

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
[VOLUME]**

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

118th Sitting

2 p.m.

Thursday, 20th January, 1977

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Speaker

Cde. Sase Narain, O.R., J.P., Speaker

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

Prime Minister (1)

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

(Absent – on leave)

Deputy Prime Minister (1)

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

Senior Ministers (9)

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

(Absent – on leave)

- *Cde. H. Green,
Minister of Co-operatives and
National Mobilisation (Absent – on leave)
- *Cde. H. O. Jack,
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources (Absent)
- *Cde. F. E. Hope,
Minister of Finance
- *Cde. S. S. Naraine, A. A.,
Minister of Works and Housing
- *Cde. G. A. King,
Minister of Trade and Consumer Protection (Absent)
- *Cde. G. B. Kennard, C. C. H.,
Minister of Agriculture (Absent)
- *Cde. C. L. Baird,
Minister of Education and Social Development (Absent – on leave)
- *Cde. F. R. Wills, S. C.,
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Justice (Absent)

Ministers (5)

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

***Non-elected Ministers**

Ministers of State (9)

Cde. M. Kasim, A. A.,
Minister of State for Agriculture

Cde. O. E. Clarke,
Minister of State – Regional
(East Berbice/Corentyne)

Cde. P. Duncan, J.P.,
Minister of State – Regional (Rupununi)

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

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

(Absent)

Cde. J. P. Chowritmootoo,
Minister of State – Regional
(Essequibo Coast/West Demerara)

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

(Absent)

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

(Absent)

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

(Absent)

Parliamentary Secretaries (6)

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

Cde. M. M. Ackman, C. C. H.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Office of the Prime Minister,
and Government Chief Whip

***Non-elected Ministers**

Cde. E. L. Ambrose,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture (Absent)

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

Cde. R. H. O. Corbin,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Education and Social Development (Absent)

Cde. M. Corrica,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Works and Housing (Absent – on leave)

Other Members (19)

Cde. L. M. Branco
Cde. E. M. Bynoe
Cde. E. H. A. Fowler
Cde. J. Gill
Cde. W. Hussain
Cde. S. Jaiserrisingh (Absent)
Cde. K. M. E. Jonas
Cde. M. Nissar
Cde. L. E. Ramsahoye
Cde. J. G. Ramson
Cde. P.A. Rayman
Cde. E. M. Stoby, J. P. (Absent)
Cde. S. H. Sukhu, M.S., J.P.
Cde. C. Sukul, J.P.
Cde. H. A. Taylor
Cde. R. C. Van Sluytman
Cde. L. E. Willems
Cde. C. E. Wrights, J.P.
Cde. M. Zaheeruddeen, J.P.

Members of the Opposition (16)

(i) People's Progressive Party (14)

Leader of the Opposition (1)

Cde. C. B. Jagan

(Absent – on leave)

Deputy Speaker (1)

Cde. Ram Karran

Other Members (12)

Cde. J. Jagan

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, J. P., Opposition Chief Whip

Cde. Narbada Persaud

Cde. C. Collymore

Cde. S. F. Mohamed

Cde. L. Lalbahadur

(Absent – on leave)

Cde. I. Basir

Cde. C. C. Belgrave

Cde. R. Ally

Cde. Dalchand, J. P.

Cde. Dindayal

Cde. H. Nokta

(ii) Liberator Party (2)

Mr. M. F. Singh

Mrs. E. DaSilva

(Absent – on leave)

\

OFFICERS

Clerk of the National Assembly – F. A. Narain

Acting Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly – A. Knight

20.1.77
2 p.m.

National Assembly

2 – 2.05 p.m.

PRAYERS

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave to Members

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to the Cde. Prime Minister for yesterday and today. Also to Cde. Baird, Minister of Education and Social Development, for today's sitting and to the hon. Member Mrs. DaSilva for today's sitting.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

APPROVAL OF ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE 1977

Assembly resolved itself into Committee of Supply to resume consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year, 1977 totalling \$417,283,736.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

The Chairman: Page 67.

HEAD 25 – MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

REGISTRATION AND ELECTIONS

Question proposed that the sum of \$562,570 for Head 25, Ministry of Home Affairs – Registration and Elections, stand part of the Estimates.

Cde. Collymore: Cde. Chairman, page 67, subhead 1, items (1), (2) and (3) and under Other Charges, subheads 5, 6, 7 and 9.

The Chairman: Before you begin, we have 100 minutes to conclude these other Heads and bearing in mind the proportion of the Government and the Opposition that will be 40:60. Please proceed.

Cde. Collymore: Dealing with subhead 1, item (1) Commissioner of Registration and Chief Elections Officer, item (2), Deputy Commissioner of Registration and item (3) Assistant Commissioner of Registration. When we peruse the figures in relation to 1976/1977 we note that there have been vacancies. We would like the Minister to say how long these vacancies existed and if they have now been filled.

Under Other charges, I shall deal with subhead 5, National Registration, subhead 6, National Elections, subhead 7, Local Authority Elections and subhead 9, Equipment and Materials. Cde. Chairman, elections and registration are very sore points in Guyana today and we on this side of the House are not satisfied with the way in which elections are being carried out. We would like to ask the Minister, who somehow is in charge of elections although, in accordance with the Constitution, he is not supposed to be, if elections are going to be held in the same old way as bequeathed to us by the British imperialists and if the same frustrations because of padded ballot boxes, postal votes, overseas votes, proxy votes, railway lines, horses and dead people, are going to be experienced. We would also wish to know if new born infants and the unborn are going to vote.

2.05 p.m.

Cde. Prime Minister said elections are going to be held next year. It seems as though many things are going to be done next year. We have been hearing about a new Constitution, and we want to know from the Minister, if he is able to reply, what is the situation with the new Constitution. We would like to know if the Constitution is going to be promulgated before or after the General Election is going to be promulgated before or after the General Elections are

held. We are not hearing anything. They are just talking endlessly about the Constitution but nothing concrete is coming out of the Ministers.

Cde. Chairman, we submit that if elections are to be held, it would be ridiculous to hold them in the same way in which the Government has been holding them, and if the Government means to hold elections under a new Constitution, then the people of Guyana should know. We submit that the Parties in this National Assembly and the people at large should be informed as to what progress, if any, is being made on the Constitution, and we should be involved in framing this Constitution. We feel it is in the interest of the Government, in the interest of the Opposition and the people at large, for us to have a Constitution promulgated in this House with the unanimous support of everybody. We are asking for an all-party committee to look into the Constitution and to make suggestions.

We have been hearing time and again about pleas for national unity. These are areas where national unity could be cemented but we are not being involved. The Government is operating as though it is running a pawnshop; it goes behind a screen and does its business. But Government business should not be done like pawnshop business; it is supposed to be public business and things which are done behind the screen should come into the limelight.

If the Minister can say when the Constitution is to be introduced in this House and if there is any plan by the Government to involve the Opposition forces we would be very grateful for the information. Some years ago a very good friend of mine, who sits on the opposite side but is not here now, said that the time is ripe for a one-party state. We know that the time is not ripe for any such thing and we know also that some Members on the Government side have not yet disgorged themselves of such an idea. In any case we know that the members of the Government dare claiming to be wedded to Marxism Leninism. We will not say that this is not so; it is up to them to prove that it is so. We will give them the benefit of the doubt. They say they want to construct a socialist society. In most of the socialist states in the world today there

are multi-party systems. Owing to certain historical developments there have been one-party regimes in some monarchical countries.

We want to ask the Minister if, in view of the Government's wish to construct socialism, any investigation has been made in the socialist states about how the multi-party system functions. If not, we would like to ask the Minister why not. We would like to suggest that there should be an all party committee to visit every socialist country, if possible, to have a look at how the system functions. Fidel Castro came to power in 1959 and it was not until 1976 that he had elections. Elections have been welcomed by the people of Cuba by 99 point something per cent. I would like to ask the members of the government if they do not think that these are very good conditions in the interest of national unity. And if they are in favour of that will they take the necessary action to have them brought to Guyana? We must have an all-party committee to check and see how socialist regimes function in a multi-party system.

As I said, elections are a sore point. In some cases the Government is not holding elections, and in other cases elections are being held. We have information to the effect that elections are being held in the bush. Why hold elections in the bush and no elections on the coast?

The Chairman: What are you saying? That there should be no elections?

Cde. Collymore: I am coming to the point, Cde. Chairman. Please do not anticipate me. In the G.I.S. news bulletin of 3rd January, 1977, we read:

“Amerindian Captains and Councillors elected.”

and on the 13th January,

2.15 p.m.

“For many months we have been hearing about elections. It is said here that these are Local government Elections. This is a government Publication from the Ministry of Information and Culture and I quote:

“Cde. Liverie Thomas has been elected Captain of Pipillipai Amerindian Village, Region 5, Mazaruni/Potaro for a period of one year with effect from November 24, 1976, at the recently held Local Government Elections.”

The operative words are “Local Government Elections.” Why are there elections in the bush and none on the coast? I shudder to think what is happening to the Amerindian people. Two Captains, 12 Councillors elected. I would like to ask the hon. Minister how these elections are being held in the Amerindian areas; what are the criteria etc? Can he explain, if possible, why elections are not being held on the coastlands?

Many of the villages are in a state of chaos because of hand-picked personnel who are out of touch with the community and the community’s aspirations but no contests are held. Where it concerns General Elections, Cde. Chairman, we submit that the situation will be multiplied. The Government, which is facing a situation where there is lack of rapport between the people and the Local Authorities, has picked on a new device, the Community Development Councils. We submit that these Community Development Councils are measures, devices or gadgets to circumvent the aspirations of the people and to perpetuate the non-representative Local Authority bodies.

I want to just let you, Cde. Chairman, and the Minister know what these Councils are supposed to do. You will see a duality of purpose if you compare these Councils with the Local Authorities. I quote here from G.I.S. Bulletin No. 7 of 15th January, 1977:

“The councils will identify community problems and needs and co-ordinate efforts towards their solution.

The councils will also serve as the means of bringing together groups and individuals in the Community for the purpose of discussing community problems and for taking joint action towards the solution of these problems.

The councils will also manage and maintain community centres, playgrounds and parks.”

It means that the Community Councils are doing everything that the Local Authority bodies are supposed to do, except raise rates and taxes. Why? We know from the machinery under which the councils function that there are aims at mobilizing mass participation which the Local Authority bodies cannot do and we feel that this is bypassing the situation and there should be General Elections.

We in the People’s Progressive Party have suggestions to make to the Government in relation to the holding of district elections, regional elections, municipal elections and general elections. If, as our good friends on the opposite side say, they are interested in national unity, they can come and talk to us; fix the date and we are prepared to discuss the situation. I do not know if our good friends on the opposite side are not embarrassed when they go abroad and people in one breath tell them about choke and rob and rigged elections. We have suggestions to make in relation to these aspects and we would welcome any initiative by the Government to have them discussed.

We are also aware that as far as legislation is concerned, many people are still not on the electoral list although they are eighteen years or older. For some reason or the other, through various measures and omissions and practices, many of the Guyanese people have been unable to get on the electoral list. We would like to ask the Minister if he is aware of this and if he has

plans to re-open the list as early as possible and to ensure that all the people of Guyana are on the electoral list.

We would also like to ask the Minister if he is satisfied with the situation in relation to overseas voting. The situation is so chaotic overseas that even railway stations in Britain voted in Guyana elections and perhaps this is one of the reasons why the Cde. Minister of Home Affairs some weeks ago tabled and passed in this honourable House the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill 1976. He tried to pass off this Bill as something quite simple and without any controversy but we know that it is to streamline the operations overseas; it is to streamline the electoral rigging machinery. This Bill dates back to 1966 so quite a few thousand of people are to be put on the roll. We are submitting that if Guyanese leave their country for permanent residence abroad they have no moral right to dictate what type of Government should exist in Guyana.

2.25 p.m.

We would like to ask the Minister these questions which have been enunciated here and we draw the House's attention to the fact that during the general debate on the budget, queries were thrown out as to the new Constitution, which we hope is going to be a socialist Constitution, and to other aspects of development in Guyana. We also asked about the way in which elections will be held and we were rewarded by a deafening silence; not a word was said.

I want to impress upon the Minister this fact; we, on this side of the House, represent over half of the population in Guyana and whenever I get up in this honourable House to make an announcement in relation to my area of intervention, I represent not myself only, I represent the People's Progressive Party and over half a million people in this country. If questions are asked, they must be answered. The Minister said nothing about the new Constitution; nothing

about Elections, how they are going to be held. I hope he respects this House by giving answers now on this occasion.

If we must say a few words about the Constitution, it is an independent Constitution - -

The Chairman: We are not discussing the question of the Constitution. If you want to talk about general elections, please proceed. We have a Constitution presently; when the new Constitution comes in, you can raise all the queries about it.

Cde. Collymore: Cde. Chairman, we are discussing National Elections, Registration

The Chairman: We are not discussing the Constitution: we are discussing the question of elections.

Cde. Collymore: With all due respect to you and your ruling, I must point out that elections are held under a Constitution and the Government is amending that Constitution and a new socialist Constitution –

The Chairman: You said I have ruled and you respect my ruling. There is no new Constitution before the House; there is a statement which the Prime Minister made that there will be a new Constitution in which everybody would be involved. You premise that means that you all would not be involved; you will not be consulted; nothing will be discussed. How could we go into that area of discussion now?

Cde. Collymore: I wanted to establish all the parameters here and now because there may not be another occasion. Since you have ruled, I submit to your ruling.

In any case, dealing with General Elections, we would like to ask that more information be “awarded” to the Opposition benches where this is concerned and that –

The Chairman: I do not follow what you mean by “more information must be awarded.”

Cde. Collymore: so you are participating in the debate?

The Chairman: I must understand what you are saying. That is my function. You are saying you must be “awarded.” What do you mean by “awarded.”

Cde. Collymore: More information must be granted to us. Where the registration is concerned, we are not satisfied with the way it has been conducted, or is being conducted, and we would like to have assurances that - -

The Chairman: Cde. Collymore you have said that ten times already for this afternoon.

Cde. Collymore: I will take my seat.

The Chairman: Cde. Nokta.

Cde. Nokta: Page 67, subhead 5, under Other Charges, National Registration.

The Chairman: Cde. Nokta, before you start, let me make it very clear. I am not preventing any person from making his comments once it is on the matter and once it is not repetitious. That is what Cde. Collymore has said. Once you are not going to repeat the same thing, please proceed.

Cde. Nokta: Cde. Chairman, some time around the 4th August, 1976, one Rampersaud from the North West district was carrying out an exercise of National Registration in the Aruau

river area. At the home of one DeSouza, there was a young man by the name of Wilfred DeSouza, his son, a mentally retarded individual who refused to be registered. The National Registration Officer reported the matter to the Mabaruma Police Station and on the 6th August, 1976, two armed policemen accompanied by the captain, one Simeon Pierre, paddled a boat four miles to the home of this individual and they shot Wilfred DeSouza in the head, cold bloodedly. He was dead, dead in the house. **[Interruption]**

The Chairman: Cde. Leader of the House, I would expect that you would not carry on that type of dialogue when a Member is addressing the Assembly.

Cde. Nokta: I want to ask the Minister if he is aware of this and whether he is satisfied that this is the way national registration should be done in this country.

Secondly, I should like to ask the Minister if any policeman or any one of the people in that party on that day was charged or was questioned and what has happened to this matter. Since 6th August, 1976, we have heard nothing. The body of Wilfred DeSouza was brought to Georgetown for a post mortem examination and it was buried in Georgetown but we have heard nothing more. I would like to ask the Minister to comment fully on this matter.

Cde. Dalchand: Since August last year national registration was carried out and up to this time people's photographs have not been taken in many areas of Guyana. Because of this people cannot get their identification cards. I would like to ask the Minister if he can say how early these photographs will be taken and these people will be afforded their identification cards.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

The Minister of Home Affairs: (Cde. Mingo): May I deal first of all with the questions asked by Cde. Collymore with respect to items (1), (2) and (3), subhead 1. He did enquire about vacancies in respect of those posts. He asked how long vacancies existed and whether they have been filled. There is a vacancy for the Commissioner of Registration and Chief Elections Office. The last office retired some time in late 1975, then his successor died and now we have somebody acting in that position. The position has not been filled.

With respect to the Deputy Commissioner of Registration, the substantive holder of the post is now on secondment to the Ministry of National Development and somebody is acting in the post. With respect to the post of Assistant Commissioner of Registration, the same thing. He is on study leave overseas and somebody is acting in this position.

Cde. Collymore, with respect to subheads 5, 6 and 7, went to town on the question of elections. I think as far as local government elections are concerned, the Minister responsible for local government in this House did explain what the position was. I should explain what is our position. We in the Ministry of Home Affairs do not ever decide when elections are to be held. All we do is set up the machinery to conduct elections once the instructions are given to us. It means therefore we are not the people to be asked when elections will be held or what type of elections we are going to have, if we are going to have a new system. For that matter, I think it is a question that neither Cde. Collymore nor I can decide. It is a question for the bigger boys. The question of a new Constitution, the question of the type of elections are not questions for you and me. It is a question for bigger people.

On the question of National Registration, he said many persons were not on the list. The Prime Minister gave the P.P.P. a commitment, that registration will be held again this year. We had one last year and we gave the commitment that we are going to have another registration this year. We are hoping to have that registration not before June this year so all those people who got away, certainly you will have an opportunity to see that they are registered.

Cde. Dalchand can tell you that he brought certain things to our attention when we were registering last year. Ask him I few didn't see to it that what he requested was done. Cde. Ram Karran also brought some matters to our attention and we saw that those matters were properly investigated. Once you do your part, we are willing to help you to see that your people are registered.

He also asked whether I was satisfied with respect to the overseas voting. As I said earlier, this is a question that has to be decided by the bigger boys. We are not even certain what system is going to be used for the next elections. And he went back to attack a very simple Bill which was produced in this House, the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill 1976. Again, may I give him the assurance that this has nothing to do with elections. All that we are seeking to do is to ensure that those Guyanese who might be born overseas or who die overseas will have an opportunity to be registered in Guyana. That is all it seeks to do.

Cde. Nokta in his contribution did mention an incident which took place in the North West District, a very unfortunate incident. Unfortunately, he did not give us all the facts. He made it appear a simple matter.

He did not say that the police were attacked by the people when they went. He did not say that -- **[Interruption]** Rampersaud was not there at the time when the police arrived, he came later.

On the question of Cde. Dalchand's contribution, we are going to have registration coming off later this year and you will get your people registered.

20.1.77

National Assembly

2.35 – 2.45 p.m.

2.35 p.m.

On the question of a charge, this matter is still being investigated. In certain areas it is a little difficult to do these things.

Cde. Collymore tried to speak on the question of Community Development Councils. Community Development Councils are Councils which are intended to do developmental work in various areas and these have been there for a long time. These Community Development Councils were established in this country before 1973 when we had the last elections. I am not certain that he really understands all the functions of these bodies and why they have been instituted. Cde. Chairman, our Ministry does not handle those elections. Those elections are handled by the Ministry of Regional Development.

Head 25, Ministry of Home Affairs – Registration and Elections - \$562,570 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Page 68

**HEAD 26 – MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS
REGISTRATION, IMMIGRATION, BIRTHS ETC.**

Question proposed that the sum of \$185,280 for Head 26, Ministry of Home Affairs, Registration, Immigration, Births etc. stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Feilden Singh.

Mr. M. F. Singh: Mr. Chairman, could the hon. Minister tell us, in respect of subhead 1, item (2), Deputy Registrar General, whether this post is in fact vacant? It does appear to be

since the 1976 Approved Estimates provided for \$7,008, but the revised amount listed is only \$1,608.

Dealing with this department generally and the work of the Registrar, Deputy and his staff, you will remember that the hon. Reepu Daman Persaud and myself spoke at length recently when we were debating the Bill referred to by Cde. Collymore. We talked of the need for legislation to simplify, and make less costly, aspects of registration of Births and Deaths dealt with by this department. We talked of the need for a simple type of birth certificate, of the need to simplify the procedure for correction of erroneous entries, the procedure for insertion on the births' register of people whose births have been inadvertently omitted. I gave the case of a person who could only have been registered by the evidence of somebody who was present at birth and she could not find anybody present at her birth therefore her birth is still not registered. These are problems we spoke at length about.

To my mind this department is, indeed, understaffed and overworked. Undoubtedly – and I will be the first one to admit this, from personal experience – the department has a very capable and knowledgeable head of department – the Registrar General. He needs the proper facilities, he needs the tools to do a better job and I would like to ask the minister what progress is being made in respect of the proposed legislation to give him better tools to do the job.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

Cde. Mingo: Cde. Chairman, the hon. Member Mr. Singh enquired as to the position with the post of Deputy Registrar General. I wish to tell him that the post is vacant. The holder of this post has been dismissed. There was a long drawn-out issue when he was on suspension, then there were enquiries. Eventually, he was dismissed. This was completed late last year,

which means that the position has not yet been filled. The post has been advertised and I think very active steps will now be taken to have it filled.

The hon. Member asked what progress is being made to have legislation to provide better facilities for the Registrar General and his staff. When we were debating the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill 1976 there were certain suggestions made by both the hon. Member Mr. Singh and Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud with respect to certain things which should have been done in that department with respect to corrections of errors on birth certificates and on marriage certificates. I should say that action has been taken to amend the legislation and also to amend the regulations which go with the Act to have those corrections made simply by the Registrar General rather than using the expensive procedure of going to a lawyer and having to spend quite a lot of money to do it.

The other point which was raised then was to have a simpler certificate. We are also taking steps to have this done. We have what we call a short certificate which will contain information just relating to the person, things like name, where born, leaving out entirely any information relating to the person's parents, father and mother, which means that it might help to remove that stigma which is caused by reference to father in the case of the child born out of wedlock. These are things we are actually working on to help improve the quality of work in this department.

On the question of staffing, the Registrar General from time to time does refer to the fact that his staff is very heavily pressed with work. For instance, he was reporting to me that on the first working day of this year 420 persons went there applying for birth certificates. There seems to be a very great pressure on this department and we are looking into the question of providing more staff. We hope to provide more staff and we hope to have certain amendments done to the regulations and also to the Act to correct certain situations which cause difficulty to people when they go there.

Head 26, Ministry of Home Affairs – Registration, Immigration, Births etc - \$185,280 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

2.45 p.m.

The Chairman: Page 69

DIVISION XII – MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

Question proposed that the sum of \$1,380,000 for Division XII, Ministry of Home Affairs, stand part of the Estimates.

Cde. Collymore: Page 69, subhead 1, Prison Improvement. We note here that the Approval Estimates in 1976 was \$300,000 and it was revised to \$180,000 in 1976. The Minister is now seeking \$28,000. I would like to ask the Minister if he does not consider this a ridiculous sum for prison improvement and whether this is another area which has fallen victim to the austerity drive. We feel that it should be considerably more than \$28,000.

Subhead 2, Stations, under the heading “Police”. We note here that \$150,000 is being sought. It says here in the legend “to provide for the renovation and construction of stations”. We would like to know where they are being built? How many are being built? And would the Minister assure the House that this sum of \$150,000 is adequate to build new stations?

Before we move on to subhead 3, we should deal with the Capital Expenditure of the Police Department. We know full well from the debate which took place here yesterday that the country is up to its ears in crime. The coke and robbers have taken over the streets. People can hardly sleep at nights. When we look at the Estimates we see that the sum approved as capital estimates for the Police in 1976 was \$2.5 million and this sum was revised downwards in 1976 to

\$1.9 million. And for this year when the incidence of choke and rob creates a crisis as severe as the economic crisis, we have a miserable sum of \$597,000. I would like to ask the Minister if he feels that this sum to be spent on capital equipment for the Police is adequate to stem the rising tide of crime and to improve the mobility and efficiency in the Police Force. We on this side of the House feel that this sum is going to create problems for the Police and the more problems are created for the Police the more the criminal elements will have a field day.

Subhead 3, Equipment – Land, Air and Water Transport. We know that the Minister on a previous occasion informed this House that over 60 vehicles have been bought. There is still a severe shortage of vehicles in the Police Department. As a result the mobility of the Police Force is hindered.

The Chairman: Cde. Collymore yesterday you made that point. Rules provide that there must not be repetition.

Cde. Collymore: I want to ensure that the nail is driven home. Subhead 4, Housing. We have information to the effect that there is a serious situation where housing for the Police is concerned and perhaps the Minister can tell us what are the facilities available? How are they going to be housed? Can he assure us that the pittance which is being given to them as a house allowance is adequate? We feel that the sum is inadequate and we have received a feedback from Police Officers that the sum needs revising upwards. We would like to ask the Minister if any housing schemes are being earmarked for the Police Department and where these housing schemes are to be located?

Subhead 8, Fire and Ambulance Station. We raised this matter yesterday. We notice that this is to provide for the construction of fire and ambulance station. The Minister did not say where the ambulance stations or fire stations would be, if they are going to be together. We would also like to ask the Minister if part of this sum will be used to buy new ambulances?

Dealing with the Fire Department, the Minister said yesterday that the Government is buying some new fire units. We want to ask the Minister if the amount of units which the Government will be purchasing will be adequate to take care of the demand for new units? We have information to the effect that at the Central Fire Station there are only two working units. The other vehicles are in a state of disrepair and chaos. At the Alberttown Station there is only one unit which is used for training purposes only. At West Ruimveldt the unit is 25 years old. Recently when it was traversing the street at a great speed a large part fell off nearly killing pedestrians. At Campbellville there is a land rover, for auxiliary purposes only, which does have a tender attached. This land rover is supposed to cater for wide areas including Prashad Nagar. We know from yesterday that there are no fire hydrants at Prashad Nagar. Will the Minister say when a proper unit will be earmarked for Campbellville?

The Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Feilden Singh

Mr. M. F. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Subhead 1, Prison Improvement. The sum of \$28,000 is being requested. This is very small indeed and the legend says to provide for prison improvement. Specifically what will be done with this paltry amount of \$28,000 in the field of prison improvement?

Subhead 2, Stations. \$150,000 is requested and the legend says to provide for the renovation and construction of stations. The sum of \$500,000 is shown in the column "1976 Approved Estimates: and that was revised to \$180,000. It is listed on page 67 of the 1976 Estimates. When dealing with that page in December, 1975, the Minister outlined to me what a big programme he had for 1976. Since we note that only \$180,000 was spent out of the \$500,000 I would like to ask specifically what was the \$180,000 spent on. What was in fact done in 1976 and what is proposed to be done in 1977 with the sum of \$150,000?

Subhead 3 Equipment – Land, Air and Water Transport. We note that \$150,000 is being requested for 1977 and we have a problem which is a little bit on the reverse here because the 1976 Approved Estimates was in the vicinity of \$1,300,000 and the revised amount was \$1,700,000. What is the position, sir? If we spent so much more, then we must have bought a lot in 1976. What are we going to buy in 1977 with this \$150,000.

In respect of subhead 5, Purchases of Horses etc., the legend states “To purchase saddles” but we are not asked to vote anything at all there. Is it that they do want some money to provide saddles or is it that we should take out the legend altogether because no money is requested?

2.55 p.m.

In respect of subhead 7, Motor Transport and marine Workshop, the sum of \$120,000 is requested “To provide for the purchase of miscellaneous equipment,” according to the legend. Can we have details of these miscellaneous equipment?

With respect to subhead 8, Fire and Ambulance Station, the sum being requested is \$100,000 and when we look at the legend it states, “To provide for the construction of fire and ambulance stations.” We will realize that with the high cost of building materials and materials generally this sum of \$100,000 cannot really construct very many fire and ambulance stations. Can the hon. Minister give us his programme for the spending of this \$100,000.

Subhead 10, Equipment, \$300,000. In 1976 the sum of \$1,300,000 was approved. What was in fact spent was only \$100,000. Therefore our programme, for which we had earmarked \$1.3 million, was drastically revised in 1976 and only \$100,000 was spent. Again I remember that in December 1975 the hon. Minister said that with this \$1.3 million they intended to buy airport crash tenders, water tenders and he listed several other pieces of equipment. Certainly \$100,000 could not have bought many of those. Can the hon. Minister tell us what

was in fact bought with the \$100,000 and what will be bought with the \$300,000 being provided this year?

Under subhead 12, Purchase of Equipment, the sum of \$350,000 is requested for miscellaneous equipment. Can we have some details on that?

Cde. Ally: Cde. Chairman, I would like to ask the hon. Minister and the Commissioner of Police who is here – I think it is a nice thing for him to hear.

The Chairman: You will ask the Minister.

Cde. Ally: Some of these stations will not help us very much unless they function properly. At the moment there are some stations which are not really functioning. And the public have no confidence in the staff of some of these stations. For instance, - -

The Chairman: Subhead 2, Stations. Some of these stations are not really functioning properly: the staff are not doing their, duty so to speak, towards the public. For instance, a man used a water pump and this pump was stolen from him one night. Two days later someone went to his place and told him that if he wished the pump returned to him he would have to pay \$150. This was a ransom. The man decided to pay the \$150 but he had to travel up to Springlands to get the pump.

The Chairman: Cde. Ally, we are dealing with stations and the legend states: “To provide for the renovation and construction of stations.” Please confine all your remarks to that aspect.

Cde. Ally: Cde. Chairman, I think you will agree with me that I wanted to speak last night and you did not give me an opportunity.

The Chairman: I don't live in the past.

Cde. Ally: We had four hours for this Head.

The Chairman: Cde. Ally, do you have anything to say? Otherwise I will proceed.
Cde. Nokta.

Cde. Nokta: Page 69, subhead 2, Stations. The sum of \$150,000 is now being put on the Estimates for capital works. As I understand it, the security of this Parliament comes under the administration of Brickdam Police Station. I have seen since the opening of the Budget Debate a very clear type of security being established in this Parliament.

The Chairman: Cde. Nokta, speak on the item please. I have been giving so much latitude to the Opposition that they are taking licence to talk whatever they like and I am not going to allow that any more.

Cde. Nokta: I wanted to speak last night on three occasions.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister, please answer the questions.

Cde. Mingo: Cde. Chairman, subhead 1, Prison Improvement. Cde. Collymore said it was ridiculous that we are spending only \$28,000 on improvement of the prisons and then the hon. Member Mr. Singh asked how was last year's amount spent. I think Code. Collymore also asked how are we going to spend this \$28,000. In the first place, I should say that last year the amount was spent on putting a launch in the Mazaruni area, a dormitory at Timehri, three houses at Mazaruni, a dispensary in New Amsterdam, and on purchasing one 7-ton truck. We also had to remove three houses in New Amsterdam; we bought a Colt van for Georgetown, water coolers and also on tractor. There was a new kitchen constructed at the Georgetown Prison. During this year we are hoping to use the \$28,000 to purchase a Colt van for moving

around Georgetown and travelling to Timehri, to buy a platform scale for the Mazaruni Prison, to improve the sanitation facilities at Timehri and to buy vulcanising machines for Mazaruni.

Subhead 2, Stations. The hon. Member Mr. Singh asked about this. He asked how the sum of \$100,000 voted last year was spent. I do not have any details at this moment. He also asked what was going to be done in 1977 and then Cde. Collymore asked where the stations are going to be built. As far as the stations go, we hope to renovate some, extend some, construct one new one, renovate two administrative buildings at Eve Leary and renovate and acquire the Demerara Rowing club to facilitate the Police at Ruimveldt. We are going to extend and renovate Matthews Ridge Police Station and we are going to construct a new police station at Yarakita. We are also going to build a station at Monkey Mountain in the Rupununi District.

Under subhead 3, Equipment – Land, Air and Water Transport, Cde. Collymore tried to compare the situation in 1976 with that in 1977. I think I did say at the time when supplementary estimates were presented in this House that we had sixty-four vehicles for the Police Force. This year we are to purchase four patrol cars, one patrol van, two land rovers and four motor cycles.

3.05 p.m.

Under subhead 4, Housing, Cde. Collymore enquired whether this provision would be enough to house policemen. He also asked where housing schemes are and enquired about housing allowance, whether the amount is adequate. I wonder if he can tell me what amount a constable receives as house allowance. Anyhow, Cde. Chairman, the Police have expressed satisfaction with their housing allowance, that is to say, we have a situation where all the security forces are receiving the same housing allowances.

On the question of housing schemes, we have earmarked a portion of land at Yarowkabra on the Linden Highway and on this land policemen are to build 125 houses. At the moment at Melanie Damishana, the Police have already completed 28 houses and are now working on another 28 houses. So that is 125 buildings and 56. Apart from that, we hope to provide housing at Wales where we are going to build two quarters and then we are hoping to repair and extend the barrack-room for women at Brickdam. We are introducing more women in the Force and so we have to find accommodation for them. And then we are going to do further repairs to two large blocks of married quarters above the officers' mess at Eve Leary. These are some of the housing projects and programmes which we have for 1975.

On subhead 5, Purchase of Horses etc, the hon. Member Mr. Singh wondered whether the legend there was in order: "To purchase saddles." That should have been omitted because there is no provision this year under horses.

Now, on subhead 10, Equipment, the hon. Member Mr. Singh was enquiring what was the equipment that will be purchased. We have a long list which I can give him: six hydraulic jacks, three air compressors, six beltwinches, four carpenter tool kits, three panel kits, one wheel alignment tool, one wheel-balancing tool, one objective tester and a long list – two welding equipment kits, two testers and so on; a very long list.

Under subhead 8, the hon. Member Mr. Singh also asked about the Fire and Ambulance Stations and he wondered what we were going to do with the \$100,000 to be voted there. I wish to let him know this is really to complete three stations in the rural areas which were started last year: one at Anna Regina, one at Leonora, one at Corriverton.

Now under subhead 10 also, the hon. Member Mr. Singh asked whether the equipment for the Airport, the Crash Tender and so on, had been bought. I wish to tell him that the Airport Crash Tender has been bought and is soon to arrive in the country. The equipment which we

propose to buy this year are three land rovers, one airport ambulance, three hundred lengths of hose and two portable pumps. I shall not deal with the questions asked by Cde. Ally or Cde. Persaud because they really had no relation to the Head.

Division XII, Ministry of Home Affairs, \$1,380,000 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Pages 26 and 27.

HEAD 5 – MINISTRY OF FINANCE AUDIT

Question proposed that the sum of \$784, 075 for Head 5, Audit, stand part of the Estimates.

Cde. Narbada Persaud: Cde. Chairman, on the last occasion when we had cause to speak about the office of the Director of Audit, I did refer to Article 116 of the Constitution of Guyana which states clearly that reports must be submitted by the Director of Audit to the Minister of Finance. At that time, I also drew the attention of the House to the fact that the Minister is supposed to lay those reports in this House at regular intervals. Unfortunately, I wish today to speak on subhead 1, items (1) (11), (13) and (15).

My first question to the Minister would be whether the post of Director of Audit is vacant because I have been told that the Director of Audit has not been there for some time. Perhaps he may be able to say whether he is on leave or he is hoping to retire or resign or something. This office deals with the financial control of all expenditure and revenue through the Ministry of Finance. Financial control however in Guyana has today become something of the past because from information received, the 1967 report was laid in this honourable House on the 15th June,

1970 and the last report, that is, the report for the year 1968, was laid in the House on 28th March, 1974. Cde. Chairman, yesterday, we had Cde. Collymore telling us about some of these frauds in some of the Government departments and it makes it very necessary for us to have some reports laid in this House. If we cannot have the 1976 report in 1977, we could at least have the 1975 Report in 1977.

At item (13), I have noted that there are some vacancies for Audit Trainees. I wonder if the hon. Minister could tell us this afternoon whether these vacancies have now been filled. I have learnt that the advertisements went out as early as possible, February last year, and interviews were conducted since February last year for these vacancies. Recommendations were made by the Audit Department and sent to the Public Service Commission. My information is that up to now nothing has been done.

3.15 p.m.

I wonder if the Minister could tell us this afternoon – as I pointed out, this department is a very important department which deals with the financial control – how early he is going to guarantee this House that these vacancies can be filled. I wonder if the Minister can tell us whether these vacancies are the cause of these reports not being prepared and not being laid before this House. I wonder if the Minister can also tell us this afternoon up to what year accounts have reached the Director of Audit in order that we can examine whether the vacancies that exist in the office of the Director of Audit are the cause of the delay or whether there is some problem which prevents the Accountant General's Office from submitting these accounts. I would feel that the Minister should bring this House up to date on these questions.

Page 27, subhead 9, Training of Auditors. I have noted a reduction in the vote for the training of auditors. I want to ask the Minister whether at the moment auditors are being trained and how many there are in training in keeping with these vacancies that exist in the office of the

Director of Audit, whether the Minister does not consider it necessary to have auditors trained in order that that department – a department that does not come under Ministerial control; it has some autonomy – can deal efficiently and effectively with the accounts, the expenditure particularly, and more so with the irregularities that take place in Government Ministries.

Mr. M. F. Singh: I certainly would not like to be repetitious on this but merely wish to say that year after year under this Head I have been talking about audit reports. The last speaker did talk about it and the urgent necessity for requirements of the law and the Constitution to be met. As the Minister has heard it all before, year after year, I would not repeat it, but could the hon. Minister give us a progress report, let us find out how things are going, when we can expect the requirements of the law to be met? For example, could he say whether the accounts for 1975 were presented for audit by the Accountant General on or before 30th April, 1976, as is required by the law to be done?

Moving away from that to vacancies, we have heard year after year admitted that this department suffers from a shortage of staff. We know it is a specialised agency, we know that plans were afoot and efforts were being made to recruit personnel to fill the vacancies. Could we again get a progress report about this? How successful has the Minister been to give the Director of Audit the tools to do the job, to give him the required amount of personnel so that he can in fact fill the constitutional role with efficiency in this very vital department?

The Chairman: Cde. Minister.

The Minister of Finance (Cde. Hope): The hon. Member Cde. Persaud asked first of all whether the post of Director of Audit was vacant. He heard the man had gone away, or was on leave, but I would like to introduce him to the Director of Audit who is sitting directly before him. **[Interruption]** I understand that. That is why I am introducing him to you. The hon. Member also referred to the fact that in his view financial control has become a matter of the past

and so on. He wondered whether it was because there were vacancies in the posts of audit trainees. He did recount what progress the department has apparently been making with regard to the filling of these posts to the point where the ball is now in the court of the Public Service Commission, but the most recent information is that there are just two vacancies in this particular post, two out of an establishment of twenty-five, so it does not appear that the Cde. Member's information is really up to date.

With regard to the question of the Audit Reports, both he and the hon. Member Mr. Singh raised the question of the lateness of the Report and, let me say, Cde. Chairman, right away that the Reports are in fact very late. I am going to admit they are embarrassingly late but the reason for this is not really at the door of the Director of Audit. The problem really lies in the machines which are in fact processing the data which come from all the Ministries.

The facts show that all the programmes for the computers have not been completely written and part of this is because we did permit the man who would normally be writing the more complicated programmes to do some extra work in programming abroad. He has just returned and without these particular programmes the complete set of reports could not be provided in order to get the complete report ready. Now the man is back on his job I would expect that one of his first tasks would be to complete at least one or two of the more complicated programmes on the basis of which we expect the final reports, the compiling of tabulations or accounts, would be available to complete most of these reports.

In fact, the last report which was presented to the Director of Audit relates to 1970. It is also the case that the 1968 report is available for the Parliament's Public Accounts Committee to look into. I am advised that the Chairman of the Public Accounts committee has not yet called a meeting to examine that report and one has to - - **[Interruption]** You didn't want to carry out

the task of examining these reports even though you claim these reports were not written. Cde. Chairman, that is no excuse really. The reports will be prepared and I hope that when they come before the Public Accounts Committee, the Chairman will be a little bit more prompt in considering the reports than the previous Chairman

3.25 p.m.

On the question of subhead 9, auditors are being trained. There is a continuous programme of training and it does not have to cost the same thing every year. There are some years when materials have to be provided. Other years materials do not have to be provided. Fortunately, I do not think we need as much material as last year and while the programme continues to be continuous we will spend less dollars.

A point was raised by the hon. Member Mr. Singh on the question of vacancies. I am told that throughout the department there are about 29 vacancies at the moment out of 122. There are problems in filling these posts as there are in filling all posts which require a high degree of technical knowledge. In fact, the Audit Department has not been an isolated case in this particular phenomenon. Very strenuous efforts are being made to fill these posts and in due course we expect, with accelerated action on the part of the Public Service commission, not only to make appointments but also to enable those people who have been appointed to take up their positions in the office of the Director of Audit so that we can see a greater reduction in the number of vacancies.

Mr. M. F. Singh: With your permission, sir, on the next page I had forgotten to ask whether we have stopped contributing to the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions. Only \$1 is listed at subhead 10, or is it an austerity measure for this year?

Cde. N. Persaud: The Minister in his reply did not indicate how soon we can expect the Reports, for example, for 1969, 1970 or 1971.

The Chairman: Cde. Narbada Persaud, isn't it implied? He said the Report for 1968 is available to be submitted. Cde. Minister.

Cde. Hope: I propose to bring the 1969 Report very soon to Parliament. The 1970 Report, I think, is with the Director of Audit. It should be ready in two or three months. The other Reports, as I said, will be brought as soon as the programmes have been prepared. I hope it will be very soon.

With regard to subhead 10, Contribution to International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions, I would think that we would like to continue to be Members but we are looking at the whole issue. If we continue to be Members, the fee will be paid. If we do not continue to be Members the fee will not be paid.

Head 5, Audit - \$784,075 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Pages 196 and 197.

HEAD 82 – MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Question proposed that the sum of \$714,308 for Head 82, Ministry of Finance, stand part of the Estimates.

Cde. N. Persaud: I just have one question on both of these pages. Firstly, I want to congratulate the Minister. Perhaps he has had a very big fight, unlike his colleagues in the other

Ministries. I have noted that all the posts under this Head, with the exception of one, are filled. Perhaps the Minister had a very big fight since it is a very important Ministry.

Page 196, item (4), Commissioner of Insurance: I would like the Minister to inform us whether this officer is rally functioning. From information, I do not think the intentions, when this post was created in 1976, are being fulfilled. The Minister can tell us whether this officer has, in fact, been doing the work he was put to do.

Cde. Hope: Cde. Chairman, the casual on-looker may feel that this particular officer is not carrying out the duties for which he is appointed. The facts are, however, that since the creation of this post in 1970 or 1971, a lot of thinking has gone into the whole concept of what we should do with the whole financial sector, including insurance. It is largely because we have not yet come to a firm conclusion how the financial sector is to be reorganised, that we have not in fact done all the things that will be necessary, including passage of laws and regulations, to ensure that this officer does as much as we had, in fact, envisaged for him in 1970 when the post was created. One comes to this impression only because one takes a very casual look at the question.

Head 82, Ministry of finance - \$714,308 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Pages 198 and 199.

HEAD 83 – MINISTRY OF FINANCE ACCOUNTANT GENERAL

Question proposed that the sum of \$1,876,643 for Head 83, Ministry of Finance, Accountant General, stand part of the Estimates.

Cde. N. Persaud: Cde. Chairman, page 198, item (70, subheads 8, 14, 15, 17 and 18. First of all, unlike the comments I made before in relation to the office of the Minister of Finance, there are a lot of vacancies existing here. I would like to ask one general question in relation to all these vacancies. How early does the Minister expect to have these vacancies filled?

In relation to subhead 1, item (7), Supervisor Data Processing Unit, I see the sum of \$7,320 has been allocated in these Estimates. For my information the functions of the whole Data Processing Unit have now been taken over by the Public Service Ministry. If we glance below item (22), we see that there is no allocation nor the Programme. I think this is just because the whole process has been, in fact, removed or taken over by the Public Service Ministry since late 1975. I would like to ask the Minister if this is so and, if it is so, why this supervisor has been retained at the Accountant General's Office.

Subhead 8, cost of Supplying Revenue Stamps. I see an expenditure of \$200,000. I tried on the income side to see or locate where the corresponding amount was put. Unfortunately, I did not see it. I do not know whether it is included in the \$1 million which is shown for Other Receipts.

Subhead 10, Payment of New Windows and Orphans Fund of Difference between 6 per cent on Permanent Investment and Actual Interest earned. I have noticed a static sum of \$40,000. When I looked through last year's Estimates I saw that \$40,000 was the approved and revised sum for 1976. I see no actual expenditure for 1975. I wonder if the minister could state what is the position there.

Subhead 14, Loss of Public Money and Stores. I have just had cause to speak about some of these things and I see the sum approved in 1976 was \$20,000 but it was revised to \$220,000. I think it is most alarming to learn that there is loss of public money and stores to the

value of \$220,000. I would like the Minister to at least give us some indication of the size of these losses or thefts of stores or money.

3.35 p.m.

Subhead 15, Crown Agents Charges. I have noted that the sum of \$140,000 was approved for 1975 and the Revised Estimate for 1975 also had the sum of \$140,000. The actual amount spent was \$4,400. I would like the Minister to give an explanation in relation to this amount of \$4,400 since the revised estimate was for \$140,000. I tried today, in vain, to get in contact with somebody in the Ministry who could give me some information on the work being done for this money paid out as Crown Agents Charges. I have been able to get second-hand information, whether it is true or not, that this is a charge-part of it, if not all – for the handling of these sinking funds abroad. I want to ask the Minister whether he could explain why the sum has been reduced by 50 per cent.

During the debate on the Budget we were informed that the sinking fund investment would now be handled by the Bank of Guyana. I would like to ask the Minister whether it is true that contributions towards debentures issued, as from the year 1972, were in fact paid to the Bank of Guyana. But we were told only this year that they are now going to handle the sinking fund. Perhaps this is the reason why he may be able to tell us. If this information is correct I would like to ask the Minister if he can tell us the total amount of sinking funds contributions paid to the Bank of Guyana so far. I would like to ask the Minister if he would be in a position to tell us on what investments the Bank of Guyana is going to use these contributions, whether local or external?

On this Head also I would like to ask the Minister some other questions in relation to these charges. These are very clear questions. Can the Minister say whether it is possible to identify all products into which external loans went and which Ministry controls such purchases.

20.1.77

National Assembly

3.35 – 3.45 p.m.

The Chairman: You went off to speak about investment. We are talking about Crown Agents charges.

Cde. N. Persaud: The sum of money for the Crown Agents –

The Chairman: When you ask a question and get the answer then you can ask a supplementary.

Cde. N. Persaud: Cde. Chairman, these are all relevant questions.

The Chairman: I am not concerned with that. I am concerned with the administration.

Cde. N. Persaud: I have noted, Cde. Chairman, that the interest on the internal debts amounted to 58 per cent of the total amount spent last year.

The Chairman: What item is that please?

Cde. N. Persaud: Now I am told that they will come over to the Bank of Guyana.

The Chairman: We are not dealing with the Bank of Guyana. We are dealing with Crown Agents Charges. Ask what those charges are. When you get the answer then you can have supplementary questions.

Cde. N. Persaud: Cde. Chairman, I thought they were the buying agents. I shall deal with that later as you advise.

Subhead 17, Leave Passage – Public Officers. I have noted that the 1976 Estimates provided for \$310,000 but the revised estimate was \$510,000 and this amount has now gone to \$310,000, which is a reduction. I would like the Minister to say whether there are not more and more officers who are entitled to go on leave. I am told that there are some restrictions in relation to that but the officers get this money which they can invest in bonds or for internal travelling. So the leave facilities are still there. It is a question of cash. I would like to ask the Minister, since I anticipate that every year more and more people will be going on leave, why the sum of \$510,000, which was shown in the 1976 revised column has now been reduced to \$300,000.

Subhead 18, compensation claims. I have noted here a decrease first of all of \$35,000 from the 1976 Approved Estimate. The 1976 Revised Estimate was \$110,000. The vote is now reduced to \$15,000. I wonder if the Minister can tell us whether this is in relation to claims made by motor vehicles owned by the Government and so on. If this is so, I think it is a very unrealistic sum to put here, \$15,000, as compared with \$110,000 that was shown in the 1976 revised Estimate. I think that more accidents are going to take place and with all the lectures we are going to give in relation to the care of vehicles we cannot reduce it to \$15,000. It is a very unrealistic sum and therefore I would like the Minister to give some explanation in relation to that.

Page 199, subhead 20, Special visits and Representation at External conferences. I have noted a reduction of 50 per cent on the approved Estimate for 1976. The Revised Estimate, however, was \$1.47 million and in 1977 the Ministry is asking for \$400,000. I welcome this fact but I wonder if the Minister at this stage can give us very briefly his plans in relation to these external conferences which will reduce this sum from \$1.47 million to \$.4 million.

Subhead 26, Expenses of Issue, \$10,000. I have noted that the sum of \$35,000 was approved in 1976. There is no revised estimate shown here but the sum of \$10,000 is being asked for now. Can the Minister say what are these expenses and what they relate to really?

The Chairman: Cde. Belgrave.

Cde. Belgrave: Cde. Chairman, page 198, subhead 16, Workmen's compensation Ordinance: The figure in 1974 was \$3,300. 1975 nil; 1976 approved estimate was \$9,000, a revised estimate is not mentioned. For 1977 there is the figure of \$1,000. There is no legend, no explanation. Can the hon. Minister tell us what this pertains to because, as we know, National Insurance takes precedence and Workmen's compensation is now obsolete; nobody speaks about it. If this is a token I ask the Minister if a dollar could not have been placed as a token instead of having this \$1,000 listed in this column.

3.45 p.m.

The Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Singh.

Mr. M. F. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On page 198, I would like to take together items (6) and (9). They both deal with supernumerary posts, Supernumerary Accountant and Supernumerary Assistant Accountant and the sum of \$1, a token amount, is reflected against both of them. Can the hon. Minister explain the reason for these two posts and where the holders of these two posts are operating at the present moment?

In respect of subhead 8, Cost of Supplying Revenue Stamps, could I ask the hon. Minister whether there are now adequate supplies of these stamps because I would like to mention to him – I do not know what the present position is, and I am sorry this information is so late – up to week before the last Saturday a Commissioner of Oaths told me that he sent this clerk to by

revenue stamps and he was told there were no revenue stamps available. I wonder whether that has corrected itself and whether there are now adequate stocks of revenue stamps available.

Maybe I should make an additional comment. Maybe the vendors are doing this, but if they are not doing it I think it would be necessary for a while to ask every customer who goes to buy stamps, whether he wants them for postage or for revenue purposes. If this is not done people could put the wrong stamps on documents or letters. I have not been into the Post Office recently but we can perhaps put up signs inviting customers to say what the stamps were required for or explain that revenue stamps are different from postage stamps and tell each customer to state whether he requires postage stamps or revenue stamps to be put on documents like receipts etc. Something along those lines perhaps would take the burden off the vendors. I can well imagine they would get fed up of having to ask every single person what kind of stamp he wanted.

Not very many people in this country realise that there is this significant change. I know that there has been publicity but I talk to people and they really don't know that there are two different kinds of stamps.

Subhead 14, Loss of Public Money and Stores: I note that the sum is significantly reduced to \$50,000 from that revised for 1976, \$220,000. One Member asked for details. I would merely supplement it by saying that I hope the necessary steps are being taken to prevent this kind of expenditure shown in the revised column for 1976, \$220,000. I would certainly like to hear of the plans the hon. Minister may have put into train to keep down the incidence of frauds and loss of money so that he can keep this within the \$50,000 which he is asking for here.

Across the page to subhead 23, refunds of Revenue (Miscellaneous): The 1976 Revised Estimate is \$280,000. It means that we are expecting to spend, or have spent, approximately \$280,000 last year but this is revised for this year to \$100,000. In fact, the Increase/Decrease

column has it as minus \$100,000 because we are cutting in half what the Approval Estimates had asked for.

I know that this is austerity year but we must not hold back refunds which are validly due to taxpayers as refunds. After all the government does charge interest in many areas like income tax and estate duty. It charges interest in many areas like income tax and estate duty. It charges interest on amounts which are not paid by a prescribed date. There when a taxpayer is entitled to a refund he should get his refund promptly because the Government does not pay out interest. I am not aware that it does pay out interest on refunds of revenue.

I should like to ask how the hon. Minister proposes to keep down this figure which has been reduced from \$280,000 to \$100,000.

I merely want to point out a little correction on page 198 in respect of subhead 10. It states “Payment of New Widows and Orphans Fund of Difference . . .” That should be “Payment to the New Windows and Orphans Fund . . .” I couldn’t understand it until I looked back at the previous Estimates and then got it correct.

The Chairman: Cde. Minister of Finance

Cde. Hope: Cde. Chairman, the first question which was raised by Cde. Narbada Persaud related to vacancies in the Accountant General’s Department. I am advised that there are just eight vacancies in that Department. I do not think that is an unusual incidence of vacancies.

With regard to item (7), Supervisor, data Processing Unit, I agree with the Cde. Member that it does appear strange that we have this post retained here when in fact the Data Processing Unit in that Department has been taken over by the Public Service Ministry but the explanation

lies in the fact that the person who occupies this post was trained to operate a different kind of data processing equipment, and therefore she was not absorbed in this new system. What we are doing now is to retain her and retrain her. While she is being retrained we did not think it expedient to remove the post or to dismiss her, in other words, to take her off the Estimates. She is there occupying that particular position while she is being retrained to fit into the new system.

On the question of subhead 8, cost of Supplying Revenue Stamps, as the Cde. Member accurately reflects, this is the cost of producing the stamps since the Post Office Corporation is a separate entity now. The corresponding revenue to that is found on pages 5 and 6 and it amounts, I am advised, to \$1.1 million; that is the receipt on revenue stamps.

Subhead 10, the question was raised with regard to this amount provided as a Contribution to Windows and Orphans Fund. The explanation is quite simple. The Government participates in the administration of the Fund and therefore guarantees the Fund a minimum of 6 per cent return on its investment. Now that guarantee would not be met if the Fund gets in any year a rate of return equal to 6 per cent or higher. So far, no money has been paid last year but we provide it in case we have to pay it this year should the returns on the Fund's investment fall below 6 per cent. I do not think anything was paid in 1976. At most times investment was above 6 per cent.

3.55 p.m.

Subhead 14, Loss of Public Money and Stores. It is misleading in a sense that the Estimates are in fact showing \$220,000 in 1976 for this particular subhead against a provision of \$50,000 for 1977. What really has happened is that losses are not brought to account until the Police cases involved are completed. The result is that at any point in time we collect a number of completed court cases and bring to Parliament the particular sums of money which have to be charged against the vote because of the theft or fraud that was involved. What happened in

1976 is that we collected a number of these things dating back three or four years prior to 1976 and brought one set in 1976. So, it does not happen that we will have to provide a similar amount in 1977.

The Member asked for some of the bigger items included here and these are all charged to the vote after the people have been convicted in the courts of law. We have one for instance where there was a loss at the Post Office at Matthews Ridge amounting to \$13,728; we have another one where there was a loss of cash and stamps at the G.P.O. to the value of \$22,000. We have another in the Charity Post Office of \$26,000 and another at New Amsterdam Post Office \$19,700. What is reflected in this is that most of these amounts are related to frauds which did take place in the Post Office Department and for which the relevant people have been charged and suitably convicted. I think the hon. Member Mr. Singh asked a question relating to that same item but I think my answer covered his question as well.

With regard to subhead 15, Crown Agent Charges, we do utilize the Crown Agents for a number of purposes: to pay pensions, in some cases; in other cases, to carry out inspection where we are buying anything in the U.K and those pieces of equipment need inspection and we find it relatively cheap to use the Crown Agents rather than sending one of our officers up there to do the inspection. And those are just two. We do pay them a small percentage for administering the investments relating to the sinking fund.

We anticipate a reduction this year for two reasons: one, we do intend – providing Parliament passes the necessary legislation – to reduce the role of the Crown Agents or perhaps remove it completely in so far as investment of sinking funds relating to locally raised securities are concerned. In addition is that, we are in fact utilizing our sub-treasuries in that particular

capital for payment of a number of accounts which Crown Agents used to handle in the past so this is one of the functions which the Office of the High Commission in London is providing. There is a sub-treasury there and we are using the sub-treasury to make payments which in the past used to be made by the Crown Agents. It is a gradual process of taking from the Crown Agents and putting it with our own people. So, we do anticipate, for these two reasons largely, that in 1977 we would not have to pay the Crown Agents as much as we paid them in 1976.

On subhead 16, The Cde. Member raised a question on the Workmen's compensation Ordinance. As he said it is quite right that most of the payments which normally would have been met by workers' compensation would be met by N.I.S. today. But, it is the case today there is some small obligation resting with the employer despite N.I.S. and the provision here is to provide against that kind of contingency.

With regard to subhead 17, Leave Passage public Officers. We did introduce a system on the basis of which a public servant can take his leave passage, utilize a part of it for domestic travel and the rest of it for certain kinds of approved investment. It was introduced, I think in 1975 and it became quite popular in 1976. That meant that a number of officers who had accumulated leave were able to utilize the facilities. Now these officers are not entitled to leave in 1977 so in effect we can visualise a lower demand on this kind of vote because what the 1976 vote did was really to absorb a number of officers who had a backlog of leave; in other words, who had accumulated leave and that number of officers has reduced considerably so we do not have to spend as much on this vote in 1977.

Subhead 18, relates to compensation Claims and a question was raised as to why the reduction. The answer is simple. It is not something that we can predict and normally it is paid when the Solicitor General or the Attorney general advises the government to settle. But, the circumstances or events on the basis of which payments like this would arise are completely unpredictable and, therefore, in a sense, one has to look at this as a token vote.

The other question which was raised related to Special visits and Representations at External Conferences, subhead 20. It is true that \$1,470,000 was spent on this Head in 1976. In 1976, the Cabinet hopes that it would approve a much smaller number of these visits. In other words, despite the fact that a visit may be regarded as very important we may have to decline to send representatives or, alternatively, if we send representatives we will have to cut the size of the representation substantially. The important point is that Cabinet intends, bearing in mind the particular situation in 1977, to spend very much less on External Conferences in 1977.

With respect to subhead 26, expenses of Issue, this really refers to the printing of bonds, the debentures which we normally issue from time to time. That, I think, concludes - -

The Chairman: Subhead 23.

Cde. Hope: Subhead 23, Refunds of Revenue (Miscellaneous). The question was raised: why the reduction? Strange enough, the speaker, I think it was Mr. Singh, proposed the premise and proceeded to argue on the premise of his own choice. I do not understand that kind of approach but it is not unknown to him of course. He presumes that the Government is going to delay refunds. This is not true. Most of the refunds which arise in the Government arise by virtue of the operation of the Department of Customs as well as the Department for Income Tax. Each of these has its own refund operations. This really covers a number of miscellaneous revenue items which are not dealt with in those two particular revenue departments and if it turns out that more revenue has got to be refunded, well it will be refunded but we hope that there will be sufficient care and vigilance to ensure that when taxes are collected they are collected in their correct amounts and in their correct circumstances so that no refunds, or less refunds, will then become payable.

20.1.77

National Assembly

3.55 – 4.05 p.m.

Head 83, Ministry of Finance – Accountant general - \$1,876,643 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Comrades, perhaps this is a convenient time to take the suspension.

Assembly resumed.

The Speaker: The Sitting of the House is suspended for 30 minutes.

Suspended accordingly at 4.05 p.m.

On resumption - -

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

The Chairman: Pages 200 and 201, head 84, Customs and Excise.

HEAD 84 – MINISTRY OF FINANCE

CUSTOMS AND EXCISE

4.30 p.m.

Question proposed that the sum of \$2,806, 019 for Head 84, Ministry of Finance, customs and excise, stand part of the Estimates.

Cde. N. Persaud: On page 200, item (3), (4), (9), (10), (11), (13), (15), (16), (17), (19), (20), (21), (23), (24), (27) and (30), and on page 201, item (36). Most of the numbers I have just called, while they might sound very many, deal with vacancies. The situation seems to

be out of proportion and this is why I would like to ask the Minister if it is true that at item (3), with an establishment that calls for 3 Assistant Comptroller of Customs and Excise, there is one vacancy; at item (4) the Establishment calls for 5 Principal Customs and Excise Officers, there are 3 vacancies; at item (9), Customs and Excise Officer III, there is one vacancy; at item (10), Customs and Excise Officer II, there are also 2 vacancies; at item (11), which calls for one Supernumerary Customs and Excise Officer II, my information is that this post is not filled; the vacancy is there; item (13) calls for 41 Customs and Excise Officer I, there are 15 vacancies; at item (15), there is provision for 12 Clerks (General). From the 12, I am told there are 8 vacancies; item (16), Coxswain, I am told that there is none which means that all four positions are vacant; item (17): I am told again all 3 posts of Launch Engineer are vacant; from the 29 Customs Guards at item (118), I am told 6 vacancies exist; item (19), Customs Overseer, government Warehouse, there is nobody there; item (20), Cooper, Government Warehouse, there is nobody there; at item (21), which calls for 7 Vehicle Drivers, there are 3 vacancies; item (23), Fork Lift Operator, calls for one person; that post is vacant; at item (24), Carpenter/Joiner, from the two, only one is there; item (27), Customs guard I, there is a vacancy again; item (30), Labourer II Heavy, I am told from the 17 posts, 6 vacancies exist.

I would like the hon. Minister to tell us whether in fact these vacancies exist in such an important department as Customs and Excise. The functions of this department in relation to importation and so forth are very important and I would feel that every effort should be made. Over the last few days we have been told that the fault really lies with the Public Service Ministry. These are very important posts, not only in this Ministry but in others too, and some effort should be made to speed up things to have them filled. It is an alarming figure from what I have enumerated and I hope the Minister will either confirm or deny, and tell us what efforts are being made. I know it is very difficult at this stage to get personnel because of the brain drain and other problems, but at least some effort should be made to have these vacancies filled.

Under this head comptroller of Customs and Excise, I would like to point out that the system perhaps that presently exists in relation to the ad valorem and the specific duties are not very operative in the interest of the small man.

The Chairman: Please attract my attention to what item or what number you are speaking on.

Cde. N. Persaud: I want to make a suggestion in relation to - -

The Chairman: You should have made that during the general debate.

Cde. N. Persaud: In relation to the shortage of these personnel, a number of problems arise, the length of time that it takes to process entries due to these vacancies in the department. Therefore I think the Minister should make some effort. I have been trying, and other people have been trying, since early December to get certain items from the Guyana National trading Corporation and the excuse given is: customs is holding up the entries. We cannot have certain essential items to carry on certain businesses and I would want to suggest to the Minister at this stage that perhaps a special department, not that there should be any discrimination, should be set up within the Customs and Excise to deal with those entries particularly relating to the importation of goods by the E.T.B. and the Guyana National Trading Corporation.

The posts at item (19), customs Overseer, Government Warehouse and item (20), cooper – government Warehouse, as I said, are not filled. For example, after the goods have gone for want of entry they are sent down to the Government Warehouse. In fact, in most cases, the goods are not sent down to the Government Warehouse and the importer is called upon to pay double charges, that means, despite the goods remain in the bond, they have to pay bond charges and storage charges and also want of entry charges, so the importer is called upon to pay two

charges. I would like the Minister to have this matter rectified. Can he tell us whether it can be rectified, because I think it is unfair. Obviously, the cost, after the importer has to pay double charges, goes on the goods - -

The Chairman: Cde. Narbada Persaud, we are dealing with the overseer.

Cde. N. Persaud: Cde. Chairman, the reason for this is perhaps that the posts are not filled. Therefore, I am asking the Minister to see about this problem.

On page 201, item (36), I see the sum of \$520,000 against overtime. When one compares that with the Total Personal Emoluments of \$1.96 million or \$2 million, it is nearly 25 per cent or over. I would like the Minister to state why the overtime has to be so high, whether some other arrangement cannot be made to avoid 25 per cent of this total Personal emoluments being in overtime.

The Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Singh

Mr. M. F. Singh: Page 200. Subhead 1, item (11), Supernumerary Customs and Excise Officer II. There is a token provision of \$1. Why is this necessary? We should have had 52 of these Customs and Excise Officer II. If we look at item (10) we would see that there are supposed to be 52. Why is this extra officer necessary and where is he attached? Items (19) and (20) were mentioned by my hon. Friend just now, so we go to page 201.

I would like to ask a question on page 201 in respect of Other Charges. In all the other Ministries, after the Miscellaneous vote there is a vote for postage, cables and telegrams. I do not see any here. Is this an omission? Does this Ministry not need a vote for postage and cables and telegrams? If it is an omission, it will have to be corrected. I cannot imagine the Ministry using another Ministry to pay for its postage, and I would not like to know that the new

post Office Corporation is not getting its bills paid. I am very solicitous about the payment of bills to these corporations.

4.40 p.m.

Subhead 8, Revenue Protection. The sum of \$100,000 is requested and it is \$70,000 less than the amount that was approved in 1976 and that was shown in the Revised Column in 1976. Under this subhead, I would like to say that recently we have been reading a lot about smuggling operations, particularly across the Corentyne River. We heard about our cheap subsidised sugar being smuggled across into Surinam and being sold there illegally at very high profits. We have read about sardines and potatoes, etc. being smuggled across from Surinam into Guyana and also being sold at fancy prices in view of the fact that they are banned in this country. In view of these increased activities in this area, I wonder whether the hon. Minister will say whether he considers the reduced amount of \$100,000 to be enough and whether he has any special measures to be adopted to deal with this apparently high increase in the incidence of smuggling.

Subhead 12, Contribution to Customs Co-operation Council. This is a new subhead and I am sorry if I may have missed an explanation before. But I wonder whether the hon. Minister will give us some details in respect of this contribution to the Customs Co-operation Council. Where is it? What does it do and what is the rationale for our contributing to it?

Cde. Belgrave: Cde. Chairman, I would like to deal with item (17), Launch engineer, and item (18), Customs Guards, on page 200. I will relate them also to item (31), Deckhand and, on page 201, subhead 9, which deals, to my mind, with the Water Guard section, Customs Boat House. I would like to direct this question to the Minister. Is he aware of the deplorable condition which this important department, namely, the Boat House, is in? The conditions under which these employees have to work are ridiculous. If the Minister has this knowledge, is he prepared to do something about it? If he does not have any knowledge of this I

would like to ask the hon. Minister to look into it because it deals with a very important part of this department. If we take into consideration the revenue from that department - \$217,993,000 – we would surely accept the fact that that particular department contributes a great deal. The Customs Boat House is an eye sore. Many of the visitors on the vessels who come ashore, pass through that particular area, the Custom Boat House. I am sure the Minister knows the position. It is just next to the Transport and harbours Ferry Stelling wharf. They have to pass through this area to pass through Customs. The stelling is broken down, the place is shabby. Workers work under rough conditions, particularly at night when they have to do water-guard exercises. There is no proper place to rest, water comes up on them in that particular area. I would like the hon. Minister to answer the question. If he is aware of these conditions, what steps are being taken to have this particular area improved or, maybe, transferred to another place which will be more attractive to both workers and visitors passing through. If he is not aware of it, would the Minister commit himself in this House to investigate it and see what can be done to rectify the position?

Cde. Nokta: Page 201, subhead 8, Revenue Protection. Quite a lot of contraband business goes on in the North West District along the Barima River, from morawhanna right down. Last night I wanted to raise this question under the Police Head, but I was not permitted. So I am taking this opportunity - -

The Chairman: Please be relevant to this matter.

Cde. Nokta: What happens there is that wealthy businessmen buy gasoline in Venezuela at very cheap prices and sell it to the poor people in the North West district at exorbitant prices. All the gasoline passes two stations: the Imbotero Station and the Morawhanna Station. I would urge the Minister to establish a customs Office there and not depend on the police. Not only do cheap goods come from Venezuela to be sold to the people at high prices, but every week hundreds of bags of sugar land at Morawhanna. Where do they go?

I am to inform this Minister that sugar is exchanged for morocut and gasolene and a lot of revenue is being lost by the Government. At Mabaruma certain shops sell sardines. Government Officers can open sardines in their homes and give their guests. I was there last September and I ate sardines too, provided for me by a Government Officer. He said, “Comrade, you are my friend, don’t speak.” I am trying to advise the Minister. When he talks about revenue protection I have to advise him. There are times when things are scare and can be easily obtained across the border. But only big shots are able to carry on this trade and poor people have to pay exorbitant prices. If a Customs Officer is there, legally people can bring in the things and pay the normal duty and consumers can be helped. But the fact is that there is no Customs Officer and no control, therefore the poor people and the Government suffer. I want to advise the Minister to examine it.

There is one tip I want to give him. The hon. Minister can check every week to see how many bags of sugar land at Morawhanna. The population at Morawhanna cannot use more than five bags of sugar per week. The Transport and Harbours Department can give you that quota and the Minister can try to find out how many tons of morocut and drums of gasolene are traded. Of course, he can’t check that because nobody checks the goods. This is my advice to the Minister in the interest of revenue protection. Something must be done. Do not depend on the police.

Cde. Ram Karran: Under that same subhead 8, Revenue Protection, I wish to draw to the hon. Minister’s attention to an error. I am sure his officers have seen it already. There is a printer’s devil. It is shown here as something like \$1,100,000.

The Chairman: That is just a spot of ink. Cde. Minister.

Cde. Hope: Cde. Cairman, Cde. Persaud raised the question of vacancies in the Customs Department. The Customs Department does have a number of vacancies. We have

been making many efforts to fill those vacancies but the department has certain constraints. One of those is that promotion takes place within the department. People have resigned and retired and it is not always easy to fill posts. In addition to that, even when we take people from below, the department has been experiencing some difficulty in getting the replacements. Efforts are being made to improve the staffing situation. I wish to confirm that we will continue these efforts to improve the staffing position within that department.

4.50 p.m.

On the question of the rapid passing of entries, I do not think it is merely a matter of staff. It is also a question of how the department is accommodated or located. Part of the problem arises because the department is now scattered in two or three different positions in Georgetown. That has been necessary because a new building needs to be constructed for the Customs Department. That building is in progress. We hope that when it is completed most of these difficulties will be removed and that, because of a better physical accommodation of the staff, the passing of entries will be facilitated.

On the question of want of entry, I think it should be recognised that our wharf space is limited and really it is the duty of importers to clear their goods in good time. It is true that if the goods are not cleared they clog the wharf and clog the state warehouse. At the moment I think a lot of this is happening and one way of getting around the charge for keeping the goods on the wharf, as well as the delay in keeping them there, is to clear them. Clearing the goods is the responsibility of the importers. If they do this they would not have to pay as much rent and they would not have to pay as much storage charges. Once the wharves are clogged up they are going to have that difficulty in terms of charges. One charge relates to the rental of the wharf and the other charge relates to the warehousing. But the way to get around that is to clear the goods. Many merchants do not have storage place; they don't want to rent storage places for their goods so they leave the goods on the wharf until such time that they can get them sold at

which time they clear them. So it is the duty of the importer to provide or rent a building or storage place, to clear the goods and to store them. If they want to have them stored on the wharf they will have to pay the charges.

The question of Overtime was raised and I think hon. Members ought to know that this overtime arises from the fact that officers have to be at the airport whenever an aeroplane comes in and they have to be present once a ship is to be cleared in order to reduce the demurrage charges. It is the importer or shipping agent who pays this overtime; it is not really the Government but it is put in this way because there is a corresponding amount which was put under revenue. Importers pay the money into revenue and Government pays the officers.

The question of Supernumerary Customs and Excise Officer II, at item (11), was raised. The reason why this supernumerary position is there is the same reason why practically all supernumerary positions are there. The substantive officer is not in place, he is somewhere else and the post has to remain on the Estimates to provide for his pension rights.

It is true that there is no provision under the section 'Other Charges' for postage. The department, as I understand it, intends to meet its postage from its miscellaneous votes.

Subhead 8, Revenue Protection. We did not hope to give as much reward; we are not as active in this area this year as we were last year. This is the only reason why the vote has been cut and this, of course, has been done largely because of the austerity position. I agree that smuggling, the reduction of smuggling and the supervision of smuggling are essentially a matters for the Police and they are the agency for taking care of this aspect of smuggling even though they do so at the customs point in collaboration with the Customs Department. I do not think we can look to the customs officers per se for the restriction of smuggling. I think substantially it is a matter for the Police and the Police are on to this particular job.

A question was also raised, I think by Mr. Feilden Singh, on subhead 12, Contribution to Customs Co-operation Council. It is a new vote. I explained, and this was some time ago, that we are operating not on the S.I.T.C. system but on the B.T.N. system, the Brussels Trade Nomenclature System. It provides for uniformity as most of the Customs areas use the B.T.N. system. This Customs Co-operation Council provides for the uniformity of definition in the customs tariff. It has a cost and all the countries which utilise its services have to make a contribution to its upkeep. That sum of \$23,000 is our contribution to the upkeep of the Customs Co-operation Council.

The question was also raised on the condition of the boathouse. I know it is in a bad condition and I have been aware of this for some time. That there has been no significant improvement is due largely to the fact that it has not been possible, with all the work which we were doing last year, to get down to that particular area. As a matter of fact, I think the work was in fact commissioned but has not been done and I would expect that that will be part of the work which the Ministry of Works will have to do this year. They did not do it last year but I am aware of the situation

I think I answered Cde. Nokta in relation to contraband goods. There are contraband goods moving on both sides of the country and at most of the borders. It is essentially, as I said earlier, a matter for the Police in the North West District.

The Chairman: What he is asking is asking is: Who is to watch the Police?

Cde. Hope: I cannot answer that, Cde. Chairman. The Police are the proper agency and are, in fact, looking at that aspect.

Question put, and agreed to.

Head 84, Ministry of Finance, Customs and Excise - \$2,806,019 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Pages 202 and 203.

**HEAD 85 – MINISTRY OF FINANCE
INLAND REVENUE**

Question proposed that the sum of \$4,733,365, for Head 85, Ministry of Finance, Inland Revenue, stand part of the Estimates.

Cde N. Persaud: Cde. Chairman, page 202, item (12), (16), (35), (39) and (40) and some more on the other deal with Toll Superintendent, Toll Collectors and Toll Inspectors etc. when I take into consideration the total amount of revenue anticipated for this year, \$2,400,000 as compared with the expenditure under this Head 85 for salary and upkeep of the toll Station, I find that about \$½ million is to be spent in relation to expenses for the toll station.

5.00 p.m.

We have been calling for increased production and productivity and I find that, in relation to the expenditure for the toll stations, the revenue really is very insignificant. Therefore, since we are asking for increased production and productivity and this, in a sense, hinders increased production and productivity, I want to ask the Minister whether he is not considering the scrapping of the toll stations. For example, the tractors have to pay additional sums; the people have farms at different points and therefore obviously the cost of production will go up in relation to the toll stations. If the cost of production goes up and farming cannot pay the farmers or production costs are too high compared with what they received, he is going to plant less and less. I speak specifically for the Corentyne area.

I want to ask the Minister, since we compare half a million dollars in expenditure against \$2.4 million anticipated as revenue this year, if it is really worth the while. This is really penny wise and pound foolish. What we will lose in increased production in relation to rice would be far more than the \$1.9 million that we hope to receive from the Corentyne and Mackenzie toll stations after deduction of cost of maintenance. I would therefore ask the Minister to reconsider this question particularly this year when we depend on increased production to take the economy out from where it is.

In respect of the Inland Revenue Office as a whole, I want to find out whether the Minister has not considered it necessary to establish an office on the Essequibo. When one goes to the Income Tax Office one sees the large number of persons who come from the Essequibo Coast and Islands to have income tax clearance or other income tax matters cleared up. These are farmers and, if we are calling for increased production, to have these farmers, first of all, pay such large sums of money in increased cost of transportation this year and to have them lose many hours at the Income Tax Office, needs consideration. I would think that the Minister should consider the question of establishing an office somewhere in that area to take care of these farmers and to avoid this big rush at the General Post Office Building.

The system is that they have to come and make an appointment. That appointment sometimes takes place two weeks later. When they return, if their documents are not in order, they have to go right back to Essequibo and come again. This, of course, is sometimes not in the best interest of the people, some of whom want to leave for specific purposes. They cannot have these requirements fulfilled within the time that they plan to leave. I should like to ask the Minister to consider this question of putting an office there.

Item (35), P.A.Y.E. Inspector. In relation to this question, I should like to ask the Minister whether he does not think it wise to reconsider the question of P.A.Y.E. in relation to people who work overtime in essential services. These are persons working in places where we

really cannot have a shift system. They are called upon to work around the clock. I refer particularly to workers at the Guyana Electricity Corporation, at the water services and so forth. Their services are really required at all hours. In the afternoons when most of us can go on the seawall and to the cinema they cannot enjoy those facilities. I would like to ask the minister, since these people take care of our essential services, whether there should not be a new formula in relation to computing their income tax.

In relation to National Development Surtax I would like to point out that there is some discrimination. Under P.A.Y.E. with \$500 and over in chargeable income you pay 5 per cent; over \$1,000 you pay 10 per cent and the percentage goes up which really means that the man at the top who gets a large salary pays more. This is really an equitable and a just system but this system really does not apply to the National Development Surtax and therefore the Minister should reconsider whether this should not also apply there. It is based on chargeable income, 5 per cent on anything in excess of \$500. It means that the man who has an excess of \$500 pays the same 5 per cent. Should not the same principle used in relation to Income Tax be applied here?

On page 203, subhead 8, Maintenance and Rental of Data Processing Machine. I have noted here that the actual amount of money spent on maintenance and rental in 1974 was \$102,700. In 1975 the actual amount increased to \$163,400 and the 1976 revised estimate shows \$270,000. We are now asking for \$400,000 and the legend states: "Increased rental due to the installation of a new computer system." In other Ministries I have been also noticing this item. I want to ask the Minister whether, instead of spending year after year such a large sum of money, which is on the ascent, the Ministry would not consider, at this stage, purchasing its own equipment rather than renting this equipment. I do not know how much it would cost, but the Minister can give us an idea of the total cost. Would it not be better for us to have our own?

Subhead 11, Refunds of Revenue. I have noted the sum of \$2 million voted in the Approved Estimates for 1976, and \$6 million is shown in the Revised Estimates column. We are asking for \$2 million this year. Perhaps the Minister can tell us how this figure jumped to \$6 million. I would like him to tell us whether this figure of \$2 million which we are asking for this year is realistic.

In relation to this item I also want to ask the Minister to consider looking into delayed payments. People have to wait very long for refunds. I should like him to tell us how many claims are outstanding and up to what year, what amounts are involved and what efforts are being made to speed up payments. Of course, we all know if we owe the Income Tax Department, we get notices and they give us so many days within which to pay the sum of money due. But persons need this money they have overpaid and some effort should be made to avoid the long delays.

Mr. M. F. Singh: Mr. Chairman, seeing that the majority of Heads left are statutory I should like to spend a few minutes on this Head, Inland Revenue, to deal with item (4), Senior Inspector of Taxes, and item (6), Inspector, Assistant Inspector etc. together and then item (5), Supernumerary Inspector of Taxes. If we look at the legends we will note that 24 new offices were created in 1976. The legend in respect of Senior Inspector of Taxes states: “Two new offices created . . .” and in respect of item (6), it is stated “Twenty-two new offices created by Supplementary Estimates 1976.” In fact, if we look at page 203 we note that the total establishment for 1975 was 312. In 1976 it increased to 373, and in 1977 it is to be increased to 422. Is the Minister satisfied that this increase in staff has in fact led to an increase in the efficient running of this Department? I am not questioning the increase in staff. I want to know merely about the efficiency and whether the officers are in fact properly trained.

5.10 p.m.

I would like to ask, does the Commissioner or any senior officer check or examine taxpayers' returns before deciding to maintain assessments which have been objected to? I understand this used to be the practice in the past. I do not know whether it is being followed at the present time. Has there been any decrease in appeals against the assessment, (1) in relation to the P.A.Y.E. section and (2) in relation to the companies and traders section? Does the hon. Minister realise – I think he does because he mentioned it in respect of the Customs Department and the centralization of a building – that the separation of this Inland Revenue department into different buildings considerable distances from each other results in a lessening of the desired standard of control, of communication and co-ordination which one would expect in this Department? To my mind, it must result in increased travelling.

Also, it could result in officers being unable to consult their seniors. We have heard of this in respect of the Customs Department too. Can the Officers consult their seniors in order to make decisions? Is he aware that matters are left outstanding for years and then suddenly when the seven-year limitation period is about to expire, arbitrary or hurried assessments are made, invariably resulting in additional appeals? This is a vital revenue-earning Department and I think that we should try to establish a good name for this Department. We should try to establish the very best public relations so that tax collection can be as painless and as little irritating as possible. Let me make this clear: I am definitely not casting any aspersions on any individual. I am merely saying that we want to try to do our very best in respect of this Department.

Page 203, subhead 11, refunds of Revenue. Just to add to the observation that last year we revised the sum to \$6 million but this year we are lowering it to \$2 million. Will this really be enough for 1977 considering the revised figure for 1976? In fact, to my mind, this whole business of having to depend on Parliament to vote money under this Head seems absurd. This money to my mind, is rally taxpayers' money and it should get back into the hands of taxpayers

as early as possible. Let me give an example: If a taxpayer appeals against an assessment and his objection is overruled by the Commissioner, he then has to lodge two-thirds of the amount of tax before he goes to the Board of Review. He goes to the Board of Review and let us say that he wins his case. Then I say as early as possible after he wins his case at the Board of Review level, the refund should be made to him. I think it is wrong for him to have to wait, if this vote is exhausted, until approval is given by Parliament or advances are made from the Contingencies Fund before being able to get that refund of his own money which he has paid in order to go through with an appeal which he eventually wins.

Having said this, let me say that I do appreciate that obviously this Department must have done a tremendous job in 1976 in expediting refunds and I have to commend them for this because they did refund to people amounts to the tune of approximately \$6 million. **[Interruption]** You didn't get any? Fair enough, will the hon. Minister tell us how many outstanding payments there are still to be made? This is an unprecedented amount that has been refunded and therefore I commend them for it. They have really done a tremendous job but I want to make an additional comment and I want to urge the Minister to speak to government Departments about this. I think that this Inland Revenue Department is sometimes very wrongfully blamed for holding back people's refund of revenue. The reason is that the refunds are not made by the department because other Government Departments do not send in their returns of employees showing the amount. I have suffered from this; I know. Other Government Departments must send in their returns showing what employees they have; what money they pay their employees because until the Inland Revenue Department receives that return – I think they call it Form 2 – they cannot make the refunds. I sympathise with this Department when it gets the blame for not making the refunds. It happens, as I said, because in so many other Government Departments officers sit warning their seats – maybe the other departments are short of staff; let us be fir to them – and do not get on with the job of sending in these returns to the particular Ministry.

Dealing with subhead 13, Expenses of Boards of Review, the legend states; “Increase in members fees owing to the establishment of two new Boards.” Will the hon. Minister tell us whether all three Boards are in fact functioning and has there been any appreciable decrease in the backlog of appeals which the Boards have to deal with or is it that as fast as they deal with the old ones there are new ones coming up? Is the Minister satisfied that valuable time and money will not be saved both in respect of the Board of Review and the officers who have to represent the Commissioner at the Board of Review if the assessment officers had initially done their homework in respect of a thorough and a searching examination of the case asking the right questions and everything else instead of allowing the case to go before the Board of Review and then at that stage having a whole full-length trial in order to elicit the facts, the circumstances, and the details which could have been elicited initially by the officers? Is he satisfied that the officers are doing this and not merely leaving it for the Board of Review to do?

In respect of subhead 16, Cinema tickets, I know that there was a problem here. I wonder whether the hon. Minister would tell us what is the position. Have we abandoned the scheme which we had? The hon. Minister knows the scheme. We did have tickets; they could not be used; have we abandoned the scheme or are we going to implement it?

The Chairman: Cde. Minister. We have fifteen minutes and three Heads yet to go.

5.20 p.m.

Cde. Hope: The answer will be brief. The first question arose on the basis of the tolls in toll stations. Cde. Persaud asked whether the Minister is not considering the scrapping of the toll stations. My answer to him is: No.

With regard to the establishment of an office in Essequibo, this matter is being examined right now and if it is proved that there is a need to establish an office there, steps will be taken to

do so. Cde. Persaud also raised the question of the National Development Surtax and the fact that the 5 per cent goes across the board. This matter was considered at the time when we imposed the tax and, taking everything into consideration, the fact that some people are paying 70 cents in the dollar and now will have to pay 75 cents in the dollar, it was considered that the combination we have is the best, the most useful and the most equitable one in our circumstances.

A question on the rental for the data processing machines was raised. The question was raised as to whether it would not be better to purchase these computers. I should explain that nobody ever purchases computers, (1) because of their high capital cost, (2) because of the high cost of maintenance, and (3) because of the rapid change in technology which one may want to make use of, and not only the change of technology but the mere fact that one's own work may expand needing better and bigger equipment. Because of all these reasons, we have maximum flexibility by renting. In fact, bearing in mind that if we purchase the machines we will have to pay the cost of maintenance and parts, there I grave doubt whether purchasing could ever be cheaper in the long run.

On the question of refunds of revenue, I think this was raised both by Cde. Persaud and the hon. Member Mr. Singh. I will answer both questions at the same time. That sum has been voted this year for the very simple reason that in 1976 we settled with Bookers. Bookers owed the Government under income tax and under the Customs Department a certain sum of money. We owed them a certain sum of money based on tax which they paid earlier and in the process of settlement the Government paid them about \$4 million in taxes. It was an exchange of cheques largely. That is why it appears in this, but it is not as if we had to refund \$6 million to the citizens of Guyana as such.

I do not think there is much delay now with regard to the question of providing refunds. It is something which the department is looking at all the time and every effort is being made to reduce any necessary delay in the payment of these refunds.

A question was also raised as to whether the department is operating efficiently and whether the officers are adequately supervised and their work checked. All of them are well qualified, and the assurance I have got is that within the limits of their experience, the department is doing its best to ensure that its work is of as high a quality as is possible.

The other question raised related to the Board of Review. I think the hon. Member knows that all three Boards are functioning. There was one which could not function over the last week or so because of the number of members who went on leave but that Board has now been put to its proper strength since last Cabinet meeting and all three Boards will be functioning. Incidentally, the Members of the Opposition have representation on all three Boards. Since the three Boards have been established, there has been a significant decline in the backlog of work and we are satisfied that the system is now working as well as is possible.

The last question that I would want to answer is the one raised by the hon. Member Mr. Singh. It relates to the fact that the Customs and Inland Revenue Departments are in two or three buildings. I agree that in the case of the Customs Department this has made for reduction in efficiency in terms of the processing of documents, but the same does not necessarily apply in the case of the Income Tax Department because, largely, sections of the department are self-sufficient in a sense. This is not the case with the Customs Department where a number of departments have to see the same document. One may well find that the section dealing with companies is located in one building and another section dealing with P.A.Y.E. is in another building and there is no reason why those two sets of officers need to collaborate on any single assessment. So, the fact that the department is in separate buildings does not create the kind of constraints that certainly affect the Customs Department.

With regard to the cinema tickets, I cannot say that I have got the most recent position with regard to that particular question but I can answer that question as soon as the information comes.

Head 85, Ministry of Finance, Inland Revenue - \$4,733,365 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

**HEAD 86 – MINISTRY OF FINANCE
PENSIONS AND GRATUITIES**

Question proposed that the sum of \$2,910,351 for Head 86, Ministry of Finance, Pensions and Gratuities, stand part of the Estimates.

Cde. N. Persaud: I have just three questions on this page relating to subheads 8, 10 and 19.

The Chairman: You will speak on subhead 19 only. The others are statutory.

Cde. N. Persaud: On subhead 19, Cost of Living Allowance, I see here \$300,000 provided. Can the Minister say who or what categories of employees are in receipt of this cost of living allowance?

The Chairman: Cde. Minister, we have only 5 minutes more.

Cde. Hope: These are some very old pensioners, those who date back prior to 1940, I think, where the pensions have been revised, and the revision came as a cost of living allowance which was added to their basic pensions.

Head 86, Ministry of Finance, Pensions and Gratuities - \$2,910,351 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Pages 205 to 217.

**HEAD 87 – MINISTRY OF FINANCE
PUBLIC DEBT**

Question proposed that the sum of \$504,546 for Head 87, Ministry of Finance, Public Debt, stand part of the Estimates.

Head 87, Ministry of Finance, Public Debt, - \$504,546 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Page 218

**HEAD 88 – MINISTRY OF FINANCE – REVISION OF WAGES,
SALARIES AND RELATED PAYMENTS**

Question proposed that the sum of \$200 for Head 88, Ministry of Finance, Revision of Wages, Salaries and Related Payments, stand part of the Estimates.

Head 88, Ministry of Finance, Revision of Wages, Salaries and Related Payments - \$200 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Page 219.

HEAD 89 – MINISTRY OF FINANCE
POST OFFICE SAVINGS BANK

Question proposed that the sum of \$7 for Head 89, Ministry of Finance, Post Office Savings Bank, stand part of the Estimates.

Head 89, Ministry of Finance, Post Office Savings Bank - \$7 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Page 220.

DIVISION XXXIII – MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Question proposed that the sum of \$2,831,700 for Division XXXIII, Ministry of Finance, stand part of the Estimates.

Cde. N. Persaud: Page 220, subhead 11, Buildings. The sum of \$100,000 was provided for the construction of buildings. I wonder whether the Minister can tell us what type of buildings these are, for which Ministry or for whom. The second question is in relation to the Customs Building now in Camp Street. Information is that it is badly in need of repairs. The toilet facilities on one floor are broken down and water is running down on the officers on the floor below. I wonder whether the Minister knows of this or whether he has intention of making repairs to permit workers to work without discomfort.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud I want to know if this building provision has anything to do with the initial building and establishment of an income tax office in Essequibo. Berbice has, New Amsterdam has - -

The Chairman: Which item?

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Is the Government putting up a building on the Essequibo Coast? One is badly needed there.

Cde. Hope: The amount of \$100,000 has nothing to do with the income tax office in Essequibo. As I just answered a moment ago, we are in fact looking at the question as to whether an office can be established there. If it turns out that it is necessary, one will be put there but not necessarily purchased. It could be rented.

The provision is really for meeting certain preliminary expenses in connection with construction of that Finance Administration Building in Main Street that I was talking about before,, to house a branch of the Co-op Bank, the Agricultural Development Bank, the Mortgage Bank, the Insurance Service. We have already seen the clearing on the old Chronicle site and this provision is to do preliminary work like architectural drawings and things like that. The works will not begin in 1977 but this amount will cover the architecture and similar preliminary work.

With regard to the Customs building in Camp Street, I know it is inadequate. We are renting the building at the moment and, in fact, I can add that we are looking for an alternative building for that part of the Customs Department.

Division XXXIII, Ministry of Finance - \$2,831,700 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

The Chairman: Comrades and hon. Members, this completes consideration in Committee of Supply of the 1977 Estimates of Expenditure. The Assembly will now resume.

20.1.77

National Assembly

5.20 – 5.30 p.m.

Assembly resumed.

The Speaker: Cde. Minister of Finance.

Cde. Hope: Cde. Speaker, I beg to report that during the last seven sittings, the Committee of Supply considered the 89 Heads and 20 Divisions of the 1977 Estimates and approved of them and agreed that they should form part of the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 1977 totalling \$417,283,736. The Estimates having been approved by the Committee, you may now put the question to the Assembly.

Question –

“That the Assembly approve of the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 1977, totalling \$417,283,736”.

put and agreed to.

5.30 p.m.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 12

The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House (Cde. Ramsaroop):
Cde. Speaker, now that the Estimates have been approved, it is necessary under paragraph 2, Article 111 of the Constitution for an Appropriation Bill to be introduced in the Assembly to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure as approved and for the appropriation of the amount required. I have had consultation with comrades and hon. Members and there is full agreement that the Bill be disposed of today.

20.1.77

National Assembly

5.30 – 5.40 p.m.

Consideration of the Bill under Standing Orders is a mere formality, as we all know. The Bill has been published and copies have been circulated to Members. As we have passed the time on our Order Paper for the Introduction of Bills, it will be necessary for Standing Order No. 12, which sets out the order of business, to be suspended to enable the Bill to be introduced at this stage. I therefore, in the first place, seek your leave pursuant to powers that inhere in you under Standing Order 83 to move the suspension of Standing Order No. 12.

The Speaker: Leave is granted.

Cde. Ramsaroop: Cde. Speaker, having obtained your leave I will now formally move that Standing Order No. 12 be suspended to enable the Cde. Minister of Finance to introduce the 1997 Appropriation Bill at this stage.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Order No. 12 suspended.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS – FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read the First time:

Appropriation Bill 1977. [**The Minister of Finance**]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

BILL – SECOND AND THIRD READINGS

APPROPRIATION BILL 1977

20.1.77

National Assembly

5.30 – 5.40 p.m.

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sum necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the financial year ending 31st December, 1977, Estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of that sum for specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Cde. Hope: In accordance with Article 80 (2) of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended the Appropriation Bill 1977 for consideration by the National Assembly and I now move that the Bill be read a Second time.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Bill read the Third time and passed as printed.

ADJOURNMENT

Cde. Ramsaroop: I beg to move the adjournment of this House to tomorrow, Friday, 21st January, 1977, when it is proposed that the Nurses and Midwives Registration (amendment) Bill 1976 will be debated and taken through its remaining stages.

Adjourned accordingly at 5.40 p.m.
