

SECOND LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

(Constituted under the British Guiana (Constitution) (Temporary Provisions) Orders in Council, 1953 and 1956).

Wednesday, 30th September, 1959

The Council met at 2 p.m.

PRESENT :

Speaker, His Honour Sir Donald Jackson

Chief Secretary, Hon. M. S. Porcher, (acting)

Attorney-General, Hon. A. M. I. Austin, Q.C.

Financial Secretary, Hon. F. W. Essex, C.M.G.

} *ex officio*

The Honourable **Dr. C. B. Jagan**

—Member for *Eastern Berbice*
(Minister of Trade and Industry)

„ „ **B. H. Benn**

—Member for *Essequibo River*
(Minister of Natural Resources)

Janet Jagan

—Member for *Western Essequibo*
(Minister of Labour, Health and Housing)

„ **Ram Karran**

—Member for *Demerara-Essequibo*
(Minister of Communications and Works)

„ **B. S. Rai**

—Member for *Central Demerara*
(Minister of Community Development and Education).

Mr. **R. B. Gajraj**

—Nominated Member

„ **W. O. R. Kendall**

—Member for *New Amsterdam*

„ **L. F. S. Burnham**

—Member for *Georgetown Central*

„ **S. Campbell**

—Member for *North Western District*

„ **A. L. Jackson**

—Member for *Georgetown North*

„ **E. B. Beharry**

—Member for *Eastern Demerara*

„ **S. M. Saffee**

—Member for *Western Berbice*

„ **Ajodha Singh**

—Member for *Berbice River*

„ **R. E. Davis**

—Nominated Member

„ **A. M. Fredericks**

—Nominated Member

„ **H. J. M. Hubbard**

—Nominated Member.

Mr. I. Crum Ewing — Clerk of the Legislature

Mr. E. V. Viapree — Assistant Clerk of the Legislature.

ABSENT :

Mr. Jai Narine Singh — on leave.

Mr. F. Bowman — on leave.

Mr. R. C. Tello — indisposed.

Mr. A. G. Tasker, O.B.E. — on leave.

The Clerk read prayers.

H. S. S. S.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Thursday, 24th September, 1959, as printed and circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

MR. TELLO ILL

Mr. Speaker : I have to announce that owing to illness the hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Tello, will not be able to attend today.

PAPERS LAID

The Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Benn) : I beg to lay on the Table the

Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations, 1959 (No. 1).

The Minister of Community Development and Education (Mr. Rai) : I beg to lay on the Table the

Annual Report of the Superintendent of Prisons for the year 1958.

and the

Report of the Probation Service for the year 1958.

GOVERNMENT NOTICES

FISHERIES (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS, 1959

Mr. Benn : I beg to give notice of the following Motion :

"Be it resolved: That this Council approves of the Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations, 1959 (No. 1) published in the Gazette of the 7th of March, 1959."

ORAL ASKING AND ANSWERING OF QUESTIONS

VACANCIES AMONG POSTMASTERS

Mr. Fredericks : The hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Tello, has asked me to deputise for him, and with Your Honour's permission, to ask the hon. the Chief Secretary Question No. 15 standing

in his name on the Order Paper. Is it true that there are a number of vacancies among the higher grade Postmasters and Post and Telegraph Clerks, including that of Chief Postmaster, New Amsterdam, Postmasters, Bourda, Suddie and Bartica, for periods of from four months to two years ?

If the answer is in the affirmative will the Honourable Minister state why the posts have not been filled as yet ?

The Chief Secretary (Mr. Porcher, acting) : The posts of Higher Grade Postmaster have been redesignated Senior Postmaster this year, and the two vacancies in that grade at the Bourda and the Bartica Post Offices were filled in July last. The vacancies for Chief Postmasters at the New Amsterdam and Suddie Post Offices have also been filled.

Four vacancies for Senior Postmasters occurred in 1957, but they were not filled, as it was decided to await the recommendations of the Special Committee of Whitley Council which was considering *inter alia* the structure of the Post Office staff. The Committee's report was submitted in August, 1958, and the proposals were passed, as presented in the 1959 Draft Estimates, by the Legislative Council in March, 1959. The grades of Senior Postmaster and Postmaster were merged with retrospective effect from the 1st January, 1958, into one grade, but on the salary scale attached to the former (Senior Postmaster) grade. Consideration is being given to allowing the four Postmasters who were recommended for promotion to the vacancies for Senior Postmasters before the two grades were merged to be paid salary as if they had been so promoted with effect from the dates the vacancies occurred in 1957.

There is only one vacancy for a Post and Telegraph Clerk (one of the posts formerly designated Higher Grade Post and Telegraph Clerk created in 1957). It has not yet been filled on account of representations from the Post Office Workers' Union which are still under examination.

Three additional posts of Senior Postmaster are to be substituted for three posts of Postmaster, and Finance Committee is being asked to authorise their inclusion on supplementary estimates for 1959, after which action will be taken to have them filled.

COMPLAINTS FROM RICE FARMERS ON UPPER CORENTYNE

Mr. Kendall : Under Standing Order No. 17(1) I seek Your Honour's permission to ask either the Minister of Natural Resources or the Minister of Trade and Industry certain questions which are of vital importance to the country.

Mr. Speaker : If the Minister is prepared to answer your questions you may proceed.

Mr. Kendall : Is the Government aware that rice farmers on the Upper Corentyne Coast, who are now reaping their padi, are placed in an embarrassing situation since the Rice Development Company has ceased to purchase their padi?

If, so, what are the Government's plans for assisting in the matter?

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Dr. Jagan) : I have just held a series of meetings on the Corentyne Coast, and in the area to which the hon. Member refers, and I had no indication that there is any hardship experienced by rice farmers at the moment. No farmer complained to me that he was unable to sell his padi. I held meetings from Crabwood Creek, as far as Bush Lot, in that area. I think the hon. Member refers to the No. 64 area, at which place the Rice Development Company had its bond and purchased padi before. As I have said, I heard of no complaints about hardship, but I shall make inquiries.

So far as the Rice Development Company is concerned, I think it was indicated to me on one occasion that the

Company is losing money in purchasing padi on the Upper Corentyne. But as far as I am aware there is no shortage of milling facilities on the Corentyne, so that I do not think there is any question of difficulty arising. In any case, if there is I have not heard anything about it.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (AMEND- MENT) BILL

The Minister of Community Development and Education (Mr. Rai) : With Your Honour's permission I would like to ask that the Local Government (Amendment) Bill, which is item 5 on the Order Paper, be dealt with now and taken through all its stages today. I am aware that the Land Bonds Bill is under discussion by the Council and is being piloted by the hon. Minister of Natural Resources. I have consulted him and he has no objection to this procedure being followed.

Mr. Speaker : If hon. Members have no objection we can start with your Bill.

Mr. Rai : I beg to move the Second reading of the Bill intituled :

"An Ordinance further to amend the Local Government Ordinance."

The provisions of this Bill will work no revolutionary changes in Local Government law. Indeed I would have been glad if it were possible at this time to bring about a more fundamental change in the structure of Local Government. Government has already, in a Sessional Paper, given its views on the Marshall recommendations on the reform of Local Government. When that scheme is accepted by Government the present rural government units will be abolished, and in their place there will be established District Councils. Representatives on those Councils will be re-elected.

As a matter of fact the Councils will be all-elected, and the franchise will be on the basis of universal adult suffrage. I regret very much to say that while Gov-

[Mr. Rai]

ernment accepts the principle that the franchise for these rural units should be on the basis of universal adult suffrage, owing to administrative difficulties it has not been possible for the next elections to be held on that basis. Pending, therefore, the introduction of universal adult suffrage I am asking hon. Members to approve of the proposals in this Bill.

The Bill, in short, is concerned first of all and principally with the abolition of the nominated element on Village Councils. At the present time Village Councils usually consist of nine members—six elected and three nominated. If this Bill were passed there would be no longer any nominated members of Village Councils. As the law at the moment stands, the Local Government Board has power to declare the number of councillors of Village Districts, and Clause 4 of this Bill seeks to confer on the Local Government Board the power to determine the number of members of each Village Council without any limitation as to the maximum number which the Board may so determine.

The provisions in Clauses 3 and 4 of the Bill are merely consequential on the proposal to abolish nominated members. Clause 5 deals with those cases where Village Districts are divided into Wards. As far as I am aware, there is no provision in the law so far which says that a councillor cannot take nomination to more than one Ward.

Under Clause 5 it is made clear that he can take nomination only in one division. Clause 8 permits the award of a gratuity to the personal representative of an employee of a local authority where such an employee dies in the service of the local authority and a gratuity is approved. The position was somewhat uncertain hitherto, and to dispel any doubts this measure has been brought forward. Clause 9 deals with the administration of grazing areas. So far as grazing areas are concerned at present authority does not extend to Crown land and Colony land, and it is now sought to extend such

authority. I do not propose to press for the acceptance of Clause 10, and at an appropriate time I will seek its withdrawal.

Under Clause 11 the proposal seeks to make it clear that the Local Government Board can either increase or decrease the annual expenditure of a local authority. At the moment it is said we must "modify" this expenditure, but it is the view of some people that to "modify" merely means to reduce. In fact, the Board should be able to decrease or increase such expenditure, having regard to the circumstances of the matter. Clause 12 deals with the financial commitments of a local authority. At present a local authority cannot enter into any contract involving more than \$100, without the approval of the Local Government Board. We are seeking to remove this restriction and to give a local authority power to enter into contracts involving up to \$1,000, without any approval of the Local Government Board.

I do not think the measures proposed in this Bill are controversial. As a matter of fact, these Amendments are long overdue. They constitute the liberalizing of the powers of local authorities, bringing them into line with the pending Marshall Report reforms.

Mr. Benn : I beg to second the Motion.

Mr. Jackson : I congratulate the Minister on several aspects of this Bill. It seems to me that in many respects this Bill has adopted a rather progressive approach to the problems of villages and of employees of village councils. One of the most important provisions is that which will cover payment to the family of a deceased employee of the benefits which would have accrued to that employee during his service. At present the position is not clear at all.

On the question of providing for a purely elected Village Council, I agree with the Minister's observation that this

measure is long overdue. I think there is one aspect of the Bill which might be given some further consideration, and that is with regard to the selling of cattle for the non-payment of agistment fees. I feel that if an owner of cattle or his representative has not been paying up these fees, a notice posted up in the village office is not enough information of his arrears. I wonder if the Minister would consider the provision that a notice be sent to the person concerned who may be out of the district, or to the owner who may not know what is going on.

Mr. Saffee: I support this Bill. I am very glad to do so, because of the fact that these amendments will be very much welcomed by people in the rural areas. The opportunity to elect their own fully-elected councils is one of the things for which the people have been clamouring for a long time. This, I understand, is in keeping with the progressive reforms which are to take place very shortly in the field of Local Government.

On the question of giving local authorities the power to enter into contracts with a financial limit of \$1,000, without approval of the Local Government Board, this is a welcome improvement, because I know there are times when these authorities have to do urgent and necessary works which exceed \$100 in cost and the limit of \$100 has caused much delay.

Mr. Rai: I am very grateful to know that two Members have spoken in favour of the Bill. I think that those who have not spoken against it are in favour of it. Members no doubt agree with me that these measures are long overdue; I think they will agree with me, too, that those who seek to serve the people must derive their authority from the people.

As regards Mr. Jackson's remarks, I share his concern about the sale of people's cattle for the non-payment of agistment fees. While it is true that the Ordinance provides that the cattle can be sold after notice has been put up in the

village office, what happens in practice? A bell is rung in the village by a village crier giving information that the cattle will be sold. Anyway, I will assure the hon. Member that I will see to it that a personal notice of default is sent out before the sale of such cattle.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

COUNCIL IN COMMITTEE

Council resolved itself into Committee to consider the Bill clause by clause.

Clauses 1 to 9 passed as printed.

Clause 10.—*Repeal and re-enactment of section 94 of Chapter 150. Charging tolls for passage of craft, animals and vehicles.*

Mr. Rai: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move the deletion of Clause 10, as I had intimated.

Question put, and agreed to.

Clause 10 deleted.

Clause 11.—*Amendment of section 105 of Chapter 150.*

Mr. Rai: I beg to move that Clause 11 be re-numbered Clause 10.

Question put, and agreed to.

Clause 11 re-numbered.

Clause 12.—*Amendment of section 188 of Chapter 150.*

Mr. Rai: I beg to move that Clause 12 be re-numbered Clause 11.

Question put, and agreed to.

Clause 12 re-numbered.

Clause 13—*Savings.*

Mr. Rai: I beg to move that Clause 13 be re-numbered Clause 12.

Question put, and agreed to.

Clause 13 re-numbered.

Council resumed.

Mr. Rai : I beg to report that the Local Government (Amendment) Bill has been considered in Committee and passed with amendments; and I therefore move that the Bill be now read the Third time and passed.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

LAND BONDS BILL

Mr. Speaker : Council will now resume debate on the Motion for the Second Reading of the Bill intituled

"An Ordinance to make provision for the satisfaction of the whole or any part of the purchase money or of the compensation payable by the Government of British Guiana in respect of the purchase or compulsory acquisition of any land by the issue of bonds, and for the issue, negotiability and redemption of such bonds, and the payment of interest thereon and for matters incidental to or connected with any of the foregoing purposes."

Mr. Jackson : Mr. Speaker, I am opposing this Bill, and I am opposing it not because I am against the issuing of bonds as a means of payment for any transaction between the Government and anyone of the inhabitants of the Colony. My opposition to it is because I see it as legislation of a discriminatory nature as well as an unfair measure.

The Minister who introduced the Bill, the Minister of Natural Resources, intimated to us that this is one of the measures taken or to be taken by the Government to relieve unemployment. In doing so he indicated that the intention of the Government, among other things, is to establish land settlement schemes; those schemes are intended to take care of our unemployed people. But

I say now, Sir, that the unemployed people whom the Minister has in mind, according to his own observation, are people who are unemployed as a result of improvements in the sugar industry, and this is where I accuse the Government of introducing a measure into this Council which is of a discriminatory nature.

The Minister referred to what Professor W. Arthur Lewis said in one of his books — that the stabilization process and the economizing which would be undertaken by the sugar industry would result in increased profit, increased wages but at the same time putting people out of work. It would appear to me that no other person in the Government could have been so naïve in presenting such a proposition to this Council so that the intentions of the Government could have been so clearly revealed to the Members who are here except that person is also of the view that all the Members of the Council are as naïve in their approach to problems or in their understanding of problems. Unemployment has been increasing for quite a long while and as far as one knows unemployment does not relate only to those people who may be put out of work because of the two reasons which have been stated by the Minister who referred to them as having come from the pen and mentality of the professor who dealt with the subject.

It is clear to me, therefore, that after a Government is elected to govern a country and after that Government undertakes to govern, nothing of its policies and nothing of its activities should even be made to appear that it is providing for only one section of the community while in other sections there are people who are passing through the same difficulties, the same hardships and the same unfortunate experiences.

We have, on more than one occasion previously, accused the Government of practising discrimination. It does appear to me that even though we have so accused them in the past they cannot turn away from their present

attitude into a broad, just, competent and equitable policy. Unemployment is very heavy in other parts of the Colony than in those areas to which reference has been made and concerning the people to whom reference has been made. I cannot see that we in this Council should subscribe either in part or in the whole to such a policy of discrimination.

I am opposing the Bill because there seems to be something either unfair or dishonest in it; because under its provisions effect is going to be given to an Ordinance passed by a previous Legislature — the one to which the Member for New Amsterdam referred and the one to which the hon. the Financial Secretary was very quick upon his feet to reply to the Member concerned. I am not here to know what transpired at the time, but I know this — that this Bill before this Council is going to be the instrument by which the present Legislative Council sought to do an act of injustice to people, an act which must be regarded by all persons or by many persons as an undemocratic act.

If the Government is going to take away my land by force, or buy it by force, I fail to see where a person whose land is being taken away under that law can be regarded as a vendor. As far as I am aware a vendor is somebody who is selling what he has — an act which is voluntary, arising no doubt from various circumstances which confront the owner of the land. But if the Government, with the power vested in it, is going to enter upon land owned by anyone and compel the owner to hand it over to the Government, such an act cannot be regarded as a sale. Perhaps Government, in its wisdom or intelligence, would be able to say under what circumstances land entered upon in the manner in which it is intended, could be regarded as a voluntary transaction undertaken between two parties.

When he introduced the Bill the hon. Minister indicated that in some areas there is easy facility for the introduction of schemes which will result

from the application of this bit of legislation; that is, that Government has, as its first step, land owned by people which is properly drained and irrigated. It is undemocratic, therefore, and I would venture to say dishonest on the part of any Government which seeks to use its power to take possession of land which offers ready facility for any scheme of land settlement, because the Government says there is land hunger when Government can put its hand upon land which has not been gainfully or beneficially used — land which is owned by the Government itself. If Government wants to acquire land for the purposes it has in mind then it should as its first act use its own land for the purpose of settling people to relieve unemployment, to which reference has been made.

Perhaps the Government Ministers may regard me as a stooge of some people whose land will now come under the eye of the Government. I say this because, like the Minister of Trade and Industry, I was on the Corentyne Coast during the last week-end, and because our team included an employee of Messrs. Bookers Bros., McConnell and Co., Ltd. we were accused by some members and supporters of the People's Progressive Party of being in the pay of the daily newspapers and of Bookers and the large Companies. It seems to me that today no one can work with any employer, or some employers, and be a member of a political party, without the party to which that one belongs being accused of being financed by big business, and of being subservient to big business. I run the risk of being personally accused now on account of what I am going to say, but I care not what the accusation is, for anyone who accuses me in that respect is someone who perhaps reflects himself or herself in that accusation.

Since the Minister of Natural Resources could have dealt with the sugar industry, as observed by Professor W. Arthur Lewis, then it is clear to me that what the Minister or his Government has in mind at the moment is land owned by sugar estates which have not perhaps

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been used as they ought to have been used, but land which is properly drained and irrigated. Why should the Government want to go in and sit down upon land on which a great deal of money has been spent by the proprietors, when the Government itself should be able to invest money to build up its own areas to the point where it is easy to embark upon land settlement schemes? What is the situation with respect to the Black Bush polder? Has Government yet decided how it is going to allocate the areas concerned for the purpose of relieving unemployment? Since unemployment is the main reason for the introduction of this Bill at the moment, then it appears to me that Government should decide now, and this Council ought to know its policy. The entire area covered by the Blocks I and II Scheme should not be given to anyone for cultivation purposes, except that person is numbered among the unemployed, for if any other person who is not unemployed is allowed to take up one speck of land in that area then the Government's statement of its anxiety to relieve unemployment is farcical and insincere.

How many acres of land are covered by the Black Bush Polder, Nos. I, II and III, and how many acres does Government propose to give to each person for cultivation? I recollect that the Minister said that the time is going to come when Government is going to determine how many acres of land a person should own. The time is coming for Government to deal first of all with the lands in Blocks I, II and III in the manner which the Minister has described, and the first persons to settle on the land should be people who are unemployed, whether they are drawn from Georgetown, Essequibo or any other part of the country, but they must not be people who already own land. But, of course, I assume that in reply to this observation the Minister of Natural Resources will remind me of the fact that this is an age of co-operative activity, perhaps collec-

tivism which exists in Italy and perhaps in China, for in introducing the Bill he referred to the fact that on that very morning he made a flight over certain areas of the country, and that he had seen land held by a certain number of people in a co-operative, and how they were cultivating land which at one time the Department of Agriculture had condemned as unsuitable for agricultural purposes.

I hold the view that nothing must be done and nothing ought to be done with respect to private people's land until the Government can guarantee that it has no more of its own lands available for distribution. I feel that no one should enter into any sale or compulsory purchase of anybody's land until the Government has distributed every inch of its own land, whether it be first, second or third depth, to people who are unemployed, for if Government has lands lying idle and is casting its eye upon the lands of private individuals which are also lying idle, then Government would not be exercising its functions in a balanced and democratic manner. It is my view that if Government were to act in the manner which this Bill suggests, then Government would have had ulterior motives prior to the introduction of this Bill. In other words, if Government pursues the course which this Bill seeks to adopt, it is going to write in the laws of the Colony the most undemocratic piece of legislation which this country would ever want to see written in its Statute Book.

I cannot understand why Government is seeking to take my land — it is almost equal to expropriation — and to tell me what price it is going to pay me for my land. This Bill is seeking to deny the proprietor of any land the right to ask for any price which he believes to be the value of his land, and there is nothing, as I said before, in this Bill to indicate that the transaction which is envisaged is anything of a voluntary nature. Does the land not worth any money at all? Did the owner pick it up, just like that? If the land has any value at all,

then there is a difference between asking me to lend the Government some money because it is passing through a crisis and taking my land from me. Has this measure come about because the Government is bankrupt, or because it is dictatorial, or because it is committed to a policy of collectivism?

If the Government's policy is to indicate beforehand what rates of interest it will pay to a person who will lend money and take bonds to those who lend, why must Government not indicate to the proprietors of land what rates of interest will accrue to them through bonds for lands which are being taken over? Why must such proprietors have to seek redress, if dissatisfied, before a Court of law, something which involves expenditure of money while their counterparts, the people who lend money to Government and accept payment in bonds, know long in advance of the transaction what benefits they will receive and what interest will be paid on the money so lent.

Why is Government treating some people like fish and some people like bone? It is unfair and it is unethical, and Government should realize that such a course of action is not on the level at all. It is something to which no one on this side of the Table should agree. If the Government is going to take my land and force me to take "X" dollars, it will be doing an act which is unworthy of its name and of its intentions. I say that in any arrangement for land to be taken over compulsorily, some publicized provision must be made as to the terms under which the land is to be taken over.

When one remembers that people in the country have been subjected to perennial floods and drought, it will be seen that perhaps owners of land became disheartened and frustrated from such experiences and were not prepared to use all land beneficially, and disgusted of the fact that Government had failed in many cases to provide drainage and irrigation facilities. If that is true, then the Government should not seek to take over the

lands at all. What Government ought to do is to test the willingness and intention of those people who may not be using their land beneficially; or adopt the same approach as to the rice millers of today — Government has virtually said to the small rice millers: "we give you so many years to improve your capacity and the type of mills you have, if you do not, then we are going to tell you what we are going to do."

This Bill should not be passed into law, but looking across the Table and down this side of it I see there is a depleted Council, but enough to pass the Third Reading of the Bill if it is taken through all its stages today.

Mr. Ram Karran : And so what ?

Mr. Jackson : We still hold the view that this Bill is undemocratic, and it discriminates between the unemployed in certain walks of life and those who are unemployed as the result of improvements in the sugar industry. Those are the words of the Minister himself. Therefore one is justified in coming to the conclusion that the schemes which will result from the implementation of this Bill will be designed entirely to serve one section of the community. I say without any fear or without any hesitancy that that is the only conclusion which this Council can draw from the speech of the Minister of Natural Resources.

I feel there is no question of a "sale" as such in this Bill, and the word "vendor" as it appears in this Bill is improperly used. This Bill is the highest point of undemocratic action, and I am strongly opposed to its passage for the reasons I have stated this afternoon.

Mr. Campbell : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am not lending my support to the measure which is before the Council today. We are told, in the Objects and Reasons, that this Bill is patterned after the Jamaica 1955 Land Bonds Bill. But Jamaica, with a density of population of around 400 to the square mile and with land surface of about nineteen times less

[MR. CAMPBELL]

than British Guiana, may well have had reasons to pass her 1955 Bill for the distribution of her agricultural lands. British Guiana has only six individuals to the square mile. We are under-populated, therefore I see no need for a bill of this nature.

One hon. Member said here that Government owns about 90% of the land area in British Guiana. That is quite a lot of land, yet Government here seeks to take away land by compulsion from those people who have got some land within the occupied 10% area. Jamaica may have had a land hunger, naturally being over-populated. In British Guiana we have an artificially over-populated area in the coastal strip. Two-thirds of the coastal area is over-populated. There are about 100 miles of fertile coastal strip from the mouth of the Pomeroon River to the Venezuelan border which is uninhabited. It must have been the lack of vision on the part of previous Governments not to encourage or inspire people to utilize this land. But our present Government, instead of taking away land from those who have it—on the principle of “take away from the ‘haves’ and give to the ‘haves not’”—they might open up this new coastal land. I do not agree for one moment that British Guiana is landless. It is not. The people love to occupy the coastal strip here. It should be on the part of Government to encourage people to go a little bit farther afield. I hold that this Bill is not the right method of approach to development of this country and to relieve the unemployment, and I cannot support it at all.

I have heard about the \$110,000,000 for development. Some of that money could be used to prepare virgin lands and open up a few roads from the coastal strip to the hinterland. That would be giving employment to the unemployed. Let them work on the roads and when they are finished building the roads the virgin lands will be made available for them to develop and settle.

The North West District — and I cannot help but mentioning it — has about one individual to the square mile. It is under-populated. Why not open up a few roads there and settle 2,000 families? It will be worthwhile. The past Government may not have had vision, but I am expecting the present Government to have vision and not to carry on in the rut of the past. I am no land owner. I have got a kind of a lease, but when I see a Bill like this coming here for my blessing I am certainly not going to give it because it is not reasonable; it is not logical, unless the Government is entering into a new kind of experimentation of socialising and communising the land. If that is the aim, well let us hear it. We will then know what to expect.

Mr. Speaker, I have finished my short remarks. I hold that the measure before the Council is not reasonable, and it does not make for harmony among the people. I also have my doubts that it would really answer the purpose of relieving the present unemployment and bringing about progressive development.

The Minister of Communications and Works (Mr. Ram Karran): I wish first of all to congratulate the hon. Member for New Amsterdam on his consistency regarding every measure that comes before this Council. There was an ulterior motive for the electricity situation that was discussed a few days ago. The hon. Member said that if the electricity failure had been in another constituency Government would have done something about it. In the case of this Bill there is some ulterior motive also.

The hon. Member for North Georgetown has also kept true to form because without adducing one reasonable argument in favour of the rejection of this Bill — I say reasonable argument — he has said quite a lot which seem to have nothing to do with the Bill which is before Council. The hon. Member, and particularly those who oppose the Bill, rant and rave about taking away people's

land. The gallant Member, I think he was at one time a part-time soldier, goes further and talks about the taking away of small mills. I fail to see the connection between the two matters but, as usual, the barren opposition tries to catch the headlines of newspapers rather than to influence the Members of this Council by argument. 'What is being done is not in the interest of the public', is what is shouted all the time.

I remember reading some time ago of an incident when the Empire-builders went to New Zealand and tried to persuade the people there to sell them some land. The New Zealanders said: 'How can we sell you land. The land is not ours. This land is created by God for us to use and for our children. If you wish you may occupy it and use it as long as you like.'

The hon. Nominated Member, Mr. Gajraj, described land as man's precious possession. I think one should reserve a description like that for one's wife and one's children and the description of the primitive New Zealanders that it is there for the use of mankind is more appropriate. Land is there as a national asset and any individual who suggests that land can be kept idle because the owner of it holds a piece of paper — a transport — cannot deny that it is a very grave sin to see that alongside those barren fields mankind is suffering for employment.

The hon. Member for New Amsterdam suggested that Government should utilize the Crown lands to settle people and to relieve the unemployment and the hon. Member for North Western District apparently supported that contention that Government should encourage the people to leave the rural lands on the coast and go to the hinterland. I do not think he can deny that the lands on the coast are far more fertile. Should we encourage the people to leave these fertile lands and go up into the interior, perhaps, in the white sand areas? We are going to fly these people right across and leave them there like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden!

Mr. Campbell mentions that roads should be built to the interior and the people who wished to occupy those lands should build these roads and then occupy the lands. Naturally, Government has on priority the building of roads to the interior, but what is to be done in the meanwhile? Perhaps the same remark made by a certain gentleman during the debate on the electricity failure can apply — "While the grass is growing the horse is starving". We are following Sir Frank Mc David's policy of compulsory acquisition of land wherever necessary and all this Bill seeks to do is to enable Government to acquire the lands by the payment in bonds whenever necessary.

Mr. Beharry: Members on this side of the Table, including myself, are opposed to this iniquitous Bill. [Laughter]. I do not think it should be put on the Statute Book of our country. It is true that I was the individual who wrote this Bill [Laughter], but hon. Members will be told the reason why it was written and how it has been distorted to suit the ideological beliefs of Members of the present Government. The purpose of this Bill, as it stands, is to convert freehold lands into leasehold lands. The present Government of this country is committed to a policy of leasehold. Lands at present occupied by people on land settlements are the sole property of the Government of British Guiana, and the present Government intends to retain ownership of those lands. It is not satisfied to retain ownership of land on the existing land settlement schemes, but to pursue that policy with respect to new land settlement schemes. But that does not quite satisfy the ideology of the Members of the present Government who intend to go a little further. The present Government intends to appropriate people's freehold lands and to have the previous owners working on the lands as tenants of the Government.

Some time ago these very Members of the Government argued that there should be freedom of the people; that a man should not own land and make profit

[MR. BEHARRY]

by another man's labour. Yet we find the present Government wanting to own not merely Colony lands but lands owned by private individuals. That is why I say the Bill is iniquitous. It is only applicable to undeveloped lands which are to be acquired and paid for by the issue of bonds which are to be redeemed after a period of 20 years. But Government does not intend to sell the undeveloped lands after they have been acquired; its intention is to retain ownership of them.

When this Bill was drafted the intention was that there should be a complementary Bill for freehold ownership of land to operate hand-in-hand with this Land Bonds Bill, but freehold ownership of land is being denied by the present Government. I want to sound a note of warning to the present Government that the largest land-owners are the worthy inhabitants of this country, and that the greatest supporters of the present Government are the people in the rural areas. I am sounding a note of warning to the Government to take heed lest it be too late.

Some time ago a Motion was moved in this Council recommending to Government that settlers on land settlement schemes should be allowed to own the lands they occupy, but the present Government denies the people that right. The day to encourage consciousness of private ownership has past, so far as the present Government is concerned. I do not only sound a note of warning to the rural inhabitants but to every sane and every reasonable person, that this is a semi-nationalization Bill. Tomorrow we may have another Bill for the nationalization of industry and commerce.

An area of 27,000 acres of land is to be developed on the Corentyne at an expenditure of \$14 million — money which this country has borrowed and which the general taxpayers will have to pay back. Government has already spent \$14 million on the Black Bush scheme,

and every land settlement scheme is being run at a loss. When this Bill was drafted the intention was that undeveloped land should be brought into production. The Minister rightly points out that there is considerable unemployment in this country, and the intention of the Bill was that Government should acquire lands, but as it has no money to pay cash for them a credit system was devised in the form of land bonds. The intention was that lands would be purchased with bonds and sold to farmers in 15 and 20-acre plots.

We know that our farmers are poor people, and the poorest of them should be settled on those lands. Provision was made that the land bonds would be redeemable after 20 years, so that the lands acquired would not cost the Government one penny, because the farmers to whom they were to be sold would pay for their plots in instalments out of the proceeds from their crops. It was a system whereby people who did not own lands would be able to do so.

Under this Bill, however, people will not become owners of land but slaves of the Government as perpetual tenants. I have often heard it said that land-owners exploit their tenants and suck their blood. This Government intends to perpetuate that system by owning land so that it can own the people too. I am asking our people to take note. It is said that people are starving, and it is asked: why not allow the Government to go even to Russia, or to any other part of the world, to raise money? But that would not be the solution. The solution to starvation is to encourage private industry: to encourage people with capital to come into our country. By encouraging such people Government will not have to pay interest on the money invested by private enterprise, but will cash in on the unemployment situation, because people would be working and spending money. But this Government does not believe in private ownership, so why should it encourage private investors to come into the country?

The philosophy of the present Government is that everything should be owned by Government. That is one of the contributing factors to the unemployment situation; that is one of the reasons why the purchasing power of those who are working is so low, and one of the reasons why the majority of the people in this country cannot afford to live as human beings should live. I wish to warn this Council and the country at large that the situation in this country will become worse every day once the policy of the present Government is maintained.

I do not speak here in support of any political Party or individual, but as I see the issues in our country. Traders can only sell when people have money to buy, and people can only have money to spend when they work. Are our people to work only with the Government? If that is to be the order of things then this country is on the road to ruin.

That is why I wanted to make it clear why this Bill was written. I wanted to let the Council know that the intention was to allow people to own their plots of land. If land is to be acquired by Government and paid for with bonds, who is going to own the land? We heard the Minister say that no one should own land, yet he says that it should be owned by Government. If this Government is genuine and honest in its intention that land not beneficially occupied should be developed, then I suggest that a land tax should be imposed on all land not beneficially occupied.

The owners of such land would not afford to pay a tax on land which is not producing anything, and would be anxious to sell it if they cannot put it into beneficial use. Why should Government want to buy land? A fundamental policy is involved. I am not criticizing the Government but simply asking that the Bill be deferred for further consideration to allow the "Opposition" to be heard.

Today every land settlement scheme is owned and run by Government. Every scheme, land settlement included, run by Government is running at a loss to the taxpayers of this country, and this Bill refers to land settlement schemes. When this Bill was drafted, the intention was to follow it up with a Supplementary Bill. The fact that the intention is now different represents one of the major issues which caused me not to remain with the Government. Marketing, milk, fish, timber — all these enterprises operated by Government are throwing money down the drain.

When the contract was signed for the development of Black Bush Polder, it was just two or three weeks after the present Government took office, therefore by this time there should have been some useful occupation of the lands. The idea was to relieve the unemployment situation. What are we doing with the money borrowed for these development purposes? Fourteen million dollars for expenditure on Black Bush Scheme. The general taxpayers will have to pay it back; they will also have to pay the taxes that will go up with the increased cost of operating land settlement schemes run by this Government. The Government should do as any good businessman when he is running his business year after year at a loss. What does he do? He commits suicide.

This Bill provides for the issue of bonds for the purchase of land and those bonds may be redeemed after 20 years. I am asking the Government to be good enough to sell the lands they acquire to people who will occupy them over a period of 20 years, and payments can be made from a fund created by the Government. If it is the intention of the Government to allow people to own land, then I appeal to them to follow my advice. I have heard it said that the people who own the land own the country. The Government owns all the lease lands, and now the object is to own freehold land as well, so the Government will own the Colony.

[MR. BEHARRY]

Only the other day I was asked by someone to donate part of my produce to the present Government. Mind you, the presence of vested interest has been criticized by the Majority Party as being one of the reasons for this country being backward, and here was a man who was able to indicate to me that this political Party was trying to become a business organization. I sent him quietly away, because I would have nothing to do with these people and their political racket, but the incident showed the pattern of thought of the Government.

This Bill fits in with that outlook and I am appealing not to the "Opposition" but to Government not to press this measure. An old saying goes: "*Donkey has big ears, but yet he can't hear his own story*". The people of the rural areas are beginning to think and to own. If we were to examine the culture of the people of the rural areas, we would find the basis of their existence is to create something and own something. This Bill seeks to change them from land-owners into serfs. But maybe the Government is more influenced by politics than by an outlook which reflects development and the feeding of hungry people all over the country. Maybe the Government is not satisfied with owning Ministries but wants to own other people's properties, and I am warning that it is wrong, and that the policy should be changed in favour of the ownership of property and land by the people of this country.

The intention of the Land Settlement Department was that people who went to live on land settlement schemes would own the land—"you move in and move on". The intention was that Government would develop the land and sell it at a certain cost on a deferred payment basis over a period of 20 years, and then develop new lands for other people to occupy. That would have brought more lands into production.

I am appealing to the Minister of Natural Resources to consider the people

of the rural areas. If it is the intention of Government to bring into use all lands not beneficially occupied, if it is the intention to bring more lands under production, then I appeal to him to introduce a Bill whereby all lands not beneficially occupied would be subject to a tax; I also appeal to him to adopt the policy of "move in and move on." I would remind the Minister that a man who possesses nothing can never give employment to another who needs it. It takes a man who has something to give employment to others. I am asking him to view seriously the situation that will result from the implementation of this Bill. Let this Bill be deferred for further consideration. The Government can do this country good if it accepts some advice from this side of the Council.

I know that the Members over there are the Government. They may be proud of the fact that they are the rulers, the masters, and if they introduce a measure here, they have the right to push it through and see it implemented; but I would remind them that it is still the privilege of the Government to consider and weigh carefully schemes or policies that may help our country. I think it would show the bigness of their hearts. It would bring their true bigness to be recognised if they were to defer the Bill for further consideration. I end my remarks to the Minister by appealing to him, in the interest of the country, to re-consider this Bill.

Mr. Saffee: I rise to support this Bill and I wish to compliment the Minister for bringing forward this measure which, without doubt, is going to help this country to solve one of the pressing problems of the day.

We heard just now one hon. Member saying that the policy of the present Government is to confiscate people's land and what not, but what I can see from his remarks is that he was just blowing off hot steam without looking realistically into the question of this Land Bonds Bill.

As far as I can see, Mr. Speaker, this Bill seeks to work in conjunction with the Acquisition of Land Settlement Ordinance which came into being in 1957. We are not really discussing the question of acquiring land. What we are discussing now is how the land is to be paid for when it is acquired by Government. That point I think was really missed all the time during the discussion of this Bill. Section 5 of the present Land Bonds Bill says:

"Nothing in this Ordinance shall be deemed to require any person entitled to compensation under section 11 or subsection (3) of section 16 of the Acquisition of Lands for Public Purposes Ordinance to accept such compensation in land bonds."

May I quote from the Acquisition of Land Settlement Ordinance, Section 7 which reads:

"Before an order is made under section 3 of the Principal Ordinance and section 3 of this Ordinance the Governor, acting in his discretion may, and if requested to do so in writing by the owner or occupier of the land shall, by notice published in the Gazette, issue a Commission appointing two or more commissioners to determine by investigation whether or not it is in the public interest that the land in respect of which it is sought to make an order as aforesaid should be acquired for a land settlement scheme having regard to the extent to which the land is not beneficially occupied or utilized for agriculture."

We hear the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara, repeatedly mentioning that Government intends to take away lands, and he wants to give the impression that Government is just going to clamp down on the people and tell them to get out. He has misinterpreted the procedure for acquiring lands and for paying for the lands.

I think at this time in our country when so many unemployed people are walking the streets to find jobs, many homes sometimes have to do without a meal or so a day. It is good to talk about opening up lands in the interior, but how many of them have an idea of how lands are developed in the interior.

Developing lands in the interior will entail a tremendous amount of capital which we find so very hard to realize today. Every backward country is trying today to move up and develop, and so we find that there are heavy demands for capital in every backward country all over the world and British Guiana stands in no different position from those countries.

In the coastal area there are around 220,000 acres of good agricultural lands and a great amount of these lands are idling. We do not want to take away people's land if they are utilizing it. It is provided in the Ordinance that if such land is not properly utilized only then can Government acquire it. Some of the Members are giving very wrong impressions as to what are the intentions of this Bill.

I would like to refer to a few points raised by the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara when he said that the Black Bush Polder scheme would have to be paid for by the general taxpayers of the country. He failed to mention that when these people are put on the land and they start to produce they have to pay rents for the land and drainage and irrigation charges. He failed to mention that, and he did it deliberately — that the money would be paid by the general taxpayers and nothing would be coming back — so the question of the general taxpayers financing the development of this scheme is not quite true. It is true that it will be financed by the taxpayers but money would be coming back to the Government by way of land rents and so forth. He said that what the Government is seeking to do is to take away private land and make it into freehold. This is a very old story. I cannot imagine a Government seeing a man having a well-kept estate, properly developed and producing and telling him 'look here, you are not using the land properly, get out'. I cannot imagine such an unrealistic Government.

He also said 'the people would have to work the land to provide for old age.'

[MR. SAFFEE]

Nothing is wrong with providing for old age if you are able to go to the land and develop it. I am certain if a man gets a piece of land at Mara or Vergenoegen he would be able to produce and make savings, so this question of owning a piece of freehold land for old age is nonsense. A man can provide security for his old age by putting his savings in the Bank, or he could take out a Life Insurance policy. He could do that if he works his land properly and beneficially. It is Government's policy that land which is not developed must come into production. It must come into use. The question whether Government is the landlord or a private owner is the landlord does not come in here. I am quite certain when these lands are cleared, like Mara and Vergenoegen, they can be put into production very very quickly; and once those lands start to produce the people will be able to pay their rents and Government will be able to help the unemployment situation.

The hon. Member for Georgetown North, brought some very unreasonable arguments into the discussion on this Land Bonds Bill. He started out by saying that we are acquiring land in certain areas when there are people unemployed in other areas and we are discriminating. There is unemployment and this is a question of selecting people to settle on those lands, and I can tell you, as a member of a Land Settlement Committee, that every precaution is being taken that the most suitable are selected to occupy the land on the Land Settlement Schemes; so I cannot see how this question of discrimination raised by my hon. Friend can convince anybody.

My hon. Friend, the Member for New Amsterdam, said in this Council that it is Government's policy to confiscate people's land. I will treat him in the same way as I treated my hon. Friend, the Member for Eastern Demerara. As I said, there seems to be a misconception of this Land Bonds Bill.

The hon. Minister pointed out on the first day that this Bill was patterned after the Jamaica Bill. I thought many of them here are strong supporters of certain parties in Jamaica and I have not heard them, at any time, criticize Jamaica for doing such a thing, but because this Bill is brought by the People's Progressive Party there is this bias. I think that is the wrong way to look at anything which will bring development and progress to a country. It is purely a partisan view; it is not patriotic, it is not broad-minded.

This legislation will not only help to put undeveloped lands into cultivation but will encourage the owners of freehold lands which are lying idle, to develop them, because they will realize that if they do not do so Government would take their lands away. That will help the unemployment situation and put more land under cultivation. What is wrong about that? There are certain areas in my constituency between Blairmont and Cab-bawa where there are over 30,000 acres of land lying idle, while people in my constituency are starving. Many of them have not even an acre of land to plant. Must we encourage such things? We want to see people live and prosper. There are thousands of acres of land now lying idle on the right bank of the Abary, while unemployed people are starving. We would like to see those people employed. This Bill will help in many ways to increase production, and by increasing production Government will be able to collect more revenue and put more people on the land. I think the Bill is worthy of support.

Mr. Burnham : Personally, I do not see the necessity for dealing at great length with the Bill which is before the Council, but there are certain observations which I think are both apposite and relevant. In the first place I must congratulate the hon. Minister of Communications and Works upon his admission as to who are the originals his revolutionary Government copies. He pointed to Sir Frank McDavid as the invisible mentor

behind this Bill. I suppose when one is in a difficult position one is entitled to seek any kind of refuge, though I am a little surprised that the present Government should have both the brass face and the temerity to cite Sir Frank McDavid. So far as I am concerned, however very eminent an authority Sir Frank McDavid may be, the mere citing of his name neither impresses nor frightens me.

I am also a little surprised at the regular references that have been made on the Government side to the fact that some Members sitting on this side of the Table have under another regime voted for the Acquisition of Land (Land Settlement) Ordinance of 1957. I thought that by now it had been clearly understood that there is some type of joint or common responsibility between Members of the Executive Council. I see that inquiry is being made. The Financial Secretary is the person from whom to acquire proof as to what was the position of other Members of the Executive Council in 1957.

I thought that by now it had been recognized that with the joint responsibility which obtains amongst Members of the Executive Council it is somewhat of a blow below the belt to accuse someone who happened to have been a Member of the Executive Council, of supporting a particular measure, because even in the P.P.P. Government we find it, and I know for a fact—I am sorry that the hon. Member for Eastern Demerara (Mr. Beharry) is not at present in his seat. He is the only ex-Minister whom I would have preferred to refer to now, and there are at present Ministers who from time to time disagree with the majority decisions of the Executive Council but come here and vote for particular measures. I see nothing wrong with that. I hold nothing against people who do that, but I must observe that the Minister of Communications and Works, who is a Member of the Executive Council, should know that a Member of the Executive Council, according to the customs and usages, normally has to vote

according to the majority, for even on the Government side many a backbencher has to vote as the Government whip dictates, and it would obtain also so far as the Executive Council is concerned.

Enough has been said with respect to the substance of the Bill for me to attempt to repeat, but I desire to observe one fact before I take my seat, and that is that though capital has been made of the fact that technically this Bill has nothing to do directly with land acquisition but merely prescribes how payments for land that is acquired are to be made, it does seek to amend Ordinance No. 13 of 1957 in a material particular. If one were to look at Clause 14 of the Bill one would recognize that subsections (4), (5) and (6) of Section 7 of the Acquisition of Land (Land Settlement) Ordinance, 1957, are to be re-numbered (5), (6) and (7) respectively, and a new subsection (4) inserted.

I did not have the advantage of hearing the Minister on the new subsection (4). If perchance he attempted to explain and to give an undertaking that it will not be used for unreasonable or nefarious purposes I do not apologize for still criticizing its insertion for, as I understand it, that subsection is such as to empower the Government eventually to seek to acquire compulsorily land, the greater part of which is beneficially occupied or utilized for agriculture. It is capable of another interpretation, but speaking for myself I should say that certainly it does not seem to be a provision which should pass this Council, for if the greater part of a particular block of land is beneficially occupied and/or utilized for agriculture it is somewhat unfair, merely because a small and maybe infinitesimal part is not so beneficially occupied and/or utilized that the whole should be compulsorily acquired.

If one looks at subsection (1) of Section 7 of the Acquisition of Land (Land Settlement) Ordinance, No. 13 of

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1957, one will see that that subsection is so phrased that the emphasis is whether or not the land is beneficially occupied or utilized for agriculture. In other words, I would submit that the average Court interpreting subsection (1) would be inclined to the view that if a substantial or the greater portion of land is beneficially occupied and/or utilized for agriculture, it would not be a proper case for acquisition merely because a small part is not occupied or utilized; but subsection (4) is so worded that it can be a milestone around the necks of persons who have beneficially used the greater part of their land.

I am inclined to be most charitable today, and consequently I shall attribute no ulterior motive to the hon. Minister. I shall merely say it was a slight oversight which I hope he will remedy. He did not tell us in the Objects and Reasons why subsection (4) was introduced. As I see it, subsection (4) was calculated to give power to the Government to seize land—let me use a more legalistic term, to acquire land—even if the greater part of that land is beneficially occupied or utilized. Whatever may be the intention of inserting subsection (4), may I point out that the intention of the Legislature is immaterial if the words in the laws are clear. Those words as they stand will give power to the Government which I think should not be given. If my original suggestion that this is a deliberate insertion for a specific purpose is correct, it may be answered by a statement by the Government or from the Government side that if a small part of a plot of land is not beneficially occupied or utilized there is no sanction applied to the owner unless he acquires the whole land.

That may be the answer, but to that answer I will give this reply; if one finds there is a hiatus in the law or a blank in the legislative provision, there are other ways of remedying it apart from this means which, to my mind, is both unfair

and unfortunate, and unreasonable. When the Bill goes into Committee I propose to move an Amendment to subsection (4) of Section 7 of Ordinance No. 13 of 1957, as enacted by Clause 14 of the Bill.

The Attorney-General (Mr. Austin): I wonder if the hon. Member who has just spoken would be relieved of his anxiety in connection with the Amendment of Section 7 of the Ordinance if he read Clause 5 (1) of this Bill:

"Nothing in this Ordinance shall be deemed to require a vendor to accept compensation in land bonds in respect of any land or part of any land unless commissioners appointed under section 7 of the Acquisition of Land (Land Settlement) Ordinance 1957 have reported to the Governor in Council that such land or part thereof is not beneficially occupied or utilised for agriculture."

The implication is that notwithstanding the provisions of the 1957 statute, if there is a parcel of land which the Government considers should be acquired for land settlement and it is found that while 90% of it is not beneficially occupied, but nevertheless 10% is under cultivation, the Government will nevertheless not be precluded from acquiring the land.

I am fortified in that view by Section 7 (1) of the 1957 Ordinance, which states that the Commissioners shall make an investigation as to whether or not it is in the public interest that the land be acquired for land settlement, having regard to the extent to which the land is beneficially occupied.

Turning to the Bill before the Council, the object of Clause 5 (1) is, to say that for example, if a man has 100 acres of land which the Government wishes to acquire for land settlement 90 acres are not beneficially occupied, he may be compelled to take bonds for those 90 acres; but if a report of the commissioner states that 10 acres are beneficially occupied Government must pay hard cash for those 10 acres—in the same way that it would have to pay hard cash for any

ordinary compulsory acquisition. It is no hardship to oblige a man to loan money to the Government to enable it to acquire unbeneficially occupied land. It would be the reverse if the land were in beneficial occupation.

I think therefore that the anxiety which the hon. Member for Georgetown Central expressed is not justified in the light of the legislation taken as a whole. The Land Acquisition law, Chapter 179, must be read as one with the provisions of this Bill, so far as interpretation is concerned. The Government was amply justified in inserting reference to the 1957 Ordinance in this Bill, because without requiring the commissioners to satisfy the authority concerned that the land is not beneficially occupied or otherwise, Government would not be able to give effect to its solemn undertaking that it will not make a land owner take bonds for land which is being used for agricultural purposes.

Mr. Benn : It is not easy to reply to speeches in a debate in which the majority of Members speaking on the subject have completely missed the point. But, of course, we are to remember that we are approaching the time of inter-colonial cricket in British Guiana, and quite a few people will want to step out of their crease, but Members will not be bowled not only by arguments on this side of the Council but also by their own consciences.

Perhaps because I referred to the question of unemployment and to sugar estates, some Members—one went out of his way to do so—read into this some discriminatory policy on the part of this Government in favour of one section of the population. If those Members were to recall the speech of my predecessor in office and the quotations he made, and the statistics he gave concerning the percentages of people on land settlement schemes and on other Crown lands, they would not have ventured out of their crease. But, as I said, hon. Members failed to see the point we were

referring to in this Bill. As the hon. Member for Western Berbice says, the Bill makes provision for paying by bonds or, in some cases, in hard cash, for land acquired under the Land Acquisition Ordinance. And that is just what the Bill says. Members have read into the Bill and have mentioned such things as leasehold and freehold and beneficial occupation. They have spoken about credit for farmers and have spoken about giving persons who take up lands the opportunity of purchasing those lands. I wish to assure the hon. Member for Georgetown North that there is no intention of the Government to discriminate on this question of land allocation. The allegation was made here once before and my predecessor in Office confounded the persons who made those allegations and I think, today, I must assure the hon. Member for Georgetown North that there is no intention of allocating lands to one section of the community.

Many other points came out of this discussion—the question of: ‘Should the Government have the right of acquiring lands which are not beneficially occupied?’—but progressive Governments in our Commonwealth countries and all over the world have passed laws which give them the power to acquire lands which are not beneficially occupied. I think in the United Kingdom there is The English Agriculture Holdings Act which penalizes all farmers who do not conform to the special agricultural practices. I can refer at length to recommendations.

I had quoted from the Committee of 1931 which was headed by the late Sir Alfred Crane and which made recommendations for the proper utilization and redistribution of lands. The Committee referred, as I had quoted at length from a section, to the large percentage of people who had been thrown off the sugar estates and had been living in villages and who did not get the opportunity of securing a piece of land. Those people have carefully studied the question before the recommendations were made, so that if

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the Government erred, it erred following in the footsteps of an eminent Guianese who, in the past, made recommendations in this Bill.

If the Government erred, it erred in the footsteps of the Caribbean Commission which suggested the taking of measures to acquire lands which were not beneficially occupied. If the Government erred, it erred in the tradition of Mr. Frank Brown, who came to this country and went into the whole question of land and wrote a Report on "Land Settlement Problems in British Guiana with particular reference to the Coastal Belt." We erred following this expert. If the Government erred, it erred following all the international organisations which had looked at the whole question of ownership of land and utilization and had recommended that land should be utilized for the benefit of the public and that lands that are not beneficially occupied must be properly utilized even if Government had to acquire it.

Is this Government saying that it is going out tomorrow and take away lands from the people and give them no chance to raise their voices? Does not the Bill make provision for commissioners to investigate properly the utilization of lands?

Those people who claim that they were in the Executive Council when the Land Acquisition Bill was discussed to be passed by the Legislative Council—those Members whom the hon. Member for Georgetown North was trying to represent—admitted themselves that it was a serious matter, and they did not even have the guts to come out of the Executive Council and resign because a measure was going to be introduced into the Legislative Council which struck at the root of what they call British democracy. No, but they sat there and, as one Member of the previous Government admitted, voted against an amendment to give owners of land one year to see if they will put the land under cultivation before Government acquires it. I am not saying that they were right or wrong.

All that I am saying is that they have come here now and because it is this Government—this Government which they continue to malign, and to oppose every measure which it puts before this Council—they are opposed to the Bill. I have the speeches of some of the Members on the other side of the Table. I would not read them. But those people sat down here and supported the Land Acquisition Bill. They did not have the guts to say 'I do not agree with it. I will walk out.' Perhaps like one hon. Member, they preferred to be kicked out.

Let us go back to the question of lands to be acquired, from areas like Henrietta and Vrouw Anna to the lands lying idle like the lands adjoining Mara and the Black Bush Polder and about lands all over the country. Let me read what the Caribbean Commission said about such lands. This was a report on the West Indian Conference, held in Puerto Rico in 1955, and I think Sir Frank McDavid was the Member who attended that Conference. I quote:

"The idea that land is the concern of the entire community is recognised in a number of countries and has found expression in legislation for the development and protection of natural resources. The Conference recognised the existence of different systems of land law which might modify the application of this concept, but felt that the use of the land should not be regarded solely as the concern of one man or one generation."

That came from the Caribbean Commission, not this present Minister of Natural Resources—not Brindley Benn's comments.

Let us look at paragraph 37—and I am taking the quotation from the *Hansard* of Friday, 5th April, 1957: The Conference recommended:

"That Governments of the area accept the concept that the use of land must be regarded not only as the business of the owner but also as the proper concern of the community as a whole and to provide legislation to give practical effect to this concept. Where the interests of landlords and/or tenants conflict with those of the community, the interests of the community should prevail."

There are many other sections of this Report of 1955 that can be quoted to show the great concern of persons who feel that the land should be properly utilized and that land should not lie idle. As I said, portions can be taken and will be taken from Mr. Brown's report and other reports to prove that the question of the best utilization of lands should be the subject of public concern.

Mr. Benham, who is well known in the West Indies—and perhaps it will be relevant if I read from this *Hansard* a Minute quoted therein, and which was handed down by one of the wisest and most far-seeing Governors, Sir Gordon Lethem: I quote :

"I wish to confirm the verbal request I made some weeks ago that we should consider amplifying Government's powers for land acquisition. In my last colony we did this by expanding the definition of "purpose" to cover land settlement, housing, etc. and I imagine this may be the simplest way here. If I remember correctly the proposal that Government should exercise powers of acquisition where justifiable was preferable to any particular form of taxation designed to cause the relinquishment of land not beneficially occupied."

My Friend mentioned land tax. The Government have spoken about land tax already. The hon. Member who spoke about land tax has already repudiated some of his beliefs as a Member of the Government and I am surprised that he should have mentioned something that the Government discussed.

Mr. Speaker : Just a moment. It is now five o'clock and I understand that the Minister of Labour, Health and Housing has something very pressing to bring forward.

Mr. Benn : I was wondering whether you would allow me to conclude the quotation from Sir Gordon Lethem's Minute.

Mr. Speaker : Go ahead if you wish.

Mr. Benn : The Minute goes on to state:

"In any case the future seems to me to demand that Government be in a position

to initiate land settlement and housing schemes in places where conditions make it desirable rather than only where land comes into Government hands by accidents on sale by owners."

With Your Honour's permission I will defer the rest of my speech until the next meeting of the Council.

DEATH OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF CEYLON

The Minister of Labour, Health and Housing (Mrs. Jagan): Before Council adjourns I ask permission of Your Honour and hon. Members to move the following Motion :

"Be it resolved: That this Council records its profound regret at the death of Mr. Solomon Bandaranaike, Prime Minister of Ceylon, and directs that an expression of sympathy be conveyed to the Parliament of Ceylon and to his widow and relatives."

Mr. Ram Karran : I beg to second the Motion.

Mr. Speaker : I shall be grateful if hon. Members of Council will stand while I put the Question. I am sure that this Motion finds favour with every Member of this Council. I shall now formally put the Motion.

Motion carried unanimously, Members standing.

Mr. Speaker : The Clerk of the Council will transmit a copy of the Resolution with an expression of this Council's sympathy to the Parliament of Ceylon and to the widow and relatives of the deceased Prime Minister.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chief Secretary : I move that Council adjourn until two o'clock tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker : Council is adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at two o'clock.