

THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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/Volume 08/

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE FIRST SESSION (1981) OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FOURTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA.

12th Sitting

2 p.m.

Friday, 1981-03-27

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (82)

Speaker (1)

*Cde. Sase Narain, O.R., J.P., M.P.
Speaker of the National Assembly

Members of the Government – People's National Congress (69)

Prime Minister (1)

Cde. Dr. P.A. Reid, O.E., M.P.,
Prime Minister (Absent-on-Leave)

Other Vice- Presidents (4)

Cde. S.S. Naraine, A.A., M.P.,
Vice-President, Works and Transport
Cde. H.D. Hoyte, S.C., M.P.,
Vice-President Economic Planning and Finance (Absent-on-Leave)
Cde. H. Green, M.P.,
Vice-President Public Welfare
Cde. B. Ramsaroop, M.P.,
Vice-President, Parliamentary Affairs and Party/State Relations

Senior Minister (10)

Cde. R. Chandisingh, M.P.,
Minister of Higher Education
Cde. O.E. Clarke, M.P.,
Minister of Regional Development
Cde. R.H.O. Corbin, M.P.,
Ministry of National Development (Absent)
*Cde. F.E. Hope, M.P.,
Minister of Trade and Consumer Protection (Absent)
*Cde. H.O. Jack, M.P.,
Minister of Energy and Mines
*Cde. M. Shahabuddeen, O.R., S.C., M.P.,
Attorney General and Minister of Justice (Absent)
*Cde. R.E. Jackson, M.P.,
Minister of Foreign Affairs (Absent)
*Cde. J.A. Tyndall, A.A., M.P.,
Minister of Agriculture
*Cde. S.A. Moore, M.P.,
Minister of Home Affairs
*Cde. J.R. Thomas, M.P.,
Minister of Education (Absent-on-Leave)
*Non-elected Members

Ministers (13)

Cde. J.P. Chowritmootoo, J.P., M.P.,
Minister, Environment and Water Supply, in the
Ministry of Public Welfare

Cde. U.E. Johnson, M.P.,
Minister of Co-operatives

Cde. J.N. Maitland-Singh
Minister, Consumer Protection, in the
Ministry of Trade and consumer Protection

Cde. S. Prashad, M.P.,
Minister, Crops and Livestock, in the
Ministry of Agriculture (Absent-on-Leave)

Cde. Sallahuddin, M.P.,
Minister, Finance, in the Ministry of
Economic Planning and Finance

Cde. R.E. Williams, M.P.,
Minister, Fisheries, in the Ministry
of Agriculture

*Cde. C.A. Nascimento, M.P.,
Minister, Mechanical Equipment, in the
Ministry of Works and Transport (Absent-on-Leave)

*Cde. F.U.A. Campbell, M.P.,
Minister f Information (Absent)

*Cde. F.U.A Carmichael, M.P.,
Minister, Forestry, in the Ministry
of Agriculture (Absent)

*Cde. Y.V. Harewood-Benn, M.P.,
Minister of Public Service (Absent-on-Leave)

*Cde. H. Rashid, M.P.,
Minister Office of the President

*Cde. R.C. Van Sluytman, M.P.,
Minister, Drainage and Irrigation, in the
Ministry of Agriculture

*Cde. R.A. Van West-Charles, M.P.,
Minister Health, in the Ministry of
Public Welfare (Absent)

Ministers of State (3)

Cde. M. Corrica, M.P.,
Minister of State for Culture in the
Ministry of Education, Development and Culture

Cde. R.C. Fredericks, A.A., M.P.,
Minister of State for Youth and Sport, in the
Ministry of National Development

*Cde. C.E. Wright, M.P.,
Minister of State for Construction, in the
Ministry of Works and Transport (Absent-on-Leave)

Parliamentary Secretaries (3)

Cde. A.W. Bend-Kirton-Holder, M.P.
Parliamentary Secretary Women's Affairs and Housing

Cde. P.A. Rayman, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister

*Cde. E.M. Bynoe, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister

*Non-elected Member

Other Members (23)

Cde. D.A.N. Ainsworth, M.P.,
Cde. M. Ally, M.P.,
Cde. M. Armogan, M.P.,
Cde. B. Beniprashad, M.P.,
Cde. B. Bhaggan, M.P.
Cde. J.B. Calderia, M.P.,
Cde. A.A. Chin, M.P.,
Cde. E.B. Davidson, M.P.,
Cde. H. Doobay, M.P.,
Cde. A.B. Felix, M.P.,
Cde. E.H.A. Fowler, M.P.,
Cde. P. Fredericks, M.P.,
Cde. E.F. Gilbert, M.P.,
Cde. J. Gill-Mingo, M.P.,
Cde. A. McRae, M.P.,
Cde. J.M. Munroe, J.P., M.P.,
Cde. R.N. Primo, M.P.,
Cde. C.G. Sharma, J.P., M.P.,
Cde. H.L.B. Singh, M.P.,
Cde. S.H. Sukhu, M.S., M.P.,
Cde. B. Tiwari, M.P.,
Cde. C. Vandeburg, M.P.,
Cde. H.B. Walcott, J.P., M.P.,

Government Chief Whip

Members from the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs (2)

Cde. R. Bishop, M.S., M.P.,
Cde. B. Latchminarayan, M.P.,

Members from the Regional Democratic Councils (10)

Cde. K.N. Jones, M.P. (Region No. 1 – Barima/Waini)
Cde. K.V. Jairam, M.P. (Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam)
Cde. C.A. Singh, M.P. (Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)
Cde. W. Bipat, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)
Cde. H.I. London, M.S., M.P. (Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice)
Cde. I. Chowritmootoo, M.P. (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne)
Cde. N.R. Charles, M.P. (Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni)
Cde. D. Abraham, M.P. (Region No. 8 – Potaro/Siparuni) (Absent)
Cde. A. Dorrick, M.P. (Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo)
Cde. D. Hinds, M.P. (Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Berbice)

Members of the Minority (12)

(i) People's Progressive Party (10)

Minority leader (1)
Cde. Dr. C. Jagan, M.P.,
 Minority Leader-

Deputy Speaker (1)
Cde. Ram Karran, M.P.,
Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly

<u>Other Members</u> (8)	
Cde. J. Jagan, M.P.,	(Absent)
Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, J.P., M.P.,	
Minority Chief Whip	
Cde. N. Persaud, M.P.	
Cde. C.C. Collymore, M.P.	
Cde. S.F. Mohamed, M.P.	(Absent)
Cde. I. Basir, M.P.	
Cde. C.C. Belgrave, M.P.	(Absent)
Cde. Dalchand, J.P., M.P.	

(ii) United Force (2)

Mr. M.F. Singh, J.P., M.P.
Mr. M.A. Abraham, M.P. (Absent)

OFFICERS

Clerk of the National Assembly – Cde. Frank Narain, A.A.

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly – Cde. M.B. Henry

PRAYERS

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave to Members

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to Comrades Reid, Hoyte, Thomas, Prashad, Nascimento and Wright for today's Sitting.

Congratulations to Members on Marriage

The Speaker: Comrades, since last we met I wish to announce a very happy occasion. Two of our members have got married, Cde. Agnes Bend-Kirton, who has now become Agnes Bend-Kirton Holder – /Applause/ and Cde. Joyce Gill, who has now become Cde. Joyce Mingo. /Applause/ I am sure you would wish me, on your behalf, to extend to them very good wishes for a successful and happy future and that the years ahead would be prosperous and joyful.

I am also told that there are other members who will soon follow their footsteps. Some members are not here but I understand that there are others, some absent and some present, who will soon follow that happy course.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers were laid:

- (1) (a) Loan Agreement between the Government of Guyana and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for Technical Assistance for the Power Development Project. (Loan Number 1906 GUA).
(b) Annual Reports of the Inland Revenue Department for the years 1964 – 1966, 1967 – 1973, 1974 – 1975, 1976 – 1978 and 1979.
(c) Customs (Exemption from Duties) Order 1981 (No. 17), made under section 8 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01, on the 11th February, 1981, and published in the Gazette on 14th March, 1981. /The Minister of Finance, on behalf of the Vice-President, Economic Planning and Finance/
- (2) Local Democratic Organs (Emoluments of Office-holders) Order 1981 (No. 10), made under section 9 of the Local Democratic Organs Act 1980, on the 16th of February, 1981. /The Minister of Regional Development./

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS – FIRST READING

The following Bills were introduced and read the First time.

- (1) Tax (Amendment) Bill 1981 – Bill No. 4 of 1981. /The Minister, Finance, on behalf of the Vice-President, Economic Planning and Finance./
- (2) Drainage and Irrigation (Amendment) Bill 1981 – Bill No. 3 of 1981. /The Minister of Agriculture./

PUBLIC BUSINESSBILL – SECOND AND THIRD READINGSENERGY BILL 1981

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to make provision with respect to the nation’s resources of and use of energy.” /The Minister of Energy and Mines./

The Minister of Energy and Mines (Cde. Jack): Cde. Speaker, in recent times the world has become painfully aware of the fact that the era of cheap energy has passed, possibly never to return. Developments throughout the world today point to the fact that one cannot consider development of any significant kind without considering also at the same time what is to be done with energy, how energy is to be utilised, how it is to be developed and how it is to be apportioned. Responding to what has been termed “the energy crisis”, countries throughout the world have set about to look for new and renewable sources of energy, for alternative uses for energy, for conservation and, more particularly, for a rationalisation and planning of energy resources.

In keeping with many countries of the world, Guyana has also embarked upon a conscious effort to develop and to rationalise its energy resources. In 1979 we established the Energy Unit which is up to the present a small unit, but which has the task of collecting important data concerning particularly our importation of hydrocarbons as well as the areas in which we use energy. That exercise is continuing, but another very important task which was assigned to the Energy Unit was the preparation of the necessary information and background document which would lay the foundation for the establishment of an Energy Authority

Early last year efforts were made to seek assistance from multi-national organisations, or international organisations, as well as from organisations such as U.S.A.I.D., and in August last year three persons, Messrs. Bosken, Melby and Klien, came to Guyana, reviewed the work which the Energy Unit had done and made certain recommendations with regard to the establishment of an energy Authority. Early this year, also under the aegis of U.S.A.I.D., a Mr. Ashby came here who reviewed the work which the energy unit had done and looked at the draft legislation which we had prepared.

Cde. Chairman, it is obvious that having regard to the state of our economy it is necessary for us to have an authority which would regulate in all its aspects the use of energy in this country. The Bill which is now before this Assembly seeks to establish that authority. What we have found is that it is necessary for us to have adequate information upon which a proper plan of action can be devised, a plan of action which will encompass the entire energy use of this country. There are a number of areas in which up to the present there are disjointed efforts at development of our energy resources and the energy authority will bring all of these efforts under one umbrella, so to speak. The draft energy act which would establish the energy authority would have a duty to keep under review all matters pertaining to energy and to report and to make recommendations to the Minister in question. All projects, therefore, which are now under consideration, for instance, hydro power, charcoal, biogas, or whatever one is contemplating, would be initiated in the first instance by the energy authority.

The energy authority does not intend to execute all of these projects itself; it will have a supervisory and monitoring role. The one area in which the energy authority in its initial stage will concentrate will be the area of energy conservation. Taking a broad view of last year's importation, and using a rough figure of \$400 million as the total cost for the importation of hydrocarbons into this country, one recognises that if as a result of conservation we were able to achieve even as small a saving as one per cent, we would thereby have justified immediately the establishment of the energy authority, since we would have saved something in the region of \$4 million.

In countries more advanced than ours where statistics are better kept than we have been able to do up to the present, a target of something like 5 per cent and in some cases as much as 10 per cent conservation has been aimed at. Of course 10 per cent would be \$40 million and that would be a very substantial saving if we could make it. We are not as optimistic as to believe that in the very first year of the inception of this authority we would make a saving of 10 per cent but we have admitted quite frankly that because of the manner in which energy has been used in the past, there has not been that care to ensure the efficient use of energy which is desirable. We are confident that with correct monitoring and the improvement in the efficiency of energy we will make a substantial saving in our energy bill running into millions of dollars.

If we turn directly to the energy authority Bill as it stands before the Assembly, Cde. Chairman, one sees that at the energy authority will study and keep under review matters relating to the exploration, form, production, recovery, processing, transmission, transportation, distribution, sale, purchase, exchange, and disposal of energy, and sources of energy within and out side Guyana. What we need to do is to finalise the preparation because it is already in process of what has been termed an energy balance. An energy balance, for the benefit of Members of the Assembly, is a document or a table which will give information as to the total amount of energy used, the cost, the sectoral distribution, the types of energy consumed, the spatial distribution, and things like that. When such an energy balance has been prepared, a proper energy budget will be prepared. We would hope that the energy budget will be prepared in 1981.

Of course, we will deal very closely with the State Planning Commission. The energy authority itself will comprise, five members but this Bill also establishes an energy advisory council. The advice which we received and which we have acted upon is that having regard to the national nature of energy in the world today, we should seek to have on the advisory council as broad-based a cross section of interests as we could have and for that reason we have included in the schedule for the organisation of the advisory council, technical organisations, organisations like the Consumers Association, the companies which supply fuel, the private sector represented by the Chambers of Commerce of Georgetown and Berbice, as well as the manufacturing associations, together with the Trades Union congress representing the workers, and, of course, the three major users of energy in this country, Guymine, Electricity Corporation and Guysuco.

With regard to the Board of itself, Ministry would expect to appoint to that Board persons reputed for their technical knowledge. For instance, we would want to have a financial controller, an economist, an engineer, and persons of that standard and quality who can make a valuable contribution towards the assessment of the information which they will have received, and who can give proper advice to the Ministry in the formulation of plans and projects for the creation of a proper energy budget and also for the development of alternative sources of energy.

We are continuing with the work which we have already started in the energy unit and we expect that some of the personnel from the energy unit will be incorporated into the energy authority.

There are, Cde. Speaker, some amendments which have been circulated and which I would like to ask to be included at the proper time. They are of a typographical nature and they deal with clauses 6, clause 8 and clause 26. With these words, Cde. Speaker, I would like to commend this Bill to the Assembly and ask that it be read a Second time.

2:20 p.m.

The Speaker: Perhaps it may be wise for me at this stage to draw attention to the corrections so that the contributions by members may take that aspect into account.

- | | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| <u>Clause 6</u> | - | Deletion of the closing bracket in the last line. |
| <u>Clause 8(1) (b)</u> | - | <u>Substitution</u> of “apportionment” for “appointment” |
| Clause 26 | - | substitution of “The funds and resources of the authority shall” for “The Authority may keep and operate a bank account” in the first line. |

Question proposed.

The Speaker: Cde. Persaud.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, we are very concerned on this side of the Assembly about the whole question of energy. We are more concerned because it affects everyone and particularly those who can ill afford to pay. For emphasis, I make the point that Guyana is not without the resources and potential to provide cheap energy and so lessen the economic burden particularly on those who can ill afford to pay.

As I look at the Bill objectively, I see it probably as an extension simply to the preparatory work. But what we on this side of the Assembly are looking for, is something more concrete, more positive and what we would like to hear, Mr. Speaker, is how soon the people of this country will be relieved of the heavy energy bills.

I had intention also to cite Clause 9 of the Bill but the Minister has already read it. I wish simply to say this, that what the authority is expected to do was done and is being done, if I understand all the processes that are going on. Because Mr. Speaker, the whole question of our potential and resources in so far as energy is concerned dates back to the late fifties when Alcan carried out an investigation on the Upper Mazaruni Project. They were thinking of a smelter and after their enquiries and investigations they came to the conclusion that it was too costly a project particularly with respect to maintenance. But in 1967 Shawinigan investigated Tiger Hill in the Demerara River and Tiboku in the Mazaruni river on behalf of the United Nations. They reported – and the Hon. Member, Mr. Feilden Singh is reminding me that he was Minister at that time. I am drawing attention to these sequences to show that the Ministry is not without data, is not without information, and some of the information that this Bill seeks to get ultimately, I am of the view that the Ministry is already in possession of this information and I ask when action will be taken.

In 1972, Mr. Speaker, a Yugoslav firm came and they were engaged to study the feasibility of the Upper Mazaruni Project but it was not ended with them. The Montreal Engineering Company did a similar exercise. I ask myself this question...

with all these investigations, men qualified, men able, the best advice available to the ministry and Government, how could the Minister this afternoon convince us in this Assembly and even his own members that nothing has been started up to this moment. Of course, I am talking about physical evidence, because I want to make the point Mr. Speaker, that electricity in this country is unreliable and the nation has been compelled to live with that state of unreliability of power and of energy. What people want to see happen is something positive done whereby they can see in the near future, in the early future, a relief in the situation. But talking about all these authorities and Advisory Councils to my mind, will not solve the problem.

I was citing so far, Mr. Speaker, expatriates for their expertise. They came, they investigated, they reported, they tendered advice. But in 1973, a task force was set up and this task force was headed by a Guyanese, Cde. Crawford. This task force conducted several studies and their inquiries and investigations relate to areas like power demand and the determination of existing power supplies and installations throughout the country. If this information is correct – and I feel it is – then I feel that the pigeon holes in the Minister's office would have been filled with enough documentation and evidence and data for action. Our contribution on this side of the Assembly is calling for action.

The task force did not only do what I alluded to a few seconds ago, but it also analysed the Yugoslavs' report to determine cost of generating power or electricity. I am not making the point, I want to be very liberal that there is absolutely no use for the authority but we are always very fearful on this side of the Assembly that we only take action to extend the bureaucracy, to put more people into positions to push pens. We want power not pen pushing. That is our position and I am sure the Minister will agree that is an objective position.

I understand that the task force has reported since 1974, so that the Minister is in possession of that too and it looks to me when I read clause 9 and I listen to him reading it, that they were doing many of the things that this Authority is expected to do. I know, Mr. Speaker, from reading the Bill, that the legislation will give certain powers to the Authority cum the government, probably to demand information, whereas the current situation is that you can ask for information and you might not get information. I see that clause clearly in the Bill. But that would have been one aspect. I would like to believe, Mr. Speaker, that the Government will find in pursuing enquiry and investigation into our resources for energy, the demand for energy, what is expected, how many megawatts we need and all that kind of information, that all land sundry will be its own people. Eighty per cent of the Companies and Corporations are in the hands of the Government, and if at all the Government has to impose the legislation, it looks like it will relate to the 80 per cent of its own people.

[Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud continues]

2.30 p.m.

I do not say that the legislation is not necessary, but this is not the answer, and this is not pertinent at this time. It is not so vital. This legislation has not in my view impeded progress so the whole question of power is not dependent upon the Bill before the Assembly. The Bill probably may be necessary for certain regulatory purposes, and it is only a coincidence. But what I was expecting the Minister to tell the Assembly and through the Assembly, the nation, is what stage the Upper Mazaruni Energy Project is at this moment, bearing in mind that we are saying that the Project at this moment in the biblical sense has been literally abandoned. Nothing is happening. There is equipment, and that is my information, idle for a long period. What is the state of that equipment? Is there security of that equipment? What has been the input so far into the project? This is our vital consideration in giving approval to the Bill before the Assembly.

In a Bulletin dated March 1976, which was called the Hydro Process, Bulletin No. 1, the estimated cost was given at that time at \$1,000 million (Guyana) when completed, and a date was set for the completion of many, many things. I have looked through previous budget speeches. A Decade of Progress under the pen of one Cde. Payne hinted in his last line that 1982 was the scheduled time for the completion of the project. We are in the year 1981, and even if we were to dream, I do not think the moment of slumber will allow us to concede in our subconscious state that the project can completed in 1982, bearing in mind that our charge is that is it not off the ground even at this current time talking in the Assembly.

With all this investigation, Cde. Speaker, we find that Swedish consultants were brought in by the Government and they suggested when they came in at the last moment, that the whole thing should be reconsidered should be reexamined. The Minister may wish to say if I am right or wrong. But, Mr. Speaker, my information is that many have advised a more moderate venture, a project which is within the reach of the Government's financial position, bearing in mind all the delicate conditions and circumstances that surround this particular project. Money has to be obtained and the Government has to make an input no matter how small. We have to bear in mind, Mr. Speaker, that the Upper Mazaruni Energy Project will have to go hand in hand with a smelter. More money will be required. I have said somewhere else, maybe in this Assembly, that we would like to see in our lifetime something happen. We are not hoping that this project will materialise for our grandchildren, or our great grandchildren. It looks as though that will be the position. It is in this context, Mr. Speaker, I urge the Minister to speak this afternoon when he replies.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that the estimated total power capability of the Mazaruni system is 22,830 megawatts, and a smelter producing 200,000 tons per annum will need 430 megawatts. I also understand that in 1973 the cost of the project was \$170 million (US) for stage one and \$484 million (US) for stage two. My very reliable information is that the project will now cost, and I do not agree with the figure, \$3,800 million (Guyana). I think it will be much more than that when one ponders on the inflation rate which is well over 15 per cent at the current time.

I am not necessarily referring to the Upper Mazaruni Energy Project but the delay in taking action, to provide cheap energy and cheap power to this country will, like other projects to which I have referred on other occasions in this Parliament, cause this project to suffer. Not only the Upper Mazaruni has been suggested by the experts for suitability or potential for power; several other projects. Let me name them: Tiger Hill, Tiboku, Amaila Fall, Kaiteur Fall, Kamarau Fall. The Government has a number of alternative areas to look into, to examine. I am sure the Government will attempt to reply that when they look at the input into those, and then what can be got out of them, you have to be more ambitious, but we have heard that kind of argument before, that you have to set standards, you have to think big. But you can only think big when you are big economically and financially. When you are not big economically and financially, to think big and to attempt to pursue any kind of effort which is not realizable in a period that is reasonable, to my mind, is a matter for complaint. That is why I make the point.

Mr. Speaker, since 1975, the Government made a decision that it intends to start the project. The 1976 budget allocated \$10 million to the project and in that same year, \$15 million for the road. We know how many millions went into those projects since, I repeat, 1976. This is 1981, five years after, and we are now introducing legislation to establish an authority. We should have been having action long before now and I think this action is very late like so many other acts by the Government.

Mr. Speaker, the project undoubtedly is in its embryonic stage. We want to see it manifested and I want to ask the Minister a question. Had the Government taken earlier advice and looked more objectively and...

carefully at a type of good project, if this country would not have been in a better position, power wise, at the current time. The cost would have been less and right now when we have incessant power failures, uncertainty of power, Tiger Hill would have been able to answer the disaster and the crisis that exists in Guyana has a special crisis in energy. We have it every month and the Minister will recall that sometime ago we had to move the suspension of a Standing Order to have the crisis debated once in this Assembly.

2:40 p.m.

I looked at the Third Biennial Congress document of 1978, on page 9, and these words are written:

“...an Energy Unit has been instituted in the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources and this unit will soon be developed into a statutory Energy Authority.”

My point is fortified by evidence from your own documentation. From 1978 you said so, that the authority would have come into being. It took roughly three years, a little under three years, before the legislation could come before the Assembly for something that is so vital and so necessary.

I want to call upon the Minister this afternoon to give us some more information, to give the Assembly some more information, specifically on dates, when positive action will be taken, how early we can expect relief, are the funds forthcoming for the project? If not, what is impeding? I think that kind of information will undoubtedly help the nation at this time. No one will deny – I do not want to allude in the Assembly to a fact that we all know – that energy power is so vital for production and because of the uncertainty of power, production also has been affected, normal life has been affected, people in the country have suffered and we cannot any longer delay in moving positively in bringing about power relief to the people of the country.

Talking about saving and conserving, we read in the same document;

“Certain Corporations have already introduced measures and regimens to ensure that fuel consumption is significantly reduced without affecting production. In addition, the use of materials like wood and charcoal is being accelerated and wind power, which our forefathers used effectively, is to be exploited. Biogas, of which we have a large potential, is also being developed.

I want the Minister to tell us what is the position with all these which the Government referred to since the year 1978.

That document has these words:

“It is not that our Party and Government seek to take us back to the days of yesteryear...”

Mr. M.F. Singh: “Coal-pot.”] To me we are going back to yesteryear. We are stepping backward continuously and what we want in this country is forward march and action and this is not what we are having. You are saying in one breath “It is not our intention to take you back to the days of our forebears” and that is exactly what is happening. I am not necessarily advocating that people must not use what we have, but every single member of this Assembly – there can be an exception – wants a better life and wants to enjoy facilities that people in other parts of the world enjoy, bearing in mind our own economic position, but our position is worse

today in Guyana than it was 10 years ago when, with 16 years of P.N.C. rules, we are saying “Go back to charcoal; Go back to the coal-pot; Go back to chula; Go back to fire-side; Go back to the candle; Go back to the jug lamp.” That kind of situation.

I hope that the Government will see our contribution this afternoon as being very objective and that the government will pursue action that will ultimately bring about a state of relief in so far as power is concerned.

I have heard other statements years and years ago about the Upper Mazaruni project and when these statements were made surely, Mr. Speaker, you would come to the conclusion that by 1981/1982 we would be there, but in 1981 we are still, I believe, to find the money; we are still to reach firm decision and, come 1981, we are still without power, hence the whole nation is affected.

I trust that the Minister in reply, apart from dealing with the Bill which stands on two limbs – it seeks to establish an Authority which would be executive and it is advisory – to me that is not here nor there. It can be another grass track.

I looked at the organisations identified to constitute the Advisory Council and I want to say in this Assembly that I think most of these organisations if not all, have an interest in power, so I do not want to question any of the organisations, but we must clearly understand that the Council is strictly advisory.

The Authority also comes under the complete control, supervision and direction of the Minister. So the ultimate decision-making Authority is the Government, neither the Authority nor the Advisory Council. I thought of making that point:

“The Authority in the discharge of its functions shall be, except in relation to the contents of a report or recommendation made by it to the Minister, subject to the control and direction o the Minister.”

I should like to feel that those who will constitute the Authority exist now and were existing before and the advice was available to the Minister. You are formalising this group, whoever they are, or recently you have new blood and new people to put in. That is why I have made an objective contribution. The Minister will make the decision. I don't want to question that but what I want to clearly record in this Assembly is that he Authority does not, in any way, bring any new dimension to the whole question of energy and power. It is an additional group for what it is worth. I hope it can be of some benefit and use to the Minister because, like the Advisory Council, they will advise the Minister. The Advisory Council will advise the Authority and the Authority will advise the Minister. Probably the Advisory Council will be able to go direct to the Minister. It is a whole advisory process again, after all that investigation and enquiry and report on report.

I want, on behalf of the P.P.P. to call for action because we have the potential, we have the reports; they have been identified long ago. We want cheap power for the people of this country so as to lessen particularly the working man's economic burden at the present time.

The Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Feilden Singh.

Mr. M.F. Singh: Mr. Speaker, the Bill by itself, in the humble opinion of the United Force, is really not controversial. In fact, I think it would be right to say that it is overdue but perhaps in this respect we should commend the Minister for at long last bringing a Bill of this nature to the Assembly. Certainly, almost all the countries in the world, even those countries with sources of energy, with petroleum deposits, even some of those countries themselves, have moved, or are moving, towards an overall Authority for energy and certainly in these days of escalating petroleum prices, in my humble opinion, control is absolutely necessary. In whose hands the control should be? Obviously, it will have to be in the hands of the Government.

(Mr. Fielden Singh continues)

2:50 p.m.

However, I do differ slightly from the last Speaker in his interpretation of section 3 (2) and I would hope to be re-assured by the Hon. Minister that my interpretation is correct in that if a report or a recommendation is made to him by the Authority, that is binding on him and cannot be subject to his control or direction. As I read the section, it says: “the Authority in the discharge of its functions shall be, except in relation to the contents of a report or recommendation made by it to the Minister, subject to the control and direction of the Minister.” So subject to the control and direction of the Minister, however, in relation to a report or a recommendation made by it to the Minister, I would take it that he is bound by that. I hope to be reassured about that by the Hon. Minister. That I think is good.

I note from his remark that it is the intention not to indulge in any party politics in the appointment of those people. The members of these committees, I understand, would be people chosen for their technical abilities, their skills, or their particular expertise in the field of energy. I am particularly pleased to see that in the Advisory Council there will be the private sector, for which I am always a champion, I think, and I say without any fear of being told that I should not say it, because I see the Government is increasingly saying it now, that the private sector has an important role to play in this country and should be encouraged every way down the line to do that. The pity is that Water Street has been so cut down that it is all Government bureaucracy now. If we had more of a private sector playing a vital part, we would not have had all these long lines and shortages and the rest of it. I am particularly happy to see the Guyana Consumers Association is on the Advisory Council; the Guyana Manufacturers Association, the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, Linden Chamber of Commerce, Berbice Chamber of Commerce, the Oil Companies; that is very good indeed.

I would wish also to be reassured that in respect of the appointment of the members of the Authority under section 4 (1), the Minister would consult with the Opposition, because certainly we in this little section of the Assembly always try to be constructive. We do not criticize for the sake of criticism and we would hope that the Opposition can be asked to play a useful part in respect of what is acknowledged to be a general crisis throughout the world in respect of energy. We would certainly want to be involved in this. The Bill, to my mind, will not solve our problems but it is a start and we must start somewhere. As the last speaker said, we have had a lot of reports. I, myself, was Minister of Works and Hydraulics in 1967 when the report by Shewinigan Engineering Company was made on the Tibaku site, but I must agree with the last speaker that we have had so many reports on so many various sites and so many studies, that one wonders what is happening. Why all these reports and nothing concrete occurs? We have had the Upper Mazaruni Project started. A lot of money was spent on the road but have we finalised the financing of the Upper Mazaruni Project? The World Bank, recently, and this is a credit to the Hon. Minister has granted money for, perhaps the Hon. Minister will correct me, looking into the feasibility, but we still have not identified any financing for the Upper Mazaruni Project. Lately, we have been hearing talk about embarking upon smaller projects, but we need to get off the ground. We are in this embryonic stage for far too long.

The Luckhoo Report years ago talked about all the problems at the Electricity Corporation. In my humble opinion not enough has been done to really tackle those problems which had been identified in the Luckhoo Report and we still have the problem. I think we have to admit the problem is not as serious as it was. There is a definite improvement in the electricity situation at the Electricity Corporation, but there is still the problem and it could happen any time that we could have a recurrence of the problem of the same enormity as it was sometime before. I think we need to get an up-dating on what is being done in these areas.

I would hope that with the establishment of this Authority we will get off the ground and something definite and positive will start flowing from this, I hope that one of the first things would be a look at the Electricity Corporation and a look at the hydro project which we were hearing about since the government assumed office as a Coalition in 1964. I think, the Executive President made a speech on the balcony of the Public Buildings talking about hydro-power. It is really a long time from 1965 to 1981. In the final analysis, Mr. Speaker, I do agree with the legislation. I commend the Minister for having brought it to the Assembly and I look forward to tangible results flowing from this bit of legislation.

The Speaker: Cde. Minister.

Cde. Jack (replying): I would like to thank the last speaker for, at least, being forthright enough to support this Bill. With regard to clause 3 (2), I think I can lay his fears at rest. Naturally, the Minister must give general direction but there is no intention to interfere with the day to day operation of the Authority. I noticed that the other speaker, the member of the majority Minority Party, seems to have stumbled upon a discovery that ultimately the decision-making body is the Government. I am very happy that he has found this out because it is a useful bit of information for anyone who is in Parliament to be aware of. It happens to be true that the Government makes the ultimate decision in any country and that is the situation here.

Cde. Speaker, this Bill seeks to give authority to carry out certain necessary work. It is true that the Energy Unit has got a lot of information. It has got data, but it did not have the legal authority, the sanction, to enforce the production of information. Anyone familiar with the world today, as Mr. Fielden Singh is familiar from his remarks, obviously, knows that other countries in the world are establishing or have established energy Authorities and the reason is that prior to 1973, energy was taken for granted. It was cheap. People did not put into their calculations as a priority, the energy factor. Today, throughout the world, the energy factor is looked upon as pivotal and crucial and everybody, whether they are in the East, West, North or South, have found the necessity of having an Authority which would comprehensively plan the total utilisation, dispersal, rationalisation process of energy.

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3:00 – 3:10 p.m.

/Cde. Jack continues/

And that is the purpose of this Bill. To say that it is neither here nor there is to miss the whole purpose of the Bill and not to understand what is going on in the world.

3:00 p.m.

To say further that if it is useful it should have been done long ago is to ask for a degree of prophecy which we mortals do not have. Prior to 1973, I know of very few countries if any at all that had a specific energy authority. Today, not only every country but throughout this year alone there are no fewer than maybe twenty conferences taking place throughout the world to discuss energy. I myself just came from a conference in Mexico where the Latin American and Caribbean regions have decided upon a common policy with regard to energy development in this region and that common policy is preparatory to a meeting which will take place in Nairobi in August when under the aegis of the United Nations we will have a world energy conference. Ten years ago there was never a world energy conference. This is something that has been brought upon us and I think it is asking a little too much to expect that Guyana alone would have foreseen all of these things.

But I think that I should say something about the perennial question that is raised about hydro. I have taken time before and my colleague Cde. Felix also spent some time explaining the hydro situation. And I apologise if I tire this Assembly but I think it is necessary that once again I carry out the process of education. When Alcan did a study of the Mazaruni and took a decision not to proceed, it was not because it was too costly. At that time energy was cheap and the conventional wisdom was that smelting of aluminum should take place, not necessarily where the bauxite was produced but where there was an abundant source of hydro-electric power already installed. In Canada at Kitimat and at Arvida there were, in fact, hydro-electric stations producing power at something in the region of three mills. The Alcan company therefore had no incentive to spend whatever amount of money would have been necessary to duplicate energy facilities in Guyana when they had them on their doorstep. At that time the wisdom was to carry the bauxite to the source of energy.

Subsequently, the conventional wisdom of the market place as regards aluminum smelting changed from setting up smelters near to the source of energy; the decision was to set up smelters at the doorstep of the market. With this in view, companies established smelters in Europe and in England. The Anglesey smelter in England is a case in point not because England had power, not because it had bauxite, but because it was a market. With the advent of the energy crisis in 1973, all of that has changed and once again we are back to the stage where people are looking for a cheap source of energy.

Now, in those countries of the developed world where the energy had already been established although it was cheap initially the pressure of industry upon the resources has caused an escalation in price so that where contracts come to an end the cheap energy ceases to exist and companies whether they be steel or aluminum or cement or what have you, have to pay now new tariffs for energy. That is what has changed the situation.

To speak of 1967 of some information, some meeting taking place, I am not aware of that. I know that in 1972 we engaged the firm of Energo Project. That firm had been engaged

in Zambia in building the Kaffri dam. The consultants in that operation were Sweco. It is not true that Sweco advised a re-thinking of the project. We engaged Sweco to improve the project from an area of 1,000 square miles which would have been flooded in the first instance; by the improvement which Sweco carried out, the area to be flooded in the first instance was reduced to 200 square miles.

Again, it is not true that the power from the Upper Mazaruni would be 22,800 megawatts. That is not true. We have done a survey with U.N.D.P. assistance of our hydro-electric potential and using those sites which had a firm power capacity of 6 megawatts and over, and that is excluding all the rest, and also using the criterion of \$1,500 U.S. per kilowatt of installed capacity, they have come up with a figure of over 7,500 megawatt of potential firm power in Guyana. Of course, we have something in the region of between 20,000 and 30,000 megawatts available if you exclude this specific cost of energy of installed capacity per unit. So it is absolutely untrue to say that Upper Mazaruni could have an installed capacity of 22,800 megawatts. In its ultimate development it can have an installed capacity of 3,000 megawatts.

The project as we have it now, and I have said it time and again in this Assembly, is to start with 750 megawatts and we can expand the energy to 1200 megawatts without raising the dam in the first instance. If we want to produce power more than 1200 megawatts we would then have to raise the dam in which case we can install turbines to full capacity of 3,000 megawatts.

The figures given with regard to the cost of stage one and stage two, I do not know where those figures were got from. Those figures are inaccurate. The figures are available. The 1976 figures are placed in a book which we call the fact sheet which we have distributed in this Assembly and which members of the Opposition should have in their possession.

Once again we hear about Tiger Hill and I think that Tiger Hill is never going to die. Some people will not learn, they will not believe. I have a note here. When Cde. Felix spoke on the last occasion he brought the document to the Assembly which showed that Tiger Hill could have had an installed capacity of 15 megawatts. At the time when this country had 13 megawatts, that is when the P.P.P. was in office, the G.E.C. had an installed capacity of 13 megawatts. Today the G.E.C. has an installed capacity of over 113. Now at the time when G.E.C. had 13 megawatts, 15 megawatts may have looked adequate. At that time the price of oil was less than a dollar per barrel. Upon the assessment of the economics and I ask once again that those members of the Opposition who don't believe would at least get the document and read it and don't repeat this thing again in this Assembly because it isn't true – at that time, the economics clearly showed that at less than a dollar per barrel of oil it was uneconomic to develop Tiger Hill.

The rhetorical question asked, if you had Tiger Hill, would you not be in a better position now? Of course. If all of us could have seen into the future then we would have done something that then was not economic but which would have turned out to be economic after 1973. There is no country that carries on its affairs upon the basis of that kind of speculation. Tiger Hill is one of the most expensive sites as regards generation of power in this country.

3:10 p.m.

Montreal Engineering was not engaged by us to do a review of the Upper Mazaruni. Montreal Engineering was engaged by us through U.N.D.P. to do the study to which I had referred earlier. That is the study of the total hydro-electric potential of the country with certain limitations. In the course of that study they make a list of priorities with regard to the sites which would give power at the best cost. Tiger Hill once again is at the bottom of the list. The figures are available, the documents are there. I am prepared to make them available to anybody in this Assembly who has a right and an interest in seeing them so as to prevent him from wasting the time of this Assembly in repeating something which has to be refuted. I make this offer. I am prepared even to get a photocopy, if I receive a request, and had it out to members of the Opposition. They can read it.

The Speaker: I think I also want to correct you. You have been constantly referring to "Opposition." Under the Constitution there is a Minority Party.

Cde. Jack: who are not the Opposition. I am grateful for the correction, but I am prepared to give it to them so that they will not come again. I do not know how many times I am going to repeat what I have said. There seems to be some fear that the truth will be out.

Now, Cde. Speaker, there is a question about identifying financing. Let me deal with this. When we had done a study of Tiboku we had to engage, because we were getting assistance from an international agency, a Mr. La Telle. Mr. La Telle came here and said that in order to have hydro station in this country of the nature of Tiboku, we should have a financial reserve.

Now, the requirement for a financial reserve is unusual for the establishment of a hydro-electric station. This financial reserve was intended to be a sort of sinking fund where money was going to be specifically put aside for a rainy day in case on one occasion the Government was unable to pay the amortisation on the dotted line. But it is an unusual requirement. Because of the suggestion that we should have a financial reserve, more money would have had to be expended in the total scheme than would normally have been the case. When you added the cost of the Tiboku project and the financial reserve, the mill rate came out at 5.6. At that time the Alcan Company claimed that the highest they could pay for power to a smelter in Guyana was 4 mills and since the figure that came out was 5.6 we said it was too high. We were unable to raise the money. Subsequently, we found that there was never an intention to put up a smelter. Those of us who are adults and who know these international organisations work would understand. Nobody came and said you can't have it. What was done was that an economic or financial device was relied upon which made it appear as if the thing was uneconomic. Now, why didn't we build it otherwise? The answer is we did not have our own money.

Coming now to the present situation, we are engaged in discussions with a number of agencies and companies with regard to the financing of this project. It would be inappropriate at this time for us to publicise the nature of the negotiations taking place and I am sure that all Members of this Assembly would be conscious of this fact. You cannot carry on negotiations to put together \$1.5 billion worth of financing in the glare of publicity. That would inhibit the negotiations on all sides and bring them to a dead end. I can assume this Assembly, however, that the negotiations have been progressing and that we have every confidence that we will succeed.

However, let me give the Assembly a reminder of the kind of difficulties which developing countries have experienced in attempting to break out of their present situation by developing a source of energy. The first experience I would refer to is that of Ghana. When they tried to develop the Volta scheme, you will remember that President Nkrumah had a great amount of trouble with the World Bank and eventually he had to make certain arrangements with a smelting company in order to get the thing off the ground. When Nasser of Egypt attempted to build the Aswan Dam, which incidentally has an installed capacity of 2200 megawatts, the political implications were such and the political results were such that the banks and the countries which had promised assistance withdrew that assistance resulting in the fact that the nationalised the Suez Canal and that resulted also in the Arab-Israeli War of 1976.

It is not simple and I am not going to pretend that it is simple to put together a package of the magnitude such as we are trying to put together. What I wish to say, however, is this, that the result of success will be of tremendous benefit to this country and the very enormity of the benefits which we would derive from the implementation of a smelter and hydro-electric project of this type in Guyana fully merits and warrants the efforts which we have taken towards its realisation.

With regard to the other sites which have been mentioned, none of them, and I repeat, none of them can produce energy as cheaply as Upper Mazaruni. Furthermore, none of them have the capacity to supply energy for a smelter of 150,000 tons or more and at the same time supply all the energy needed for the national grid. It is only Upper Mazaruni that has the capacity to fulfill both requirements and it is for this reason we have continued to press the development of the scheme. Furthermore, we have gone the furtherest distance with Upper Mazaruni. We have had the feasibility studies done, the studies have been assessed and appraised by the experts of the World Bank, and they have been passed.

3:20 p.m.

If we were to switch in mid-stream now, the same people who are saying they want quick action will have to wait at least another three years for us to do another feasibility study. Perhaps another four years to do another feasibility study, then to find ourselves in a position when we go out to look for money and with the escalation and the inflation rates being what they are, by the time four years have passed we will find ourselves in the same position...

now that we're looking for the same amount of money but for nearly half the amount of power. It is for this reason that we have continued with the Upper Mazaruni.

Turning very briefly to the other aspects of energy, renewable energy, and non-conventional energy, which we are pursuing, this will be the task of the Energy Authority to monitor. It is not the task of the Energy Authority to execute the individual projects but we are at the moment quantifying and assaying our peak resources; we have a bio-mass project; we are looking into a wind project, where we hope to get assistance from OLADE, which is the Latin American Energy Organisation, and, of course, we have signed contracts to do feasibility studies on mini-hydro stations in the outlying areas of this country which will not be integrated into the national grid.

Apart from that, as a stop-gap measure, the up-dating and improving of the Tumatumari Hydro-electric Station is expected to bring in between 20 and 45 megawatts in a matter of another three years, perhaps three to four years, and that answers the question which the member of the majority minority party asked, that is, what are we doing with regard to the interim, because we do recognise that the Upper Mazaruni will take a longer time than that.

I trust that I have answered the questions that have been raised and that I have satisfied all of the legitimate concern. There is one last think that I would like to mention and that is that the Biennial Conference which was referred to as the Third Biennial conference took place in 1979 and not in 1978.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3.

Mr. M.F. Singh: Mr. Chairman, just to have a bit further clarification on 3 (2) from the Hon. Minister. I got the impression that he was accepting Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud's position rather than mine when I said I concluded from the wording here that in respect of the contents of a report or recommendation, the Minister would be bound by it and therefore to that extent it would not be subject to his control and direction. Am I right?

Cde. Jack: Cde. Chairman, the understanding that I have in this provision is that I would have to receive the Report but the implementation of the Report would be a matter for the Government and I could not at this stage say what that Report is. For instance, suppose the Report's suggestion was that the Energy Authority should be scrapped. Would I be bound by it? This is a matter for the Government and this is a matter for Parliament, so it will depend upon the extent and nature of the recommendation that is given. What I have been saying is that we will not give any direction as to how a Report or what a Report should have. This is what I am saying. The Minister could give general directions as to the working of the Authority but as regards the Authority's work and its Report, we could not tell them, "Write the Report this way or that way", but what they can do, they can write the Report however they wish and submit it to

us. It must be this way, because if it was otherwise this would then be an Authority higher than the State.

Clause 3 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4 to 21 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

3:30 p.m.

Clause 22

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr. Chairman, one short question. The Minister has wide powers under Part IV of this Bill to make regulations. Does he not consider it more appropriate under clause 22(2) to make regulations, instead of being subject to negative resolution, to be subject to affirmative resolution, so that when he takes action he would be able to carry the confidence of the Parliament?

Cde. Jack: Cde. Chairman, I do not think that anything turns on this at all. If there was an intention to register dissent, there would be a negative resolution put forward. The realities of the situation are such - -

Clause 22, as printed, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 23 to 29 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported with corrections; as corrected, considered; read the Third time and passed.

MOTION

INCREASE IN OLD AGE PENSIONS

“Whereas section 8(1) and (2) of the Old Age Pensions Act, Chapter 36:03, now provides as follows –

- 8 (1) The amount of pension payable to any person under and in accordance with this Act shall be –
 - (a) in the case of a person ordinarily resident in Georgetown, thirty dollars per month;
 - (b) in the case of a person ordinarily resident elsewhere in Guyana than in Georgetown, thirty dollars per month.

- (2) The National Assembly may, from time to time, by resolution (which shall be published in the Gazette), vary the amounts and any residential qualification prescribed by subsection (1) with effect from the date of the resolution or such earlier or later date as is specified in that behalf in the resolution.

And whereas it is proposed that Old Age Pensions payable under paragraphs (a) and (b) of section 8(1) of the Act be increased from thirty dollars per month to forty-five dollars per month with effect from 1st January, 1981:

Be it resolved that this National Assembly in accordance with section 8(2) of the Act approve that the amounts prescribed under paragraphs (a) and (b) of section 8(1) of the Act be varied from thirty dollars per month to forty-five dollars per month, with effect from the 1st January, 1981.” /The Vice-President, Public Welfare./

The Vice-President, Public Welfare (Cde. Green): Cde. Speaker, I beg to move the Motion standing in my name contained in Notice Paper No. 5 and first published on the 19th March, 1981, dealing with an increase in old age pensions. Cde. Chairman, this is a routine matter which has in fact been ventilated in this Assembly during the Budget Debate. I need only to remind the Honourable Assembly that our legacy of colonialism and the unfair exploitation of our human and natural resources has left us with a group of senior citizens who have in some cases no provision for their existence and subsistence. They did not have previous Governments with the foresight to put into place things like the National Insurance Scheme and other social benefits so that people when they arrive at the last years of their lives could look forward to some assistance. Therefore, the mechanism of old age pension has now become in some areas the principal means of subsistence for our senior citizens. It is our proposal, Cde. Chairman, that we increase by 50 per cent the present pension, and to remove the differences in amounts as we did before the restrictions which existed in terms of geographical location. That pension is now fixed at \$45 per month. The Motion seeks to make this effective from the 1st January, 1981, and I commend this Motion to this Assembly.

Question proposed.

Cde. J. Jagan: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition People’s Progressive Party, I wish to make some comments on this Motion before the Assembly. The Vice-President informed us that in raising the old age pension from \$30 to \$45 per month, they were seeking to assist old age pensioners and give them the money, if I may use his words, which would be the principal means of their subsistence.

The Chronicle newspaper, which is owned and run by the Government ruling party, this morning said that his measure was in keeping with the new Constitution which directs that aged citizens should be allowed to live in reasonable comfort and dignity and it is in the context of the Vice-President’s words and the words of the official mouthpiece of this Government that I wish to raise these points, that I do not think that the sum of \$45 per month can allow anyone to live in reasonable comfort and dignity or that that amount of money could be the principal means of subsistence.

Let us examine what one can get with \$45 a month. I drew up a simple budget, I hope I do not bore the Members of this National Assembly but we should all be concerned with how our senior citizens live. If an old pensioner bought one pound of milk at \$4, two pints of rice, two pounds of meat – and I am speaking in terms of a monthly allocation – two pounds of chicken, one dozen eggs, one small bottle of coffee, four pounds of provisions, one pint of cooking oil, two cakes of bath soap, two cakes of kitchen soap, matches, \$4 for electricity – of course, all my prices are unbelievably low because I do not suppose anyone in Guyana spends \$4 per month for electricity – kerosene for fuel, and maybe four pounds of sugar. That would take up \$45 per month.

I go to this trouble because I do not think that Members of this Assembly really appreciate what it is to live on \$45 a month. Of course, this does not include rent. We have to assume that an old person is bound to pay some rent. I do not know where there are any low-rental rooms in the urban or rural areas. Occasionally one can find them. That is a little more easily found in the rural areas. Even that is quite hard. It does not include rent, it does not include clothing, shoes, you cannot even get a pair of shoes for \$45. Greens, I haven't even introduced in a simple budget things like greens or the occasional house hold items, towels, sheets, what have you.

3:40 p.m.

In other words, I wish to make the point that its no use telling us that the Constitution directs that aged people should be allowed to live in reasonable comfort and dignity when this Council or those who take the Executive decisions cannot fulfill the terms of this Constitution. It makes the Constitution mockery. The money is there. Close down the Ministry of National Development where you are wasting money, where you are using the money to run a political machine. Take that money and put it over in old age pensions and we will have a better deal for old age pensioners. I am giving you the means, the ideas on how you can do it. It can be done.

Do we have to have our fathers or our fathers-in-law got o the Palms to die...

in such waste. We do not want our relatives to go to the Palms when they cannot live on the meager pension or when their children or their in-Laws cannot afford to upkeep or take them into their homes. You know these days the feelings of family responsibility have changed. There was a time when the older people were secure in the family system but people have become urbanised and in the course of urbanization they are selfish, they live for themselves; their parents can go and die in the Palms, they do not care. This is one of the problems we face.

Many people will not take their fathers, mothers, grandfathers and fathers-in-law into their homes and care them and many of them, as you know, have to live outside of the security of the family and when they cannot exist on the \$45 a month, they have to end up in the Palms. We see it every day. Sometimes I see an old man or woman sitting with all they own, their rage and bits and pieces of cardboard, trying to survive under an abandoned car, under a donkey cart. If you look you see it right here in the City of Georgetown and in the country. So that these are the problems which we should be concerned with and I do not think it is justice for the Vice-President to come here and merely offer \$45 per month.

I get a lot of correspondence from old people who protest that they cannot live on what they are being provided with. Some also cannot even get the amount provided by old age pensions. I have a letter here from an 80-year old man who has been applying for about 10 years for old age pensions. He says he wrote the Prime Minister four times and cannot even get a reply. The processing of many of the applications is so very long that many persons do not get the opportunity even to receive the pittance. I hear many complaints about all aspects of old age pensions.

We're supposed to be providing the old people with free transportation. Many of them complain that the bus drivers won't stop for them or that they have no consideration for them when they try to board a bus. They treat them roughly because they say its free. That should not be. Those in charge must look into these things. No use we come here and we use such sweet dainty language about our senior citizens when the people working under us don't care a damn about them aren't being helpful; aren't being kind and polite to them. I think this is the least we can do.

I would urge that we close down the Ministry of National Development and we transfer the funds over to social assistance.

The Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Abraham.

Mr. M.A. Abraham: Mr. Speaker, in as much as the United Force welcomes this increase in old age pensions, I hasten to say immediately that we consider it, like the Hon. Member Mrs. Jagan, hopelessly inadequate to meet the needs of our senior citizens. Sir, I speak especially for the senior citizens of the hinterland, of the interior, of the Rupununi and especially of the Pakaraimas. A place like Monkey Mountain. The complaint is that even Government personnel or even Party personnel going there in recent times have been trying to make representation for certain old people there but more often than not their efforts are frustrated. Monkey Mountain is one of those areas with old Guyanese people, some of them blind, some of them too old to walk, some of them illiterate, or rather, the majority of them illiterate.

We come a little near to the Rupununi. We come to the Tipuru and Karasabai area. There is a report of a certain old woman who has got to walk a distance of some 20 miles in order to get her old age pension, from Karasabai to Tipuru, having two mountains in the Rupununi – in the Rupununi they say two bumps – to cross before she can get her old age pension. She is very arthritic, her knees are beginning to look rather swollen, and towards the end of the journey she gets the sum of \$15. The Hon. Vice-President said that the original amount was \$30. This old lady got \$15. What really went wrong there? Is it that there is a special distinction between the senior citizens of the Coast as against the senior citizens in the interior, in the Rupununi?

Then, again there is the complaint that the paying officers in the Government are telling the people that in order for them to qualify for old age pension they have, first of all, to be 80 years old. Sir, what really has gone wrong there? Then again, there is the difficulty of ascertaining who are eligible for old age pension. Because the majority of these persons, these aged citizens do not have birth certificates and even baptismal certificates for in the Rupununi most of the people there are in possession of baptismal certificates. But we are speaking of those old people 65 years and over.

3:50 p.m.

Sir, I suggest to the Government, to the Hon. Vice-President, that some criterion be used whereby persons who are obviously eligible for old age pension, who are very, very old, could be enrolled into this old age benefit scheme.

With those few words I am going to take my seat.

The Speaker: Cde. Vice-President.

Cde. Green (replying): I am reluctant to mirror the quiet irritation of my colleagues behind me who, in response to what the Member from the United Force was saying, uttered in disgust, “Nancy story!”. He says from his own knowledge he knows the Rupununi but the particular speaker never left Nappi and really could not speak with authority.

The other temporary, acting or substantive leader of the Minority Party made certain observations. I would just like to say that the Ministry is willing to look at it with a quick eye and immediately examine any report of delays in the processing of old age applications – in fact, the regional system is one mechanism that is intended to speed up this kind of process and we are willing to listen, to the Minority Party or the United Force, and to any representations made in the area of genuine delay.

Cde. Speaker, we indicated that this was not the only mechanism for helping our old people. I said it was one of the principal ones. The G.T.S.L. alone expends over \$3 million in the movement of our senior citizens and we will not say that the sum offered is utopian, but certainly it is an effort by this Government, an act of sincerity in the present socio-economic circumstances and I commend the Motion to this honourable Assembly. [Applause.]

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, “That this Assembly do now adjourn until Thursday, 2nd April, 1981, at 2:00 p.m.” [The Minister, Drainage and Irrigation in the Ministry of Agriculture.]

Adjourned accordingly at 3:54 p.m.