

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT**

[VOLUME 7]

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

158th Sitting

2 p.m.

Wednesday, 17th May, 1978

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Speaker

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

Members of the Government – People’s National Congress (49)

Prime Minister (1)

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

Deputy Prime Minister (1)

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

Senior Ministers (8)

Cde. H. D. Hoyte, S.C.,
Minister of Economic Development and Co-operatives

* Cde. H. Green,
Minister of Health, Housing and Labour

* Cde. H. O. Jack,
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources

*** Non-elected Minister**

- * Cde. F. E. Hope,
Minister of Finance
- * Cde. S. S. Naraine, A.A.,
Minister of Works and Transport
- * Cde. G. A. King,
Minister of Trade and Consumer Protection
- * Cde. G. B. Kennard, C.C.H.,
Minister of Agriculture
- * Cde. M. Shahabuddeen, C.C.H., S.C.,
Attorney General and
Minister of Justice

Ministers (5)

- Cde. S. M. Field-Ridley,
Minister of Information
- Cde. B. Ramsaroop,
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs
and Leader of the House
- * Cde. C. V. Mingo,
Minister of Home Affairs
- * Cde. V. R. Teekah,
Minister of Education, Social
Development and Culture
- * Cde. R. E. Jackson, **(Absent – on leave)**
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Ministers of State (9)

- Cde. O. E. Clarke,
Minister of State – Regional
(East Berbice/Corentyne)
- Cde. P. Duncan, J.P.,
Minister of State, Ministry of
Economic Development and Co-operatives
- Cde. C. A. Nascimento, **(Absent – on leave)**
Minister of State,
Office of the Prime Minister

*** Non-elected Minister**

- Cde. K. B. Bancroft, J.P.,
Minister of State – Regional
(Mazaruni/Potaro)
- Cde. J. P. Chowritmootoo, J.P.,
Minister of State – Regional
(Essequibo Coast/West Demerara)
- Cde. J. R. Thomas,
Minister of State, Ministry of
Health, Housing and Labour
- Cde. R. H. O. Corbin,
Minister of State, Ministry of
National Development
- Cde. A. Salim, (Absent – on leave)
Minister of State – Regional
(East Demerara/West Coast Berbice)
- Cde. F. U. A. Carmichael,
Minister of State – Regional (North West)

Parliamentary Secretaries (4)

- Cde. M. M. Ackman, C.C.H.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Office of the Prime Minister,
and Government Chief Whip
- Cde. E. L. Ambrose,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture
- Cde. S. Prashad,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Economic Development
and Co-operatives
- Cde. M. Corrica,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Education, Social
Development and Culture

Other Members (21)

- Cde. E. M. Bynoe
Cde. W. G. Carrington
Cde. L. A. Durant

Cde. E. H. A. Fowler
Cde. J. Gill
Cde. W. Hussain
Cde. S. Jaiserrisingh (Absent)
Cde. K. M. E. Jonas
Cde. M. Kasim, A.A.
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.
Cde. C. Sukul, M.S.
Cde. H. A. Taylor
Cde. R. C. Van Sluytman, J.P.
Cde. L. E. Willems (Absent)
Cde. C. E. Wrights, J.P.
Cde. M. Zaheeruddeen

Members of the Opposition (16)

(i) People's Progressive Party (14)

Leader of the Opposition (1)

Cde. C. Jagan
Leader of the Opposition

Deputy Speaker (1)

Cde. Ram Karran
Deputy Speaker

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)
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, J.P.
Mr. M. A. Abraham

OFFICERS

Clerk of the National Assembly – F. A. Narain, A.A.

Acting Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly – A. Knight

17.5.78
2:15 p.m.

National Assembly

2.15 – 2.20 p.m.

PRAYERS
ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

(i) Leave to Members

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to the Cde. Jackson for a week from today, and to Cde. Salim for today.

(ii) Behaviour of Leader of the Opposition

Comrades and hon. Members, at the Sitting of the Assembly on Monday, 10th April, 1978, during the debate on the Motion for the Second Reading of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 1978, the conduct of the Leader of the Opposition was grossly disorderly. The Chair did not take action then as the Leader of the Opposition withdrew immediately thereafter from the Chamber. As this is the first occasion that the member is present in the Chamber since the incident, I wish formally to bring this matter to the attention of the Assembly and particularly to the Leader of the Opposition and to say that should there be a recurrence, the Chair would be taking appropriate action.

**(iii) Congratulations to the Prime Minister and
Comrades Janet Jagan and Ram Karran**

Comrade and hon. Members, I was privileged on the 18th December, 1972, to offer congratulations to the Leader of the Opposition Cde. Cheddi Jagan as being a Parliamentarian for twenty-five years. Today I am happy to say that another opportunity has presented itself to me to offer congratulations to three members of the House as being Parliamentarians for twenty-five years namely, the Cde. Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham, Cde. Janet Jagan, and Cde. Ram Karran. **[Applause]** They were all elected to the House for the first time in the elections held

on the 27th April, 1953, under universal adult suffrage and subscribed to their Oaths at the first Sitting held on the 18th May, 1953.

Cde. Janet Jagan was elected to be the Deputy Speaker, the first holder of the office of Deputy Speaker. In the elections of 1957, she was elected to the House and was appointed as Minister of Labour, Health and Housing. Consequent on the death of Claude Christian in June, 1963, Cde. Janet Jagan was appointed to the Senate and as Minister of Home Affairs. She now sits as a member on the Opposition Benches. During her term of office, certain important Bills were introduced by her, notably, the Workman's Compensation Ordinance, the Rent Restriction (Amendment) Ordinance, the Labour (Amendment) Ordinance, the Housing of Labour Workers on Sugar Estates Ordinance, and the Local Government (Amendment) Ordinances relating to adult suffrage and village council elections. She, undoubtedly, has made a great contribution to the political life of this nation.

Cde. Ram Karran, the present Deputy Speaker, served as a member until the Constitution was suspended in December, 1953. He was re-elected in the elections of 1957 and was appointed Minister of Communications and Works. In 1961, he was again elected as a Member of the House and was appointed Minister of Works and Hydraulics. In 1964, he was on the P.P.P. List of Candidates and was declared elected but did not take his seat until the 18th May, 1965. He was also declared a Member of the House in the elections of 1968 and 1973. He, too, has rendered great service to the political life of this country. His wit has certainly enlivened the proceedings of this House on many occasions.

The third member I wish to congratulate is Cde. Forbes Burnham, the Prime Minister of Guyana. He was appointed Minister without Portfolio from 18th May, 1953 to 28th May, 1953, and on the 29th May, 1953, the first Minister of Education until the suspension of the Constitution in December, 1953. He served as an Opposition Member in the 1957 and 1961 Parliaments. In December, 1964, he was appointed Premier, Minister of Development and

Planning and Attorney General. He was the first person to be appointed Prime Minister. This was on 1st February, 1966 and he has held that office up to the present time. **[Applause]**

To achieve a twenty-fifth anniversary as a Parliamentarian is therefore a worthy cause for celebration but it is even more so in the case of Forbes Burnham who, today celebrates his twenty-fifth anniversary as a parliamentarian, as his career has been marked by the highest achievements, as leader of the successful Independence struggle, and as Head of Government of Independent Guyana.

If I might crave your indulgence to look back, albeit briefly, over the career of our distinguished colleague, I am sure you will agree that his level of achievement was the almost inevitable outcome of a career which, from the beginning, was marked by distinction. Sensitive to the new currents in the Guyanese society and to the strong national desire to be free from the constraints of the colonial system, he became, soon after his return home from a brilliant academic career, the co-founder and Chairman of the People's Progressive Party. At a time when the Legislature had only a marginal position in determining the future of the country, he perceived clearly the need to commit at the same time, his enormous energies and talents to other movements which could improve the lot of the people. Foremost was his interest in the trade union movement, an interest and a commitment which led to his election as President of the Guyana Labour Union, and later, as a member of the Trade Union Council.

Parallel at one stage to his parliamentary career was his involvement in municipal politics, a field in which as in all others he was to achieve the highest office, as Mayor in 1959 and again in 1964. But to return to the mainstream of his career, the Cde. Prime Minister was Minister of Education in the 1953 People's Progressive Party Government until he was removed from office at the suspension of the Constitution.

The founding by Forbes Burnham of the People's National Congress in 1957 was to mark an important turning point not only for Guyana but for the Caribbean and the developing world. It was the People's National Congress which thereafter became the main instrument in our people's struggle for Independence. In every phase of the struggle, whether in villages or mining town, or plantation or savannah, whether in international forums including the United Nations or in Whitehall, the Cde. Prime Minister as Parliamentarian and as Leader of the Opposition from 1957 to 1964, was to play a leadership and decisive role. It was his crowning honour that he should lead the country into Independence nearly some twelve years ago on May 26, 1966, an event which was to transform and give full meaning to our power as a parliament, henceforward responsible only to the people.

My colleagues, I am sure that you will agree with me that the twelve years since Independence have been marked by the profound socialist reconstruction of our society designed to give meaning to Independence. **[Applause]** All these changes have come before us, have been the subject of our deliberations either in terms of providing legislative authority or the provision of funds. It was the Cde. Prime Minister who initiated those major steps which have given meaning to freedom in its political aspects, in its economic dimension, and which have provided us with a new sense of our own worth and dignity.

Foremost among these measures was the change to Republican status, a change which severed the last links which tied us politically to overseas power. Next came the assertion of our people's permanent sovereignty over our natural resources in the great acts of nationalisation of the bauxite industry, the sugar industry and the major part of the timber industry. A significant element in this programme of transformation is the utilisation of local resources and the mobilisation of local savings through local banks.

Although not so visible was the initiation of those processes of change designed to rid us of the colonial past and the colonial attitudes and to enable us to see clearly the value of our own

heritage. This is a far-reaching programme marked on the one hand by small things such as the form of dress we now wear here in Parliament and which has set the national style, and by major efforts such as the great Festival of Arts, CARIFESTA, which provided the opportunity not only in Guyana but for the whole region, for an artistic renaissance.

But while the Prime Minister as Parliamentarian has been concerned with primary domestic issues, as Head of the Government, he has sought to create a regional and international environment which would support our domestic programme for social and economic reconstruction. It is well known that it was his initiative first in the Dickenson Bay CARIFESTA Agreement and later in the hosting of the Conference of Caribbean Officials in August, 1967, which provided the dynamic and the blueprint for the regional integration movement which, despite its difficulties has been deepened in the Caribbean Community.

The integration movement is only part of the pervasive influence which he has exercised on Caribbean affairs. Some sister territories have emulated our Republican status or are planning to do so. Others have adopted a similar socialist strategy and some of the techniques which we have developed for social and economic change. CARIFESTA has become a regional festival, with the second being held in Jamaica. Indeed, it would be difficult to chronicle in a short space of time the far-reaching influence of his ideas and vision.

Looking beyond the region, it was the Prime Minister who took the decision to host in Georgetown in August 1972, the Conference of Foreign Ministers of non-aligned countries, a Conference which it is generally agreed revitalised the non-aligned movement and provided it with that programme, the Georgetown Programme for Economic Co-operation among non-aligned and other developing countries which has since become a major component in the New International Economic Order.

Another initiative of the Prime Minister, indeed, I am told one taken during the non-aligned Foreign Ministers Conference, led to the formation of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group, the ACP Group of countries, whose foundation meeting was opened here in Georgetown by the Cde. Prime Minister. This ACP Group of countries has negotiated with the European Community, the Treaty, the Lome Convention, which has provided us with a reasonably remunerative market for our sugar, an important source of financial and technical assistance and marks an advance towards the New International Economic Order.

More recently and to touch on only one more item of what could be a long catalogue, I am sure we will all recall the Cde. Prime Minister's address to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in 1975 in Kingston, Jamaica, which enabled that Conference to take important measures towards the implementation of the New International Economic Order.

There is little doubt that in Cde. Forbes Burnham we have produced a leader of world stature. In every part of the developing world, he is regarded as a leader in the struggle for self-determination in both the political and economic fields. It is because of his vision that many States in every region of the developing world look to Guyana to play a leadership role. The Freedom Fighters of Southern Africa regard him as their mentor and their friend. Very recently, I have had the privilege, if I might speak personally, of seeing for myself the respect and affection with which our Prime Minister is regarded in the great countries of the socialist world. **[Applause]** He has done so much to transform Guyana and in a significant way, the regional and international system, in order that his own people and the peoples of the developing world will be able to live a better life in full freedom and dignity. **[Applause]** I am certain that members of the House will agree with me that whatever matters might divide us, we should unite today in honouring our colleagues as Parliamentarians for twenty-five years and wish them long and fruitful lives. **[Applause]** Hon. Member Mr. Feilden Singh.

Mr. M. F. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I would like to join with you in extending to the hon. Prime Minister, to Mrs. Janet Jagan, and to Mr. Ram Karran, on behalf of the United Force, indeed, on behalf of myself as a Parliamentarian and my colleague, our heartiest good wishes on their twenty-fifth anniversary as Parliamentarians.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this achievement, I will agree with you, does transcend party politics. You have given a very brief history of their achievements. We take note of them and we commend them on their achievements. We are all aware of the rigours, of the stresses and strains on the life of a Parliamentarian. In their case, not only have they been Parliamentarians but they have held much higher office in this Parliament, indeed, in the Government of this country. In the case of the hon. Prime Minister, he has been Prime Minister since 1965, but that they have survived so well in such difficult times is indeed a credit to them and, I think, a tribute to their sturdy constitutions with which they all seem to be endowed. I am sure lesser people would have gone under. Even though I disagree with their ideology, even though we in the United Force have a different ideology to theirs yet we still recognise their zest, their devotion, their dedication to the ideals in which they believe. I extend, therefore, to them on behalf of the United Force our sincere, our very best wishes for their future, good health, and happiness. **[Applause]**

The Leader of the Opposition (Cde. C. Jagan): Cde. Speaker, I too would like to make a few observations on this occasion when three Members of this Parliament are celebrating, and the House joining in these celebrations of twenty-five years' service in this Parliament. This is indeed quite a long period in the history of Guyana and much has transpired in this period, some things which are to the credit of the country, others not so creditable. It is unfortunate that on this particular day we have to be debating a very controversial issue which has aroused the ire of practically the whole of Guyana, representative bodies, all shades of public opinion and,

therefore, while we would like to celebrate this occasion we find it very difficult to do so reflecting this public opinion in this House.

Indeed, the People's Progressive Party and other forces in the country who are concerned about democracy, who are concerned about Parliament, who are concerned with debate, discussion, dialogue, who are concerned with representative Government and institutions, we fear that today all these things are in serious jeopardy. Thus those forces with which we are allied and those with which we are not even directly allied are concerned about developments. We think it is tragic for the history of this country that on this important day when three members of the original P.P.P. are celebrating twenty-five years in Parliament we have come to a situation where the country is seriously divided, where issues which we fought for are today in jeopardy, the right to vote, for instance, which the P.P.P. at that time fought for, and that is why we find it difficult today to consider this day a day of celebration. Rather, we have declared it a day of mourning.

The Prime Minister: Cde. Speaker, may I thank you for your kind remarks and may I wish a happy requiem to those who are dying. **[Interruption]**

The Speaker: Comrades, may I have some order, please.

QUESTIONS TO MINISTERS

Question No. 23

Cde. Nokta: Cde. Speaker, I wish to ask the Minister of Works and Transport, Question No. 23 which stands in my name on the Order Paper:

“Will the Minister of Works and Transport say when the Government proposes to acquire suitable equipment to effectively clear the channels of the Demerara and **Essequibo** Rivers to facilitate proper navigation of these rivers?”

The Minister of Works and Transport (Cde. Naraine): Cde. Speaker, a study was carried out by a firm of Consultants with respect to the dredging needs of the country. These consultants recommended that a simple and less expensive way to fill Guyana’s short-term needs could be achieved by mounting a crane on a pontoon and to use split barges pushed by a tug to get rid of the spoil.

The crane has already been acquired and it has been mounted on the pontoon. An order has been placed for two split barges and a tug and it is expected that these items will be available before the end of this year.

Meanwhile, the crane/pontoon is being utilised to carry out some limited dredging operations.

Cde. Nokta: I wish to ask a supplementary question. Listening to the Minister, I gather that this crane which will be erected on pontoons will soon be acquired. I would like to ask the Minister if he thinks, having experience with the experiment that was carried out last year with the same crane and pontoon, that this equipment will be more suitable to provide the desired result.

Cde. Naraine: The crane and pontoon have already been acquired. What needs to be done now is for the split barges and tug to be acquired so that the materials which have been dredged from the areas of siltation can be taken away from the positions of dredging so as to prevent the dredged material washing back into the excavation. In the areas where the present pontoon and crane operate, it would not be as efficient as when the split barges have been

received, but it is a satisfactory method. It has been used in many countries and this would suffice for the kind of dredging that one has to do in the harbour as well as in some of the river areas. If we had to dredge the bar or something like that, then much larger dredges would have to be acquired.

Question No. 24

Cde. Nokta: Cde. Speaker, I wish to ask the Minister of Agriculture Question No. 24 which stands in my name.

2.40 p.m.

“Will the Minister of Agriculture say what is the total expenditure incurred during the period January 1974 to December 1976 on cassava cultivation in the Port Kaituma-Matthews Ridge Agriculture Project and how much has been derived from the Project during that period?”

The Minister of Agriculture (Cde. Kennard): Cde. Speaker, there was no “Cassava Project” as such in the Matthews Ridge/Port Kaituma Area during the period January 1974 to December 1976. However, there has always been some cassava cultivation by settlers ever since the area came under the Government’s control in 1969. Such cultivation is now being expanded to a maximum of 2,000 acres in that area.

Cde. Nokta: Cde. Speaker, I would like to ask a supplementary question. The Minister is telling us that there is no cassava project. The question is how much was spent during the period January 1974 to December 1976 on cassava cultivation and how much has been derived from that?

Cde. Kennard: Since there was no formal cassava project as such, there can be no sum of money attributable to the scattered cultivation of cassava by farmers in the area. In the project there is a small cottage industry which produces cassava flour, cassava bread, casareep and starch. That production by that cottage industry earned an average of some \$2,400 per month during the period 1974 to 1976 from the conversion of some 15,000 – 20,000 pounds of roots into these products.

Question No. 25

Cde. Nokta: Cde. Speaker, I beg to ask the Minister of works and Transport Question No. 25 which stands in my name.

“Will the Minister of Works and Transport say whether the Government has given consideration to the many requests from the residents of Rupununi South for the re-opening of the Wichabai Air Strip; and if the answer is in the affirmative, will the Minister say how soon will work commence?”

Cde. Naraine: Cde. Speaker, the Wichabai airstrip was inspected by the Director of Civil Aviation on 20th February, 1978, and found to be serviceable. There was need for minor maintenance work including weeding, and some arrangements have been made with the Rupununi Development Company for this work to be done.

Although the Guyana Airways Corporation schedule does not include Wichabai airstrip in its route structure, it can be used within a few days notice on special trips, if such trips are justified. Meanwhile, the area around is served from Sand Creek. I should mention also that at the present moment an examination is being undertaken of all airstrips in the Rupununi with a view to rationalising air and land transport so that a better service can be given to the area.

Cde. Nokta: Cde. Speaker, I would like to ask a supplementary question. I see that the Minister has carried out some investigations and from his report it seems that some work is being done. The fact that some work is being done seems as if some implementation will be done in connection with additional flights. I want to assure the Minister that this --

The Speaker: Cde. Nokta please ask the question.

Cde. Nokta: I want to assure the Minister that this airstrip, if put into active use, will be of service to the people. So I want to ask the Minister to tell us whether he intends to have scheduled flights going to that area every week, or how often he intends to have them.

Cde. Naraine: This would depend on the study that is being carried out now whereby we are looking at air and land transportation to try to rationalise the two modes.

Question No. 26

Cde. Nokta: Cde. Speaker, I beg to ask the Minister of Agriculture Question No. 26 standing in my name.

“Is the Minister of Agriculture aware that equipment for the construction of a meat-processing plant has been lying in the open at the Guyana Airways Compound, Lethem, Rupununi, for over four years?”

Will the Minister say how soon the meat-processing factory is to be set up and put into operation? Doesn't the Minister regard this situation as a gross misapplication of the taxpayers' money?”

Cde. Kennard: Cde. Speaker, the equipment which I believe is being referred to by Cde. Nokta is not for a meat-processing plant. Some second-hand equipment was acquired with the intention of processing residues after slaughter of cattle. Pieces of this equipment were sent to Lethem and stored at the Guyana Airways Compound. The erection and operation of this equipment at Lethem subsequently proved to be uneconomical and a decision was made to halt the project and to seek, if possible, alternative use for the equipment in the area.

Cde. Nokta: It shows that the Minister has invested money in buying some unused or dilapidated equipment. The question is, does he regard this as a gross misapplication of the taxpayers' money?

Cde. Kennard: Certainly not, Cde. Speaker.

Cde. C. Jagan: May I ask the Minister whether a feasibility study was carried out before this equipment was purchased and whether, after all these years, the Government proposes to use the by-products of the cattle industry in that area so that we can earn some more foreign exchange and feed the people of Guyana who are starving?

Cde. Kennard: Cde. Speaker, this equipment was never intended originally for the Lethem area. It was bought for another area for general use, for example, at the Georgetown Abattoir. The equipment was sent to Lethem because it was found to be unsuitable because of the changed circumstances at the Georgetown abattoir. Because of that the equipment found its way there, hopefully to be used at Lethem. As I indicated, that use was found to be uneconomical and we are now exploring some alternative use for the equipment within the area without bringing it back to the city.

Cde. C. Jagan: Cde. Speaker, from the answer the Minister has given, this is a case of gross mis-management. The last question I would ask the Minister is whether he considers

selling this equipment as junk so that we can earn some foreign exchange to buy some soap for Guyana?

Cde. Kennard: There is no intention to sell the equipment as junk, Cde. Speaker.

Question No. 27

Cde. Nokta: Cde. Speaker, I beg to ask the Minister of works and Transport Question No. 27 standing in my name.

“Will the Minister of Works and Transport indicate when work will commence on the new vessel to service the North West region, giving particulars of its capacity, speed and turn around schedule?”

2.50 p.m.

The Speaker: Cde. Minister of Works and Transport.

Cde. Naraine: Cde. Speaker, the construction of the new North West vessel commenced in November, 1977. The dimensions are as follows:

Length overall	-	151 feet
Beam	-	28 feet
Draft	-	6 feet 3 inches
Speed is designed for	-	16 knots

It is expected that the vessel will make two return trips per week to the North West and it will be capable of taking two hundred passengers seated and ten tons of baggage on any one trip.

Cde. Nokta: I would like to ask a supplementary question. Will the Minister say when work will commence on the construction of this steamer?

The Speaker: I think if you were listening you would have heard him say construction of the new vessel commenced in November, 1977.

Cde. Nokta: Will the Minister say who the contractors are and when the vessel will be completed?

Cde. Naraine: Cde. Speaker, the contractors are the Guyana National Engineering Corporation and the estimated time for completion is 18 months but we are hoping that they will be able to finish it before that time. I again invite Cde. Nokta to go down there and see the ship under construction.

Cde. C. Jagan rose --

The Speaker: Dr. Jagan, what are you rising for?

Cde. C. Jagan: I am rising in connection with a letter I wrote you today drawing your attention to the fact that several Motions have been brought before this House, pertaining to the abolition of proxy voting, overseas voting, and the counting of votes at the place of poll, Motions relating to elections in Guyana. They were put on the Notice Paper. We now have before us a Bill--

The Speaker: I am not going to allow you to make a speech. You have either to rise on a point of order or to make your contribution to the Bill. What are you coming to?

Cde. C. Jagan: I am making a statement.

The Speaker: I am not going to allow a debate or a statement. I am not going to allow you to use this as a political forum.

Cde. C. Jagan: I am not making this a political forum. This is the place to raise issues and I am raising one.

The Speaker: We have a procedure.

Cde. C. Jagan: I am saying that the Bill before the House has to do with procedures which are germane to General Elections and those Motions have to do with procedures germane to General Elections. In the Standing Orders, Wednesdays are reserved for members' Motions, members' business, and priority should be given to these members' Motions. Since such priority has not been given and several months have elapsed, eleven months nearly, I am proposing that the present Referendum (Amendment of the Constitution) Bill be not proceeded with, that an opportunity should be given to the Opposition to discuss those Motions which are on the Order Paper and which have been there for the past eleven months. I think it is not an unreasonable request.

This matter is of vital importance to the people of this country today and this is what the Parliament is all about, to discuss and debate issues which people are concerned with and for this reason I make that request. I move, therefore, a Motion that the Referendum (Amendment of the Constitution) Bill 1978 be not proceeded with.

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

The Speaker: Really, I shouldn't answer and I should ask the Minister to proceed but out of deference to you, I will read the Rule. Despite my several explanations, it appears that I cannot be understood or you don't want to understand me. Rule 20 states:-

- 1) Public Business shall consist of motions and Bills.
- 2) Subject to the provisions of these Standing Orders, Government Business shall have precedence on every day except on Wednesdays when Private Members' business shall have precedence.
- 3) Government Business shall consist of motions and Bills sponsored by Ministers and shall be set down on the Order Paper in such order as the Government think fit.

Now, today is Wednesday. Today is members' day. We have members' Motions. We have members' Questions and they have been given precedence.

Cde. C. Jagan: Cde. Speaker, you have members' Motions and members' Questions today. Yes. These are important Motions which have been before the House for eleven months. On several occasions I have pointed out to this House that many Wednesdays pass and opportunity is not given for them to be debated. Cde. Speaker, you take the point that you cannot put these Motions on the Order Paper, that the Government has to do it. The Leader of the House, unfortunately, does not put these matters before the House. When I asked him in your Office just now whether he will give me a date, this week or next week, he said he will have to consult, he will have to think about it. He will give me an answer in due course. Is this the way to run a Parliament? Is this the way the Government wants to run the Parliament? Is this parliamentary democracy?

Cde. Speaker, I would say that the Government does not want to debate these matters and that is why I am appealing to you. You are here to defend the rights of this Assembly. These people in the Government – there are some good ones who are democratic but the majority of them are not, they just take orders – do not intend to discuss these matters, to put them formally

on the agenda. How can we say this is a Parliament which is run like the Parliament in England? In Trinidad, West Indies, matters come up before the Parliament daily but not this Parliament. Eleven months have passed. Why are the members of the government afraid to bring these matters before the Parliament for discussion? It would seem that they do not want to change the election procedures. They rigged elections in the past and that is why they don't want to give a distinctive answer in this House one way or the other about these procedures which have to do with free and fair elections, and now with a free and fair Referendum.

Therefore, Cde. Speaker, I am asking you to use your authority. Not because by a majority they selected you to be Speaker that you have to defer to their unreasonable wishes. I say that the Speaker has some authority, a lot of authority, and he should insist that these Motions be discussed if not today, that they are put on the Order Paper this week, or next week. We have a lot of time. I would suggest that the Leader of the House, the Minister of Justice – he is supposed to be the legal expert, the man dealing with justice and you and I should sit down and decide on a specific date. I ask you to fix it right now, if possible, so that we can have this matter put on the agenda for discussion.

3 p.m.

The Speaker: Well, I think you have abused all the privileges of this House. Democracy is at work, greatly because you have spoken out of turn.

Cde. C. Jagan: Out of turn?

The Speaker: Out of turn, yes, absolutely out of turn. However, I will not argue. I have ruled. Will the Minister please proceed?

PUBLIC BUSINESS**BILLS – SECOND AND THIRD READINGS****REFERENDUM (AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION) BILL 1978**

A Bill instituted:

“An Act to provide for the submission of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 1978 to the vote of the electors qualified to vote in an election of members of the National Assembly, in accordance with Article 73 of the Constitution.” **[The Minister of Home Affairs]**

The Minister of Home Affairs (Cde. Mingo): Cde. Speaker, in accordance with Article 80(2) of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended the Referendum (Amendment of the Constitution) Bill 1978 for consideration by the National Assembly.

The Speaker: Just before you proceed, may I draw your attention to one small correction in clause 5, the line before the last. Instead of “Validity or Elections Act”, it should read “Validity of Elections Act.” It is a typographical error.

Cde. Mingo: Cde. Speaker, I beg to move the Second Reading of the Referendum (Amendment of the Constitution) Bill 1978. In moving the Second Reading of this Bill, I wish to draw attention to article 73 of our Constitution which provides that a Bill to effect certain amendments to the Constitution must be submitted to the vote of electors qualified to vote in an election of members of the National Assembly in a manner prescribed by Parliament.

Cde. Speaker, you must recall that on 10th April, 1978 – I think we must remember that day when so much hysteria and drama had been generated in this House – Parliament passed the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 1978. In order to fulfil all the requirements of the provisions of article 73 of the Constitution, that Bill, before being submitted for the assent of the Cde. President, must be submitted to a Referendum which must be conducted in accordance with the procedures to be prescribed by Parliament. The Bill before Parliament this afternoon therefore, seeks approval of these procedures which are to be applied for the purposes of the holding of the Referendum. Cde. Speaker, these procedures for the conduct of the Referendum are quite simple and are set out in sections 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the Bill. I wish to refer very briefly to some of them. In section 3, provision is made for the holding of the Referendum on such a day as the Cde. President, acting in accordance with advice of the Cde. Prime Minister, shall appoint by proclamation and which must be a day not earlier than the 10th June and later than the 10th October this year. The question, as has been stated in the Bill:

“Do you approve of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 1978 which was passed by the National Assembly on 10th April, 1978, published in the Official Gazette dated 13th May, 1978”,

will be set out on a ballot paper. The electorate shall be asked to answer “**Yes**” or “**No**” to this question.

Provision is also made in the Bill to conduct the Referendum, as far as possible, as if it were an election of Members of the National Assembly and to apply the representation of the People Act or any other law relating to elections of Members of the National Assembly. The National Validity of Elections Act shall not apply.

Section 6, Cde. Speaker, gives the authority to the Minister, who has responsibility for the conduct of elections, to make regulations which will provide for the manner in which the

Referendum is to be conducted with the modification of any such law as referred to in section 5 including omissions from, additions to and amendments of any such law, for the application of any law when enforced in relation to 26th August or in connection with elections, and lastly, for any other matter appearing to the Minister to be necessary or expedient for the purposes of this Act.

Cde. Speaker, this Bill is very significant in that it sets the stage for the holding of the first Referendum to be held in Guyana. I am indeed grateful to be afforded the opportunity to participate actively in the presentation of a measure of such historic significance in Guyana and I have great pleasure in moving the Second Reading of the Referendum (Amendment of the Constitution) Bill 1978.

Question proposed.

Cde. C. Jagan: Cde. Speaker, we now have before this House the second Bill dealing with the same question which we dealt with not so long ago. The first Bill sought to get the people of this country to surrender their right to future referenda for amending the Constitution. During the debate on that Bill, the main argument put out by the Government was that there is need for a new Constitution, and all kinds of arguments were put forward about the Constitution not being in keeping with the national ethos of the country at this particular time. We heard arguments also about

“why complain about amending the Constitution with a two-thirds majority? We did not use our two-thirds which we had since 1973 to take away the fundamental rights of the Constitution.” Those are all being regurgitated in the press, in the Guyana Chronicle day after day.

Now we have a new gimmick and that is, that the National Assembly will be constituted into a constituent Assembly to write the new Constitution. I do not know whether this is as a result of the sharp criticisms which have been coming from practically every quarter in this country, but be that as it may, I would like to say, as I see it, what is likely to happen in the near future.

First, the Government will hold a Referendum in early July. Secondly, it will bring another Bill before the National Assembly for the postponement of elections, before the 25th July when the House is supposed to be dissolved. Thirdly, it will set up a Constituent Assembly, constitute the House into a Constituent Assembly.

3.10 p.m.

Fourthly, stretch out the work of the Assembly almost indefinitely for another four or five years. Fifthly, bring another Bill in the Parliament to ratify the draft Constitution made by the Constituent Assembly with the two-thirds majority which is already in the House. Lastly, in the changes which will be made, insert that the P.N.C. will be the paramount party in Guyana, that the P.N.C. leader will be Executive President, and, to give the National Assembly a facade of democracy, introduce in the Assembly, along with political parties thrown up at elections, certain so-called mass organisations.

I give this **scenario** so that the people will not be confused with all this hocus-pocus about the necessity to have a new socialist Constitution, and to give it a democratic air, that people will have a chance to write it, the Parliament, Government and Opposition, and other organisations, and the people will have a chance to have their say in making this Constitution.

Cde. Chairman, the first thing we have to think about in dealing with this Bill for the holding of a Referendum is that it is going to be rigged. The same procedures which were

adopted in the last two elections will no doubt be repeated again and that is why the government did not want to come to this House with those Motions to which I referred a little earlier dealing with overseas voting and proxy voting and so on, so that a definitive position could be taken, yes or no, whether the Referendum would be free and fair. One of my colleagues will deal more fully with the mechanics of the elections, making of the voters list, the proxy voting, overseas voting, postal voting and the tampering with the ballot boxes. We will get more information on that; the House will be informed.

Before I come to the point of making the House into a Constituent Assembly, the Government will, after the rigging of the Referendum, postpone the elections. On what ground? Oh, we need to have a new Constitution for a socialist Guyana. That is number one, and that needs time.

What will be the mechanics? Oh, we are very democratic, we are going to appoint a Constituent Assembly made up of the Government and the Opposition in the Parliament, and the Opposition will be consulted to see what mass organisations should be brought into this Constituent Assembly in an unofficial capacity. What hypocrisy! Because in that Constituent Assembly they already have the two-thirds majority which was stolen at the last election and knowing how they operate, have operated by steamroller tactics all these years in this Parliament, we know what will be the fate of that Constituent Assembly. That is only a sop to placate public opinion in this country and abroad.

We now come to the next question. The Constituent Assembly itself. No doubt, it may be argued that in the past there was such a body, maybe it was not called Constituent Assembly but the whole Parliament constituted itself into a Committee to put up proposals for a new Constitution. But that Assembly in 1957 came out of a free and fair election. **[Interruption]**

The Speaker: Comrades, I do not want a repetition of what happened on the last occasion. The last time, Cde. Jagan said that he can take heckling but when he was heckled he could not take it. I am going to deal firmly on this occasion, so please, members of the Government, do not heckle.

Cde. Hoyte: I apologise, Cde. Speaker. I don't want the hon. Member to push down his books again.

Cde. C. Jagan: On that previous occasion a democratically elected House with the Government and Opposition sat in this Committee. It included other shades of public opinion in this country that were represented in the House. By interests I mean, sugar interests, the Chamber of Commerce, and they, so to speak, representing public opinion, sat there to write a Constitution.

A speech was made over the week-end by the Prime Minister where he said that the P.P.P. did not consult the people and that certain words were used, that the people are regarded as cranks and crackpots. One thing with the ruling party, it is very adept at distorting things, lifting out of context certain phrases and giving them general applicability. Everybody knows that there used to be people like Bishop Ifill and clearly it was because of that, that we decided at that time not to have representation from that kind of individual. I repeat, the House then represented all shades of political opinion in this country and economic interests, and therefore, we felt the House, having been elected at a free and fair election, was competent to write a draft and that draft was not a final draft. That draft was not a final draft which was automatically passed by the majority in the Parliament. What these people are now asking us to do is to agree that there will be this Constituent Assembly in which they have a majority, and then they will bring it back to the Parliament and pass it with the same majority which they have. I want to show that there is not a parallel because they will try to adduce, no doubt, in their argumentation that this was what was done by the P.P.P. Government.

As regards stretching out the work of the Assembly so that they can virtually give themselves another term in office without having been elected by the people, we have rich experience in this House about that matter. I remember when two Ministers were brought before the Ombudsman on a corruption charge instituted by Eusi Kwayana, the Prime Minister first said that there was a Bill in draft to deal with corruption and it would soon become law. That was December, 1971. Nothing has happened up to today and that Bill has not been brought before this House. In December, 1974, in the Sophia Declaration, steps were taken to deal with that question of corruption, that all the leaders of the P.N.C. would have to report to the Leader of the P.N.C., the maximum leader.

3.20 p.m.

That, again, we have not seen, although in the meantime Trinidad and Jamaica have passed integrity legislation, the same kind of law that is supposed to be drafted.

Side by side with that, they set up a Committee of this House to extend the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman to deal with questions pertaining to corruption and other related matters. That Committee was appointed towards the end of 1971 or the beginning of 1972. What happened? The elections came in July 1973 and still the Committee has not yet put up its findings. Since 1973 to now the Committee has been dissolved. So we have rich experience of how the P.N.C. can manipulate a situation to achieve the result it wants. In other words, it neither wanted the Bill in this Parliament to deal with the question of corruption nor did it want the Ombudsman's powers to be extended. So it played for time and the end result is that no report has come before this House and the Committee has been dissolved. The same thing will happen in the Constituent Assembly. It will play for time. Meantime, Bills will be passed and when the new elections do come, the Constitution would have been changed to have written into it by another amendment, as I said already, the P.N.C. as the vanguard Party or, to use the members own

words, the paramount Party, the Party which is supposed to play the leading, guiding role in the society. At the same time, the P.N.C. leader will be declared the Executive President.

We have noted how the P.N.C. Constitution itself is constructed, where the P.N.C. leader has absolute powers, not as under the democratically-run Marxist/Leninist vanguard Party where there is collective leadership and also democratic centralism. If there is in the Party Constitution that kind of unlimited power contrary to the principles of Marxism/Leninism, then it can still be called socialist Guyana and the Executive President can be given the same unlimited powers that De Gaulle demanded in 1968, when the Algerian crisis was on and everybody said “**bring back De Gualle to save the nation.**” De Gaulle demanded absolute powers and at that time the French people were willing to give him. Here, people will not be willing, but they will take it. That is the question here. Perhaps we would not have it as they have it in Haiti where there is a life Presidency – Duvalier. Papa Doc created for himself a life Presidency, then it became a hereditary Presidency. After he died, it went from Papa Doc to Baby doc, his son. In the case of the Prime Minister, unfortunately, there is no son but a daughter can do just as well. It seems that this is what we are heading for, an autocracy as well as a hereditary autocracy. All of the time when we are celebrating the twenty-five years of the Prime Minister in Parliament --

The Speaker: That is not a fair comment. We also celebrated your wife’s and Cde. Ram Karran’s.

Cde. C. Jagan: Yes, Cde. Speaker, very soon we will be celebrating yours too.

The Speaker: I am eminent enough to be celebrated.

Cde. C. Jagan: Oh, you are! I think we should respect you for that. What else will they do in amending this Constitution? They will try to give it a facade of democracy. After all, this is not the day and age of gunboats. This is not the day and age when the imperialist and

reactionary forces can willingly resort to force and get away with it. So the imperialists are now talking about human rights. So their plans everywhere have to at least pay lip service to human rights. They cannot talk about a one-Party State. Everywhere we go now we hear declarations being made, oh, we do not believe in a one-Party State. But every day, in actual practice, the rights of the people are being eroded. As a result, you have virtually a **de facto** one-Party State.

During the last debate, the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources mentioned their success. He said they had a two-thirds majority since the last elections and they did not take out the fundamental rights sections which they could have done if they wanted to. Again what he did not tell this House, and his colleagues did not tell this House, was the multiplicity of ways by which the Constitution has been subverted. From the Public Service Commission to other institutions like the Ombudsman and so on, the rights which are specified in the Constitution under fundamental rights have been eroded in practice. Another colleague of ours will deal with this question.

The Speaker: Cde. Leader of the Opposition, will you sit down for a minute, I will give you the minute you have lost. Cde. Leader of the House, I expect that you will take some appropriate action to have this noise in the precincts of the Chamber stopped. **[Pause]** Cde. Jagan. **[Pause]** Cde. Jagan your time is going and you have only 6 minutes, I am not approving any extension of time, unless the House approves an extension.

Cde. C. Jagan: All right, do what you like. I was making the point that the National Assembly will be given the facade of democracy -- **[Interruption]**

The Speaker: I will not allow persons in the public gallery to be walking in and out. Please sit.

Cde. C. Jagan: -- where mass organisations, along with political parties, will be given

17.5.78

National Assembly

3.20 – 3.30 p.m.

representation in the House. At the same time, the image which the Government will create will be one of non-alignment, the democratic regime, practising self reliance and urging the people to produce or perish.

3.30 p.m.

Cde. Speaker, today, the word non-alignment, while as a political pose it has moved to some positive positions, nevertheless, there are many who take different positions in this movement, some working with imperialism, some working against imperialism and some sitting right in the middle straddling all the fences. So now what will we have? We are going to have trips to the West and trips to the East. We are going to have the position --

The Speaker: Cde. Jagan, 5 minutes more.

Cde. C. Jagan: -- where we will move from the two super powers through imperialism of the '70s to a very skilful manoeuvring between the Soviet Union and China and, at the same time, instead of trying to revive the policies, instead of uniting the country, threaten the people with further penalties, that if they do not produce they will perish. We had pointed out before in this House that the Government was moving to the right. We quoted one of the bright luminaries of the P.N.C. who said that the way forward was to adopt capitalist methods. We were told he does not speak for the P.N.C. Now we have it from the horse's mouth. It was reported in the **London Financial Times** by Hugh O'Shaughnessy in an article written by him, that:

“Mr. Forbes Burnham the Prime Minister of Guyana who had nationalised foreign-owned sugar and bauxite interests in recent years, yesterday gave a virtual pledge that new foreign investments will be immune from take-over. He made a strong appeal for foreign capital to help in the development of Guyana's land and mineral resources, including what we thought were very rich deposits of uranium.”

The other day I spoke to a West German, who was interested in uranium. He wanted to know whether our policy was the same as the P.N.C.'s policy, in order that the stability in this country, from their point of view, can be ascertained. The article goes on:

“He calls for foreign investors to join with Guyanese capital in consortium to exploit Guyana's bauxite, silver and other raw materials. He also suggested joint ventures in steel such as nickel.”

Cde. Speaker, you will recall that when they spoke about meaningful participation in bauxite we said then that was in keeping with the new imperialist strategy of partnership which Douglas Rogers had enunciated in 1970 during his tour of Africa. We said further that the system had been tried out in Mexico where the foreign big bourgeoisie had linked up with the local bourgeoisie all the people's revolutionary gains of the past had disappeared. He referred to Chile under Eduardo Frei where there was a similar formula under the slogan of Chileanization of copper. Now, they're going back to the same position.

After the nationalisation of Demba, a **New York Times** man interviewed the Minister of Energy and then Minister Ramphal, and they said clearly that the policy was not nationalisation but partnership. They moved – and we congratulated them for that – forward against imperialism and nationalised them. But what are they doing now, in spite of the praiseworthy things which could be credited to the Prime Minister who spoke about taking over the natural resources of the country. What are they saying now? What does it mean?

The Speaker: I wish to interrupt you because I was at the Press Conference when the correspondent from the **Mirror** newspaper asked the same question and an explanation was given. That is why I made those remarks.

Cde. C. Jagan: It talks about nationalisation. From what I read in the newspapers, the Prime Minister said that it is --

The Speaker: That is what I am telling you. Your **Mirror** newspaper correspondent Cde. Moses Nagamootoo raised those same points at the Press Conference and he was given an answer. The same points you are making, he made, and the explanation was given.

Cde. C. Jagan: There are two different phases of this. You are stealing my time now by intervening.

The Speaker: Your time is up already. I am giving you the 2 minutes extra that I took up.

Cde. C. Jagan: What they are talking about has two distinctions. One is whether foreign properties will be nationalised. That is what Hugh O'Shaughnessy spoke about. He said that the undertaking was given that there will be no nationalisation for now or in the future in his lifetime. The Prime Minister has corrected that. Let us hope that what he says here is the same thing which will be reported abroad because we know sometimes things are said by this Government with forked tongues. This regime is now inviting foreign capitalists to come back to exploit the natural resources of this country.

The Speaker: Time.

Cde. Ram Karran: I beg to move that the Leader of the Opposition be given another 15 minutes to conclude his speech.

Question put, and agreed to.

Cde. C. Jagan: Cde. Speaker, here is a clear proof of the sell-out of the interests of the people of this country. The Prime Minister also spoke about the pressures which are being put by the I.M.F. So far, they have resisted those pressures for devaluation but other aspects of those pressures have already been implemented. You dismiss the workers to balance the Budget. You remove subsidies and cut down social services. You do all of those things so that you can repay all the money you have borrowed. Debts are taking up 33 percent of the Budget. So the I.M.F. is continually putting more pressures but the Prime Minister says they have resisted the pressures dealing with devaluation.

Mr. Manley said last February that he was not going to accept the I.M.F. package but in April he devalued for the first time. In January, he devalued it for the second time, and now he has devalued it for the third time. We are going to see how long this pressure will be resisted.

Clearly, we don't see that this is going to develop because these pressures can be resisted knowing the nature of this regime. What they want to do is to get the Referendum out of the way, get the Amendment to the Constitution to postpone elections out of the way, and then put more lashes on the people through devaluation. By then, the people won't have any say in the country because they will be getting blows one after the other. That is going to be the format.

3.40 p.m.

Cde. Speaker, I must turn to a few points which I think need to be corrected. I have referred already to the statement that the masses are crackpots and cranks. The P.P.P. has never made a statement like that as regards the workers, the farmers. We know that there are a few people like those, like Bishop Ifill, who was another one who rode around on a bicycle with the Union Jack and so on. Everybody knows about those people. A point was made by the Prime Minister in that final paragraph of his speech. He said:

“Finally, it was not the P.N.C. that in 1962 without consulting the public, presented, albeit unsuccessfully to the British Government a draft Constitution for an automatic adoption.”

That is a big lie! I have here the record of the 1962 Proceedings of the London Constitutional Conference. Appended to this report is a statement called Notes of a Conference Held at Queen’s College on Sunday, 14th October, 1962, to discuss views expressed by individuals and organisations in memoranda submitted by them on the proposed draft Constitution of Guyana. It goes on, speaking about me:

“Sometime ago, it had been proposed by Government that the draft Constitution should be prepared and considered by the public but this plan has had to be abandoned because of the lack of co-operation by the Opposition Party.”

It goes on further:

“He also regretted,” - speaking of the then Premier – “that the P.N.C. and U.F. were not represented at the Conference. The reason given to them for this was that they did not recognise the draft and therefore could not participate in such a Conference. A saving grace (he said) was perhaps the fact that the leaders of the various parties have had discussions under the chairmanship of the Governor and a tabulated statement of their views had been prepared. In addition, the Government had a draft Constitution prepared by the U.F. and it was understood that the Secretary of State for the Colonies had requested the P.N.C. to submit their views.”

So it was not, as the Prime Minister said, that we did not consult anybody. There was a draft. That draft was put up to the public and debated. In this report, there is mention of

organisations like the Junior and Senior Chambers of Commerce, the Sugar Producers' Association and other bodies which were represented at the Conference.

Incidentally, Cde. Speaker, they talk about the colonial Constitution which needs to be changed. In 1961, as a result of their help, the British Government put into the Constitution, the clause for prompt and adequate compensation, as contained in their draft. The Ramsahoye draft of 1962 took out that clause but the Burnham draft, the Ramphal draft, re-inserted it. That is a fact. Let me read it to you – and they are now talking about the Constitution being a hindrance to them. This is one paragraph of that report. It says:

“Mr. Williams said there would not be a divergence of opinion from that of proposes if a simple statement like that appearing in the 1961 Constitution, the provision that prompt and adequate in the draft Constitution.”

Cde. Shahabuddeen, the Minister of Justice, was part of all that at that time and no doubt he knows what I am talking about. So, it was not true, as the Prime Minister misinformed this nation, that the P.P.P. went to London in 1962 with a draft Constitution which was rammed down the throats of the Guyanese people. That is a big, blatant lie!

Incidentally, Cde. Speaker, at that meeting, there were eighty two organisations represented, and individuals were present, including Mr. Mohamed Nissar who now sits with the Government. He was there at the time, his name is mentioned here along with those organisations. So, it is not true to say that we railroaded this measure through the House and thus denied the rights of the people.

There was another point which was raised and that is what I would like to raise. Today, the public has spoken out against this Bill. What are those public bodies? All the opposition parties, the churches, the major denominations in this country have come out against this Bill,

including the Guyana Council of Churches, the Hindu Dharmic Sabha, the Sad'r Anjuman along with the Methodist Church, the Catholic Church. There was held in Surinam an Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Bishops of the Antilles and they have come out against this Bill and Referendum. The bulk of the lawyers have come out against the Bill and these are not P.P.P. lawyers in the main; there was a mixed bag of all kinds of political persuasion and ideological positions. The doctors, again by a huge majority, have come out against this Bill; so have the architects, and, no doubt, as time goes on, there are going to be more and more organisations expressing their opposition to this Bill.

Cde. Speaker, what are we trying to do in this country? Are we merely trying to hold on to power by any means or do we want to see this country go forward? That is the fundamental question which has to be asked today.

The Speaker: Five minutes more.

Cde. C. Jagan: If we are going to go ahead on the basis of democracy, of consultation with the masses, of involving the masses – because without their involvement you cannot solve the bottleneck of production, the crisis of production which is plaguing this country today – are we going to ride roughshod against the wishes of the total majority of the people of this country, the great majority of the people of this country, simply because some people want to stay in office to hold on to power and privileges?

Cde. Speaker, I would ask that this Bill be deferred. This Bill should be deferred and the Government should seek to take the opportunity to meet with all the organisations – not just the political parties – which have spoken out, and the Government must not use the Press to hide information!

The **Chronicle** newspaper has refused paid advertisements from the Guyana Council of Churches and the whole galaxy of lawyers. Why is it? What are they afraid of? Why are they afraid for these two representative bodies in Guyana to speak out and tell the public how they feel, and not only how they feel but to inform the public and educate them as the lawyers' statement was clearly indicative of?

I have a copy of last Sunday's **Chronicle**, 14th May. What does it state?

“Hysterics notwithstanding, the inconsistent position of the main opposers must be highlighted. In 1959, when the issue of Constitutional change was being debated in the Legislative Assembly, Cheddi ‘Braggart’ Jagan was one of those who voted against the use of several referendums as a means of changing the Constitution.”

Cde. Speaker, a few days before, they took the same line. That was on Thursday, 11th May. This is what the paper stated:

“The People’s Progressive Party had said that the referendum procedure for changing the Constitution must stay. But a Government spokesman said such a position was totally inconsistent. The spokesman pointed out that as far back as 1959 when the matter of constitutional change was being discussed in the legislative Assembly, Dr. Jagan was one of those who voted against the referendum as a procedure for changing the Constitution. (See Report of the Constitution Commission 1959).”

Cde. Speaker, I have that report here. I will hand it over to you later on for you to peruse and see whether there was any such proposal. There was nothing about referendum in here! The **Chronicle** not only prints lies but uses such insulting remarks as “Braggart” Jagan. I do not mind; it does not bother me. But, for the **Chronicle**, a Government paper, paid for by the taxpayers, to descend to such low positions is a discredit to the profession of journalism. These

vermin who write like this should not be sitting there being paid by taxpayers calling themselves journalists, distorting historical facts!

Here is the book! I challenge anyone to say in which chapter, in which verse in this Constitutional report, I said that I was opposed to referendum. That is why, incidentally, the P.N.C. members of Parliament voted at that time that the call for entrenchment and any constitutional changes must be supported by the whole House. Now they have changed that position. They do not want referendum; they do not want the whole House, because they want to pass it through the two-thirds majority which they stole at the last elections.

The Speaker: Time!

Cde. C. Jagan: I conclude by saying that I challenge the Chronicle, I challenge the members of the Government to put facts before the public and not lies, so that the public could be properly informed about what is taking place in this House and in this country and not use the media for the purpose of distorting history and re-writing history so that they could perpetuate themselves by misguiding the population of Guyana.

The Speaker: Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, the Minister of Home Affairs in presenting this Bill described it as one of historic significance. But of equal significance was the fact that he presented it in less than five minutes. The Bill is of historic significance. In my experience in this Parliament, there has been no other measure as controversial as this one and public opinion has never been so strong as it is at the moment. Almost everyone has spoken out against the Bill. Needless to mention, some of them were abused. Various types of insults were attributed to those who sought to exercise their constitutional right to speak against an amendment that affects the fabric, if not the heart of the Constitution. One would expect that people must continue to

enjoy these rights. It is not a privilege; it is a right and any media or any individual, moreso Government spokesmen who indulge in abusing those who seek to exercise their right, would be writing on the wall as to what the people of this country must expect in a new Constitution and particularly and specifically in the implementation of a new Constitution.

The Bill before the House sets out the procedures under which the Referendum will be held. This is what the Bill is for. But when one examines the Bill, those procedures are not written in as such. We will come to that in a moment. This Bill, like the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, is asking the Parliament to give that power to the Minister, a member of the party which is involved in the controversial amendment. The Minister will decide in his sole judgment what procedures must be followed to ascertain the views and vote of the electorate because he is going to make the regulations. We are quite conscious of the existence of the Representation of the People Ordinance but the regulations for the Referendum will be left at his sole discretion.

3.50 p.m.

One would have expected that in a matter of this type, the Government would have come with a foolproof Bill and told this House that these are the procedures under which one would seek to ascertain the verdict of the people in this matter which is so controversial. In fact, this Bill, cleverly drafted, merely attempted to ensure that certain provisions both of the Constitution and of the relevant Ordinance are complied with probably to stave off any attempt at challenging the legality of the Bill in the court. What does the Bill say? The Referendum means submitting the Bill in accordance with article 73(3) of the Constitution to the vote of the electors qualified to vote in an election of the Members of the National Assembly for the purpose of ascertaining whether the Bill has been approved by a majority of electors who vote on the Bill.

The pertinent question is: where is the list for us to see who are qualified to vote for objection to be made in accordance with section 14 of the National Registration (Regulations) Chapter 19:08? That list must precede the Referendum process but we have not seen it up to now. Moreover, was registration carried out in accordance with section 14 of the Act itself? Not the Regulations. Probably the Minister is going to look for the Act and the Regulations to make himself **au fait** with what is required. That is the Minister of Justice. Then there is the list to be published according to section 15 to enable objections; that is Chapter 19:08 and in the Ordinance it is page 9. None of those provisions, both of the Act and of the regulations, have been complied with. And thus one imagines what will take place.

The question is, will this be done, and when, bearing in mind that the Government has announced July for the conduct of the Referendum, so that before the end of July we must have enumeration, we must have people registered, and ensure that they are registered? We must give the people an opportunity to scrutinise the list, to be permitted under laws that exist within the statute now to see whether on those lists there are still the names of those who died many years ago, the names of those who do not exist in the register of births and deaths, like the phantoms, the ghosts, and so on. Those factors must be borne in mind and the public must know and the nation must come to the realisation that the Government again, despite severe criticism both inside this Chamber and outside is moving to deprive the people of their rights. The members of the Government care not. They have always shown contempt for public opinion and the situation is not better today.

This Bill has to be approved by a majority of the electors qualified to vote. The Act says the registration of electors must be conducted under the general direction and supervision of the Elections Commission. Probably I can pose the question: Is the Elections Commission properly and fully constituted?

The Speaker: Cde. Persaud, it is 4 p.m. We will take the Suspension. The Sitting of the House is suspended for 30 minutes.

Sitting suspended at 4 p.m.

4.24 p.m.

On resumption --

The Speaker: When the suspension was taken Cde. Persaud was speaking. Please continue.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, I was making the point that the Elections Commission has a role to play in this Referendum since the Elections Commission has the power under the relevant Ordinance to exercise general direction and supervision over the registration. I refer here, Cde. Speaker, to section 16, Chapter 19:08, subsection (1). It states:

“For the purpose of securing the registration of persons eligible thereof under any order made in pursuance of section 6 and who are qualified to be registered as electors for elections to the National Assembly and of ensuring the effectiveness of the central and divisional registers (in so far as such persons are registered therein) as registers of such electors, registration pursuant to this Act shall be under the general direction and supervision of the Elections Commission; and, accordingly, article 69(1) (b) of the Constitution shall apply to this Act.”

I want to make another point. In the conduct of the Referendum, article 69 of the Constitution is also relevant and applicable. The question I was asking when the adjournment was taken was, if the Elections Commission is properly constituted. Is it functioning? The

charge we make is that the Elections Commission is more dead than alive. In any such exercise, any Parliamentarian or any member of the public must be satisfied as to the impartiality of the institution that will be involved in executing the Acts and laws to ensure fair results. Those are all factors, to my mind, which relate to the whole process of referendum. One must be disappointed at the manner in which this House was treated when this Bill was presented this afternoon. There was no explanation. The Government is talking about creating a Constituent Assembly and about consulting and bringing in people as advisers and what not and no attempt has been made to satisfy those of us who sit in this House, and indeed, even its own membership. It failed to do that in the manner in which the Bill was presented this afternoon and one must take note of the contempt with which the House was treated. These steps to which I referred and which are sanctioned by the relevant statutes, the Acts and Regulations and, indeed, the Constitution, are vital links to ensure free and fair results.

We know how the people feel. We can sense the momentum of the people's protest and we know too that there are large numbers of P.N.C. supporters who have been speaking out against this amendment and this rape, if not murder, of the Constitution. But we know, too, that if the process to ensure the vote of the people is not fair, is not just, is not right, then though the people feel strongly and the momentum is there against the Bill, the result can be negative. We are confident, as everybody else is, that if the process is fair the people will reject this Constitution (Amendment) Bill. I proceed to say that if the requirement of the Referendum is not fulfilled, then it follows that the P.N.C. Government will flout the constitution and perpetuate itself in office for a longer period than that provided by the Constitution. That is a significant point. Article 82(3) of the Constitution is clear, that Parliament automatically stands dissolved at midnight on 25th July, 1978. It is no question of the Prime Minister advising the President to dissolve. In my humble opinion, the Prime Minister, subsequent to the 25th July, 1978, does not have that power and the process is automatic. I develop the point to show that if subsequent to that date the Government persists and converts this Assembly into a Constituent Assembly, it would not only be an immoral body, but it would equally be an illegal body.

Our charge, when we debated the Constitution (Amendment) Bill and now that we are talking about the procedure for Referendum, remains unchanged. The whole process and exercise have been designed with one intention and that intention is for the P.N.C. to perpetuate itself in power in the Government against the wishes and the will of the people. It will be a case of the P.N.C. nominating itself to the Government after the expiration of its term of office. What we will have is what is known as an interim Government. They talk of colonialism. If this is not colonialism, then I ask, what is? What is more obnoxious? Years ago, we spoke against institutions like the Local Government Board and we condemned that and said it was nominated. But today when we talk about constitutional reform and constitutional development, I fail to see how any person with legal background and, indeed, with the background of the Cde. Attorney General and Minister of Justice could be a party to this exercise. This is not constitutional development; this is retrograde, it is backward and it should be condemned in the strongest possible terms. Thus, we say, so far as this Opposition is concerned, we simply do not only oppose the Bill, but we reject the Bill. The Bill must be spurned and we are going to call upon the electorate to show that contempt if it reaches that point. One expects that greater judgement will prevail and the Government will return to sobriety and will respect the will and the feeling of so many people who have spoken against the amendment.

This Bill, which is ancillary to the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, is highly objectionable. The Constitution (Amendment) Bill was a forerunner to this one and thus it must be treated with all contempt. This Bill and the previous Bill must be put in a single coffin and the people of this country called upon to join that funeral exercise so that we would not only see the Bills in a coffin but their final interment once and for all, never to rise again.

We have heard before that the colonials were bad and the P.P.P. initiated their exit from this land because we felt that this land belongs to the people and we must exercise sovereign right over it. But even as they were said to be, they permitted things like house to house enumerated supervision of ballot boxes, and fair counting. These are things of the past. It is

extremely difficult when one crosses the border of Guyana to go abroad to explain to people what elections mean in the Guyanese context because there is no parallel to what takes place in this country. The very colonials permitted entrenched provisions in the Constitution which the P.N.C. Government is now seeking to remove. It has been said in this House and outside, that India's Constitution can be amended by a two-thirds majority. Let me say for the information of the House and for the record that action is now afoot in India to reverse that and all Parties have agreed to fundamental rights provisions as well as those Articles which deal with elections, to be subject to a referendum in the future. I want to quote a statement of April 21, 1978. It states:

“It is understood that all Parties more or less agreed that the basic features of the Constitution like its secular and democratic character, the fundamental rights, free and fair elections to Parliament and State legislation and independence of the judiciary should not be modified except through a referendum apart from being passed in both councils or Parliaments by the usual secular majority. Such a referendum would be conducted by the Elections Commission and all those eligible to vote would take part in it.”

Cde. Jack was the Member who referred to the Indian Constitution when he contributed to the debate on the Bill. And I think the *Chronicle* echoed that. Now, for the information of the House and the **Chronicle**, India is reversing that.

4.35 p.m.

In fact, India is in the process of doing exactly the opposite of what we are doing here. If India with its 650 million population does not see the referendum process as cumbersome, should we with our half-million people find it cumbersome to give the people the right to speak on the character, the framework, the structure of the Constitution itself? India has a better record. The Prime Minister contested the election and she was defeated. We don't have that here. Once you

are in power and once you control the machinery of elections, as far as the P.N.C. is concerned, it can never be defeated. India has a more dignified and honourable record, not only with the Constitution, not only elections but the judiciary. When Mrs. Gandhi was Prime Minister, the Court ruled against her. Now that she is in the Opposition, a Magistrate had the guts to rule favourably to her. That is India's position, we don't have that here. We have a far way to go and being at this stage of our constitutional development we are removing the safeguard, the protective rights that are entrenched in the Constitution, and exposing the people of this country to a rigged two-thirds majority.

Even Trinidad – and I don't want to take a long time on this – is calling for a referendum and to quote the Guardian of 23rd April, 1978, page 3:

“the historical use and significance of the referendum is structured on the inalienable right of the individual to be heard.”

They speak of that right and the individual must be heard in that it must go the people. Let the people vote on the substance. Do not come with a backdoor amendment and tell them “give us a blank cheque.” The Government must not be allowed to sell the people a pig in a bag.

What is more objectionable is the fact that this Bill, and this is a very substantial point, while it makes applicable the elections Act, has excluded a significant thing in its preparation and presentation and that is the National Assembly (Validity of Elections) Act, Chapter 104. It means that when the referendum process is completed, the people of this country will have no right to challenge it in a court of law, whoever is assigned the power, be it the Elections Commission or the Commissioner of Elections. That announcement will be final.

I say this afternoon in this Parliament, Cde. Speaker, that article 71 of the Constitution gives exclusive jurisdiction to the Courts to look into matters of this type. I am sure the Attorney

General and Minister of Justice knows of this provision. Probably he needs to be reminded of it, and after I have reminded him, I hope he will remove that existing blockage in this Constitution, exempting the National Assembly (Validity of Elections) Act, Chapter 1:04. In article 71 of the Constitution it states:

“(1) Subject to the provisions of this article, the High Court shall have exclusive jurisdiction to determine any question –”.

And I want to read the relevant part, that is, sub-article (b) (i):

“either generally or in any particular place, an election has been lawfully conducted or the result thereof has been, or may have been, affected by any unlawful act or omission;”.

I think that is enough, in that, article 71 of the Constitution gives exclusive jurisdiction to the Court and these despots are sticking by this amendment. By this procedural Bill, they are denying the Court that right at the conclusion of the Referendum. But the Government does not want the people to challenge it as it will be necessary so to do, because if it is the Government’s intention to proceed with the Bill, then I say, once the process is fair, it will lose badly. It cannot poll 25 percent of the votes on the Referendum.

I would like to make another significant point. When the Referendum is put to the electorate, all that is required under the Constitution is 51 percent voting. What you have, in effect, is this: if only 51 percent vote in favour of the amendment, it looks as if it will be constitutional, the process would have been completed and thus the amendment can be effected, and the bill taken to the President for assent. But what that effect means? It means that 51 percent of the people would have voted in favour of a two-thirds that the Government says it got in 1973. To me that looks like a constitutional crisis bigger than the Attorney General.

The point is clear that if 51 percent of the people vote in favour of the Referendum then the implication is that the Government no longer enjoys a two-thirds majority. That is the situation that will be developing in this country. Based on that factor, I say that the Government has no moral, no legal, no Constitutional right to proceed with the Bill.

What we are saying is that if the Government wants to bring a new Constitution, then the people must know what the Constitution is. Of the 110 practising members of the private Bar, in Georgetown, those who are not in Government employment, 80 signed a protest which called for the withdrawal of the Bill. So many lawyers have run away from this country that it is scandalous. Of 20 lawyers in Berbice, 16 signed in protest. In Essequibo all signed in protest. While I read the Chronicle which reported the meeting between the Minister of Justice and the lawyers, I asked myself: Was the Minister a party to that report? Because it was clearly a one-sided report, and I am being very kind to him. He still owes the public the obligation to see that their views are published in the way and manner in which those views were reported.

We find this afternoon, that we have reached the point where the Government is in haste to maintain power, to go beyond five years which it doesn't have the mandate to do. I repeat that if the Government was contemplating, as it was since the 14th December, 1974, a new Constitution, the people should have been provided with that Constitution. In fact, when the Prime Minister was interviewed on the 17th June, 1977, by the Caribbean Network System, he was asked this specific question: "Will this Constitution have an effect on the holding of general elections?" He replied, "I don't see why it should. The Bill is very simple." But we see that that is now dishonoured --

4.45 p.m.

The Speaker: Cde. Persaud, 5 minutes more.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Very well, sir. That is now dishonoured and the Government is moving to postpone the elections possibly for all time or for a period so that it can attempt to win back some support in the country. But, Cde. Speaker, it is clear that the people are alert; it is clear that the people will not permit the Government to do what it is moving to do. It is clear that the people will strongly and fearlessly resent this action of the Government.

The Minister must tell us this afternoon: Will people overseas vote in the Referendum? If they are permitted to vote, why do they not come here and live with the shortages, with the blackouts, with the hardships and with the sufferings? What right have they to vote on the Constitution of this country? We say and we call upon the Government to exclude them and to amend the law now to remove overseas voting. Overseas voting would have been the greatest contempt on the people of this country. It means that people who have left this country for so many reasons, and probably are enjoying a better life abroad, are going to guide and direct the destiny and the future of this country. I say they have no right and we strongly oppose it. Cde. Speaker, in support of the fact that these people are likely to vote, the Gazette set aside a period, I think it was the beginning of April to the ending, for the registration of non-resident voters but there is no such exercise here up to now. I think the last time – I am subject to correction – that registration was carried out was in 1976. It means that for the whole of 1977 there was no registration. In 1978, there was no Order issued by the Minister concerned for registration, but in July 1978, we are going to have a Referendum and a list is vital for that Referendum. How could the Government answer these questions?

The Speaker: Two minutes more.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, I want to say that in the context of Guyana and in the context of this Parliament, when the Government says that Parliament “A” or Parliament “B” in that country or in the other country has its Constitution so framed that two-

thirds can amend it, it must understand that the concept of two-thirds envisages that more than one Party would be involved. I am surprised that so many people who are supposed to be learned have been speaking so loosely about the two-thirds. But, in Guyana's context, a two-thirds majority means P.N.C.; it does not mean anything else. In fact and in truth, if this amendment is passed through all its stages, what the Guyanese people would be doing is selling away their rights once and for all and giving that right to the rigged two-thirds. In fact, it would be empowering one single Party to decide the constitutional course and the future of this country and any thinking person must oppose that and strongly oppose that. But we have confidence in the people. The people will not permit it; the people will resent it; the people will oppose it. The time has come in this country when nobody must sit on the fence. **“Speak out now or perish forever”** must be the slogan. Speak out now or perish forever! We must move Cde. Speaker --

The Speaker: Well, I think you have had the last say there – forever.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, we must therefore move collectively and in unity to kill this Bill once and for all.

4.55 p.m.

The Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Abraham. [Applause]

Mr. Abraham: Mr. Speaker, I am worried, honestly. There is going to be a vote. The people are not registered. The voters' lists have not been brought up to date. Many voters are now dead. People have moved. It is so easy for the dead to vote. When was the last registration? Has there been one since six years ago? Or is there one to enrol only P.N.C. supporters as seems to be the case in a certain coastal village? We hear of people being registered in the United Kingdom for the past three months. At the last elections, 95 percent of

the voters in the United Kingdom were recorded as having voted P.N.C. We hear of no such registration in the Rupununi or in the North West. Why?

The Cde. Leader speaks to people in Manchester and in London, two cities about 188 miles apart, about the Referendum and brings them up to date on the topic. Yet, Amerindians in the Rupununi, roughly 200 miles from Timehri, and in the North West, about eighty miles away from Timehri, are not told a thing. Probably it is much cheaper doing so here than in the United Kingdom. It would appear that Guyanese in the United Kingdom and in other places are more important than our Amerindians. Has anybody tried to inform them on what the Referendum is all about? We may be told: Don't worry, all will be done in time. It is all under control. Control of one. The P.N.C. The 1968 lists to the Rupununi were not on time for many people to bring to the attention of the people who were to vote and to give a chance to people to demand to be included. Even if the lists are in order, will all be well? Let me tell you what happened in 1968 under the P.N.C. in Lethem.

Lists of voters were distributed and duly posted up by the Government authorities. Came polling day, the people went to vote at a school two miles from Lethem.

“Oh, your name is not on my list, you cannot vote.” “But it is on the list at the school.” “No, it is not on my list, you cannot vote.”

An Amerindian said:

“Oh no, just a minute.”

He marched out of the polling station pulled down the list of voters put up by the D.C., marched back, put the list on the table.

“This is my name. See it”

“ It is not on my list. I have a list of all the voters. You cannot vote.”

Surely the polling officer could have sent word to the District Commissioner or allowed the man to vote. “No. You cannot vote.” Was the man annoyed? Would I have been annoyed? Would you have been annoyed? Would you trust the Government anymore? I doubt it. Actions, such as a list full of omissions, do not generate trust and confidence. This did happen. Would anybody complain of irregularities?

“Afraid I may lose my job. Afraid I would not get supplies. Afraid of what might happen.”

Some Amerindians might just pack up and leave the so-called Socialist State.

In 1968 and 1973, to the amazement of the people, the votes were not counted in the Rupununi or locally in the North West. Why not? No doubt, some wise comrade said, let all be counted in town. Why? No matter how many good reasons may be given, this only leads to suspicion especially if Opposition agents are not allowed to travel with the boxes. Such conduct can only lead to dishonesty. All parties must be present or there can be jiggery-pokery. Let me give you a simple example.

In a village in the North West there were elections for captain. Two candidates contested, one P.N.C. and the other non-P.N.C. Most of the villagers were not in favour of the P.N.C. There were two boxes one for each candidate. This is bad. All can tell how the people voted. Such a thing leads to distress, fear, and enmity. The result was that most people voted non-P.N.C. All could have seen that from the number of feet that went to the non-P.N.C. box. Counting time came, normal procedure, both candidates were present. A comrade from town

counted the votes. The P.N.C. won. Did this deceive the people? No. Not on your life. Did they protest? No. Would they protest now? Yes. Did this lead to greater support for the party? No. Do the people trust the party? No.

The television company that made the film **The Making of a Prime Minister** showed to what lengths the P.N.C. will go to perpetuate itself in power. Guyanese in the United Kingdom are duly registered, Guyanese in Canada. Why not Guyanese in Brazil? There are many Guyanese in Brazil since Amerindians leave and go there. The Wai Wais, for example. No man can deny this. Not even my good colleague, Cde. Philip Duncan. The Government knows that this is a fact. The school numbers have dropped terribly at Konashen. Other Amerindians go as well. Why is nothing done to register them? Allow them to vote, encourage them to come back. Or is it because they will vote against the P.N.C.? Their leaving means they were fed up, they were dissatisfied, they were afraid.

Last year there was drought with famine and lack of cassava. “**No hunger, no famine**”, says the **New Nation**. Government officers visited the area yes, they got as far as Lethem. Shea, nearly 100 miles away, did they visit Shea? No. Then food was sent up so, no famine. Did this deceive the people? You cannot deceive Amerindians like that. You may fool the people in Georgetown because they don’t know the conditions up there. The P.N.C. Government, the party which is paramount, the party which hopes to become the one party in this country, like Russia, etc. says, “all will be well”. We will consult the people. No doubt, but do what the people really want. Not only what the party wants.

Even now the party has tremendous power. It can ban people from the interior at will. There is no need to give any reason except that it is for the good of the country. Father Maynard Keen was told, “The Government has nothing against you.” A year later he was stopped at the airport. You cannot enter. But why? He was given no reason. Why was no reason given? Because the party is paramount. It can do what it likes, not what the people want. Oh no. Were

the Amerindians consulted? No. Did they ask for the return of Father Keen? Oh yes. Very much so. The answer: Silence. We have a P.N.C. regional man writing and this is what he says:

“Expel all expatriate priests. Put in prison all local Guyanese priests.”

I quote from the **New Nation** of May 7, 1978, Letter to the Editor, Sectoral Records of some Catholics, and it reads:

“Government put into preventive detention for a while all Guyanese priests and columnists who have disturbed the peace and others who are likely to do so. The foreigners should be dealt with in the normal way.”

This was in support of the **New Nation**'s editorial of 23rd April, 1978. Are we going to become like Cuba or China where to be a Minister of religion is suspect? In the **Catholic Standard** of 14th May, we read of a Irving as a social parasite the latest Soviet harassment of dissidents because of their religious or human rights activities.

We want proper registration, proper voting, and proper accounting; otherwise there will be dissatisfaction in the interior, in Georgetown, in Linden, and all along the coasts. How will the party control affairs? By the Army? We hope not. Let me give the paramount minority party, the P.N.C., a warning. The Amerindians will take roughness only for a time. They won't be the same. If things get too rough, then they will go. Who will run the Rupununi ranches then, a source of much needed food? Mr. Speaker, if too many Amerindians go, others might come in from outside of Guyana.

5.05 p.m.

If I might digress for a while, a certain priest gave a lift to Cde. Philip Duncan in September 1968 from Lethem to Karaudanawa, one hundred miles, via Wariwau and Achiweb and then helped him get transport to Aishalton. Yet, when anyone does a similar act of kindness, a similar humanitarian gesture to the P.P.P. or to the United Force, he is at once held suspect; he becomes a marked man. A certain Amerindian teacher invited three U.F. friends. This was year 1973, an election campaign was in progress in the Rupununi, the Karaudanawa creek was high and the friends arrived at Karaudanawa, drenched, cold and hungry. The teacher invited his friends to share his bread and the warmth of his thatched-roof house that night. The next thing was that he was severely rebuked by the Party when the word got around that he had sheltered friends from the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Fred Atkinson, a trained headmaster and a really good teacher of art packed up in disgust and left. He was appointed to Arantol Government School, South Rupununi. This school, a brand new school in the South Rupununi, was opened by the Government, yet the simple necessities for a school were not provided, for example, books, chalk, paper, etc. He made representations to the Ministry but to no avail. Fred Atkinson, typical of the Amerindian, chucked in and left and the profession and the Rupununi lost a good teacher.

When the priests were managers, they visited schools regularly and kept high the morale of teachers working under trying conditions. At the outset, headmasters were provided with food and money until their appointments were approved by the Ministry of Education. They saw to it that the schools were provided with chalk, books, and stationery. They even helped to transport goods from the airstrip to where the teachers lived, thus alleviating the hardships of Rupununi life. These priests saw that all was well. The education Officers prefer to stay in Georgetown. They cannot find time to visit Rupununi schools. One headmaster says he had not seen his Education Officer in the two years that he was Education Officer. He did not even go to the school where he served at one time as headmaster, and he was manager of that same school for

fifteen months. The Party does not help Rupununi teachers like the priests did. Teachers now have to wait very long to receive their salaries. In the good old days the Church advanced the teachers' salaries until their pay came in. Yet the Party would like to chuck out the priests now, forgetting all their good work done over the years.

When I die, I would like a simple requiem by a priest from my Church. Surely, those devout Catholics on the other side of the House want the same. I am afraid that our final wish may not be granted if the **New Nation** were to have its way. So these are some of the reasons why we cannot agree to give the P.N.C. more power than it already has. The Party has come to the end of its five-year term of office. Let the members do the honourable thing, let them withdraw this Bill and hold free and fair elections in accordance with our present Constitution.

The Speaker: Cde. Mohamed.

Cde. Mohamed: Cde. Speaker, I would like to join my fellow colleagues in saying how much we resent this Bill. The hon. Minister of Home Affairs indicated that the Bill before us is introducing the machinery which will be charged with conducting the Referendum scheduled for July. That machinery is machinery which is not completely new to the people of this country. We have seen it in operation in 1968 and again we have seen that machinery in operation in 1973. Virtually, it will be the same machinery that is going to be used for the Referendum. Now the moment is opportune for us to look back into that machinery, how it operated in 1968 and 1973. Our experience indicates that this apparatus will be put into operation to carry out a referendum, a very sensitive referendum, which is going to change the Constitution of Guyana. Then we are sure that the people of this country will share with us the feelings of opposition and resentment.

Our experience shows that the electoral apparatus that will be utilised in July is nothing more than a contraption, a diabolical invention which, in the hands of specially selected

technicians, have been manipulated in 1968 and 1973 to decapitate democracy and to subvert basic human rights in this country. Those from the P.N.C. are very much satisfied with the results and the work of this apparatus. But whilst there is a handful expressing satisfaction with the results and the work, there is a growing number of the Guyanese working people who are simultaneously expressing resentment. Now it is worthwhile to note that the work of the apparatus and the machinery in 1968 and 1973 has left indelible imprints upon the minds of those tens of thousands of Guyanese who were victims to the weaknesses and inadequacies inherent in that machinery and which machinery is open to very shameful abuse, and which was abused substantially in 1968 and 1973.

It was only five years ago that the Guyanese people were exposed to a machinery, to an elections apparatus which proved to be a nightmare event in our recent history.

5.15 p.m.

In terms of history the wounds created then have not been healed. And now, whilst the wounds are still fresh and open, you are going to again utilise that machinery to carry out similar acts of denial of freedom, denial of democracy, which are tantamount to rubbing pepper and salt in the open wounds of the people who, more and more are being called upon to take Guyana out of its present crisis, the people who are called upon to produce, people who are called upon to raise production and productivity. In a few months we will see the rights the people ought to have enjoyed once again being completely eroded. That machinery was the very machinery that helped to wrest power from the hands of the people for this regime and it is that apparatus that has allowed a rigged two-thirds majority to enter into this House but at a heavy price, a price which meant the brutality, imprisonment, persecution, blood-shedding, and the shooting of a large number of persons in 1973 resulting in the death of two. That was how it was in 1973 and that very machinery is going to come back again July to carry out a referendum. We, on this side

of the House, hope that there will not be a trail of crushed lives and broken homes as the 1968 and 1973 elections apparatus left.

The election machinery that this Bill will set up for the Referendum immediately permits the opening of the flood-gates for fraud and rigging and, at the same time, it leads to the denial of the exercise of a fundamental and inalienable right of the people, the right to vote. It makes democracy unacceptable to every adult and every qualified person in this country. We cannot, therefore, having understood fully well the operation, and having learnt from our experience, agree that that machinery, which has been rejected by the people of this country, which has not provided and which does not guarantee free and fair elections...

NB: PAGES ARE MISSING FROM THE ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT.