the Rent Restriction Ordinance should continue for another year at least until a final decision has been taken as to the question of incentives for building houses and as to other facilities with respect to the possible Amendment of this present legislation.

Before I formally move this Motion, I should like to reiterate that, right now, the tenants have the right to go to the court and get their premises assessed if exorbitant rents are charged. The Government is well aware of all the things that are happening today. After the committee has gone into the recommendations of the Sharples Committee - as a matter of fact, two knowledgeable members of the public have already been working on this - I propose to hold some discussions with the Landlords' Association and the Tenants' Association to get their views on this. I, therefore, have very great pleasure in moving the Motion standing in my name.

Mr. Chandisingh: The hon. Minister of Housing and Reconstruction has spent quite a few minutes giving us a long history of the Rent Restriction Ordinance. But I submit that he has not really told us what the Ministry has done and why it has not acted during the period of two years since the Minister has been in office.

The Minister went right back to the year 1922, but it is regrettable that he did not think it fit to refer, in his remarks,

[MR. CHANDISINGH]
to the agitation of our great labour leader H.N. Critchlow, as a result of which the Rent Restriction Ordinance was passed in the first instance. The Minister also indicated that he is fully aware of the difficulties faced by his predecessor - referring to me - from 1959 to 1964. I dare say that the hon. Minister has not been aware that I was in office from 1961, and not from 1959. I should like him to make that correction in his notes.

The whole burden of what the Minister has said goes to show that the Government is thinking of making permanent Amendments and changes to the Rent Restriction Ordinance, not in favour of the tenants, who are being more and more exploited today, but to give relief and assistance to the landlords, and the tenants, in the long run, will have to bear the effect. The tenants in this country, particularly those in the low-income brackets, are having a very difficult time. The Government, in every respect, is launching an onslaught against the people in the low-income bracket, the working class, and all the working people.

I wonder, from what the Minister has said, whether the long delay in making this Ordinance permanent legislation has not been because of the Government's desire to amend it in such a way that it will further affect the tenant. I am inclined to this view because of what the members

of the Government used to say when they sat on this side. They were very critical, and they openly called for legislation to make the Rent Restriction Ordinance permanent. The fact that they have not been able, after two years in office, to bring the necessary legislation before this House, leads me to wonder what is behind all of this.

2.50 p.m.

Now, many people are aware of the fact that rentals are skyrocketing. We have had various reports such as the newspaper article which was published two Sundays ago, I think, which drew attention to the mounting problems with which the people of this country who are tenants are faced. For this reason, I thought that the Minister, in his remarks, would have concentrated less on history, and more on how his Ministry intends to tackle the new situation which we see today. This is so because —

Mr. Speaker: There is not a quorum in the House, Mr. Leader. [Pause.]

[At this stage several hon. Members took their seats.]

Mr. Chandisingh: There are many people who are in the privileged society in this country who feel that, with this Government in office, they now have the licence to go ahead and increase exploitation of the masses. This, I submit, is the

reason that we have a new situation developing today. In some cases, rentals have been raised from \$60 to \$100 within a period of a few months. The moment a tenant leaves a house, the landlord lets the house and increases the rent by \$10 and so on.

I would submit that what we need is not just a revision of the Rent Restriction Ordinance along the lines suggested by the hon. Minister, which leads us to great doubt about his intentions, but a thorough examination of what can be done about the Rent Restriction Ordinance. The position has been, and it still is, that the onus is on the tenant to raise the question of unduly high rentals. We know that, because of the grave housing shortage, many tenants are reluctant to do this. I, therefore, think that the Government should be exercising its mind constantly to finding ways to stop this rising problem, in order to give greater protection to tenants.

The Minister has told us that his Ministry has not been idle about this matter. But we do not see much housing construction being done. In my opinion, we are witnessing no more in reconstruction. So, I wonder what really has the Ministry been doing! I think it has been doing nothing! I wonder whether the Minister has forgotten this question since the last time when he made the promise that that would have been the last occasion for Government to come before the House and ask for an extension

of the Ordinance! I should like to urge the Government that, far from making it possible, in the amendments it may be considering, for landlords to increase the rents, the Ministry ought to increase the protection for tenants, which protection is highly desirable today.

We know that the present system is to encourage landlords to build houses for rentals. But this is not the answer in my opinion. This has never been the answer. I feel that landlords will not build to a large extent, and Government should not regard this as the way out. The way out is to concentrate on building low-income houses, and also in tightening up the Rent Restriction Ordinance. Those are the requirements of the present situation, and I hope that Government will carry them out expeditiously since the rentals of houses are mounting every day and every week. This is one of the most important things that Government should tackle. We, on this side, support the extension of this Ordinance because we feel that it is necessary.

Mr. Luck: I listened with some surprise to the speech of the hon. Minister of Housing for two reasons. For the first time we heard him making a speech trying to justify something, and he obviously went to some trouble to collect his facts. Unfortunately - and for the record - he has been guilty of a grave error. He said that the T.U.C. made representations in 1939

[MR. LUCK]

for a Rent Restriction Ordinance. [Mr. Bissemer: "I did not say that."] Do you want to correct your statement? The facts are that the T.U.C. was first formed in 1941, and the body which made representations in relation to the hardships then being faced by tenants, was the British Guiana Labour Union which was then led by that great redoubtable champion of labour, Mr. Nathaniel Critchlow.

The second reason why I was flabbergasted was that I remembered the speech of the same gentleman who, in the same capacity as Minister of Housing on the 31st December, 1964, said in this very Chamber, and I read from the *Hansard* of Thursday, 31st December, 1964, at page 17:

"May I also indicate to this House that this Government intends to look into the Rent Restriction legislation in the very near future, so that the entire effect and application of the Rent Restriction Ordinance may be made a permanent bit of legislation for the future governing or control of landlord and tenant in this country."

The hon. Minister (Mr. Bissemer) said this on the 31st December, 1964. It is now December, 1966.

3 p.m.

Fully two years have elapsed, and the words "very near future" used by the hon. Minister certainly have a great deal of elasticity. I remember that in December, 1965, when a similar Motion was presented by the hon. Member, I reminded him of his statement on the 31st December, 1964. He made some apology to the House that it would be the last time he would come and ask for an extension of this Ordinance.

The fact that there is complexity of relationship between the tenant and the landlord, I do not doubt. [Mr. Bowman: "There is no complexity."] The hon. Mr. Bowman has rightly pointed out that there is no complexity. There is no complexity if you have a clarity of view and a clarity of philosophy in the matter. The failure of this Government, after two years in office, in proposing legislation in relation to landlord and tenant is indicative of the difficulties in the Coalition Government between the allegedly working-class party and the other party. Mr. Bowman has been paying rent all of his life, and I suspect that he will be renting a house for the balance of his life. The tenants in Georgetown are unable to get relief from the wealthy classes.

What is the effect of the continuation of this Rent Restriction Ordinance? It was

merely an *ad hoc* Ordinance, and I do not think it was clearly thought out. [Interruption.] Due to the uproar outside this House, I think we should suspend this sitting, sir. There is a gentleman in the compound airing his grievances. He merely seeks to present his grievance to the appropriate Minister, but the Minister is hiding in this House. I suggest that we suspend the sitting until the uproar is over.

Mr. Bissember: Action is being taken to get rid of the nuisance.

Mr. Luck: Are you going to lock up the man now? Referring to this Motion, in 1941 the Ordinance was merely a piece of *ad hoc* legislation, and it was not intended to last so long. Therefore it was inevitable as the years rolled on that various anomalies would creep into the administration of the Ordinance. This measure which was here since 1941, with the passage of time, has become more unrealistic from day to day. The difficulties in the administration of this Ordinance from day to day must make the Minister realise that a review of the Ordinance is long overdue.

For myself I would say that the tenants must be protected against the rapacity of the landlords but, unfortunately, in seeking to protect the tenants it is possible that measures designed to help tenants may not have the desired effect. There

is no doubt about it that about ten per cent of the houses, in the areas where the Rent Restriction Ordinance is supposed to operate, do not enjoy the protection of the statutes. This is due to the fact that the law made in 1941 and the law made for fixing the standard rent some time in 1936 cannot really operate in 1966. Landlords adopt the most ingenious means of evading the provisions of this Ordinance.

If a law is too harsh, nobody who has ever bought a house can dream even of paying the interest rate on the small mortgage he may have. He cannot pay the interest rates on the standard rent referred to in this Ordinance. That is why the landlords seek to evade the provisions of this Ordinance. The time is long past when these provisions should have been repealed and more realistic laws passed to provide protection for the tenant while paying due regard to the legitimate claims of honest landlords. No honest landlord, from my experience, can long remain a landlord if he receives the rents paid according to the present law.

It is an indication of the low regard in which the laws of this country are being held when the landlord class is still flourishing, because in the whole Ordinance the landlords adopt the most ingenious and ruthless measures to evade the provisions. Even an honest landlord is compelled to take this course when he knows that the legal rent for

[MR. LUCK]

a building may be \$14 and he can get \$100 a month for it. I say that these laws should have been reviewed long ago.

The hon. Minister only spoke what I felt was his intention when he said in 1964 that these laws would be re-examined in the very near future. He said:

" . . . this Government intends to look into the Rent Restriction legislation in the very near future, so that the entire effect and application of the Rent Restriction Ordinance may be made a permanent bit of legislation for the future governing or control of landlord and tenant in this country."

3.10 p.m.

He was quite right in saying this. It was overdue in December, 1964, and today there is a crying need for this legislation. It speaks volumes about the incapacity of this Coalition Government to come to some meaningful agreement, that no legislation of this nature, as promised, has been put before this Assembly even after the effluxion of two years. What is inhibiting the P.N.C. section of this Government from putting forward legislation on behalf of the tenants, legislation that is clearly long overdue?

I am reminded by my hon. Friend, that even before 1964, as may be read in *Hansard*, every

time the Rent Restriction Ordinance came up for extension, the P.N.C. was saying through its leaders, who were then on this side of the House, that legislation should offer better protection to landlords as well as to tenants. I should like to tell the hon. Minister of Housing that, as the hon. Member Mr. Chandisingh said, we would like to provide some measure of protection to the overburdened tenants against harassment and extortion by the landlords. We would wish to join with him in passing legislation next month for the protection of tenants.

In conclusion, let me say that I notice there is to be a reshuffling of Cabinet Ministers, which is certainly overdue. I hope that when an assessment is taken of the work of the various Ministries, this example of negligence, inefficiency and slovenliness will be borne in mind by those who make the decisions to transfer Ministers and make demotions.

Mr. Persaud: The housing problem is a serious one, particularly in the City of Georgetown. I believe that a tenant is in duty bound to pay his or her rent and, if the rent is not paid, I agree that the necessary legal process should follow. However, when one examines the Rent Restriction Ordinance, Chapter 186, one sees that the landlord has a great advantage over the tenant, for if a tenant refuses to pay his rent the landlord has the legal right to swear

to an affidavit and to seize furniture from the home of the tenant without going to court. This occurs every day in the City of Georgetown, for heartless landlords are taking full advantage of this process as a means of avoiding the other legal process of going to court and suing the tenant for rent or for possession for non-payment of rent, in which instance the tenant has the right to secure the aid of a lawyer and to defend the matter to the hilt.

I am also aware that very often Magistrates do make orders inviting tenants to vacate premises within a short period, unless the rent is sooner paid. There is very little or no protection for the tenant under the Rent Restriction Ordinance. In 1962, Mr. Chandisingh introduced this very matter into the Assembly, seeking an extension of the legislation. I would like to quote, from the *Hansard* of 19th December, 1962, column 130, what the Prime Minister, Mr. Burnham, had to say on that occasion:

"I do not oppose the Motion. I will vote for it, but in December, 1957, when a similar Motion was moved I pointed out that it seemed rather unrealistic and a waste of time to be invoking the provision of Section 63 of the Ordinance, because certainly not within the foreseeable future will the necessity for giving a measure of protection to tenants

be removed. In the circumstances I think the Ordinance should be a permanent part of the Statute Books until such time as there is no necessity for it, otherwise we waste paper and time to renew it year after year. Further, I suggested in December, 1957, the Government ought to consider the complete overhaul and amendment of the Ordinance."

We are aware of the events between 1962 and 1964, but the point I wish to make is that the Minister who was charged with the responsibility for Housing from 1961 to 1964, also had to carry the responsibility for the Ministry of Labour, together with the Ministry of Health. He was, therefore, doing the work that three persons are doing today and yet, today, we clearly see the incompetence of the Minister who is responsible for Housing.

I am not opposed to the Minister as an individual, but the Government is using taxpayers' money to increase the number of Ministries and the number of Parliamentary Secretaries and still the work is not being done. This Minister is surely guilty of incompetence. There are no two ways about it. All he has to do at the moment is to deal with Housing and, although the Prime Minister expressed a desire as far back as 1962 for this Ordinance to have a permanent place on the Statute Book, yet nothing has been done and, in 1966, the Minister is not in a

MR. PERSAUD

position to tell us definitely when he will come to the Assembly to introduce permanent legislation to protect both the landlord and tenant.

I urge the Government to do something. The Minister of Housing and Reconstruction should not tell us that he is seeking approval for an extension of this Ordinance; he should say when he is coming before the Assembly to place this Ordinance permanently on the Statute Book. I sincerely hope that, when it considers the question of a Cabinet reshuffle, the Government will put the right persons in the right positions and, if this present Minister cannot carry out the various duties with respect to housing, I suggest that someone who is more capable should be given the responsibility.

3.20 p.m.

Dr. Jagan: We get a bit tired hearing Government Ministers and back benchers ask: "What has the previous Government done in seven years?" One would have thought that during those seven years in the wilderness the previous Opposition would have had enough time to think not only of what was being done, but what should be done.

First of all, I should like to refer to some of the things that were done. Before I do so, I think one has to look at this question of landlords and rent restrictions somewhat dialectic-

ally. It is not merely a question of law. During the regime of the last Government, landlords and people who attempted to exploit the working class were held in check because they knew not only that the law was there, but that there was the administration - by executive and other methods - there were regulations, and there was always the threat of having new legislation. That is why, even though we may not have had a law put on our Statute Book, nevertheless, there was not the flourishing racket which is going on at the moment.

All around, from top to bottom, people are being squeezed mercilessly, even in the City of Georgetown where the Government's own supporters are. We gave these people protection, and there was not this kind of racket. Other forms of protection were given to this class of people - the peasants and workers. When we assumed office, we found that, although rents were controlled, the lands on which buildings were put up were not under control, except in a few places. What did we do? First we extended the provisions of the rent restriction law to the whole country and we brought in the application of the law to include not only control of rentals but also building land, because a racket was run where the landlord used to squeeze the tenant in some way, particularly if the tenant was a multiple tenant. The tenant may be on the landlord's land which may be rented for cultivation,

for building houses, and so on. If the landlord did not squeeze the tenant in one place, he gave him notice to remove his house. In this case, something was actively done by the previous Government.

The previous Government extended the rent restriction law to the whole country. Prior to that it applied only to Georgetown, New Amsterdam, and I believe Bartica and Wismar, and then building land was brought within the provisions of the law. So the Minister must not say that nothing was done, or if he knew about this he should not have omitted it in his historical review, because he certainly would not get a Ph.D. degree for that kind of thesis. As I said, landlords and other exploiters were kept in check, but now the landlords and exploiters are having a field-day because they are seeing the dilemma of the Government and they know about the duality of the Government. [Mr. Bissember: "Not duality, incompetence."]

There is a lot of incompetence. On one hand, one arm of the Coalition is claiming that it represents the working class, with a socialist ideology. The other arm of the Coalition is clearly helping its wealthy friends. It is equating socialism with communism, with the taking away of people's property and so on, including the landlords. So, faced with this dilemma - two forces opposing each other in the Cabinet - there can be no positive action. We find

today that poor people are being squeezed in this country. In the sugar estates, the people who have lands no longer have protection. They are being picked up. The employers are resurrecting ancient regulations which they made so that the people are denied what they are entitled to. I refer to production bonuses.

In the Rice Farmers (Security of Tenure) Ordinance provision was made for assessment committees to be established on which tenants had their representative. Tenure of office for some of these people has now expired. What has the Government done? The Government is bypassing the Rice Producers' Association and is putting landlords, in many cases, to represent tenants. This is what is happening. No wonder the landlords in the City of Georgetown are squeezing money out of the poor people. There are increases of 25%, 35% and 50% overnight.

The Minister spoke about increase in wages, but we know that the worker is faced with the increasing cost of living due to other factors besides rentals. The cost of foodstuff is increasing, and we cannot afford to pay this increase at the moment.

3.30 p.m.

I should like to bring to the Government's attention another aspect of this question, and that is the question of building land. You cannot solve the housing problem unless you solve the land problem. A few years ago, during the time of the Interim Govern-

[DR. JAGAN]

ment, I think, there was a proposition by the then "Interim Minister" that that area next to Campbellville should have been bought by the Government, but the Interim Government said that if it did that, it would lose money. And nothing was done.

[Mr. Luck: "They made me pay \$6,000 for a lot."] But what happened? Mr. Prashad bought the land cheaply and then he put in some roads. [Mr. Ram Karrao: "Not roads, dams."]

The people are complaining that they cannot move into their areas. I do not know what the Minister is doing about this. Lots used to be sold for less than \$2,000. This week, a gentleman told me that he is being asked to pay over \$5,000 for one house lot. I was at a wedding ceremony in the area and the people told me that the lots are so small that if two houses are built, you can virtually jump from one to the other. Of course, the Government has removed capital taxes so that its wealthy friends like Hari Prashad and d'Aguiar can get away with "murder". We have seen recently how the Demerara Tobacco Company sold 300,000 one-dollar shares at \$1.75 a share. They can get away with "murder" because their friends reduced the capital gains tax from 45% to 15%.

You cannot expect the housing problem to be solved unless you have got cheap land. If a landlord or an individual has to buy land at such high prices, he will not build. This is obvious. Land is available all around here. For this reason, the Minister should immediately em-

bark on a scheme to acquire some of the lands from the sugar estates nearby, and parcel out these lands to people at low prices. Let them go in for self-help and make up their own lots, and I am sure that the lots will be better than those that Mr. Prashad has given them at Prashad Nagar.

If the Government has any imagination, it will be able to solve the housing crisis also, for this country has a lot of timber, and a lot of unemployment. Let members of the Government go to their American friends who are willing to give aid in machinery. Let them go and tell them that they want some equipment and some food. Many people who were working with sawmills have no work. They have no houses to live in because they cannot afford to pay rents. Government can get all the lumber it wants. It should get the land from the sugar plantations and then it will be able to tackle this problem.

However, before doing that the Government should see to it that some attempt is made to control the price of land. I do not think this is a difficult proposition. As I said, Government Ministers had seven years when they were in the Opposition to examine this question. They have been in the Government for two years. On the last occasion we were advised by the Minister that that was the last time he was going to have an extension of this Ordinance. Therefore, we urge the Minister not to make excuses or to cast the blame on the past Government, but to come here very soon with something

tangible so that we can solve this very pressing problem. It is not fun to be badgered by landlords, not knowing where you are going to live, knowing you may be put out in the streets.

This is a very serious human problem. Unfortunately, Ministers have got in the habit of riding high now - big limousines, big horses! They have lost contact with the people, and because of this, they cannot appreciate the people's problems. I would urge the Minister concerned to go and do some work, not only in his office, but down in the streets and hear what the working men think and what they feel. We saw a sample of it not so long ago in this very compound! Mighty Joe Young! He was not fighting in the ring, he was fighting against the party for which he voted! This is not a matter for joking. I can assure the Minister that on this question, he will always get the support of this side of the House, just as with Ankoko and with other matters where working-class interest is threatened. The Government will always get the backing of this side of the House on such matters.

The P.N.C. arm of the Government should pursue an independent policy. It should look back into its own manifesto. If it does not do so, faced with the contradictions inherent in this coalition, it will do nothing for the working class. That is why there is virtual stagnation in the country today. Nobody knows what to do! Nobody is willing to make any decisions! We are drifting, and in the process of drifting the

quo is maintained. Whoever is riding high now feels more inclined to ride roughshod over the people.

Mr. Benn rose --

Mr. Speaker: I would have thought that the climax of your argument laid in your leader.

Mr. Benn: I wanted to remind the Minister of certain things because it is right that Ministers should, every now and again; be reminded of what they said. They are, perhaps, so busy that they do not have a chance to read what they said in the past. In addition to this, I should like to speak on some other problems which people in the rural areas face. I wish to read from page 15 of *The New Road*, the P.N.C. manifesto:

"Our standards of housing like those of health, though less low than those of some underdeveloped countries, are much lower than those of many a civilised nation. Thousands of our citizens are still un- and ill-housed. There are too many slums.

We shall plan to provide housing of good quality and standard to take care not only of our present population, but also the potential growth.

Housing is not a mere social and economically remunerative service. It not only satisfies a basic human want and need, but also makes

[MR. BENN]

health and well being of the members of the community, thus making them potentially more productive.

It is also a form of individual saving and at the same time tends to generate development of our forestry products and some minor industries, all of which have an employment potential.

We shall plan to provide housing along with new industries and agricultural schemes while avoiding class segregation.

3.40 p.m.

That is very well written. The Government should make very clear its intention to house the people instead of coming here and shouting, "What has the previous Government done in the past seven years?" The hon. Minister of Housing and Reconstruction should concentrate some of his attention on the manifesto submitted by his party to the electorate. I will remind him of some of his party's promises to the people. Of course nothing in this direction has been done as yet. The hon. Minister will claim that he had only two years in office.

In *Highways to Happiness*, printed by the U.F., another arm of the Coalition Government, this is what is written:

"Our policy is to set up the Guyanese worker as an independent citizen, proud of his national status, and his position as a home owner.

We plan, through Home Purchase Co-operatives and other incentives, to create 5,000 new home-owners each year."

We have not even seen 2,000 houses yet.

"There again, we estimate each home purchaser will contribute an average of \$500 per year out of his own earnings towards the rental purchase of his own home, instead of paying rent to a landlord. This means that over a 6-year period home purchasers will contribute \$52.5M.

"We estimate that the average cost of each home will be \$5,000 and that the total investment necessary to build 30,000 homes will be \$150M. We estimate to provide \$97.5M by home purchase mortgage loans. Of this amount, we calculate \$36M will be provided through local private sources, \$25M from foreign government sources and \$36.5M from foreign private sources."

Two years have gone already and nothing has been done. These are two propositions and promises which have been made to the electorate. We have heard a lot from the hon. Minister about his ideas for housing. We were told that one insurance company had decided to put aside some money for aid to the housing project. The hon. Minister boasted a few weeks ago in this House that the Trades Union Council, through his assistance, encouragement, or initiative, was getting land on which to build houses as a

result of loans from American sources. However, while all of these promises are being made and these large amounts of money are being talked about, the housing situation is getting more and more serious every day. Young married people require more houses for their families, but we are getting only a lot of promises.

Another problem is the one which concerns people resident in the sugar estate areas. There are really two problems in relation to this matter, and the hon. Minister of Housing and Reconstruction should do something about them. He forgot that during the term of office of the P.P.P. the extension of the Rent Restriction Ordinance was made to include premises and lands throughout the country. One problem that affects people in the rural areas, especially those who have to live on lands formerly owned by sugar estates, is that there are a lot of restrictions placed on their occupancy. One will find restrictions in one's mortgage bond.

Look at the *Official Gazette* and you will see what is mentioned about the land formerly held by the sugar estates and now transported to sugar workers. The people are told that they cannot have shops on the land, they cannot carry on any trade, and so on. These restrictions are found in the leases of the people living on the East Coast of Demerara on lands formerly occupied by the sugar estates. This shows that a private corporation is putting restrictions on the people. I do not know what is the legal term for it -

whether it is a lease or a transport. One cannot put up a sign unless one gets permission to do so; one cannot build more than one house on a $\frac{1}{4}$ acre of land, and so on. These restrictions are made by the private authority and not by the sanitary authority. The hon. Minister should go very carefully into this matter and see whether the Government should not do something about these restrictions. If anybody can put restrictions in leases, then one does not know what will happen next.

In the case of the workers on the extra-nuclear schemes of the Sugar Estates, they are told that they cannot plant coconut trees or trees more than a certain height on the land. I should also like the hon. Minister to give attention to the housing of sugar workers. I understand that since 1964 no new loans were given to sugar workers for new buildings. The loans they were getting were given for painting or the extension of their residences. The hon. Minister will recognize that there are still many hundreds of sugar workers who have not yet got houses. I understand also that there is a money problem, and that some of the money in the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund should be used for the construction of new houses. I wish the hon. Minister will turn his attention to this matter, if he has not yet considered it, and see what can be done for the sugar workers.

Another point is that there are sugar workers who are resident in villages. In other words, workers who live in Bux-

[MR. BENN]

ton and Vigilance have to pay rent when they should have been receiving loans for the construction of houses under the extra-nuclear scheme.

3.50 p.m.

The hon. Minister should get in contact with the people in charge of the Sugar Welfare Fund and encourage the management to speed up this process. There is this problem of the construction of streets, dams and so on, in the sugar estates. A large portion of the Sugar Welfare Fund is now used for building streets but this process is very slow. At Industry, where I live, the construction of streets and culverts started a long time ago and now work on the project has ceased, and residents at Industry face serious problems and difficulties when rain falls.

Not only the schemes are affected. Nothing is being done on the roads outside the schemes and on the roads under the control of the sugar estates. I should like to ask the hon. Minister of Housing to do something about this.

It has been said by the hon. Member, Mr. Chandisingh, who leads this side on this matter, that we support the proposition of the extension of the Rent Restriction Ordinance, but we would like the hon. Minister and the Government to spend more time in 1967 considering this problem so that by next December, when we come to discuss this, we will be encouraged by his report. We hope that there will be no necessity for the extension of

this Ordinance in this manner, because many more houses will have gone up, and will be in the course of construction as a result of his endeavours.

Mr. Ram Karan: It is recorded in *Hansard* that the hon. Prime Minister said that he does not accept one section of the Bible which says that "he who hath not even the little that he has should be taken away". Perhaps the Prime Minister believes in the opposite viewpoint and that is why 90,000 acres of land, held under licences During Her Majesty's Pleasure, have virtually been converted to freehold land for the sugar producers.

It is true that my friend, Mr. Deeroop Mahraj, and other small landlords have benefited from a few acres, but the conversion has benefited the sugar producers, whose executive committee sits on the other side of the House, with 100,000 acres of land. There are thousands of idle acres in villages and on sugar estates on the East and West Coasts of Demerara. What has been happening on the East Coast? The sugar producers have been empoldering this land and selling it at a price of three or four thousand dollars per acre.

One would have thought that this Government, with its solicitude towards the working classes would have said, "Let us get the front land, which is valueless to you in so far as cane cultivation is concerned, so that we may use it for the surplus population". The Government paid over \$12,000 an acre to the Demerara Sugar Company for land

on the East Bank of the Demerara River. The hon. Minister of Housing and Reconstruction should consider the thousands of people chased out of their normal places of residence and now crowding together on the East Coast.

Members on this side of the House, and some, I am sure, on that side as well, would be very glad to see the Minister and the Government do something to ensure that these people are not ejected from these lands on which they have a very negligible sort of tenancy. It was the wish of the last Government to see this put in order, and I ask the hon. Minister to ensure that people obtain the proper tenancy as well as proper roads and water supply.

I recall that not very long ago some of these persons appealed to the Government for water from the adjoining village of Plaisance. The Village Council resisted and Government did absolutely nothing to ensure that water, which is a very important item in the life of the community, should be supplied. As a result of that, a large number of children became affected with all sorts of abdominal diseases. I hope the Minister will do something about it.

We must not forget incidents which occurred in 1946 when the area known as Campbellville was acquired by the Government at the fantastic figure of \$450,000. This was one-ninth of an area which had been bought for \$60,000 in 1932. The sugar producers sold the area from Bel Air to Campbellville for \$450,000. What was heart-rending was that the authorities used the housing situation at the time to obtain

the support of the people who could hardly afford to purchase the land, much less to build houses. They made it appear that the P.P.P. had been agitating against the interest of the people concerned. I see a situation similar to that arising now in relation to the Green Belt. When Mr. Costello came to this country he made certain proposals based on his knowledge. He knew about the development of land and the development of cities.

Sitting suspended at 4 p.m.

4.30 p.m.

On resumption.--

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair.]

Mr. Ram Karran: When the suspension was taken, I was dealing with the Campbellville scandal where one-ninth of an area acquired for \$60,000 in 1932 was sold to the taxpayers of this country for the vast sum of \$450,000. I was developing the point to show that the unfortunate, impecunious workers of this country were made to feel that the purchase of this land was in their interest. In other words, they felt that forking out their money into the pockets of the expatriate giants was in their interest.

A similar situation is developing and has, to a certain extent, commenced in the area east of Bel Air. My friend used to be very closely associated with that area. What happened was that the planning expert, Mr. Costello, came here immediately after the war with a view to setting the pattern of development in the City and its environment. His recommendation was

[MR. RAM KARRAN]

that that area should be the Green Belt area. Before you got to the Green Belt area, however, there was a low density area. The houses were far apart and the lands on which they were situated should have been bigger so that there could have been adequate penetration of air to the high density areas in the west and south of that area nearer to the City, and the workers who lived in more congested areas at the south could have had some proper flow of the pure Atlantic air.

However, as soon as Mr. Costello had left these shores and the Interim Government had stepped in, we found that Bookers had begun to cut up these lots into very small cubicles. That area is not provided with sewerage facilities and there is no obligation, on the part of the occupiers, to put in septic tanks. We found that the people who lived so near to each other were disturbed by the stench that flowed from the toilets and so on. It is fortunate that the people themselves, having regard to the general unhealthiness of the place, have, at great expense and extreme sacrifice, begun to put in septic tanks of their own. The Government has done nothing to improve the situation.

What I now fear most is that Bookers, the owners of the area further east, from Sophia to Industry, which is known as the Green Belt and which is now being used for rice cultivation and cattle rearing, are now bringing tremendous pressure on the Government and the agents of the Government and they are saying that that area should be

used for denser housing. I wish to sound a note of warning and to ask the Minister of "Housing and Reconstruction" - in inverted commas - to see to it that nothing is done to allow the owners of this land to get away with "murder".

Mr. Costello's recommendations are admirable ones and no sensible person, in or out of this House, ought to object to there being fairly large holdings, on which single-lot houses can be erected and on which gardening, poultry, or even sheep-rearing, can be carried on, so that the area remains what Mr. Costello intended it to be - the lung of the City. If these heartless landlords are allowed to continue to make greater profits, it means that we will have houses very close together and the value of the lands will go up. Naturally, because of the housing shortage, and because of the large number of people in the City, there is a premium on land. Lands in this country cost as much as lands in the United Kingdom. There can be no contradiction to that at all.

I ask the hon. Minister and the Government to ensure that the price of land is not allowed to go higher, or, in fact, it should not be as high as it is now. People are asking for \$4,000 per acre for lands in that area. That is a fantastic sum having regard to two things: the original cost of the land, and the fact that the lands are being used for rice cultivation and catch crops only.

We have absolutely no objection to the extension of the Rent Restriction Ordinance but, while

we welcome it, the hon. Minister's assurance that there would be an increase in the rentals of houses in this country, allegedly to satisfy both sides, stands out as serious a threat as the National Security (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, in so far as the tenants of this country are concerned.

During the suspension, the hon. Minister of Health (Mr. Mahraj) asked me to correct myself and to say that he no longer benefits from the lease lands in Essequibo, having sold them out already. I thank the Minister for his assurance, and I think he was very wise to have sold and acquired the money already. [Mr. Mahraj: "Shame."]

Before I take my seat, I want to advise the hon. Minister and other members of the Government, including Mr. Hari Prashad, by quoting from this book *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* by R.H. Tawney. Mr. Tawney was not born in the Soviet Union. He is an Englishman, an Honorary Doctor of the Universities of Oxford, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, London, Chicago, Melbourne and Paris. I should like to quote one verse, a few lines, from page 151 of this book:

"You thoughte that I woulde
not requyre
The bloode of all suche at
your hande,
But be you sure, eternall
fyre
Is redy for eche hell fyre-
brande.
Both for the housynge and
the lande
That you have taken from
the pore
Ye shall in hell dwell
evermore "

4.40 p.m.

Mr. Bissenber (replying): I should like to say, in the circumstances, that I am grateful to the hon. Mr. Benn for the remarks which he made. I should like to reply to two points, the first was made by the hon. Mr. Ram Karran. He said that the Government had bought land from the Demerara Company at \$12,500 per acre. The second was made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. He mentioned the front lands on the East Coast.

Now, I happen to know that no negotiations were ever embarked upon, even at the time when the squatters were occupying the front lands owned by Bookers. In the months of May and June of 1964 when the matter came up for the previous Government to take a decision to house these people and let them remain on the land, no action was taken. They failed to negotiate to buy these lands from Bookers. The people who now tell us that we should see that the squatters are not removed from the area, are the same people who refused to act in 1961, 1962 and 1963 when they were repeatedly asked by members of the trade union movement to provide land, which they had available, to build homes for working-class people. They said that they had no land available and they would not even negotiate with the T.U.C. to make the land available for the working class people.

Today, this Government has provided 110 acres of land at a bare minimum cost to the T.U.C. for it to provide 560 homes for the working-class people in the trade union movement.

[MR. BISSEMBER]

They said that no construction is taking place. Phoenix Park on the East Bank is a wonderful city, there are 75 new buildings. Then there is Meadow Brook in Lodge. One only has to drive through these areas to see what has been done and what is being done. Sixteen apartments will be put up before Christmas, and 193 new building structures are already there.

Let me refer to the rural areas. The hon. Members should take a look at Cumberland. We have developed the land and we are putting in roads now. We do not have to be told what is stated in our manifesto. We are carrying out what is stated in it. We are building houses as fast as we can. We are putting in roads and connections where none existed. For instance, Dr. Jagan went there with his chairman --

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are you referring to the hon. Members?

Mr. Bissember: I beg your pardon, sir. The hon. Member Dr. Jagan and the hon. Member Mr. Nunes went to the housing scheme and they were looking around. They saw for themselves the conditions under which the tenants are living today. Places which were never cleaned have been cleaned. They talk about helping the working-class people! We are presently continuing the construction of concrete drains which were not there during the last 10 years! All those are benefits to the working-class people who cannot afford to pay \$100 a month rent for a big building in Georgetown.

A team from my Ministry visited Leguan and Wakenaam to find out whether land is available, and to encourage people there to build by way of self-help. I mentioned these things to refute one or two of the statements made by some of the members of the Opposition. I can give them the assurance that this Government will never sit down and let the working-class people suffer as they allowed them to suffer. We shall carry out the promises that we have made. We shall do as they never attempted to do.

As may have been noted, under our Development Programme, \$7 million is expected to be spent on self-help housing. We have just purchased 178 acres of land at a very low cost for the construction of houses. I can go on and on narrating what we have been doing and what we will continue to do.

The hon. Member Mr. Ram Karran mentioned the Green Belt. I can assure him that the Green Belt is being investigated by the Central Planning Authority, and I am aware of what he has in mind. But I can give him the assurance that that plan which was drafted 15 years ago will be thoroughly looked at by this Government in the interest of the working class of this country.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, "That this Assembly do now adjourn until Friday 16th December, 1966, at 5 p.m. [Mr. Bissember.]

Adjourned accordingly at 4.50 p.m.