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THE *Speaker* *Chairman*

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATS

OFFICIAL REPORT

[VOLUME 1]

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

34th Sitting

Friday, 20th January, 1967

## NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

*The Assembly met at 2p.m.*

*Prayers*

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

*Present*

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

*Members of the Government*

*Members*

The Honourable L. F. S. Burnham, Q.C.,	— Prime Minister
Dr. the Honourable P. A. Reid,	— Minister of Trade
The Honourable P. S. d'Aguiar,	— Minister of Finance
The Honourable N. J. Blissember,	— Minister of Information (Leader of the House).
The Honourable R. E. Cheeks,	— Minister of Local Government
The Honourable E. F. Correia,	— Minister of Communications
The Honourable Mrs. W. Gaskin,	— Minister of Education
The Honourable L. John,	— Minister of Home Affairs
The Honourable R. J. Jordan,	— Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources
The Honourable M. Kasim,	— Minister of Works and Hydraulics
The Honourable W. O. R. Kendall, C.B.E.,	— Minister of Health and Housing
The Honourable C. A. Merriman,	— Minister of Labour and Social Security
<i>Parliamentary Secretaries</i>	
Mr. D. B. deGroot,	— Parliamentary Secretary, Prime Minister's Office
Mr. J. Bowman,	— Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Social Security
Mr. O. E. Clarke,	— Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education
Mr. P. Duncan,	— Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Local Government
Mr. J. G. Joaquin, O.B.E., J.P.,	— Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Works and Hydraulics
Mr. V. Too-Chung,	— Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Finance

*Other Members*

Mr. W. A. Blair  
Mr. J. Budboo  
Mr. W. Carrington  
Mr. R. G. B. Field-Ridley  
Mr. D. G. B. Makrag  
Mr. T. A. Sancho  
Mr. M. F. Singh  
Mr. J. . Thomas  
Mr. E. Tello, Deputy Speaker  
Rev. A. B. Trotman  
Mr. E. M. S. Wharton, J.P.

*Members of the Opposition*

Dr. C. B. Jagan, Leader of the Opposition  
Mr. A. Chase  
Mr. am Karan  
Mr. R. Chandisingh  
Mr. H. J. W. Hubbard  
Dr. Charles Jacob, Jr.  
Mr. C. V. Kes  
Dr. F. . ansahoye  
Mr. E. M. G. ilson  
Mr. M. amid, J.P.  
Mr. J.E.S. Luck  
Mr. D. C. Jagan  
Mr. H. Lafi  
Mr. M. ban, J.P.  
Mr. Y. Ally  
Mr. R. D. Persaud  
Mr. M. Poonzi  
Dr. S. A. Ram' n  
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 S. S. Rampal, C.M.G., Q.C.,  
Attorney-General and Minister of State  
Mr. H. Prashed  
Mr. B. H. Benn - on leave  
Mr. L. Linde - leave  
Mr. E. M. Stoby  
Mr. M. Bhagwan

REQUEST FOR LEAVE TO MOVE  
THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE  
ASSEMBLY ON A MATTER OF UR-  
GENT PUBLIC BUSINESS

Gastro-Enteritis Epidemic

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. Jagan): Mr. Speaker I wish to move the Adjournment of the Assembly on an urgent matter pertaining to the gastro-enteritis epidemic. I have already given you notification of this. I hope that you will grant permission for this matter to be taken this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker: Permission is granted. We will deal with this matter at 4-30 p.m. today.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

APPROVAL OF ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE BUDGET DEBATE

Assembly resumed debate on the Motion moved by the Minister of Finance on 16th January, 1967, for the approval of estimates of expenditure for the financial year 1967, totalling \$110,645,905.

Mr. Speaker: We will now begin the debate on the Motion. I understand that agreement has been reached between the Government and the Opposition whereby the main Opposition speaker — Dr. Jacob, I think — will be allowed to speak uninterruptedly for one hour and the Adjournment will be taken at 6.30 p.m. today.

Dr. Jacob: On Monday last, hon. Members listened to the reading of an extraordinary document prepared by the Coalition Government. The 1967 Budget statement was remarkable, not because it presented a true and faithful picture of the economy, that is, an objective assessment of the performance and an honest forecast of future developments, but because of the light it shed on the character, not only of the Government but of its backers, and also on the character of the hon. Minister of

Finance (Mr. d'Aguiar) who presented that statement.

The picture of a buoyant economy, of public confidence and of social stability projected by the Minister is no more than a distorted image of the existing hard facts and realities of life in this country. The statistics were tailored and/or misused by the Minister to present this glowing picture. Dishonest comparisons were made. I recall that in the first Budget presented by the Coalition Government a misuse of statistics took place in which the Minister of Finance compared his estimates of revenue and expenditure with actual revenue and expenditure for some previous year. He compared unlike things. In this Budget there has been a repetition of the same sort of thing.

I remember that it was the Victorian statesman Disraeli, a Tory, who made the observation that there are lies, damned lies, and statistics.

I do not agree that statistics, per se, are lies. However, the use to which statistics may be put is what makes them, in the words of Disraeli, worse than damned lies, and this is exactly what the Government has done.

Now, when we strip the 1967 Budget of all its deceptive and sugar-coated verbiage, what picture does it present of the economy of neo-colonial Guyana?

2.10 p.m.

This Coalition Government says that Guyana is not in the grip of stagnation. This is not true. It also says that its policies are not a hindrance to progress. This is a half-truth. Of course, its policies are not a hindrance to progress, but what we have to do is to ask ourselves this: A hindrance to whose progress? Certainly not the progress of the masses of this country! They are not a hindrance to the progress of the wealthy natives and the big expatriate com-

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panies and monopolies that operate in Guyana today.

What, may I ask, are the realities of the present situation? There is a fall in living standards for the masses of this country. There is increasing unemployment and an increasing crime rate as a result of unemployment and bad social conditions. Then there is the rising cost of living and, with this Budget, there will be a further increase in the cost of living. There is creeping inflation. All of the wage gains that may have been made by the workers of this country have been wiped out completely by the increase in the cost of living.

There has been, during last year, a record number of strikes, indicating a grave state of industrial unrest, and this year the people have been provided with inadequate public services by the Coalition Government. There have been many unfilled posts—professional, technical and administrative. Even stationery has been short in the Public Service. There has been a serious shortage of drugs which has placed in jeopardy the health of the entire nation.

What are the reasons for those things? Fiscal and monetary policies have not been used to produce for the Government, the adequate funds which it needs to run this country. The benefits of all its development expenditure accrue not to the masses of this country but to the big expatriate interests and the native rich. Very little of the fruits of development trickle down to the masses of the country. Further reasons are that since the coalition took office, there has been a stop to the redistribution of income. Most of the fiscal measures we introduced, which were aimed at redistributing wealth and income, have been virtually abolished by the Coalition Government.

The increased gross domestic product and national income figures pro-

duced by the hon. Minister of finance do not give a true picture of the economy as a whole. It looks good on paper. But when one examines what is happening throughout the country, one finds that today the rich of Guyana, local and expatriate, are much better off than the masses. The poor people in Guyana have become poorer, relatively and absolutely, just because the fruits of whatever development is taking place are not being equitably distributed throughout the country. Loans and grants received from abroad are directed towards the same old things because of the strings attached to them. The Minister of Finance has, therefore, projected a false image of the economy; the economy is in a serious state of inflation.

Inflation is an economic disease which damages the masses of a country more than anyone else. The deficit financing which the Government has been indulging in since it came into office, with no increase in productivity, has caused inflationary pressures to develop in the country. There is no increased production to offset the increased money supply, because of the Government's borrowing for current purposes from the commercial banks. Deficit financing, too, makes the rich in any country richer because the Government has to borrow from them by selling them securities. This Government in Guyana is paying those who lent it money exceedingly high rates of interest. In other words, the Government proposes to make the rich in the country richer.

The poor people, the clerical and the working masses, do not have money to put into Government securities. They are barely existing, but in spite of that, more tax burdens are being placed on them. Therefore, the only people who can benefit from this deficit financing which the Government has been indulging in is the class of people that this Government

represents, and the same class of people which schemed and plotted to get it into office. Most of the debt — \$15 million — due to the banks has increased the money supply. Prices have gone up and the value of money has fallen as a result of governmental policies.

Members of the Government only talk about import substitution, but no action is being taken. What, indeed, they are trying to do is to strangle the agricultural sector of the economy. They are not really interested in import substitution because the expatriate companies are the biggest importers. If there were to be any real import substitution, who would suffer most? The friends of the Coalition Government! Would this Coalition Government deliberately set out to hurt its friends, those who schemed and plotted to

would do that. The high propensity to import, to which the Minister of Finance referred, is something which is in the interests of the business community, and particularly the expatriates who operate in this country.

We were told by the Minister of Finance that there was good progress in 1965. I have already explained that the progress in 1965 was mainly for the upper classes and not for the masses.

Again, what kind of a picture do we have? The picture of an economy in which there is an uneasy social calm. We were told that peace has been restored, that there are no civil disorders. This is true, but the reason for the absence of civil disorders in 1965 and 1966 is due to the fact that the inciters and the promoters of civil disorders are now the people in power. It is not in their interest to have their supporters make civil disorders. There is, however, no industrial peace. We have had more strikes than ever before in the history of this country.

2.20 p.m.

There is also more fear in Guyana. Let us look at the exodus of persons from this country: many of them are supporters of the minority party in the Coalition Government, the United Force. In 1965, 4,524 persons departed permanently from Guyana. In 1966, up to the end of November, 4,334 persons left the country. [Mr. d'Aguiar: "From what source are you quoting?"] The source is the Statistics Digest published by the Coalition Government. Then we have the recently enacted National Security Act, victimisation, and the favouritism practised by the Government. All of these things will increase the number of persons departing permanently from Guyana in the months and years to come.

I notice that the hon. Minister of Finance made no reference to the Caribbean Free Trade Area Agreement, which is calculated either to increase or to encourage West Indian immigration into this country. I wonder whether it is because the supporters of the United Force fear such immigration? Why did he not mention it? With reference to this question of fear, there is the flight of capital from Guyana. This has been encouraged for, perhaps, personal reasons by the members of the Government and, particularly, by the Minister of Finance who, as we all know, is an old enemy of sterling exchange control.

There is also presented to the people of this nation the picture of an economy in which the Government lives above its means. This has been admitted in the statement by the Minister of Finance. This Government is in perpetual debt, but being in perpetual debt makes the money-lenders and the banks richer. This condition in which the Government lives on overdrafts is going to continue, because the Government must, in gratitude to those people who have put

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it in power, adopt policies and measures to enrich them.

The Coalition Government has set a very bad example for the rest of the nation. It is going in for prodigal expenditure and conspicuous consumption, while the masses suffer as a result of this Government copying the example of rich Western nations. It has been the victim of what has been described as the "demonstration effect" the effect which the higher living standards of other countries have on the poorer countries. Like the ape this Government is, it lives above its means, and it produces further hardships for the bulk of the people in this country.

Many months ago I asked several questions relating to Government finances, but these questions have not even appeared on the Notice Paper. I asked the questions in order to get information as to how public finances are being managed. There is gross mismanagement, and the Government has been flouting the Standing Orders of this House. Questions ought to be answered within 14 days from the date on which they appear on the Notice Paper, but my questions have not yet appeared on the Notice Paper. What is the reason for this? While the Government squanders the taxpayers' money and talks about independence, which is a sham, the masses of the country are being squeezed progressively by the activities of the Government. Debt charges continue to rise, and the masses will be taxed more and more in order to help pay these charges. Of course, the Minister of Finance is a money-lender. There is a natural affinity between him and the other money-lenders, so he has to take action to help them.

We were told in the statement read out on Monday last of the economy in which there is an adverse trade balance. We are importing more than we are exporting; we are not taking

steps to increase local production. There are many other reasons for this unhealthy state of the trade balance. There is no real desire on this part of this Government to promote industrial enterprises. The imperialist friends of the Government will not promote this sort of thing. The Government talks about these things, but it does nothing to make them a reality. If we were to industrialise this country by manufacturing certain items, then the imperialist powers would lose valuable markets for their manufactured goods. It is in keeping with the policy of those foreign powers that this Government does not take steps to do certain things.

Added to that, the raw materials we produce and export are subject to price manipulation by the imperialist countries that dominate the world market. That is another reason for the bad trade balance not only in relation to Guyana, but to all underdeveloped countries in the world. This, in turn, leads to the deteriorating balance-of-payments position with which we are faced today.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development at a recent meeting complained about the price manipulations by the monopolists of the world market which have led to serious loss of income by underdeveloped countries. They said that there should be more stable prices for primary produce. If we do not get stable prices for our produce, I do not know what will happen to this country because this Government plans and intends to keep Guyana as a primary producer.

Again, according to the statement made on Monday last, we have the picture of a country that is totally dependent upon imperialist aid, the kind of aid that destroys political sovereignty — which it has already done, for there is no independence — and it also reduces a country and its people to a state of economic

serfdom. The Minister talked about this being a sovereign nation. That is one of the most brazen falsehoods contained in this document.

2.30 p.m.

Where is the confidence about which the Minister speaks when there is a flight of capital and, perhaps, of his own capital? We have the picture of an economy in which there is shameless fiscal discrimination against the masses in this country, against the working class. All that has been done has been for the benefit of the foreign investors. What about the Reynolds deal, which is still secret? This country has not been told about the giveaway of its wealth to the Reynolds Metal Company. What about the secret deal with the Demerara Bauxite Company? How has revenue benefited? If revenue had benefited, the Minister of Finance would have been the first to get up and tell this Assembly about it. There are no more capital taxes, which is a further example of fiscal discrimination.

When the P.P.P. Government was in office, direct taxes in this country were higher than indirect taxes, which fall largely on the masses. What has happened since the Coalition Government assumed office? Indirect taxes, such as customs duties, have risen, and today we find that there is a higher proportion of indirect than direct taxes. In other words, the poor people of this country are carrying a heavier tax burden than the wealthy classes in Guyana.

The trend that was established from 1961 to 1964 has been reversed, because this is a Government that governs in the interests of the wealthy. The Minister of Finance warned the people of this country that workers and consumers should not try to get more out of the economy than they put in. He warned workers and consumers, but he did not warn the exploiters in this country, the expatriate companies and imperialist monopo-

lies. He did not warn them, but he warned the consumers, which shows the contempt this Government has for the people who produce wealth in this country. His remarks have been misdirected; he should have directed them to those who got the Coalition into office. They are the ones who put the minimum into the economy and take out the maximum. The workers put in their labour, and sometimes their lives, but get nothing for it because of the economic system that prevails.

In addition to that, even though the workers put in their labour and their lives, they are robbed at every turn. That is why we are poor. That is why all puppet states are poor, and that is why they will make no progress. What the Government has to do is to restore the equitable system of taxation and bring back exchange control on sterling area transactions.

Also, inadequate service is provided. The statement of Monday last presented the picture of a country in which the public is not getting value for its money. It is paying for services, it is paying for goods, let us say, but it is not getting these things because money is wasted and squandered. The Minister himself admits this. Money is spent without authority, illegally, and the Government claims that it has made savings by denying the people the goods and services which were their due. What has happened to these savings? They have been wasted in other directions.

Let me continue with the picture presented. We have an economy in which agriculture is being strangled, but members of the Government pay lip-service to the modernisation and diversification of agriculture. Subsidies to agriculture have already been reduced, and the Government plans a further reduction of these subsidies.

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Members of the Government speak of rationalising subsidies. Last year when consumer taxes were increased by about \$2½ million, the Minister of Finance told this Assembly that he was rationalising customs duties, but the rationalisation of import duties resulted in an increase of \$2½ million in taxes on consumers in this country. I wonder what will happen to agriculture when the Minister rationalises agricultural subsidies in the near future?

In addition, the Coalition Government has been killing the only Guyanese owned industry in this country — I refer to rice — and it has been ruining the rice trade merely because the country is not sovereign as the Minister alleges. It is not sovereign in anything. The Government is acting at the dictation of its foreign rulers. A prosperous agriculture is necessary in any country for industrial growth, because the products of agriculture are needed to feed the growing industrial population, to find substitutes for imports, and to provide raw materials for local manufactures.

The Government is killing agriculture. It does not want industrial growth, as I said, because its masters will not permit industrial growth or growth of manufacturing enterprises in this country. Therefore, the optimism of the Coalition Government is unfounded, as indicated by the realities of the situation. The plain and unvarnished truth is that Guyana's economy is in a grave state of crisis. This picture has not been presented to the nation and to the world, and no amount of juggling of figures or circumlocution will be able to conjure away the bad state of the economy.

What are the reasons for the crisis? Both parties in the coalition are not free to implement their election pledges which were made to the masses of this country. We are worse off now. This country is worse

off than when it was under British rule, and the reason is this. Instead of having one imperialist power plundering us, we now have all of them, Uncle Sam and the other European imperial powers. There is fierce competition going on between all of these exploiters. At the moment it seems that Uncle Sam is winning and John Bull is losing. And, while this fierce struggle goes on, the Guyanese nation is losing most of all, and we will continue to lose, as long as this country is ruled as it is at the present time.

2.40 p.m.

What, therefore, may I ask, is the solution to this serious problem that faces this new nation? Three things are necessary. First, there must be reunification of the working class of this country. Secondly, there must be a recognition of the class struggle, and thirdly, there must be a will on the part of the masses of this country to make the decisive sectors of our economy, — social property; make them the property of society so that the whole people, the whole nation, the whole of Guyanese society will benefit from the fruits of their own toil and from the natural endowment of their country. At the moment, the Guyanese people are robbed of the produce of their labour, and the natural wealth of their country is going to foreign monopolies like the bauxite companies, the oil companies and many others.

I wish to deal with a few matters mentioned in the Budget statement. I have noted that there has been a great drop in the volume of money circulating in the economy. The Minister of Finance made no mention of this in this important statement. Why did he ignore the fall in the volume of currency in circulation? The reason is because he is conscious of the fact that the fruits of development have only been going into the pockets of the expatriates, and they ship the



money out. The masses of this country, the people who carry money, who do not have bank accounts, are the ones responsible for a large supply of money, but they have no money in their pockets now. The money has flown out because it went into the pockets of the wealthy expatriate companies. That is why the money supply has dropped.

In 1964, the volume of money in circulation was \$33.5 million in notes and coins. In 1966, the volume in circulation was \$22.5 million, a fall of nearly \$11 million. This is the measure of the exploitation of the workers of this country. It is also proof of the class character of the Coalition Government— anti-working class, anti-labour, pro-rich, pro-imperialist.

There has been much talk about restoration of confidence. Let us see how much of this is true. I have already mentioned the flight of capital. That in itself is not an indication of confidence, but that has resulted in the tight money situation in the country so much so that, recently, when the Georgetown Municipality — the members of which are either members of the two coalition parties in the Government or their supporters — asked this Government to guarantee an increase overdraft to the commercial banks, the Government naturally agreed, but when the Municipality went to the commercial banks, because of this tight money situation, because of the flight of capital which Mr. d'Aguiar is responsible for, the banks said they had no money to lend, even though the Government guaranteed, and the Municipality had to go without the increased overdraft. Is this an indication of confidence?

The members of the business and mercantile community, like the Government, have been living on borrowed funds, living on credit because many of them, on account of fear and the bad example set by the Min-

ister of Finance, have shifted their money out and put it in safer quarters. The *Official Gazette* of 31st December, 1966, disclosed in a statement of assets and liabilities of the commercial banks that, at the end of November 1966, deposits in the banks amounted to \$6.07 million whereas overdraft, that is money lent to the mercantile community, amounted to \$30.3 million. In other words, five times the amount of money on deposit was lent to the mercantile community because those in the mercantile community, the friends of this Government, have shifted their money abroad for safe keeping. Do all of these things to which I have referred indicate that there has been a restoration of confidence in the community, and particularly in this fraudulent Coalition Government that we have?

I will now refer to the tax measures. — Because of the Government's extravagance, waste, corruption and budgetary misallocation, the coalition now has to increase the burden on the working class in this country. — It will be increasing this year, by nearly \$3 million, indirect taxes which fall on the masses. In 1966 indirect taxation went up by \$2½ million so, within two years, an increased burden of \$5½ million has been placed on the working class.

On Monday last, the Minister told us that the effect of this increase on the retail price index will be less than 0.1 index point. In the same way as the statistics have been tailored to show a favourable state of the economy, just so this figure of 0.1 index point is also tailored. It is therefore fictitious and fraudulent, and the masses will discover — if they have not already done so — that their cost of living will jump many index points because the merchant friends of the Government will take the opportunity to increase prices not only on the commodities

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that have had their duties increased, but also on a wide range of untaxed commodities which are used by the masses largely. They will do this because the trade licence duties have also been increased by the Coalition Government.

2.50 p.m.

I should like, in view of the manner in which increased duties were presented in the House, that is, by group numbers and item numbers, to state some of the more essential items which have been taxed by the Coalition Government, and which will put increased burdens on the majority. The rich can afford to pay these increases. I have no doubt about that. But what we are concerned about is the effect of these increases on those who can least afford to pay, and who are now taxed the most.

We find that there have been increases in import duties on items such as radios and radiograms, which today are necessities; motor cycles, a cheap means of transportation for many people in this country; travel goods and handbags; stockings and clothing. A large number of items of clothing have had their duties increased. I remember the Minister saying that he has no designs on cosmetics, but in the same breath he has increased duty on the item which we all know does something for the legs of young ladies, and which does even more for the older ladies, namely, stockings!

Again, the duty has gone up on refrigerators operating by electricity and oil. In a country such as this, a refrigerator has become a necessity today. The duty on grapes and tomato paste has been increased. There is no substitute for tomato paste. For grapes you can substitute duncs. The duty on glucose, cocoa powder, chocolate powder and tea has been increased. We do not even have an adequate supply of coffee,

and there are no substitutes for many other items. When we come to confirm the Order for increased customs duties we will have much more to say on the increases.

The Government has reduced the duty on trailers for agriculture [Mr. d'Aguiar: "Do you want me to put it up again?"] But who are the people to benefit from this reduction? Not the small farmers but the big-income estates and foreign industries. It is quite evident what kind of a Government we have. In the case of the masses, taxation goes up. In the case of the exploiters of the Guyanese people, taxation goes down. The trade licence duties which have been increased is another means of helping the mercantile community at the expense of the consumers. The Government thinks it is clever. In order to help the merchant class, and not to incur increased odium, it does not increase all customs duties, but increases the duties on trade licence which will prompt the merchants to raise the prices of commodities, and, therefore, to fill their pockets at the expense of the masses. This is the reason for the increase in traded licence duties.

Then we have the capital gains tax. I warned the members of the Government when they interfered with our capital gains tax structure that they were harming themselves and the country. They fiddled with the capital gains tax and in 1965 reduced it to a flat rate of 10 per cent on short-term gains. Realising their mistake shortly thereafter, in the 1966 Budget, the financial "wizard" increased the capital gains tax to 15 per cent on short-term gains. He has now realised the folly of himself and his colleagues, and proposes in 1967 to put a 10 per cent tax on long-term gains. I repeat that all gains, whether short-term or long-term, should be treated as income and taxed at progressive income-tax rates

up to a maximum of 45 per cent. That is the kind of capital gains tax we had on the Statute Book, and that is what this Government has removed. That is the only fair way.

If you tax the earned income of people at progressive rates going up to 70 per cent, what is the justification for not taxing unearned income at the same progressive rates? The Government has given no reason in past debates. We feel that there must be a restoration of the original capital gains tax if benefits are to accrue to the revenue.

We have been informed by the Minister that he plans to spread the initial allowances. I have no great objection to that. But I will make this observation. — Initial allowances — do result in a loss of revenue, and what this Government ought to do is to guard against such losses now and in the future. What it means is that there will be a further subsidy to the tax holiday company, even though the tax holiday has ended.

The Minister proposes an extension of the period within which inter vivos transfers will be exigible to estate duty. At the moment, I think the period is three years. If an inter vivos transfer takes place within three years of death, the estate of the deceased is taxed. The Government now wants to extend this period from three years to five years prior to death. This is good, but I say it is not enough. Again, the Government has realised its mistake of dismantling our fiscal structure as it did with capital gains. What is the remedy here? I say, again, the remedy is to restore the gift tax in order that it may buttress estate duty legislation and close the loopholes which have been reopened by the abolition of the gift tax.

3.00 p.m.

In line with its character, again, the Government dismantles legislation and passes new legislation with

loopholes. The loopholes are provided to benefit the wealthy members of the community, and that is why we have so many loopholes in the estate duty legislation. It is only the gift tax legislation that will close these loopholes and put an end to the avoidance of tax by those who can afford to pay.

The Minister of Finance also proposes to dismantle the personal income-tax rates, but I warn the Government that any dismantling of the income-tax rates designed to relieve persons in the upper income brackets of any taxation they are paying now and to penalise those in the lower income brackets will result in further suffering by people who can hardly afford to pay. That is likely to happen, if we are not careful. I issue a warning to the Minister of Finance that, when he begins to decimalise the income-tax rates, he had better watch out.

So far as income-tax rates are concerned, the Government proposes to give more generous terms. It will extend the tax holiday period to 10 years if, in the opinion of the Government, an enterprise does not benefit sufficiently from the 5-year tax holiday. This opens great possibilities for corruption and dishonest accounting on the part of enterprises enjoying a tax holiday. Why do these things? Why does this Government create conditions which will breed corruption and dishonest practices? This shows the morality of the class of people that this Government represents, the criminal class.

We now have what is called the "incentive race". Many of the poor Caribbean countries have been competing with each other in this matter of trying to attract foreign, private capital. Now Guyana is to enter this stupid race. Some of these Caribbean countries have gone to the absurd length of granting tax holidays to their detriment, and Guyana will now follow the example of these countries.

[DR. JACOB]

These incentives will result in a great loss of revenue to this country. Incentives are meant to increase production, but if the Government continues in the way it is going, we will lose revenue and get no benefit.

The Economic Commission for Latin America, in Chile, in the year 1962, condemned this practice of granting incentives because they discovered it was leading to many abuses, and corruption was taking place. There is another point. Many of the exemptions granted to some of these foreign enterprises do not accrue to the enterprises themselves, but to a foreign Government, because this Government has no provision for double taxation relief. The benefits from the incentives ought to go to the enterprises. Is this the kind of thing the Government of a country such as this wishes to promote?

I want to make a few more observations on the speech of the Minister of Finance. He told us that export earnings went up in 1966 as a result of the operations of the foreign-owned bauxite companies. True; we all agree on that. But what a sad thing it is that one of our strategic raw materials should have its export earnings increased as a result of the illegal and unconstitutional war which is being waged by the American imperialists against defenceless people in Vietnam? The aluminum monopoly and many other monopolies are profiteering on the war. War is necessary and essential for the preservation and expansion of this criminal economic system. I will quote two small passages from a publication called *World Business*, which is issued by the Chase Manhattan Bank, of whose presence we are all very conscious. I will quote from page 3:

6. The anticipated annual spending rate of roughly \$25 billion on the Vietnam war will prevent the U.S. economy from slipping into recession."

Because of the Vietnam war the American economy is said to be in recession. War is essential for the preservation of the American economy, and the poor exploited people of Guyana must contribute to the murder of the people in Vietnam. I will quote again:

"The 1966 Vietnam-propelled U.S. business boom has meant strong export sales for several European countries such as Britain, Germany and France. Sharply increased metals prices improved export receipts for such Latin American countries as Chile, Peru and Bolivia. And U.S. supply purchases are estimated to have pumped around \$1 billion into the economies of Japan, the Philippines, Thailand and other free Far East countries. Continuation of the Vietnam war in 1967 will make for a prolonging of these extraordinary demands."

No better proof is required than this to show that the system which this Government supports is a criminal system, and it should be retired in favour of the system to which I referred earlier. [Mr. Clarke: "Which system is that?"]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member has spoken for one hour.

Dr. Jacob: In conclusion, I will say that the 1967 Budget Statement is a fraudulent document; the figures are fictitious and calculated to deceive the masses of this country. Some of the friends of this Government have closed their accounts in Water Street; cheques from this Coalition Government are all over the place. This Coalition Government is a disgrace to this country. What we need is real independence. [Interruption.] A P.P.P. Government will be able to bring real freedom to the Guyanese people.

The Minister of Trade (Dr. Reid): If we were here for entertainment, then I would have taken time to reply to my friend. But when we come

to debate the Budget, it is a serious type of debate, because we want to pass information not only to our listeners in the Gallery, but to the public as a whole.

3.10 p.m.

I listened in vain for something substantial from the last speaker. I heard nothing. The same arguments that we have heard over the past two years were raised. We know that from 1964 to date 10,000 persons have gained employment in this country. We know that some of the causes of strikes are deep-seated. There are grievances that have been lying dormant for many years, but now people think that it is time to enjoy some freedom, time to demonstrate their independence now that there is a Government in office that will listen to their appeals. When they attempted to demonstrate in times past, they were fired on, they were shot at from cars. We know that.

The increase in the availability of work is demonstrated by the fact that in the building trade alone about \$8 million has been spent. Workmen in the building trade must be part of the masses of this country. We know that there has been a substantial increase not only in the collection of direct taxes but also in the number of people who have to pay.

The purpose of today's debate is more to let the public know how the taxes will affect them; how they will affect the rich; how they will affect poor persons like me; how they will affect hon. Members also. The Minister of Finance in presenting Government's proposals indicated very clearly that Government will introduce additional import duties with a projection that they will yield about \$2.5 million. The additional duties will fall on a limited range of imports. [Interruption.] My hon. Friend says that we are afraid to do this because we will interfere with the mercantile community, but we are making sure

that the additional duties will fall on a limited range of imports, because, if the goods so taxed can be produced here then people will produce them; if people can do without them, then only the wealthy will tend to purchase them.

Let us take the first group of items selected for additional taxation, alcoholic drinks and tobacco. None of us will be much concerned if there is some increase in duty on tobacco and alcoholic drinks because we know that these are largely nonessential. Some persons have very sophisticated tastes and would still like to have imported drinks, such as cognac and certain brands of whiskey. We do not wish to encourage them, but if they are determined to have these things which we regard as non-essential and as luxuries, then Government must make sure that they pay for these items so that revenue will come from the rich and not from the poor, not from the masses.

I should like to go through the list and name some of the items that have been selected for additional taxation. First, I name alcoholic beverages. We have local beverages and I am not referring to the one that is called "Dr. Jacob". I am speaking of the one that is manufactured legally. It is now available here to meet our needs and there has been no increase on this. We must use what we have and this Budget is intended to accomplish that.

Foodstuff is of interest to all of us, so let us look at the things that will be affected in this group. My friend named a few items but let me name a few also. Fruits and nuts appear in the list, apples, grapes, which my hon. Friend mentioned, and peanuts. We do not grow apples but we have all sorts of fruits, and I see no reason why we should spend hard earned money to import this kind of product. Hence the price of apples has been changed and instead of

[DR. REID]

being sold at 48 cents per pound they will be sold at 53 cents per pound. We have no apologies to make for this.

Let us look at dried fruit, preserved fruit and fruit preparations. All will be affected. Preserved vegetables and vegetable preparations in tins, for instance, tomato juice, tomato soup, canned peas are all affected, and we would like the public to know what will be the change in price. The price of tinned soup will rise from 36 cents per tin to 40 cents per tin. The masses need not purchase these items. They need not spend their money on canned soups and tomato juice, because they can grow tomatoes, if need be, in window boxes.

As we go down the line we see that cocoa and chocolate confectionery will have heavier import duties and so will tea and spices. These are items that we can very well do without. If people want them they must be able to pay and Government must collect revenue, which is needed to continue the work of developing this country.

One thing is very important. As soon as the budget proposals are put forward there are some dealers, some merchants who, regardless of the items listed for a change in price, pay no regard to the proposals and change everything. As the last speaker has rightly indicated, they go ahead and change every price. They are unscrupulous dealers. We would like them to know that we have already set up a Prices Committee. Mr. Sidney King is Chairman, and Mr. John Fernandes, Snr., Mr. Archie Simon and Mr. Joseph John are members of the Committee. It would be interesting to know that this Committee has found out that this is indeed a fact.

3.20 p.m.

Merchants tend to use the prices generally, regardless of whether or not the product is affected, but this Government is determined to take note of this. [Mr. Chase: "Only that?"] As a matter of fact, the Committee has recommended certain proposals, and if the merchants continue to do this then the necessary action will be taken and we hope that it will be the type of law that will bring peremptory imprisonment to some of them. This should enable them to keep their hands clean, if not their souls, so that they would not try to destroy the poor people of this country. If we catch a few of the big fishes — not the small ones — who deal in black marketing and give them a little term of imprisonment, then the others will take note and the behaviour will certainly change.

This Budget, with additional import duties on foodstuffs, can be seen as a great incentive to our farmers, the people who produce the goods, because if the imported items increase in prices, if they are restricted, if the same quantities cannot be obtained in this country, then people will have to buy what is produced locally, and our farmers, who are our chief producers, must benefit from this. Guyana has the land, Guyana has the farmers and, I believe, Guyana has the capacity to produce most, if not all, of the essential foodstuffs. We must behave in the same way that people behave in other developed countries and use what we can produce.

I know of several developed territories where only things like wheat and potatoes are grown, and if you happen to live in those countries, then these are the things you eat morning, noon and night, and there is no quarrel about it. People have grown accustomed to eating what they produce. Now that Guyana is independent and not ruled by foreign

masters, — [Mr. Chase: "What?"] [Mr. Chase: "You do not understand what neo-colonialism."] [Laughter.] — now that the mercantile system is not in action in Guyana, we will be able to do some of the things that were not done in the past.

As we move nearer and nearer towards industrial agriculture, as we begin to go in for food processing and food preservation, Guyanese will have to take note too of the Food and Drugs Ordinance so that we will be able to produce goods of a reasonably good quality without misrepresentation and adulteration. The Government will see to it that the goods we produce locally are good products not suffering from any misrepresentation or adulteration. Indeed, I think this Budget is quite an incentive to the local producer, whether he is a farmer or a manufacturer, because it can act as a stimulus. One of the main objectives in the Budget is to stimulate our producers to produce goods that the people in this country need. By doing this, we will not import as many million dollars worth of foodstuff as we have imported in the past. For instance, in 1965 we imported about \$30 million worth of foodstuff alone, one-third of what we use. I am satisfied that a Budget of this type will be quite an incentive to local production and there must be a decrease in importation.

When we produce local goods our Guyanese community sometimes like to compare them with the imported items and say that they are not of the same standard. We must understand that as we get into the manufacturing business, into processing of our raw materials, we will obtain perfection as we go along. If we wait for perfection we will never begin. This Budget will not allow people to wait until they perfect what they are doing. This Budget is giving them a

chance to continue in what they are doing. We hope that as the demand for our product grows the standards will get better and better. It is also our hope that our buying community will not be hypercritical of what is produced locally. In any case, persons who are determined to produce goods that suffer from adulteration will also have to be careful in what they do because the Government is determined that fair and reasonable standards should be maintained.

It is the Government's hope to raise \$2.55 million from this exercise. But that is not all, because in this country we import \$30 million worth of foodstuff, and if we can produce some of this, there will be more work for more people and there will be more money remaining in this country to do the other jobs that must be done.

It is good at this time to look at some of the items that will be affected, and see if any of them can be produced locally or if we have any local product that can be substituted for any of them. If we go through this list carefully we will see that oranges and tangerines will be affected. All of us know that we have these products. Limes, grapefruits, apples, grapes, avocado pears — we know about those — peanuts, preserves, canned fruits, jams, jellies and marmalade will be affected. I see absolutely no reason why these items that I have mentioned should be imported. Tomato sauce and something called "tomato puree" will be affected. We cannot continue to import things like these.

Then we come to the juices. It is always good to look at the cans. This Government has only been in office for a short time and, fortunately, there is now a factory where canned orange juice can be obtained. Grapefruit juice, orange juice and several other juices are still imported. Then we bring into this country de-

[DR. REID]

hydrated vegetables, all sorts of soups, arrowroot, sago, non-refined and refined sugar, coffee, cocoa powder, tea, spices, margarine, lard, flavouring, essences, mustard, baking powder and vinegar. We see absolutely no reason why we should continue to import such products. I took time to mention them.

3.30 p.m.

We know that there are smart dealers who will want the public to believe that every article of food is affected. This is not so and we want to re-emphasise that, if any attempt is made to raise the prices of items that are not mentioned, the people should co-operate so that we can bring rascals to judgement.

It might be well at the same time to mention some of the essential goods that are not affected. For instance, meat, poultry, canned fish, ham, canned milk, butter, cheese, eggs, barley flour, canned corn, potatoes — This is important; potatoes are not affected — beans, peas, split peas, garlic, onions, carrots and coconut oil. All these things are not affected and I have read them out so that they will be given due publicity and the public will not be cheated whenever they go to do business.

Now, with a budget of this kind, we see a new future for the producers of goods in this country because in times past, no action was taken to restrict some of these imports, no action was taken to put them above the means of the masses, and as a result, our local products have suffered. Perhaps there was reason for that because in times past there was the mercantile system where we were forced to produce goods that our masters wanted us to produce. But now Guyana is independent. Guyana is managing its own affairs, and Government, regardless of some of the criticisms that might come from the

Opposition, is taking this bold step to ensure that the imported goods that need not be imported should have such duties placed on them that people in the mass will not attempt to purchase them. If they need substitutes, then the goods that we produce locally will be available to them. Then, more people will get into the business of growing crops, and more people will get into the business of processing and preserving our own raw materials as far as food is concerned, instead of having to order food from abroad.

All those who are interested in Guyana will have no choice but to support a measure of this kind, even if it means that the wealthy will have to pay more for these fancy foods that they probably have developed a taste for, even if it means that the masses will do without them. The suffering of the masses, if any at all, should be very brief because if people from this country should travel to foreign places, regardless of what they are accustomed to as far as foods are concerned, they will have to eat items that are used in those countries. I am certain that nobody dies because of this exercise.

It is for us who have been given the task of managing the affairs of this Government to encourage the community-at-large to follow the principle of eating what they can produce, and to produce more of what they eat. If this is done diligently and conscientiously, quite a service will be rendered to the entire country because there will be more money in this country, and Guyana needs money now for development. There will be money that can be used for buying the equipment for development which we cannot produce ourselves, and we will move forward into a better economy with a happier set of people. This is our task.

The hon. Minister of Finance, in moving the Budget proposals, took



this into account as one of the primary objects for this year, and we are already satisfied that the majority of people in Guyana are beginning to see the good sense of it. There can be no quarrel if we put higher duties on things like cognac, foreign tobaccos of all kinds — I cannot remember all of their names—and foreign drinks. If the import duties on such items are raised, then the masses will have nothing to complain about. As a matter of fact, they should feel very happy that here is a Government which is determined to build this new country, and to start it off where all Governments ought to begin, by producing goods and services that are needed. Wherever we may go for loans, East or West, in the final analysis it is what we produce that will count, and since we are determined to remain an independent nation — now that there is global inter-dependence, we are jealously guarding our sovereignty.

One of the ways to maintain our independence is the ability, the capacity and determination to produce goods and services that our people need. On these points I think the Budget should be supported by all those who are true nationalists of Guyana. I am happy to support the Budget moved by the Minister of Finance.

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Hubbard: I wish to begin this afternoon by extending my heartiest congratulations to the Minister of Finance on this Budget Speech. My congratulations are deserved because the Minister has employed, in classical style, the technique of the pawnbroker behind his screen in framing the Order which imposes increased taxes on the largest number of commodities. The Minister disguised what he was doing, and I think that he succeeded in trying to fool the masses of the people.

I also wish to congratulate him because he seems to have suddenly come to power in the Government. Fresh from his success in making a scapegoat of Minister Kasim, he has been able to impose his professional pawnbroker's technique upon the framing of the Budget to a greater degree than he has hitherto found possible. I congratulate him, and I commiserate with the Government as a whole.

In a document as lengthy as that read to us by the Minister of Finance at the beginning of this meeting, one must expect to find somewhere something which demonstrates the philosophy of the Government on whose behalf that statement is read, and, searching the document and knowing the Government, I set about finding this statement of philosophy but my search was in vain. The philosophy of the Government is clearly demonstrated, however, in its treatment of two items mentioned specifically in the Budget Statement: One item is matches, and the other item is the tax holiday. Now the "Prime Minister of Finance", as Mr. Kasim humourously called him sometime ago, told this House that he was taking 25¢ a gross in excise for matches. He was increasing the excise duty on matches by 25¢ per gross boxes, but, having done that, he makes a Price Control Order which takes 72¢ per gross boxes on matches from the consumer. In other words, it is a case of "one for Parry and two for Knights". The exchequer, that is the public, is to benefit to the tune of 25¢ per gross boxes of matches when the consumer is to be made to pay almost three times what is going to the public.

The hon. Minister of Trade, to whom I listened with attention in the hope of getting something which would guide me, or enlighten me as to the Government's trade policy in relation to this matter, spoke about unreasonable price increases. Surely a Gov-

[MR. HUBBARD]

ernment that gives to the merchant or capitalist 47¢ for every 25¢ that it takes from the working-class poor — the people who have to light fires with matches and cannot turn a switch to get heat — can offer no reproaches to the merchants who seize the opportunity to increase prices and suck the poor. How can it? It has been helping its friends at the expense of the poor, and it now quarrels with its friends for helping themselves quite obviously at the expense of the poor.

The other item, as I said, is the one dealing with tax holidays. The Minister of Finance intimated to us that after setting up industries in this country persons were to be allowed to keep all of the profits that they earned from these industries, and that he was prepared to allow them to do so for a matter of 10 years in certain circumstances. Somewhere it was stated in the Journal of the party to which the "Prime Minister of Finance" belongs — I beg your pardon, sir, the hon. Minister of Finance, — that the Government is going to set up industries and then turn them over to private enterprise.

Now, much has been written on the question of profit, and many volumes are devoted to the justification of profits. My hon. Friend the Minister of Finance is so anxious to help the capitalists that he is withdrawing or removing the philosophical justification of profits and the profit system, because what he is proposing to do is to supply capital to private enterprise and to pay capitalists for merely reaping profits and, perhaps, providing some sort of management which could be purchased.

3.50 p.m.

We therefore have no philosophical justification for profit. There is no enterprise and no risk and the profits of such enterprises are to be appropriated in entirety for five to

ten years. We will then repeat the experience of places like Puerto Rico, Jamaica and Trinidad when, having plundered the community with the help of a Government of similar philosophy, they will pick up their enterprises, or merely pick up their bank money, and go. The Government will have provided the enterprise and all they will have to move is their profit.

We therefore see clearly stated just what this Government is, just what it aims to do and just how completely impossible it must be for the masses of the population to benefit from any development programme which is managed by this Government. The hon. Minister of Finance made no reference whatsoever to the movement of the retail price index in this boom period which he described. He could not describe it poetically; he is incapable of that.

I have here the quarterly Statistical Digest for September of 1966 and it reveals that the retail price index, at the end of 1958, stood at 102.3 points. At the end of 1964, it stood at 113.1 points, that is to say, in the period from 1958 to 1964, a period of seven years, the retail price index rose only by 10.8 points. At the end of September 1966, the retail price index stood at 121 points, so that in the small space of 21 months the price index had risen 7.9 points as compared with 10.8 points for the previous seven years.

This is of great importance. When we add to this the shrinking volume of unsophisticated money, we recognise what every working-class person understands, namely, that a great depression has moved into his home and is setting about quickly to destroy him and those who depend upon him.

I have just one more commentary on this Government and those whom it serves. We have two new industries: One is the production of nails and the other is the production of remoulded

tyres. The nail factory is owned by small people and the Minister of Finance has made it a point not to increase the protective duty upon nails. The men involved are small persons; they do not deserve the protection! The duty remains where it was before the Budget was presented. In the case of the remoulded tyres, the factory which is owned by the biggest concern in this country, the oldest expatriate concern in this country. Bookers, that receives a further protection in addition to what was given to it when the Budget was resented last year.

The hon. Minister of Trade tempted obliquely to refer to superficial criticisms of the "buy local" effort made in one of the prostitute journals when he spoke about statutes. A Food and Drugs Amendment Bill has been in draft in the pigeon-holes of the desks of the circumlocution office for many years. This Bill has suffered; there have been personality clashes. One personality involved has left the circumlocution office and gone into retirement abroad. It is to be hoped that now that this Government is in office, it will bring out the Bill from the pigeon-holes and have it passed.

Sitting suspended at 4.00 p.m.  
4.36 p.m.

On resumption -

MOTION FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY TO DISCUSS DEFINITE MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

*Gastro-Enteritis Epidemic*

Dr. Jagan: Our young nation has been severely hit. I am now not talking in economic terms but in medical terms. Unfortunately, many have not only suffered but have lost their lives and, as we have been reading daily in the Press, this killer gastro-enteritis has taken a heavy toll of lives of young children. From one end of the country to the other, parents are today weeping.

For the past two years we have been warning the Government about sanitation conditions in this country, in displaced centres, about the inadequacy of proper services, and we were told that the Opposition knows not what it is talking about. Instead of acting, for instance, in the displaced areas, on a report which was produced by a committee whose credentials could not be questioned, we saw the spectacle of the Government appointing another committee, and even that committee's report was pigeon-holed.

I recall that in the 1940's, in times of heavy rainfall, latrines and housing settlements were inundated with water and people suffered greatly. We warned the Government that a similar situation would develop in this country if it did not act quickly but, with its usual callousness, the Government said that we were only trying to scare the people. What is even more unfortunate is that this matter was not handled, as far as we can see, expeditiously, and even when there were known cases, we found that either proper treatment was not given or there were no medical practitioners to attend to the people. As a result, there are poor children dying from one end of the country to the other, even as far as the North West District.

My information is that about 10,000 children have been affected and that the deaths, which are a little over 40 officially, will probably be found to be nearer 200. The Ministers may smirk but we know that, in this country, there are no proper means of diagnosing ills, there are no proper means of giving treatment and, as a result, people die. A few days ago a disclosure was made by one of the physicians in New Amsterdam and we read about the controversy in the Press as to whether or not the physician had a right to come out and speak his mind in public. This

[DR. JAGAN]

is not the time to split hairs on rules. Had it not been for such an exposure by this brave doctor, perhaps the Government would have been still sleeping.

4.40 p.m.

Let us hope that they have awakened from their sleep. If anything could have been said of the Government in a positive manner, it should have been in the field of health. Unfortunately, we have seen one calamity after another. We have seen one Minister after another being changed. People do not want changes of Ministers. — What could be much better is a change of Government. [Applause (Opposition).]

The time is coming when members of the Government will not be able to show their faces in the streets. All their wild promises have evaporated into thin air. Had the opportunity been given on this occasion to move a vote of 'no confidence, I think the public would have voted 'no confidence' against this Government.

We want to hear specifically from the Government today what is being done. We do not want to know what is being done in Georgetown, because even in Georgetown the people are dissatisfied. We want to know specifically, what is being done, from the North West District to the Corentyne River to allay the fears of the people and to give them proper advice. We want to know if drugs are available in sufficient quantities at any time, at the right places. We know that, in order to make the Budget balance, to make it appear that the finances of the Country are in a glorious state, they have been cutting expenses —

Mr. Speaker: You were speaking on a definite matter — gastro-enteritis.

Dr. Jagan: Yes. This is why the Ministry has been affected. I hope

the cheese-paring policy of the Government will be stopped when it comes to the health of the people. My colleague, Dr. Ramjohn, will give further details on this tragic situation, because he, personally, deals with a lot of these cases.

Dr. Ramjohn: There was a gastro-enteritis epidemic not so very long ago. If I remember correctly, it was early in 1965 that a number of children died, and there was a great deal of suffering by parents and others.

4.45 p.m.

During the past two months I myself have been responsible for treating between 500 to 700 odd cases of gastro-enteritis. Today alone I have treated about 30 cases and possibly more. [Mr. deGroot: "Good business."] The hon. Member appears to be thinking from the point of view of profit. I did not intend to mention it, but since last week I have been charging these people only the cost of the drugs. [Interruption by Mr. Merriman.] I know that the undertaking business is booming.

No one who has not been personally affected by gastro-enteritis can realise the enormity of the suffering which Guyanese people are going through, at this moment, from one end of the country to another, from the Corentyne to the North West District. I have just sent home a number of children whose mothers had to start travelling from Leguan Island in the Essequibo somewhere around five o'clock this morning in order to receive treatment in Georgetown. They will probably reach home about eight o'clock tonight.

There is a hospital at Leguan which the previous Government built. A doctor was placed there, but for the past four or five months there has been no doctor at Leguan to treat sick children. I can hear the cries of the little children still ringing in my ears all day and at night for weeks

on end. I have seen mothers bursting into tears and asking: "Doctor, does my child have gastro-enteritis?" I have seen a mother 30 years of age who recently had her first child after many years, and that child is sick with gastro-enteritis. I have seen a young couple with their first-born sick with this disease, but hon. Members on the other side do not seem to be aware of what is happening.

From my personal experience I am trying to enlighten this House. A lot of these people are unemployed; some are poor and cannot provide the necessities of life; they cannot buy food to eat, and some of them have to leave the hospital because they prefer to go to a private doctor and get treatment for their children.

I am aware that the death rate is several times the amount which has been officially given. I have read a statement in a newspaper where it was mentioned that some of these children did not die from gastro-enteritis but from diarrhoea. Gastro-enteritis will start with vomiting, but this sign ceases after a period of days. If they die from diarrhoea, are you not going to list them as dying from gastro-enteritis? The Ministry of Health cannot possibly be aware of the number of deaths, unless it checks the registers of births and deaths in every district in order to ascertain the exact number of children who have died from gastro-enteritis. The official figures quoted refer to those who have died at the institutions. I say that the death rate is several times what has been officially given.

The doctors in private practice are aware that this epidemic began long before the Ministry of Health acknowledged that there was an epidemic. The public, the doctors and some members of this House knew that there was an epidemic of gastro-enteritis. The Ministry denied that there was an outbreak of gastro-enteritis, and it was, in fact, the last

in Guyana to know that there was such an epidemic.

The first line of defence against epidemics of this nature — this is fundamental and elementary — is proper sanitation. We on this side of the House have pleaded and exhorted the members of the Government to pay more heed to sanitation. I have asked several questions about spraying; I have asked questions about pure water and sanitation in general. These things have been most unsatisfactory. What has happened to the money which has been voted for spraying latrines with oil? [Interruption by Mr. Merriman.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, will you please keep quiet!

Dr. Ramjohn— I do not know what has been done with the money voted for spraying. On several occasions while Mr. Bissember was the Minister of Health and Housing I was informed that the refugee areas were not being sprayed, and I asked certain questions relating to the matter. The Minister said that the areas were sprayed. I was informed some time afterwards that no spraying was being done. Quite recently I was told that no spraying was being done in those areas.

It must be realised that if an epidemic breaks out in areas surrounding the capital, it must eventually reach the capital and contaminate it. It is a short sighted policy to leave people for so many years without pure water. In certain of these areas, when it rains, the latrines and the kitchens become one. We have pointed out these conditions to the Government, but nothing has been done in the matter.

I have said that proper sanitation is the first line of defence in epidemics of this nature. The second line of defence must be notification. There are certain diseases which must or ought to be notified by all medical

[DR. RAMJOHN]

practitioners. These diseases include cases of polio, tuberculosis, diphtheria, typhoid. Gastro-enteritis should have been among them. If gastro-enteritis is not included, then, in view of the fact that there was a previous epidemic, it should be included as a notifiable disease. Under this system a doctor who sees one case in the North West District can inform the Ministry of Health about the matter. [Interruption by Mr. Merriman.]

Mr. Speaker: Do not interrupt him; you will have a chance to rebut what he said.

Dr. Ramjohn: A doctor may see a case in the North West District; another doctor may see one in the Rupununi, at Skeldon, at Mahaicony, or in Georgetown. When this happens a doctor is supposed to fill out a form with the name of the child, the day and year in which it was born, the address and so on, and send this form to the Ministry of Health, which is the central clearing house. When this is done, with the physicians co-operating, the Ministry of Health would obviously be in a position to know when there is an epidemic and to take the necessary steps to meet the situation.

Even when the Ministry realised that there were cases of gastro-enteritis, its attitude seemed to be to delude or deceive the public as to what was taking place, instead of taking the proper steps to contain the disease, alert the population as to what should be done and provide the necessary drugs and laboratory tests. We have read several conflicting statements in the Press about the epidemic. We have read of assurances given that the epidemic was contained and there was no need to fear anything. But what should have been done when it was realised that there was a serious outbreak of gastro-enteritis in Mahaicony was that

the Ministry of Health should have asked other physicians, in the absence of notification, whether there were such cases in their areas. It was the duty of the Ministry then and there to carry out laboratory tests to find out what was the nature of the disease.

Two months after the epidemic had ravaged this country an effort was made to send specimens to be tested in Trinidad. We have no virologist here. We have already voted money in this House for a laboratory and we shall be voting money again, but up to now there is still no idea of what is the organism. I am certain that if proper steps had been taken from the beginning of the outbreak of gastro-enteritis and if help had been sought from abroad from the Trinidad Regional Virus Laboratory, for instance, we would have had much better results very many weeks ago. If it was possible to isolate and identify the organism, then it was the duty of the laboratory of the Ministry of Health to carry out sensitivity tests to determine what drug was the most suitable to destroy this organism.

I do not want you to accept my own personal opinion, but it coincides with the opinion of many practitioners in the city of Georgetown that the organism, whether it be a virus or not, is at the moment unimportant. What is important is that the organism which does the greatest damage is secondary, and it is felt that the bacteria will respond to medical treatment with anti-biotics.

5.00 p.m.

It seems to me that the Ministry is not yet aware of this. The anti-biotics which have been used are not suitable and cannot destroy the organisms causing the disease. Several private practitioners have been using chloromycin and have had excellent results. They have found that this does destroy the organisms which do the greatest damage.

There are some drawbacks, and laboratory tests may show that it is not the most suitable drug, but the antibiotic that is now being used, neomycin, cannot destroy the organisms for the simple reason that this antibiotic is not absorbed in the blood stream. It remains in the bowels and, in the case of a child suffering from the disease, the organisms have already invaded the blood stream. Yet the general treatment rests on neomycin. In my view this is wrong.

Having carried out laboratory tests, having discovered what was the most suitable antibiotic, it was the duty of the Ministry of Health to ensure that the drugs necessary were in large supply at every medical institution throughout the country. This was not done. It would also be the duty of the Ministry to circularise all doctors, be they private or not, not dictating to them what they must do, but suggesting that, as sensitivity tests have been carried out, such antibiotics and such treatment would provide the best results.

This has not been done and is not being done yet. I should like hon. Members to see a number of the persons who visit the Georgetown hospital for treatment. They are pitiful specimens with their children in their arms. They have been to me in the day and at night, telling of their experiences in the outpatients and casualty departments and even in the wards. Some of the stories they tell are indeed pitiful. I do not wish to inflict them on hon. Members. Suffice it to say that in the early stages of the epidemic hundreds of children were treated with sulphur drugs, which were considered miracle drugs some years ago. They still have their uses, but are inadequate for the treatment of gastro-enteritis.

It seems to me that the reason why sulphur drugs were used initially — and they were widely used in the outpatients department — was that they cost little. [Hon. Members:

"Shame!"] An effective drug for the treatment of a child suffering from gastro-enteritis cost nothing less than three to five dollars. I would say that the bottles I was shown with sulphur drugs, manufactured locally, could not have cost more than ten cents. [Hon. Members: "Shame!"]

The parents of the children, for whom these drugs were prescribed, were not even told of the precautions to be taken to ensure an adequate intake of fluid. The kidneys of one child were severely damaged by the sulphur drugs that were given at the Georgetown hospital. Only after a big hue and cry was raised did the authorities begin to use neomycin at the Georgetown hospital and that has been in short supply at almost all institutions.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition has mentioned the grave position that has arisen in the case of one doctor at the New Amsterdam Hospital who found it necessary to speak out. I must congratulate him even though I do not recommend breaking the rules. I submit he had no other choice. From my own experience I am almost certain that poor young man will be victimised.

After the outbreak of gastro-enteritis, a ward should have been set aside in every public medical institution to deal with cases. This is now being done, but it was done at a very late stage. Everything that the Ministry has done during this epidemic has been done too late. After the epidemic has ravaged this country for weeks and weeks, specimens are now being sent to the Virus Laboratory in Trinidad. It is a case of locking the stable door after the horse has gone.

There can be no gain from the death and suffering of little children and their parents. There is one who had the temerity to suggest that. I should not like to say what I think of him. It is our duty, our responsi-

[DR. RAMJOHN]

bility, on this side of the House to see that such tragedies do not recur and that effective methods are used in future.

For years there have been shortages of drugs at Government hospitals and institutions. In this Assembly we have voted additional money for drugs. What has happened to them? I am tired of hearing the complaints of patients to the effect that they were told to return to the hospital in a week's time. Can you imagine the case of a young child, who is having frequent bowel motions, and whose parent has gone to the dispensary at the hospital and, after waiting all day to see the doctor, has been told that there are no drugs, and perhaps some will be available the following week? These are not "sophisticated" drugs, these are common or garden drugs. These are drugs like hetrozan.

A few nights ago a mother came to me. She had been to the casualty department with a child and after her experience there she decided to come to see me during the early hours of the evening. She told me that the lone doctor with a long line of patients said he was "fed up" because he had no drugs to give to his patients. He just did not know what to do; he had a mind to apply for sick leave and go home and rest. How can one blame him? One must sympathise with the plight in which the medical officers are finding themselves. They have been trained to do a job; they are willing to do a job, but they are human beings and, without the tools, how can they pretend to be doing the job?

We have pointed out time and again that the policy of Government is a bankrupt one in this direction. The policy seems to be to economise on the health services in order to spend money in other directions, per-

haps for trips abroad or things of that nature.

5.10 p.m.

It is essential that the health services should not become a political matter. The health services are primarily for the health of the entire nation. Each Government should do its utmost to see that it has health services second to none in the world. At the moment, if we were to canvas public opinion as regards our health services, we would find that they are in the worst possible state and that they are possibly worse than those in many other countries. A great deal needs to be done and we on this side urge the Government to pay more heed to this department.

There has been a great influx of doctors. People at Leguan are suffering because there are no doctors there. Children are dying there from gastro-enteritis. When the P.P.P. was in the Government several doctors were there — I myself was a doctor there.

The Ministry of Information seems to have taken over the publicity campaign. It is trying to delude and fool the public. We are hearing that everything is being done, all the experts are here, pamphlets are being distributed, and that the people are being warned. This is just a cover-up in order that the people might not learn of the real situation.

I must conclude by pleading once again with the Government to pay more attention to the health services. If there are bottle-necks in the health services they must be weeded out, but we must have efficiency, we must not have discrimination in appointments. We must have the proper kind of drugs and treatment for our people and we must be able to meet emergencies in an intelligent and straightforward manner with efficiency, with knowledge. This is the only way in which we shall be able to help.



Mr. Wilson: The greatest asset of a country is its children, and particularly infants and young adults. This Government stands condemned, either as incompetent or criminal, because of the manner in which it has handled the incidence of gastro-enteritis which has been killing so many children in Guyana. This Government sought refuge in propaganda. It believes that propaganda can erase the bitter experience of parents who have seen their children die.

On one occasion I could clearly see that the propaganda was to highlight places like Mahaicony where only a few children suffered and a few children died. The Government would say, "Only two children died in this area. The disease is under control." While the Government was saying this, several children were dying all over the country, particularly in Berbice. One was left to wonder whether this Government was so callous, so criminal, as to be saying to itself, "Well, those children who are dying are not the children of our own supporters." There was a strong suspicion of that. [Mr. Merriman: "Shame!"] I know that the truth will hurt you; I am glad to see the reaction. Or perhaps the Government was saying that the children are just the children of the "masses that are asses", according to the view held by one of the leaders of the parties in the coalition.

Did this Government do what it should have done to tackle this incidence, this dying of children, or did it sit complacently behind the walls of propaganda to justify that it was doing what it should have done? Gastro-enteritis is not a new disease. When I was a boy at school I used to read about gastro-enteritis. Why is there this uncertainty, at this time, about how to treat it? What has this Government done since 1965 when

search to find out what are the agents of the disease? The Minister should say what steps have been taken since 1965, when this Government assumed office.

Gastro-enteritis is a disease that attacks poor children. This Government does not care about the poor children. This Government is concerned about the rich, and that is why it is so happy about this. That is why it is so indifferent to what is happening. Why does not the Government send for specialists? We hear talk about a Commission for this and that. Does not the Government want a Commission to handle this matter of little children being killed by gastro-enteritis?

5.20 p.m.

I should like to refer to what is happening in the displaced areas. I am dealing with health. A score of delegations went to the Minister of Health imploring this Minister to do something about health conditions in these areas. They sent memoranda upon memoranda pointing out the danger, and asking the Ministry to spray some anti-malaria oil in the latrines, or spray something else to keep away the flies. The Government cannot afford to do that because it has to take care of its entertainment expenses, its cocktail parties and its suppers. Who are these children that they should worry themselves about them?

In December, the Government made an apologetic attempt to spray one area. The people were told, "Look here, we can only afford to spray here 'so many' days. After the holidays, when the Government votes money we will know whether we can continue to spray" as if the disease and the germs are going to lie dormant and wait until these people are ready

[MR. WILSON]

Then we have the case of clinics. Delegation upon delegation, letter upon letter, memorandum upon memorandum have been sent about the establishment of a clinic. The principle was accepted that a clinic must be established. Then the Government turned around and said, "Look, if you find a house in the area we will establish a clinic." These poor people are living in shacks; they do not have proper houses in which to live. What callousness! This Government talks about the Development Programme. I call upon this Government to live up to its responsibilities and to help all the children of this country.

The Prime Minister went on a trip to meet the people. Where did he go? He went to Haslington, No. 11, and so on. He was able to say that the people of Haslington are living under bad conditions. Mrs. Gaskin: "But overweighting ought to be ashamed that it produced something like you." You can talk about "shame" as much as you want, I condemn you as being partisan in this matter.

I would ask this Government to get down to the hard work of finding out, as it should have done, what is causing this disease and the specific drugs that must be used in order to save children's lives. In addition to that, everyone knows that prevention is better than cure. Attention to all insanitary conditions in all areas, and particularly the areas where displaced persons live for it is known that health conditions are terrible in those districts.

**Dr. Ramsahoye:** I did not intend to speak on this Motion for the Adjournment, but I think, on reflection, that I should not allow this occasion to pass without pointing out a few important points to the Government. We have reached a position where it is now necessary to go into the medi-

cal statistics to examine the incidence of gastro-enteritis for the period prior to 1964.

I have always been told that gastro-enteritis is predominantly a disease arising out of certain social conditions. Gastro-enteritis has its source in falling living standards, and in the inefficiency of sanitary services. I am convinced that the debacle of 1964 with the resulting displacement of people and the conditions in which people live in insanitary and intolerable surroundings are the real source of this epidemic. It is also my opinion that if the medical statistics were examined for the period before 1964, they would reveal that the rise in incidence of gastro-enteritis would be after 1964. There can be no doubt that these little enclaves wherein people live in intolerable conditions without sanitation are the real source of this disease.

We all know that the Government would wish to be conservative in its Estimates, and one can sympathise with it for this. The truth is that the disease is spreading. It is not being contained because the source has not been tapped. The areas which provide the conditions for the spreading of this disease remain as they are. As the hon. Member just said, they have been that way since the disturbances of 1964, and despite entreaties, very little has been done to help. It is not an unfair criticism to say that this Government has not attempted to lean over backwards to help the displaced persons.

What I wish the Government to know is that if the displaced persons, whether they are at Haslington or Vryheids Lust or some other part of Enmore have to continue to live in disease will be carried into 1967 and 1968; it will continue. There was the plague arising out of insanitary conditions after the war. This is a similar situation.

5.30 p.m.

● It is **o** that people suffering from falling living standards may not be in the best condition to resist this disease. Well-fed children who get this disease have a better chance of resisting it and recovering. I know of two European children who have suffered permanent damage as a result of this disease. Imagine a child having to go through life retarded! It has to grow up, live and die retarded! It is a serious matter.

I would say that rather than making politics out of this matter, let us go into the medical statistics before 1964 and find out if the existence of this epidemic has increased since 1964. Our Chief Medical Adviser will know that Dr. Waterlow is an authority on gastro-enteritis, which is a third major killer. Let him come here and see the settlements and the conditions under which certain people live. These settlements I would classify as the fons et origo in themselves.

● If this Government would do something to improve the sanitary conditions in the settlements, then the people would be in a better position to resist disease. It is not that the people in this country are so impotent that they cannot make one separate effort to solve the insanitary conditions under which some of our brethren have been living since 1964.

● This is not a matter of politics; it is not a matter in which one would seek to make political capital out of what is happening, but there are certain criticisms which should not be considered unfair when levelled at this Government in this matter. Drugs are short. Surely, arrangements can be made to have drugs flown out to this country. There is hardly a country in which help will be sought and will not be received. If you want doctors, then let this House know that you have asked for them.

and let the House know which countries have turned you down. None would turn you down. While you are treating those who are ill, you must endeavour to improve sanitary conditions in certain areas to make sure that the disease does not spread to other areas. Let us tackle the disease at its source.

The Minister of Health (Mr. Kendall): It is very unfortunate that such an important matter which affects the lives of children in a new nation should be brought to the level of politics and that responsible members should suggest to this House that the reason for gastro-enteritis in this country is political.

The Government is aware of this epidemic, and it is doing everything in its power to arrest it. At this stage I must congratulate the *Mirror*, the organ of the P.P.P., in that, when the Ministry of Health issued a list of suggestions for the public in relation to the epidemic, it was the first newspaper to print it. But it has been said that, due to shortage of drugs and the Government's inability to provide the necessary funds for health purposes, the children are affected by this disease.

It is well that this House should know that about \$10 million which is about 12 per cent of our National Budget, is being spent under the head of Health. Where drugs are concerned, nearly \$1 million was spent. I know that, in spite of the amount spent, a large proportion of the drugs are going into places where they should not go, due to dishonest practices. I want to assure hon. Members that I know of some of these sources, and I hope it will not affect them when the matter is brought to light.

At a later stage, I will ask Your Honour to permit me to read a statement which has been prepared by my Ministry for this debate. From that statement you will see that in spite of what has been said, the Govern-

[MR. KENDALL]

ment has been doing everything possible to arrest the spread of this disease. I think Dr. Ramsahoye was the most honest of all the speakers on the other side of the House; he admitted that in Latin America, and this part of the world, gastro-enteritis reigns.

If the hon. Members on the other side of the House will do some research they will find that our percentage of deaths from this disease is much lower than in other places. In other places the percentage is 15, but at the moment in Guyana it is about .8 per cent. I appreciate that the fact that our percentage is lower than in other places is not a solution to this matter, but it is something that cannot be eradicated in any civilised country. I would have been the first to try to have this disease contained, and this is what the Government is endeavouring to do at the moment.

Dr. Ramsayoye feels that the squatting areas are responsible for this disease, but I want to assure him that, from the information received by my Ministry, these areas are not affected.

With your permission, sir, I wish to read this statement:

The outbreak of gastro-enteritis commenced in Mahaicony about the middle of December. Other areas that soon became involved are — Eastern Berbice, West Coast Berbice and more recently Lower East Coast Demerara, East Bank, West Bank and West Coast Demerara. So far, there have only been a few cases in Georgetown. A mild outbreak has been reported on the Essequibo Coast and only one death has occurred there. It has been recently reported that there are many cases in the islands of Leguan and Wakenaam and the position there is presently being investigated.

have to date suffered from the disease. The deaths so far have been approximately 38. The case fatality rate (i.e. the number of deaths per 100 cases) has been exceedingly low — .8 deaths per 100 cases, i.e. 8 deaths per thousand cases. The case fatality rate in outbreaks of this nature is usually well above 15 per cent i.e. 15 deaths per 100 cases or 150 deaths per 1,000 cases. From the very onset, intensive measures were introduced in the Mahaicony District to combat the epidemic. Two additional health visitors were assigned to the area to work closely with the resident surgeon of the Mahaicony Hospital. The aims here were to follow-up discharge cases from the hospital in the homes, to discover new cases and to treat mal-cases; and to refer severe cases to the hospital for early treatment. By a combination of these measures the situation so far has been kept well under control.

5.40 p.m.

At the Port Mourant and Skeldon Hospitals, similar measures were instituted from the onset of the outbreak and the number of deaths at these institutions has also been very low. At the New Amsterdam Hospital, however, the number of deaths was much higher than at the other hospitals partly because of the greater admission of cases and partly because of the greater severity of the cases. At the Georgetown hospital, the great majority of cases arriving there have come from a number of scattered areas in Demerara. Considering the number of cases being admitted at the institution from day to day, the number of deaths at this institution is very low.

Education to the Public: Every channel of information available has so far been used, namely:

1. Radio talks by the Chief Medical Officer, informing the public of

infants and young children, very early to a doctor or a hospital. As the majority of the patients have been confined to the infant and pre-school age group, this was considered to be a very important bit of advice, since this age group cannot stand dehydration (or loss of fluid and salts), dehydration being the main cause of death in gastro-enteritis.

2. Radio announcements by the G.I.S. setting out 10 rules for the community to follow in the control of the occurrence and spread of the disease.

3. Distribution of some 30,000 leaflets at health centres, schools, post offices and other public places, setting out the 10 rules referred to already.

Cause: Evidence (both clinical and pathological) is steadily mounting to indicate that the specific cause of the disease is of the nature of a virus. Specimens have been sent to the Trinidad Regional Virus Laboratory and the University of the West Indies for identification of the virus. Since it is now felt that the disease is of the nature of a virus, the use of drugs is of minor importance. The sheet-anchor in the treatment is the prevention of dehydration by the administration of fluids by intravenous, rectal or subcutaneous drin.

There is no shortage of drugs. (Mr. Ram Karran: "Do you wish us to go to the hospital tonight?") What we do not find at the hospital, we will find at your friends nearby.

Mr. Lall: Three weeks ago I informed Members of this hon. House that the epidemic of gastro-enteritis was invading the Berbice area, especially New Amsterdam. I mentioned that a child died in the arms of its father.

Mr. Speaker: I think it is in keeping with parliamentary practice that when the Minister replies the debate is ended. I cannot see the sense of going on. The Minister has replied. Let

us run this at a Parliament. I do not wish to prolong the debate.

Mr. Lall: I made this observation and at the time the Government paid no attention whatsoever to what was happening in New Amsterdam and in the country districts. Up to that time there had been one death in New Amsterdam. The following day, when I attended a sitting of the Assembly I received a telephone message that my grandson had died from gastro-enteritis. I have seen many of the Ministers, hon. Members and some of their supporters, giggling and laughing while this very important matter was being discussed. Perhaps these persons do not have children, and do not know how difficult it is to care a child. This is not the only thing that is happening. The present Government cares more about the dead than the living.

Mr. Speaker: Speak on the matter of urgent public importance which is before the Assembly!

Mr. Lall: I am saying that steps should be taken to prevent such an epidemic in this country. The theatre at the Georgetown hospital is badly in need of repairs and can collapse at any time but the former Minister of Health recommended that more refrigerated rooms should be built to store the dead. This is the way the members of this Government are operating and are prepared to operate and, through you, Mr. Speaker, we must expose them. You must not bridle our mouths; we are here to expose them in the interest of the community at large.

I am appealing to the Government to preserve the health of these young children.

5.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member Dr. Ramjohn has already spoken on certain policies. He has covered that ground.

Mr. Lall: I am appealing —

Mr. Speaker: I do not want to hear any more.

Mr. Lall: I therefore call on the Government to expend more money on the health services —

Mr. Speaker: That is nothing new.

Mr. Lall: — to prevent diseases in this country.

Mr. Speaker: If you have not got anything to add to the debate please take your seat.

Mr. Ram Karran: We have just listened to most disappointing information from the newly appointed Minister of Health and Housing (Mr. Kendall) on this very serious epidemic that rages in our country. One would have thought, after Your Honour had given your consent to a debate on this important matter, that the hon. Minister would have given an indication of what is taking place, and what steps are being taken to prevent the spread of this terrible disease.

All that the hon. Minister has done is to indict himself, and his Government to a greater extent, for the callousness which we saw expressed by the members of the Government when hon. Members on this side were speaking. The Minister made a fantastic charge and slandered hon. Members on this side of the House. I understood him to say that people who have connections with Members on this side of the House have stolen goods or drugs.

Mr. Speaker: The point of view of the members of the Opposition was well put by the hon. Member Dr. Ramjohn.

Mr. Ram Karran: The hon. Minister has slandered Members of this House and has admitted his own inefficiency and the inefficiency, I presume, of the Police Force and all those responsible for the protection of the drugs owned by the inhabitants of

this country. That is the admission that he has made. He has said that the drugs that have been bought for the treatment of diseases and that should have been in the hospital, have found themselves in the hands of private practitioners, allegedly friends of the members of the Opposition.

The hon. Minister should not tell us that our friends have stolen drugs. He should take steps to recover the drugs so that proper treatment is given to the children who are dying day after day from gastro-enteritis. The figures were concocted by the newspapers to show that only 40 children died, and the Minister himself reduced the number by saying that only 38 children died from gastro-enteritis. [Interruption by Mr. Merriman.] The hon. Minister is not qualified to speak on this. He can only talk about the dead. He ought to keep his mouth shut when people are talking about the living. [Laughter.] [Mr. Merriman: "You are talking about the dead children."]

The hon. Minister is saying that the Government has done everything possible to fight the epidemic. He consoles himself and attempts to console those parents who have lost their children. It is no satisfaction that in Latin America about 15 per cent of the children lost their lives as a result of gastro-enteritis, and here in Guyana we only lost about 8 per cent. [Mr. Wharton: "8 per cent?"] I beg your pardon, .8 per cent. It is no satisfaction even if it is .001 per cent. The Government ought to take steps. I submit that the hon. Minister has said absolutely nothing about what change has followed the policy of the Government. After this disease had ravaged the whole country, we read in the newspapers a week ago that samples were sent to the centre in Trinidad — to which this country contributes — so that tests could be taken.

The hon. Minister not only confuses himself but argues against himself. In one breath he says that drugs do not mean very much, you have to make sure that the children are not dehydrated. One would expect that the hon. Minister who has the Chief Medical Officer sitting behind him — I know the Minister is not a doctor, he is a layman like myself — would get the advice of intelligent people. The Director of Medical Services, apart from being a medical practitioner, also holds a degree in public health, and the hon. Minister ought to be able to advise us in sensible terms, rather than attempt to mislead us and create more confusion in the minds of the people of this country.

[The hon. Minister talks about drugs. Sometimes I visit the hospital at night and I can assure the hon. Minister — [Mr. Merriman: "To carry away drugs."] I admit that I have many, many failings, but I can assure Your Honour and hon. Members that my house was never searched. In 1962, some of my friends were taking refrigerators on their backs. I do not want to prolong this debate, but I make these points because the hon. Minister — I have always complimented him on being an experienced Minister — is totally unsuitable in this new field. His predecessor has created confusion by his propaganda activities. The Prime Minister and his colleagues ought to ensure that the Government is capable of talking care of these valuable drugs.

Mr. Luck: I rise to speak very briefly on this matter. Late in December I knew from firm information that the epidemic was raging very fiercely in the Eastern Berbice area around Skeldon and Springlands. I knew positively that this was a fact. At the time I was receiving this information, this Government was issuing very reassuring bulletins that there was no gastro-enteritis epidemic. The Government issued such a statement.

6.00 p.m.

One wonders whether the Government does not stand condemned for having done so. I had heard of the disease spreading at Skeldon. The doctor there could not even come to Georgetown for Christmas. I inquired about the disease and was told that it was killing very young babies. As a Member of this House, I must express my unhappiness at the way this matter has been handled. Quite clearly, whatever is causing gastro-enteritis must be controlled. It will spread more rapidly if certain elementary precautions are not taken.

If it is a fact — as it is a fact — that this epidemic was raging in December, the Ministry of Health must have known that it would spread throughout the country. But the Ministry at that time, did not alert the population of the necessary precautions to be taken, and of the necessity for improved sanitation. Up to two weeks ago I was at the Casualty Ward of the Public Hospital and a parent brought in a child who was obviously very sick. The parent complained that the child had looseness of the bowels, and was vomiting. These are the classic symptoms of this disease, but to my horror, this parent, greatly distressed, was chased out of the Casualty Ward and told, "Do not come here; go the Out-patient Department."

The point I am making is that 5,000 babies have been affected. Why did not the Government set up an Emergency Ward to deal with gastro-enteritis? My little son broke his hand. I am not without many friends and I got help from every body, but still it took me an entire day to see my son's hand fixed. Imagine those poor people being sent from pillar to post, not knowing where to go. Until two weeks ago, I never dreamed that this was such a terrible disease. That is why last evening I strongly supported bringing this Motion to the House.

[MR. LUCK]

I know the Government has been slack in handling the situation. Imagine the Government saying there is no epidemic.

I do not want to scare anybody, but from the Government's own statement it appears that the death rate has not been the same at all hospitals. One wonders why, when this epidemic was raging in Berbice throughout December, when children were dying at the New Amsterdam Hospital, one of these fine specialists was not specially detailed to go there for the period of the epidemic. My information is that the epidemic, is now falling off; this is the tail-end of it. Whatever we may have thought of the contribution of the hon. Member Mr. Wilson, one must wonder why it is that this epidemic was allowed to rage throughout eastern Berbice and only two visits were made by specialists to that area. There are many highly qualified and very competent doctors at the Georgetown Hospital, and nobody thought of assigning one of them specifically to the New Amsterdam Hospital. Why did 28 children die at that institution?

This disease, I understand, leaves permanent damage to those it afflicts, and 5,000 babies must represent at least 30 per cent of the children between the ages of one and two. The population between the ages of five and six in this country is 21,000. I would submit that there could not be more than 35,000 children between the ages of one and two, and I reckon that 5,000 is a very high incidence indeed, putting aside the mortality rate. I was informed by medical practitioners that they doubt that the death rate being given by the Government is accurate. One notices that the figures given by the hon. Minister are carefully qualified.

This is a poor country and the majority of people are poor and ill-informed. I was told by a medical

practitioner with one of the largest practices in the country that he estimates the number of deaths to be in excess of 200, and we would wish an examination of this problem. That is why we have brought it to this House. In a matter such as this, we expect prompt action to be taken. There is no pigeon-holing the matter now; it has come to town. We hope that vigorous efforts are being made to combat this disease. People must die and diseases must kill, but if medical skill can help us, this Government should seek aid from sources friendly towards us.

As the hon. Member Dr. Ram-sahoye pointed out, children of prominent people have been affected by this disease. Canadians have been badly affected. It would take only a telephone call to bring to us a man from Canada, America or Moscow. If anything can be done, I would hope that this Government would see that it is done.

Dr. Hanoman spoke out the truth, and as my friend said, he is a brave fellow. One good result of Dr. Hanoman's speaking out has been that specimens are now being sent to be examined. It seems that this disease is a difficult one. What is wrong with seeking help in this matter? I hope that when next an epidemic of this nature occurs, the Government does not seek to conceal, to the harm of the country, the facts of the situation.

The hon. Minister said that they are taking all steps to inform the public what should be done. They have given 10 "do's" and "dont's". The truth is, the first three are really one, so there are only seven. But that was only done this year. When the deaths were taking place in Berbice they said that there was no reason for alarm; there was no epidemic. Over 1,000 persons had already been affected in Berbice. That is why we



have brought this matter to be ventilated in <sup>the</sup> House.

6.10 p.m.

Mr. Chandisingh: I shall not be long, and I crave Your Honour's indulgence to say one or two things on this subject. I had expected that the hon. Minister of Health would have attempted to dazzle us with science, and that he would have attempted to make excuses based on the technical points, but he has not done anything of the sort. I would say that in his prepared statement he has not answered some of the points made by the Opposition. Possibly that is due to the fact that he already had this statement prepared.

The Minister has said that we should not bring politics into this question of human life. I agree with him to a certain extent, but I would also like him to note that politics plays a very great part in health as in other matters. Politics nourishes the rich and excludes the poor and vice-versa. — There is a very good example in what I have seen during the two or three months since the outbreak of this epidemic. It so happens that I have a very close relationship with the areas in which the largest number of deaths has accrued. That area is where I now reside, Albion. It was quite clear that hundreds of cases were affected with the disease, long before the Government admitted the seriousness of the epidemic.

I remember I was amazed to find that the Government did not take action earlier in this matter, merely on the point of publicity. So far as my observation goes, it was only when the Mirror, made the challenge and offered to print daily whatever publicity the Government wished to issue to protect the children, that some action was taken on this score. The Ministry had previously denied the outbreak of gastro-enteritis.

As a matter of fact, the Ministry has a health education division, which, I presume is still functioning. Many of us who know something about how the Ministry should function must ask ourselves what was done during this period, and why much more was not done?

Just by way of example: I notice that within the last few days the Government has been given publicity on the radio to this matter and has been calling upon parents to take their children to be vaccinated against polio. That shows that proper action is now being taken, but I wonder whether one or two cases have not created fears in the minds of the members of the Government which led them to the realisation that children between certain ages should be protected from an outbreak of polio.

Although this is not the question under discussion at the moment, it has a bearing on the matter. What has happened during the last two years so far as polio inoculations are concerned? The previous Government saw to it that children reaching a certain age were given polio inoculations. Are children still inoculated against polio at the medical centres? Has the Government now realised that children should be protected from polio?

Every one of my colleagues can give an example of what is taking place in connection with this outbreak of gastro-enteritis. I have had a report from a parent who said that his wife took his child to the Georgetown Hospital and went to the Out-patients Department. I think it was on Friday 13. I am not sure about the sequence of things, but by nine o'clock the Out-patients Department stopped looking at children who were brought to that department. The child could get no treatment at any other department, and it was necessary to seek the services of a private medical practitioner. This situation, in some

[MR. CHANDISINGH]

cases, has been repeated at the New Amsterdam Hospital where, I understand, the Out-patients Department is closed half of the day and only in special circumstances one can go to the Emergency Department where a nurse may admit a serious case to the hospital.

In these circumstances, one must question the adequacy of the Government's measures. We have been told that the Government was able to secure the services of very many doctors, and that their recruitment of doctors has been fruitful. Several doctors have come to this country recently. Why then, when this outbreak of gastro-enteritis has taken such serious proportions, should there be only three G.M.O's at the New Amsterdam Hospital? I understand that we have approximately four specialists. It is necessary that one of the G.M.O's function as an aid, but he does most of the work of the specialist who has to recommend what treatment should be given to a patient.

It seems to me that the medical staffing at the New Amsterdam Hospital, which is the main area from which most of the cases have been coming, is inadequate. If we have so many doctors in this country, then the Government should have seen fit to start a crash programme to deal with cases of gastro-enteritis.

It seems to me that the Government had hoped that this epidemic would die on its own. What has happened is that the children have been dying at a faster rate than when the outbreak started. It seems to me that the policy has been one of misunderstanding, or there has been inefficiency on the part of the political Government of this country. I make this point because I have had experience as a former Minister. Very often the technical staff know what needs to be done and they can give

advice to a Minister, but the politician has a direct responsibility to the public and he knows that if anything goes wrong he will be responsible.

6.20 p.m.

I would, therefore, lay the blame on the political head of the Ministry. Perhaps I should say on the "heads", because of the frequent changes. I do not know who is responsible. It is not the present Minister as he has only recently assumed office. I would blame the entire Government, all the colleagues of the previous Minister of Health, for not taking action.

I should like to point out, also, that the sanitation standards at Albion are very low. Since the recent heavy rainfall almost all the yards, including my own, have been flooded. One has to walk through six inches of water even to go to the toilets, and these have not been sprayed. Nobody can remember when last they were sprayed. I wonder whether the sanitation - authorities - are - doing enough. I am not blaming the sanitary inspectors who are trying their best to do their duties, but do not have the oil to spray as often as spraying is required in the area.

I take this opportunity to call upon the Government to correct this grave shortcoming on its part, which is causing people so much suffering. Members of the Government have spoken about the number of deaths being very small but like my colleague the hon. Dr. Ramjohn, who should know better than I, I would say that many of the deaths are not recorded.

This situation, furthermore, is causing a lot of concern to people. It must cause parents and mothers, in particular, great distress when they know that their children are afflicted with this dreaded disease. Last night I happened to meet a young man whose younger brother and sister had just "come down" with the disease

and one of them was hospitalised. If one went round the area of Bloomfield and Letterkenny one would find that all the children in some families are catching the disease.

On the one hand, the Minister tried to say that drugs were available and then, as by hindsight, he claimed that in any case drugs were not necessary because all that was needed was to give intravenous injections which would produce results. Let us assume that the disease was not carried by a virus. I happen to know that certain types of drugs were not available. In New Amsterdam, when the affair "blew up" in the Press, the authorities in the hospital had to send every day for drugs. When the roads were impassable the drugs could not be obtained, either because of lack of transportation or because the drugs did not arrive in time. The Minister cannot disclaim that on certain days the roads were impassable.

I should like to call upon the Government to give an assurance that it will make available the additional medical and ancillary staff necessary to cope with the problem that the Minister himself has outlined, that is, the problem of ensuring that dehydration does not take place in those children who are affected.

If the drugs required are not available, then there would seem to be a big task in the hands of the medical personnel and the Government.

To me, as a layman, it seems that dehydration calls for closer attention and more technical and medical skills in the application of the treatment that is necessary. We are not satisfied that this has been given, particularly when we recall what I pointed out with respect to the staffing of the New Amsterdam Hospital. The same conditions apply to the institutions at Skeldon and Port Mourant, as the G.M.O. of the district is supposed to be looking after the hospital.

In conclusion, we claim that the Government has shown callousness and ineptitude in protecting the lives of people about whom it pretends to be so concerned. It is not so concerned about the lives of the poor as it is with the rich. I can do no more than call upon the Government to remedy its errors and satisfy the real demands of the public of Guyana.

#### ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, "That this Assembly do now adjourn until Monday, 23rd January, 1967, at 2 p.m." — [Mr. Bissember.]

Adjourned accordingly at 6.30 p.m.