

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

[VOLUME 1]

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIRST
LEGISLATURE CONSTITUTED UNDER THE BRITISH GUIANA
(CONSTITUTION) ORDER IN COUNCIL, 1961

5th Sitting

Thursday, 7th December, 1961

SENATE

The Honourable Senate met at 9.30 a.m.

Prayers

[**The Vice-President in the Chair**]

Present :

Appointed under Article 47 (2) (a) :

Senator, the Honourable H. J. M. Hubbard, Minister of Trade and Industry

Senator, the Honourable C. V. Nunes, Minister of Education and Social
Development.

Senator C. V. Christian

Senator M. Khan

Senator C. S. Persaud

Senator Christina Ramjattan

Senator H. Thomas

Appointed under Article 47 (2) (b) :

Senator Anne Jardim

Appointed under Article 47 (2) (c) :

Senator A. G. Tasker, O.B.E.,

Senator C. V. Too-Chung, Vice-President.

Mr. I. Crum Ewing — Clerk of the Legislature.

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

ABSENT :

His Honour the President, Senator Ashton Chase — on leave.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRESIDENT EXCUSED

The Vice-President (Senator Too-Chung): Hon. Members of the Senate, I have to inform you that I have received a letter from the President asking to be excused from the sitting today.

PAPERS LAID

The following Papers were presented:

General Review and Report of the Archives Department for the period 1959-1961.

Progress Report on the Development Expenditure for the quarter ended 30th June, 1961, in the Development Programme 1960-1964.

Report of the Director of Audit on the Accounts of the New Widows and Orphans' Fund for the year ended 31st December, 1960.

Report on the Geological Survey Department for the year 1960.
[Senator Hubbard, Minister of Trade and Industry.]

Annual Report of the Department of Labour.
[Senator Nunes, Minister of Education and Social Development.]

BILLS—FIRST READING

The Vice-President: Hon. Members. I have received from His Honour the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly a letter transmitting three Bills for consideration by the Senate. They are:

- (a) Loan (Consortio Empresas Grupo Del Conte) Bill, 1961.
- (b) Criminal Law (Procedure) (Amendment No. 2) Bill, 1961.
- (c) Local Government (Postponement of Elections) Bill, 1961.

The Minister of Trade and Industry has expressed his willingness to deal with

the Loan (Consortio Empresas Grupo Del Conte) Bill, while the Minister of Education and Social Development will move the other two Bills.

Bills presented and read the First time.

SECOND READING

LOAN (CONSORCIO EMPRESAS GRUPO DEL CONTE) BILL

A Bill intituled: "An Ordinance to authorise the Governor to issue Bonds in connection with the construction and financing of the Parika-Bartica road".

The Vice-President: Hon. Members, as you have been advised, we have met for the purpose of considering the three Bills. I therefore call upon the Minister of Trade and Industry to move a motion for the suspension of the relevant Standing Orders to enable the Senate to proceed with the Loan (Consortio Empresas Grupo Del Conte) Bill.

Senator Hubbard: (Minister of Trade and Industry): The Government is anxious that action should be taken to finalize the transaction to enable a start to be made on the construction of the Parika-Bartica road which will be financed as a result of this Bill. I therefore move that the relevant Standing Orders be suspended to enable the Bill to be taken through all its stages today.

Question put, and agreed to.

Senator Hubbard: This is to me a very proud day, because it has fallen to my lot to initiate in this Senate a Measure which will commence work on the fulfilment of a dream which Guianese have cherished since the beginning of time. It is my proud duty to move the Second Reading of a Bill which provides for financial arrangements to allow a commencement to be made on the extension of our road facilities, so that we

may be able to sit in some powered vehicle other than a train and reach the remote hinterland of our country.

As hon. Members are aware, 90 per cent of our population lives on the coastlands. We are overcrowded, and because of that we are sometimes irritable with our neighbours. We disagree on many things, but I think we are all agreed on the necessity to move inwards and to spread our population as widely as possible over the many lands which now lie in natural forest, or are at any rate unoccupied and unworked. All patriots have felt that the future of this country lies in developing its hinterland. Some have dreamed of great wealth lying hidden under the roots of our forest giants, but we are yet to learn whether that natural wealth does exist, or whether it is only a pipe dream of a poverty-stricken people. I have been advised that in this hinterland of ours there have been discovered traces of many important minerals. We have found manganese, which is now being mined and exported. We have found traces of such other valuable minerals as lead and zinc, but most of our forest area is rain forest with a plentiful rainfall and, in such natural circumstances, minerals leech downwards and exploration is difficult. Exploration is difficult, but even getting to the point where we must begin exploration is hazardous in the present conditions of our transport system.

9.45 a.m.

The Bill for which I now seek to get the Senate's approval is the first step in rationalizing our transport system so that we can look beyond these forests and find out what is there, if indeed anything is there; that we may explore the extent to which the minerals whose traces have been discovered, exist in quantities which will justify expensive and extensive mining operations.

This country has been explored only by the geologists and by the intrepid and, indeed, the valiant porkknockers who came from the villages on our coastlands. It is these people, going over swift running rivers in boats that did not afford them a great deal of security, and streaking waterfalls, dying with a song on their lips, who brought us glimpses of what we hope is great mineral wealth in the hinterland of our country. The road which will result from the financial arrangements conceived in this Bill must surely be a great memorial to a great band of explorers anonymous, valiant and truly Guianese.

The problem of building roads in British Guiana is not a simple one. Roads on the coast have not followed any strict engineering pattern. They were originated to take light traffic and to carry "massa" in his horse and buggy from one plantation to another for swizzles in the morning and bring him to town so that he could do his regular shopping. In consequence, some of the roads we have running over the country have bases which it is most expensive to build roads on. That is the disadvantage of the past. And let us not forget that "the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children." We are now having the sins of our fathers truly visited upon us. But we are a new generation. We stand on the edge of a great tomorrow and we do things rather differently from the haphazard methods of our forefathers.

The road which is to be built will link Parika with Bartica because the road will run from Parika to a point opposite Bartica and there a ferry built in our own shipyard in British Guiana will carry the passengers across and the great hinterland will lie at their feet after a journey which is not too difficult or too long.

[SENATOR HUBBARD]

As we all know, the question of providing finance in under-developed countries such as ours has always been a difficult undertaking. It is all the more difficult when we are not free; when we are the wards of other people because when we are wards the world expects that the warden should take care of us, and so we do not get the generous aid we expect and, indeed, might receive if we are free. But we are approaching freedom and in spite of the fact that there are some amongst us who do not wish to be free or say they do not wish to be free, we are going to be free. This arrangement, therefore, arises out of our necessity to find finance in a form which is acceptable to us and acceptable to the financiers.

When the decision was taken that this road should be built, tenders were invited with a view to having the contractors participate in the financing of the operation. Bids were received and, having regard to cost, competence and the availability of contractor's finance, Government decided to award the contract to the *Consortio Empresas Grupo Del Conte*. This is a concern which has had experience in road building in Peru, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic and, so far as technical advice available to the Government is concerned, we are advised that they are competent to do the job. But, also, they have agreed that payment for the work should extend for a period of 10 years and that in satisfaction of the work they will accept bonds issued by the Government of British Guiana and bearing interest at the rate of 4½ percent. The Bill, which it is my privilege to move, seeks to authorize the transaction and to provide that the interest earned should be free of income tax as is customary with loans which we float nowadays.

The objects and reasons appended to the Bill set out, concisely, the principal facts and I have, therefore,

contented myself with putting the measure in context and inviting the Senate to support me in the circumstances of the Bill. I, therefore, Mr. President, have pleasure in moving the Second Reading of the

Loan (Consortio Empresas Grupo Del Conte) Bill, 1961.

Senator Jardim: I want first to say that Government is showing considerable imagination in going through with this Bill. As the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry (Senator Hubbard) has said, right through the history of this country there has been the tendency of vested interest who controlled the country to concentrate development on the coast. Imagination is needed to see that our future lies in the Interior, and is, therefore, welcome. I would, however, like to point out that though the aim of this Bill is commendable, the Government needs to be extremely careful in utilizing a foreign concern.

In Venezuela, at present, there is an economic depression. Is it that there is not sufficient work for this concern in Venezuela? Or is it that we are paying more than the Venezuelan Government pays at present for similar work? Do we need to do this? In Trinidad, recently, we have had the example of a West Indian Government in all good faith being led astray by a small Venezuelan company. For two years they had been dealing with this company but they had been led around in circles. Finally, they had to break off their dealings with it and turn the financing of that project over to another concern. Has the Government considered this example in awarding this contract to the *Del Conte Group*? If the Government has, well and good. If it has not, I would like seriously to ask Government to go into this concern thoroughly, because, at the moment, Government is playing with the hopes and aspirations of the people of this country. Should

something go wrong with this road; should it not be built by its target date: should the cost of it rise above that which the Government expects it to be, it would be a serious blow to this country. It would set back the psychological climate which is needed for opening up the Interior, by many years. For these reasons I think Government should consider giving as much publicity as possible to this concern. The people of this country should be brought into it. The imagination of the people of this country should be aroused.

So far, we have had in the newspapers publicity given a survey of the railway track by this concern. It was published in the newspapers that this survey was made at the cost of \$400,000. Since then, there has been no utterance from Government on this point. We are at a loss to know what is happening about the railway. I sincerely believe that this kind of publicity is not good enough. We must know more about the Parika-Bartica road. From the start of the construction of this road Government should satisfy public opinion that this firm is reliable; that it is capable, and not a small firm playing with the hopes of the people of Guiana as a small Venezuelan firm played with the hopes of the people of Trinidad. Right through the construction of this road we should know of the progress they have made, and when it comes to fruition, Government should give details of its cost to the people of this country who, in the last analysis, are paying for it.

10.00 a.m.

Senator Hubbard (*replying*): Mr. President, I am grateful for the compliment which Senator Jardim, representing the only opposition here, has seen fit to pay to the Government. I appreciate that. I can assure the hon. Senator that the Government is well aware of the difficulties which face the Trinidad Government, and has taken every-

thing into consideration in awarding this contract to the Company. Venezuela is in a difficult economic position. That is well known even to people who do little reading in economics, or pay little attention to what is happening in the world. Even Senator Jardim is aware of the difficulties in Venezuela.

I think it would be unkind of me to say why Venezuela is in her present difficulty, because we hope to have very friendly relations with that country. But Senator Jardim, and the country as a whole, may rest assured that this Government is very conscious of its responsibilities to the people; it is a people's Government and, therefore, it is not likely to squander what is very hard to get. Finance is very hard to get, and we husband it very carefully and try to spend it wisely.

If, as is bound to happen on occasions, some technician makes a mistake and we do the wrong thing, we keep such an eye on what takes place that we are able to discover the error and put it right. Again, we have the strength of being a people's Government, and, since we are a people's Government and have the confidence of the people, we need have no fear of admitting errors and correcting them. I give Senator Jardim the absolute assurance that if we discover ourselves to be in error, we have the strength to admit our error and put it right.

Reference was made to the railway survey. A survey was made of the railway as a base for a road for the simple reason that, to build a railway, engineering surveys have to be undertaken, because you cannot run a railway tract on soft mud, and it was a reasonable assumption that the bed of the railway would be a good bed for a road. That is why the survey was made. Nothing more has been heard about it for the simple reason that the Government has not found the finance to proceed with the matter, and further,

[SENATOR HUBBARD]

because the Government, at the present moment, has a United Nations Expert on Transport examining our whole problem of transport—not just the railway—the question of roads; the question of the rôle that water transport has to play in our emerging industries, and the relation of one to the other. That is why nothing more has been heard about the railway. It has not been abandoned; it is that we are working on the comprehensive examination of the whole problem of transport in this big country.

Finally, Senator Jardim has referred to bad publicity. I am very, very grateful indeed that the Senator should have raised this question of bad publicity, because it is one of the things that has plagued this country very much indeed. I went to North America just a short while ago, and I had the privilege of meeting some of the world's leading statesmen. I met the Prime Minister of Canada, who began by almost threatening us that we would have to justify a place in the Commonwealth, but, after he had been speaking to us for half an hour, he found such a different reality from what he had expected that he took the meeting past the scheduled half an hour to an hour and a quarter and had to keep his Cabinet waiting. We parted as friends.

The misconception of the Prime Minister of Canada is a misconception generated in British Guiana, and largely generated by the Party of which Senator Jardim is a leading member. It is today being peddled again by the newspaper which serves her Party, and which sends its reporters here to take only the speeches that she makes. If Senator Jardim is really conscious of the effect of bad publicity, she should do her best to ensure that the management of that newspaper, over which management she must have some influence, adopts an

attitude of responsibility in its function of reporting and avoids creating the bad publicity which is so harmful to British Guiana.

Sir, I think I have answered the points made by Senator Jardim, and I say, again, how grateful the Government is that, at least in the small matter of imagination, it can find common cause with the Senator. I express Government's hope that, in the matter of responsible behaviour, it can eventually find common cause with the Senator and her adherents.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Senate in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Senate resumed.

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

10.15 a.m.

CRIMINAL LAW (PROCEDURE) (AMENDMENT NO. 2) BILL

A Bill intituled: "An Ordinance to amend the Criminal Law (Procedure) Ordinance."

Senator Nunes (Minister of Education and Social Development): I beg to move the suspension of the relevant Standing Orders to enable the Senate to proceed with the Criminal Law (Procedure) (Amendment No. 2) Bill, 1961.

Question put, and agreed to.

Senator Nunes: It is doubtful whether subsection (2) of Section 5 of the Criminal Law (Procedure) Ordinance, Chapter 11, provides for the ad-

dition of cases to the list after the Criminal Sessions have commenced. This Bill seeks to clarify this position.

Further, Section 32A of the Criminal Law (Procedure) Ordinance does not provide for applications to be made for all-male juries in cases listed after the commencement of the Criminal Sessions. This Bill seeks to make that provision. I now move that the Criminal Law (Procedure) (Amendment No. 2) Bill, 1961, be read a Second time.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Senate in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Senate resumed.

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

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (POST- PONEMENT OF ELECTIONS) BILL

Bill intituled: "An Ordinance to provide for the postponement of Elections to Village Councils and for purposes connected therewith."

Senator Nunes: I beg to move the suspension of the relevant Standing Orders to enable the Senate to proceed with the Local Government (Postponement of Elections) Bill, 1961.

Question put, and agreed to.

Senator Nunes: The Local Government Ordinance, Chapter 150, provides for the holding of elections to village

councils between the 1st November and the 2nd December, 1961, under the limited franchise of property qualification of fifty dollars. I am quite sure that it will be conceded generally that this is an undesirable situation, and it is the intention of this Government to take progressive action and have subsequent elections based on universal adult suffrage. It will be remembered that the Treasurer of Coventry, Dr. Marshall, recommended that if the principle of universal adult suffrage be accepted at the centre it should also be accepted in the case of villages and other local authorities. It is therefore the intention to seek a postponement of village council elections pending the preparation of electoral arrangements for elections on the basis of universal adult suffrage. It is proposed that this provision should be retrospective as from the 31st October, 1961, that is the date preceding the period during which the elections were due. I have great pleasure in moving that the Local Government (Postponement of Elections) Bill, 1961, be read a Second time.

Senator Tasker: I support the object of the Bill but rise in order to grumble once again, as I have done on previous occasions in another place, at this insidious method of retrospective legislation. There may well be sound reasons on the Government's behalf why this legislation could not be brought forward earlier. In fact, however, the original Bill was not published until the 4th November—three days after the commencement of the period for local government elections—and I do most strongly protest on this matter of principle. Each time it happens there is always a good reason to explain the sacrifice of the principle involved. But one of these days we are going to find ourselves sliding into retrospective legislation before we know what has hit us, and it is going to be on a very much more vital matter to most people than the mere postponement of elections. I

[SENATOR TASKER]

beg the Government to give us an assurance that this is not going to be part of its policy in the future.

Senator Nunes: I rise to express regret at the delay in bringing forward this Bill. I would like to assure the hon. Senator that the Government has noted his comments, and to assure him too that it is not the policy of this Government to delay matters, but in this instance we regret it sincerely. I shall communicate to my colleague exactly what has been said in the Senate today.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Senate in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 6 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Senate resumed.

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

ADJOURNMENT

*Resolved, "That this Senate do now adjourn to a date to be notified."
[Senator Hubbard].*

Adjourned accordingly at 10.37 a.m.