

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
[Volume 7]
PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE THIRD PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE
CONSITUTION OF GUYANA**

168th Sitting

2 p.m.

Friday, 24th November, 1978

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (62)

Speaker

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

Members of the Government – People’s National Congress (45)

Prime Minister (1)

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

(Absent)

Deputy Prime Minister (1)

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

Senior Ministers (12)

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

Cde. S.S. Naraine, A.A.,
Minister of Works and Transport

Cde. B. Ramsaroop,
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House

***Non-elected Minister**

Cde. C.V. Mingo,
Minister of Home Affairs

* Cde. H. Greene,
Minister of Co-operatives and National Mobilisation

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

*Cde. F.E. Hope,
Minister of Finance

* Cde. G.B. Kennard, C.C.H.,
Minister of Agriculture

(Absent)

* Cde. M. Shahabuddeen, C.C.H., S.C.,
Attorney General and Minister of Justice

Cde. V.R. Teekah,
Minister of Education,
Social Development and Culture

*Cde. R.E. Jackson,
Minister of Foreign Affairs

*Cde. J.A. Tyndall, A.A.,
Minister of Trade and Consumer Protection

Ministers (2)

Cde. S.M. Field-Ridley,
Minister of Information and Culture

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

(Absent – on leave)

Ministers of State (10)

Cde. F.U.A. Carmichael,
Minister of State – Regional (Rupununi)

***Non-elected Minister**

Cde. P. Duncan, J.P.,
Minister of State, Ministry of Economic
Development and Co-operatives

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

(Absent)

Cde. K.B. Bancroft, J.P.
Minister of State - Regional
(Mazaruni/Potaro)

(Absent)

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

(Absent)

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

(Absent – on leave)

Cde. S. Prashad,
Minister of State – Regional
(East Demerara/West Coast Berbice)

(Absent)

Cde. R. C. Van Sluytman,
Minister of State,
Ministry of Agriculture

Cde. L.A. Durant,
Minister of State – Regional
(North West)

Parliamentary Secretaries (5)

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

***Non-elected Minister**

Cde. M. Corrica,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Education, Social Development and Culture

Cde. E.M. Bynoe
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Trade and Consumer Protection

Cde. C.E. Wright, J.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Economic Development and Co-operatives

Other Members (14)

Cde. W.G. Carrington

Cde. E.H.A. Fowler

Cde. J. Gill

Cde. W. Hussain

Cde. K.M.E. Jonas

Cde. J.G. Ramson

Cde. P.A. Rayman

Cde. A. Salim

(Absent – on leave)

Cde. E.M. Stoby, J.P.

Cde. S.H. Sukhu, M.S., J.P.

Cde. C. Sukul, J.P.

Cde. H.A. Taylor

Cde. L.E. Willems

Cde. Zaheeruddeen

Members of the Opposition (16)

(i) People's Progressive Party (14)

Leader of the Opposition (1)

Cde. C. Jagan

(Absent – on leave)

Leader of the Opposition

Deputy Speaker (1)

Cde. Ram Karran

(Absent – on leave)

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. I. Basir

(Absent)

Cde. C.C. Belgrave

Cde. R. Ally

(Absent)

Cde. Dalchand, J.P.

Cde. Dindayal

(Absent)

Cde. H. Nokta

Cde. P. Sukhai

Liberator Party (2)

Mr. M.F. Singh, Leader of the Opposition

(Absent – on leave)

Mr. M.A. Abraham

(Absent)

Officers

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

Acting Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly – A. Knight

ELECTION OF A MEMBER TO PRESIDE AT A SITTING

The Clerk: Comrades, as both the Speaker and Deputy Speaker are unavoidably absent, it is necessary for the Assembly to elect a Member to preside at this Sitting. I therefore now invite nominations for the office of a Member to Preside.

Cde. J. Jagan: I beg to nominate Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud.

Cde. N. Persaud: Seconded.

The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House (Cde. Ramsaroop):
Cde. Clerk I beg to nominate Cde. Sukhu.

Cde. Ackman: Seconded.

The Clerk: Comrades, there are two nominations. Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud has been nominated by Cde. Janet Jagan and the proposal has been seconded by Cde. Narbada Persaud. Cde. Sidney Sukhu has been nominated by Cde. Ramsaroop and that nomination has been seconded by Cde. Margaret Ackman. I will now put the Question, "that Cde. Sukhu be elected as the Member to preside at this Sitting".

Agreed to.

The Clerk: Cde. Sukhu is there declared elected to preside at this Sitting.

[Cde. S.H. Sukhu in the Chair]

PRAYERS**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE PRESIDING SPEAKER****Leave to Members**

The Presiding Speaker: Leave has been granted to Comrades Oscar Clarke and A. Salim for today's sitting, to Cde. Jagan for one month from 15th November, 1978, and to Cde. Ram Karran for one month from the 3rd November, 1978.

Acting Leader of the Opposition

I have been advised by the Leader of the Opposition that during his absence Cde. Janet Jagan will be sitting as Leader of the Opposition. [Applause]

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Paper was laid:

Review of the Operations of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund for the year 1977.

[The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Development on behalf of the Prime Minister]

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

Incidents concerning the People's Temple of the **Disciples of Christ Church**

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Development (Cde. Reid): Cde. Speaker, on Friday, 17th November, 1978 Congressman Ryan and a team of journalists together with a group representing concerned relatives made arrangements to visit Jonestown in

24.11.78

National Assembly

2.30 -2.40 p.m.

the North West District. The original plan was to go and return on Friday, 17th November. However, once in the North West district at Jonestown, it seems as though plans were changed and Congressman Ryan and his team overnighted in the North West area. From reports, some slept in Jonestown and others slept in areas nearby. On the evening of Saturday, 18th November, 1978, things seemed to have happened swiftly, so swiftly that one gets the impression that many of the things acted out were pre-planned or pre-arranged. Reports suggest three things happened before the departure of Congressman Ryan that are relevant to the whole incident:

- (a) that Congressman Ryan expressed satisfaction with conditions and the things he saw at Jonestown;
- (b) that some persons asked Congressman Ryan to leave Jonestown; and
- (c) that there was an incident in which a member of the Temple menaced Congressman Ryan.

At the airstrip at Port Kaituma, six miles from Jonestown, when the Congressman and party were about to leave, shooting broke out._____

2.40 p.m.

Congressman Ryan and three reporters were killed, as well as an American citizen, a former resident of Jonestown. Several other American citizens were injured. One of the more seriously injured persons was conveyed that very evening to the Georgetown Hospital where a medical team was on stand-by and the injured person received immediate attention, the others were flown out the following day.

The Government and people of Guyana deeply regret this tragedy and sympathise with the Government and people of the United States of America and, in particular, the sorrowing relatives of Congressman Ryan, the newsmen, and members of the People's Temple.

Investigations have revealed that among the dead are four children who have been informally adopted by the People's Temple but who are of Guyanese birth. We deeply regret their death and extend our sympathy to their relatives.

Later, Cde. Speaker, a report was received at Matthew's Ridge that a number of persons had committed suicide at Jonestown. The civil forces with the help of the Guyana Defence Force, late Saturday night despatched ranks into Matthew's Ridge and moved by foot and train to Kaituma. During the next twelve hours, arrangements were made to fly up troops to Kaituma to move into Jonestown. On Sunday, troops advanced on foot to a junction near Jonestown. It should be noted that all this was done under very adverse conditions since the terrain was very difficult. The situation at Jonestown was unclear and there was unusual rainfall with poor visibility. Early Sunday evening the troops were in control of Jonestown where they discovered bodies which, on subsequent count, amounted to 383, further discoveries have up to now taken that figure to 775 and it is possible that this number will increase.

During Sunday, senior officials, headed by our Crime Chief, arrived in the area and commenced investigations and identification of the dead. By early Monday morning, additional police manpower was flown in and Guyana Defence Force troops mounted clearing patrols in the jungle surrounding Jonestown with the primary task of searching for survivors of the tragedy. Simultaneous with this operation, an air reconnaissance was done by helicopter around Jonestown. Meanwhile, on the ground, the Jonestown area, Guyanese personnel with the assistance of two survivors and the police were able to identify and tag 183 bodies.

By Tuesday morning, after earlier discussions with the American Ambassador and senior Government officials, areas of co-operation and collaboration were agreed on. Later that day the major Task Force arrived at Timehri. It had earlier been agreed that the bodies be returned to the United States of America primarily to avoid the obvious logistic problem of relatives having to travel all the way to Guyana and possibly to a remote part of the country to recover the bodies,

and also to permit the American investigative forces to make positive identification of the victims where necessary. We have so far received optimum co-operation and assistance from the United States Government and officials, as well as other personnel, despatched to assist in this massive operation of removing cadavers, searching for survivors and seeking to find answers to the very many problems posed as a result of the Jonestown disaster.

On the very Saturday, and the assumption is that there is some connection with the incident in the North West, a mother, Sharon Amos, as assistant to Jim Jones, and her three children were found dead in the People's Temple headquarters at 41 Dennis Street, Campbellville. At this moment investigations have reached a point where charges of murder are likely to be made. Simultaneously, the intensive search for survivors is continuing and in this we have been receiving valuable assistance from the United States authority.

Our late Honorary Consul, who had lived and worked in Los Angeles, had recommended that the Guyana Government give consideration to an application for the People's Temple to establish a community in some part of the hinterland where the main activity could be land development. This religious group had an establishment in California, and was anxious to establish a branch in this country. They had a history of community work and agricultural involvement. They had applied for a lease of 25,000 acres but after the area had been surveyed, a lease of 3,000 acres was eventually granted to accommodate a project expected to involve at least 500 people. This was consistent with Guyana's policy of hinterland development and our attempts to encourage individuals and groups to establish themselves as farmers in the hinterland area. Grants of land have always in quantum related to the location of the land and the purpose for which it would be used.

The People's Temple began to work in 1974 and their attitudes enabled them to take advantage of the agricultural potential of the area. They grew a variety of crops and engaged in livestock rearing. Inevitably the tragic events of these last few days have given rise to speculation and questions. Wild rumours have been circulated, some within Guyana and some

24.11.78

National Assembly

2.40 -2.50 p.m.

printed as fact by certain sections of the overseas Press. But there are some issues with which we must deal now. We can state with certainty that the leader of the group, Jim Jones, is dead. Not only have our Army officials, experts and former residents of Jonestown identified Jim Jones among the dead, but United States authorities officially confirmed today that they have made a similar identification. How many people were at Jonestown at the time of these tragic events? There have been contradictory reports about the exact number and investigations are still proceeding to get the final figure.

It must be remembered that Guyana is a free country where people are free to enter and leave, of course, in accordance with our regulations. More than that, all persons legitimately in Guyana are free to move from one place to another within our country without control, and this, of course, results in there being at any one time a state of flux as regards settlement of people. But based upon our records, there should be 915 members of the People's Temple in Guyana.

There have been some questions concerning the security of the area. We can state positively that the authorities have been aware of the significance of the security of the area and have been exercising supervision. With regard to the possession of guns and ammunition by persons at Jonestown, our records show that four (4) licences were granted after applications had been made and in respect of which proper checking had taken place.

2.50 p.m.

Our present information discloses that there has been a serious breach with regard to the possession of fire-arms but prior to this event there was no indication that such a breach had occurred. In any case, the culprits may now be beyond our punishment.

Cde. Speaker, the Government recognises the unprecedented magnitude of this tragedy and will continue to do everything possible to carry out its obvious responsibility. A diligent and intensive search for survivors is being maintained. The Police are pursuing investigations and are

likely to institute other charges in the very near future regarding breaches of the law. The future of Jonestown is receiving the active attention of the Government.

I wish in conclusion, Cde. Speaker, to reiterate our deepest and heartfelt sympathy to all who are bereaved. We mourn with them in this hour of grief.

**REQUEST FOR LEAVE TO MOVE THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY ON
DEFINITE MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

Incidents concerning the People's Temple of the Disciples of Christ

Cde. J. Jagan: Mr. Speaker, I hereby make a request for leave to move the Adjournment of the National Assembly on a definite matter of urgent public importance. If ever there was a matter requiring full airing, this is it. If this matter does not qualify under the rules of the House, I would like to know what does. I refer to the horrifying events of November 18th when a leading Congressman, three ace American newsmen, and over 775 members of the People's Temple were murdered in the North West District...

The Presiding Member: Cde. Acting Leader of the Opposition, I would like you to be bried on the point.

Cde. J. Jagan: I will be brief, sir. I would like to draw to your attention, Cde. Speaker, the gravity of this situation made more grave at this very moment when we heard the shocking news of the rise in the number of deaths. I must confess to be so shaken at this moment that it is not so easy to speak. But at this meeting of Parliament today it would be a neglect of our duty to the people of this country if we did not make a strong effort to air this matter which involve not only the nation but as we know, it is of international significance. The very security of our nation has been threatened by the monstrous events of Saturday last and if this House is to have any dignity or any genuine significance to the Guyanese community then it must cease being a

meeting place for mere formal ratifications of the Government's particular business of the moment, and it must become a body that can look into all aspects of life in this country so vital to the welfare of our inhabitants.

The Presiding Member: Acting Leader of the Opposition, I am advised that after a Statement, it is not the procedure for a member to have a point raised. I have allowed you a brief moment to raise your point and...

Cde. J. Jagan: Cde. Speaker, there is no such rule to prevent someone from raising a matter of urgent public importance.

Cde. Ramsaroop: Cde. Speaker, may I state a point of order. In our Standing Orders governing the matter raised by the Acting Leader of the Opposition, it is clear under Standing Order 11 (2) that at this stage, not later, the person seeking to ask for the suspension of this Standing Order must merely give an indication which is by way of a notification of the matter to be raised. This is not the time when the matter is to be debated and when particulars of the matter are to be elaborately gone into. This is clearly a breach of the Standing Order that exists and which governs this matter.

Cde. J. Jagan: Cde. Speaker, I have not yet given a full indication of what I want to speak about. I would like to point out that the urgency of this request is to have a full airing of the Jonestown massacre, a tragedy, which must be examined by this body. We have heard a Statement but we must have a discussion. There are many matters being covered up. We must know what is underneath this monstrous episode of November 18th. All of us here and the whole country want to know what is being hidden. Is there anything to do with the Mafia...

The Presiding Member: As far as I am aware, there is no covering up. A Statement with regards to the incident has been presented and as I said, you have to be brief on the point.

The Minister of Economic Development and Co-operatives (Cde. Hoyte): May I rise to a point of order, Ce. Speaker. I think the Cde. Leader of the House has pointed you very clearly to a Rule, Standing Order 11, which sets out quite clearly and unambiguously the nature of the permission which the Chair can grant to a member seeking to have a matter raised under the provisions of the Order. The most the member can do is to indicate the nature, the subject matter of the issue she would like to speak about without any elaboration, without attempting to debate the matter, without attempting to amplify. But, what the member is seeking to do is to debate, is really to amplify, and I submit that she is not entitled to do that. Furthermore, before I take my seat, it is the tradition in this honourable House that members should stick to facts and it is quite wrong for the member to claim that 775 people have been murdered. There is absolutely no evidence to that effect, and of course, it is monstrous for her to allege that there is any effort to cover up.

Cde. J. Jagan: Cde. Speaker, I wish to positively move that this House allows a debate today on this subject which, I maintain, is of the utmost urgent importance to every single person in this country and that there must be more facts than the Ministers has given. He has not given us sufficient information for us to understand fully...

The Presiding Member: Cde. Acting Leader of the Opposition, I think you are aware that there is a Motion before the House which is on the Order Paper and you will be allowed a proper opportunity when the time comes. At this present time...

Cde. J. Jagan: May I say that the matter is not on the Order Paper, only Notices have been given and you will recall that the Opposition has a number of motions that have been on the Notice Paper for years. Are we to wait until next year to debate a matter of this importance? And I also wish to point out that the text of my Motion to this House is not as exact in nature as that which I wish to put forward here today. That asks a specific question of the...

The Presiding Member: Well, I would not permit any further discussion of this but I would give a Ruling. Comrades, a matter to be discussed on a Motion for the Adjournment of the

24.11.78

National Assembly

3 – 3.10 p.m.

Assembly must be one of such importance that will cause all other business of the Assembly to be suspended so that the particular matter could be discussed. Such a matter must be definite, urgent and of public importance and must satisfy the conditions attached to these requirements.

As it is the Speaker who has in the first place to be satisfied that the matter qualifies as one to be raised on a Motion for the Adjournment of the Assembly, a member who wishes to so move the adjournment must submit to the Speaker before the commencement of the Sitting, a written notification of the matter which he wishes to discuss. This gives the Speaker time to consider the matter. The matter now raised by Cde. Janet Jagan was addressed to the Speaker but in his absence it was brought to my attention only a few minutes ago, after I was elected to preside. I must advise that a substantive Motion on the same matter was submitted by the Member Cde. Janet Jagan. That Motion was approved by the Speaker and has today been put on the Notice Paper. Copies of Notice Paper No. 180 have been circulated to Members.

From the rules governing the restriction on Motion for the Adjournment as set out in May's Parliamentary practice which, along with our Standing Order, governs the proceedings of this Assembly, I have observed that:

“Members are precluded under the rule of anticipation from discussing on an adjournment motion a notice of motion or an Order of the day which already stands upon the notice pater or order book.”

Cde. J. Jagan: Am I to understand that you are saying that this is not a matter of the utmost public importance? When will the Motion be heard, I submitted a letter today.

The Presiding Member: Cde. Leader of the Opposition, Acting, we have ruled on the matter and we will proceed with the other matters before the House.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS – FIRST READING

The following Bills were introduced and read the First time:

(1) Labour (Amendment) Bill 1978 – Bill No. 23/1978

(2) Wage Councils (Amendment) Bill 1978 – Bill No. 24/1978

[*The Minister of Health, Housing and Labour*]

PUBLIC BUSINESS**MOTION****SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 46**

“Be it resolved that paragraphs (2) and (3) of Standing Order No. 46 be suspended to enable the Assembly to proceed at its Sitting on Friday, 24th November, 1978, with the second reading and the remaining stages of the following Bills:-

(i) Labour (Amendment) Bill 1978
(Bill No. 23/1978)

(ii) Wages Councils (Amendment) Bill 1978
(Bill No. 24/1978)

Cde. Ramsaroop: Cde. Speaker, the Government, as is well known in this House spurns any opportunity to depart from the Standing Orders and practices that govern the business of this House, and on many occasions in the past I have expressed that view. The matter of the suspension of the Standing Orders is not a matter we treat in a cavalier manner, with levity.

I signified by way of a Motion dated 21st November, 1978, my intention to seek the suspension of paragraphs (2) and (3) of Standing Order No. 46 to enable the Assembly to

proceed at the Sitting on Friday, 24th November, 1978, that is today, with the Second Reading and the remaining stages of the following Bills: The Labour (Amendment) Bill 1978 – Bill No. 23/1978 and the Wages Councils (Amendment) Bill 1978 – Bill No. 24/1978. In fairness to this House, I think something ought to be said in extenuation of the action which the Government has taken in this matter.

First, the measure itself is a relatively – indeed I am tempted to say pre-eminently – simple measure. The crux of it is contained in one Clause really with respect to both measures. It is not one of those convoluted technical parliamentary matters that require deep thought and active consideration and in view therefore of its relatively simple technical nature, I think we in this House can wink the eye, as it were, with respect to the rigid implementation of these Orders. If I may plead, too, in mitigation another reason for asking for the suspension, it is to my mind a measure which will receive national acclamation. There is no one in this country who will wish to delay the most urgent implementation of this matter in view of the nature of it. It is a matter that affects the welfare and well-being of thousands of workers in a particular industry although it clothes the Minister to exercise powers beyond the timber industry. Therefore, it is an eminently salutary matter that will augur well for the promotion of workers' interests in Guyana.

With those reasons, therefore, may I commend this Motion in my name for the relevant suspension to enable these measures to be taken through their remaining Stages at today's Sitting.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, in opposing the Motion for the suspension of the Standing Order, I think it is vitally necessary on this occasion to draw the attention of the House to the relevant Standing Order so that we can see what are the requirements before a Bill could reach its second Stage for debate. Standing Order No. 46 states:

“(1) Subject to this Standing Order, at the conclusion of the proceedings on any stage of a Bill, the Member in charge of the Bill may either name a day to be appointed for the next stage of the Bill or move that the next stage be taken forthwith.

- (2) An interval of not less than three clear days must elapse between the first and second reading of a Bill, unless the Assembly on motion made and question put, agree to proceed with the Bill at an earlier date, or forthwith.
- (3) No Bill shall be read a second time before the expiration of seven clear days from the date of its publication in the Gazette and until it has been printed and circulated to Members.”

What is the present position? These Bills, No. 23/1978 and No. 24/1978 were only published in the Gazette and even if these Bills were circulated after publication on the 22nd November, these Bills have not reached the hands of the public. Members of Parliament were presented with these Bills on Wednesday afternoon. It would mean that the first breach this afternoon is that there has been late publication of the Bills and hence two days have elapsed instead of seven. _____

3.10 p.m.

Even if the Bill was introduced today as it was introduced, three days must elapse from today before this Bill can be debated.

Standing Orders are made to be honoured and observed. If Standing Orders are to be suspended, it must be done sparingly and the Government must be able to present a strong case to show that due to unforeseen circumstances it was not able to comply with the Standing Orders. In fact, the frequency with which the Standing Orders are suspended in this House makes a mockery of the Parliamentary system and further reduces this Parliament to the farce it has been for some time. But the Government, by these actions, is compounding that idea.

Indeed, Cde. Speaker, one must be satisfied that the people concerned, the trade union movement and individual trade union organisations which will be affected by this Bill, are consulted and that they had an opportunity to have the Bill discussed with their members.

Members of the Opposition must be provided with sufficient time to convene their Parliamentary group and to have a discussion with those who constitute the Parliamentary Committee. We have got members in the Essequibo and one member on the Corentyne. It was impossible to have these members down in time. One asks the question whether those members up to this moment are in possession of the Order Paper or the Bill, bearing in mind that the member from the Corentyne is not here.

How can we then sit idly by without strongly voicing our opposition to the frequency of the suspension of the Standing Orders and the fact that Government does not adduce any convincing facts to persuade the Opposition to agree to the suspension. What is more, Cde. Speaker, is that there are Motions and Questions for members of the Opposition which have qualified under the Rules to be put on the Order Paper, thirty days in one case, fourteen days in another case and we have got Motions and Questions date back to 1976 and 1977 and up to today these Motions are ...

Cde. Ramsaroop: Cde. Speaker, on a point of order, certainly the Cde. Shadow Whip was going along very well all the time but his latter remarks are completely extraneous to the determination of the Motion before this House. You are not concerned, Cde. Speaker, with the extant Motions and Questions before the House, whether they are to be discussed now or whether a debate should be initiated for their discussion and the propriety or impropriety of those matters. I, therefore, ask that those remarks be expunged from the records of this House as being totally irrelevant.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: I am surprised that the Cde. Leader of the House, who is a lawyer, has asked you to say that you are not concerned with an act of impropriety. That is unheard of in any part of the world and I will show you the relevance of the argument. This is a Motion and my argument to oppose the Motion is that Motions and Questions that have qualified and have been lying in the Parliament Office, for well over two years have not found their way to

the Order Paper, but a Bill purporting to have been published on Wednesday evening has found itself on the Order Paper within forty-eight hours. If that point is not relevant, what is relevant, I ask the Cde. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

I would strongly argue that any person who occupies the high seat of speakership, whether he is capable of so occupying it, or whether he does not have a clue to what is required of the Chair, must of necessity show some sense of appreciation for impropriety. This one had undoubtedly breached all reasonableness.

Cde. Speaker, we have got matters of greater importance that ought to be debated by this House and those matters are not brought. People have been murdered, people have committed suicide. We have got a virtual scandal on our hands with respect to Jonestown and that matter is not...

The Presiding Member: Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, is that relevant to the matter before the House?

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: If you would give me a chance...

The Presiding Member: You have questioned the competence of the Speaker and I am saying that is an irrelevant point in arguing your matter. I ask you to confine yourself within the subject.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, you having posed a question, I ought as a Member of this House to extend the common courtesy of a reply. But it appears that you posed the question and you even sought to answer it. My view would have been that it is totally and implicitly relevant. The question of your opinion would not affect my judgement of the matter.

I proceed to make the point this afternoon that we have got more urgent issues, like the National Restaurant on Robb Street. That is a question of recognition but that Bill is not before the House. In fact, we feel that in matter of this type, full opportunity ought to be given to all concerned, the labour movement, the public, and Members of Parliament, and this opportunity the Government has been withholding from the Members of Parliament, and the public. In view of that I wish strongly to oppose the suspension of the Standing Orders and we will vote against the suspension. I want to ask the Government to desist in the future from this type of exercise.

The Minister has not come this afternoon to tell us what is preventing the Government from complying with the requirement of seven days. He has not said a word about that. He has not adduced one bit of evidence to say why the Rules could not be complied with. In fact, these rules are made and they ought to be observed. As I said in this country at the moment there is only one thing which we have more than suspensions of the Standing Orders. We have more blackouts. We have had quite a few today. Second in line would have been the increased suspensions of the Standing Orders of this Parliament. What is this Book? It has been reduced to nothing. Probably, the time has come for it to be burnt, consumed in the fire. We want it to be observed. The Speaker has got a special duty towards the House to ensure that it is observed.

In view of those points, we oppose the suspension and what we will do is call upon the Government this afternoon not to proceed with the Bill. I want to know if the T.U.C. was consulted. Circulate the Bill and let the T.U.C. see it, let it be aired and examined and then bring it back for debate. The possibility is that the Government might find support in many quarters when it is properly examined.

The Cde. Leader of the House said it is not a technical Bill. He is a lawyer, he knows that certain provisions of the law are being amended and in order to appreciate the gravity of these amendments, it is necessary for these amendments to be compared and examined in relation to the Principal Act. Only then we will be able to ascertain what the nature of the Amendment is.

Cde. Speaker, presiding, though you ought not to enter debate, you ought to have a grasp of what the nature of the Amendment is. I do not want to question you on that but I ask you to search yourself to see whether you have been able to apprehend what is the nature of these Amendments, what Act or Acts they relates to, and whether the Amendment could not have come in a more comprehensive way taking into account that there has been some complaint about the Wages Council being somewhat cumbersome... One would expect in good draughting and in good preparation of legislation that you would have had a comprehensive type of amendment that would have taken care of every single thing instead of coming with it piecemeal.

For anybody to make a really intelligent contribution to the debate, he must be *au fait* with the Wages Council Act and with all the relevant pieces of labour legislation that relate to the Amendment before the House and no person, no matter how naïve he wants to be, can tell this House that the period from Wednesday afternoon to now is adequate enough to look at all the legislation and to see whether Amendments ought to be proposed to the Government's Amendment before the House. We need time for all of that.

The Standing Order requires that Amendments ought to be handed to the Speaker a day before. Those Amendments have to be drafted and tabled. We were given this on Wednesday after 4 o'clock. There was the next day for the handing in of the amendment, then the next day for the debate. Cde. Speaker, when one portion of the Standing Orders is suspended and the remaining portion is in operation, one just cannot comply. We would have been defeating, as we so often defeat, the whole process of the parliamentary system and the Government must stand indicted for subverting the parliamentary system by various acts of omission and commission, restricting a proper and comprehensive debate and contributions on vital and significant matters before the House. I hope that this is the last time the Leader of the House will come with a Motion calling for the suspension of the Standing Orders in order to debate such Bills. So far as this is concerned, we are opposed to it.

If the Government comes with any matter which the Government can reasonably persuade the Opposition to agree that it was not possible, it was vital, it was necessary, that it had no indication before, hence it could not have complied, surely as a reasonable Opposition we would be willing to go along with the Government. On this occasion, we must oppose and strongly oppose the Motion for the suspension of the Standing Orders.

The Speaker: Cde. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House, do you wish to reply?

[The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House indicated in the negative.]

Question –

That paragraphs (2) and (3) of Standing Order No. 46 be suspended to enable the Assembly to proceed as its sitting on Friday, 24th November, 1978, with the second reading and the remaining stages of the following Bills:-

- (i) Labour (Amendment) Bill 1978 (Bill No, 23/1978)
- (ii) Wages Council (Amendment) Bill 1978 (Bill No. 24/1978)

Put

Cde. J. Jagan: Division!

Assembly divided: Ayes 25, Noes 9, as follows:

Ayes
Cde. Zaheeruddeen
Cde. Willems
Cde. Taylor

Noes
Cde. Sukhai
Cde. Nokta
Cde. Dalchand

24.11.78

National Assembly

3.20 – 3.30 p.m.

Cde. Sukui

Cde. Stoby

Cde. Rayman

Cde. Ramson

Cde. Hussain

Cde. Gill

Cde. Fowler

Cde. Carrington

Cde. Wright

Cde. Bynoe

Cde. Ambrose

Cde. Ackman

Cde. Durant

Cde. Ban Sluytman

Cde. Prashad

Cde. Thomas

Cde. Chowritmootoo

Cde. Duncan

Cde. Carmichael

Cde. Field-Ridley

Cde. Mingo

Cde. Ramsaroop – 25

Cde. Belgrave

Cde. Mohamed

Cde. Collymore

Cde. N.Persaud

Cde. Reepu Daman Persuad

Cde. J. Jagan – 9

Motion carried.

**BILLS – SECOND AND THIRD READING
LABOUR (AMENDMENT) BILL 1978**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Labour Act to confer additional powers on the Minister responsible for matters relating to labour in regulating the wages of employed persons.”

[The Minister of Health, Housing and Labour]

The Minister of Health, Housing and Labour (Cde. Green): Cde. Speaker, I beg to move that the Labour (Amendment) Bill 1978, Bill No. 23/1978 and the Wage Councils (Amendment) Bill, Bill No. 24/1978 be read a Second time.

Cde. Speaker, with your permission, I propose to deal simultaneously with these two amendments since they are intimately connected and in fact, when one looks at the objectives of the amendments, one will find that, had it not been for the way that the original legislation was drafted, the way in which the two Bills were implemented and the spirit of the legislation, they are in fact talking about a single opportunity to amend our existing laws. I am dealing this afternoon merely with the intention of these Bills and do not propose, Cde. Speaker, to allude to any set of circumstances which may or may not be immediately related to the proposals before this House.

At the moment, there are two existing bits of procedures, that deal with salaries and wages of workers. One is known as the Wages Council and the other has to do with an Advisory Committee under the Labour Act. The existing procedures, as noted by my good friend, Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, are long and drawn out and stipulate that the Minister must first appoint a tripartite advisory committee to investigate and to make recommendations. Then further, as the law stands at the moment, the Minister is required to publish a notice of intention to make the Order, giving not less than 30 days' notice for objections and where there are objections – and very often there can be objections in these particular circumstances – the Minister may then be required to hold a further enquiry on those objections before the Order is finally made.

24.11.78
3.30 p.m.

National Assembly

3.30 – 3.40 p.m.

That is so far as the Labour Act is concerned.

The procedures in the Wages Councils Act, Chapter 98:04 are even more time-consuming and laborious since, as presently written, the Minister would be required to first reconstitute whatever Wage Council is needed and refer to it. It could be the Timber Grants Wages Council or the Sawmill Workers Wages Council and for that matter any Wages Council existing at the particular time. These Wage Councils would then have had public notices of their proposals giving not less than sixty days' notice for written representations to be made to them following which the written representations to be made to them following which the written representations would have to be considered before proposals are submitted to the Minister responsible for labour who, after further examination, can then proceed to make the order.

I do not think it is any secret that since Government has – and I think we are unique in this respect in the Co-operative Republic of Guyana – as a result of discussions with the T.U.C. advanced the minimum wage for 1976 and for 1977, the Government minimum wage is now considered generally in the society as the wage that should be looked to in the non-governmental sectors. In fact, the difficulty that some sections of the private sector have is that the workers are demanding that they be paid no less than the minimum wage which exists in the public sector. The Government has presently advised, and after discussions with the T.U.C., that it is not at the moment disposed to make that minimum wage for the Government sector a national minimum wage. We are not disposed because we are cognizant of the fact that in many areas of activity where there are employer and employee relationships, because of existing circumstances in the country, perhaps because of the particular nature of the enterprise or business, it may not be feasible for the employers or the owners, as the case may be, to pay a national minimum wage which is exact to the present Government minimum wage for public sector employees.

However, there are a number of areas in the private sector where it is felt, after some examination, that they can pay this minimum wage. I said it was unique earlier because the

tradition established in the pre-P.N.C. days was that it was the private sector which sort of set the pace. It was always the private sector that maintained a higher wage level and minimum wage because of the philosophy, the beliefs of this Government, because of the relationship which existed between this Government and the working-class movement. The Government as an employer has ways and sets certain high levels in so far as the minimum wage is concerned. Of course, we hope in passing, and as we noted when the agreement was signed, that this was an act of faith and that the workers recognising this would join in the effort to increase production and productivity.

The proposal before this House, therefore, is not to dispense with those procedures which exist at the moment in the Labour Act and under the Wages Councils Act, but the idea is to allow the Minister responsible for Labour to act with expedition in fixing minimum wages under circumstances which he feels are vitally necessary. Accordingly, proposals were made to Cabinet, Cabinet accepted the recommendations to amend the Labour Act and the Wages Councils Act, recommendations which are now before the House. In brief, the recommendations care to permit the Minister responsible for labour, notwithstanding the existence of an advisory committee under section 7, notwithstanding the procedures as exist in the Wages Councils Act, to make wages regulations and orders, regulating the wages payable to workers engaged in any occupation without having recourse to appointing Wages Councils and, in addition, to stipulate the minimum wages payable to employed persons in any sector of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

We consider this Bill one of urgency because of circumstances which exist in some sectors of our economy at the moment. I wish to make it clear that if this Parliament passes the amendment proposed, that the Minister responsible for labour will not use the powers now sought without taking into consideration the legal factors which go into the determination of minimum wages and conditions for workers in any sector of our economy. I therefore propose these amendments to this House and feel that notwithstanding the objections to the suspension that my friends on the other side will find it convenient to support these measures proposed.

Question proposed

The Presiding Member: Mrs. Jagan.

Cde. J. Jagan: Mr. Speaker, I find it difficult to speak at this moment when I search my mind to try to find what is the urgency of this Bill. The Minister of Labour has said something that I cannot be convinced that this is a matter of such importance that you have to suspend all the various Rules of this House in order to rush it through, for what? For two insignificant Bills that if they were passed next month they would matter little? What would happen?

In this House we are called here to discuss some of the most trivial and ridiculous things when world-shattering events are taking place; we are to discuss these two Bills. It beasts me, my mind bothers me at the fact that we, big people not children, are called here, when in our midst, hundreds of children are lying dead and we cannot talk about it. I just do not understand it. One of the greatest tragedies that has happened in this country and all over the world. I cannot understand what it is. Is it cold-heartedness? Nothing is being discussed and here we are to discuss a Bill of the smallest relevance to what is happening in our community and anything of any importance is shoved off to wait for another year or so.

Who will give me a bet today? I will take a bet, I can go as high as \$20.00. Who will take a \$20.00 bet that the Motion put here on the Notice Paper to discuss the monstrous event of November 18, will not come up here in 1978. I will take anyone's bet here. I will bet the Speaker if he is will to put up the \$20.00.

I do not know what this House is for? Is this House for us to come here, rush through Bills inconsequential to the rights of the community, and what is important is not discussed and what is unimportant is discussed. What has the Minister of Labour rushed us here for? To talk about these Bills? Is he is in a hurry that he cannot wait. He wants to set the minimum wage for

domestic workers which his Government has been sitting on for more than ten years? Is this the urgency that brought them here today?

Will the Minister tell us if now at last he is given the right, we give him the law, he can do what he wants, so he is going to set out, I suppose, the minimum wage for domestic which his Government has refused to introduce for at least twelve to thirteen years. I do hope that the Minister of Labour will at least have that as the first charge he will take upon himself because I should imagine that would be most urgent.

Why has not the Minister consulted the T.U.C.? Or is he going to tell us he has consulted the T.U.C.? Are we going to have more lies in this House? I have been in this House when we were told ‘Oh yes, National Insurance Scheme, we consulted the T.U.C., the raising of the contributions for the Widows and Orphans’ Fund, oh yes, we have consulted the T.U.C. But the T.U.C. says they were not consulted. What goes on here? It is like the Minister read a statement an hour ago. He tells us what he wants us to hear but he will not tell us what he does not want us to hear. What is there under the blankets that you are hiding? What are you sweeping under the carpet? This is what Guyana and the whole world wants to know. Why are we covering up? Why are we lying in this House.

Will the Minister now tell us that he consulted, because I know that he did not consult the T.U.C. on those two Bills. Is he going to stand up and say, yes, he consulted? If he stands up and says we did not consult, I say why did you not consult? Why? The T.U.C. instituted long ago procedures that the Government should consult on all legislation relating to workers but this Government operates in its own particular way. It raises the National Insurance contributions without any form or consultation to fill the treasury that is empty from mis-spending, from corruption, from squander mania and, yet Members of this House who are supposed to be honourable have the audacity to tell us that they consulted. Did they consult on the increase in the contributions to the Widows’ & Orphans’ Fund. We are told in this House “yes” I do not know what is going on. I really do not know. I do not know what the rush is; I do not know what the

urgency of this is. I cannot understand why we are brought to this House. Why, a Government which is so poor is expending on electricity even. Because most of us cannot get electricity. What are we wasting time for when we have important matters? I do not understand it.

I say that this Bill whether we pass it today or whether we pass it next month, matter little. What matters is what has been happening with 775 people who are dead including hundreds of children and I know that women here, whether they are P.N.C. or not, feel like me. It is an unspeakable tragedy that has taken place. But we cannot talk about it. We cannot get proper answers. Will we know if the C.I.A., and the Mafia were involved in all the terrible things that have been happening there? You have the House of Israel marching all over the place supporting the P.N.C. Are we going to have another holocaust? I cannot understand it. I would say if the Minister wants his Bill, give it to him, he'll take it anyhow. Whether we vote yes or no it is the same thing. But I will just give him a cheap piece of advice. Let him for the first time in his life do something good. Let him now use his powers and let us see within this year the setting of a minimum wage for domestics. I would ask that.

Cde. Belgrave: Cde. Speaker, like my colleague, I am a bit concerned in relation to the haste with this particular pair of Bills before this House. I have a thought in mind that the intention of this Bill may be to keep in tune with the Ford recommendation for the timber industry, for a minimum wage etc. And what worries me on this whole issue is that the Minister to my mind had enough time, since the Ford Commission met and gave its findings, not only time for the workers in the timber industry but also for the quarry workers. There was enough time for the Minister to search his connections as to what he intended to do in relation to these particular areas where workers are not properly serviced and it is felt that these particular industries can afford to pay the minimum wage.

Like my colleague, I am here at short notice and had it not been for the Deputy Prime Minister's contribution, had it not been for the debate for the suspension of the Standing Orders on two occasions, we would have been finished with the exercise of these two Bills which drew

24.11.78

National Assembly

3.50 – 4 p.m.

(Cde. Belgrave continues)

us out so quickly to be in this House to discuss. I thought for a moment when I heard that Parliament was supposed to meet in this House today that we would have been discussing an important piece of legislation on which I, myself, and other members of the Labour Code Commission spent lots of hours and time discussing and trying to get through to ensure that this Bill would be in the hands of the Government expeditiously so that action could be taken against the barbaric attitude taken by a Chinese national in this country, re National Restaurant and its workers. I would have been prepared in any way I could to influence my colleagues despite the fact that we know that it is wrong to continue the attitude in Parliament concerning the suspending of the Standing Orders as had been done so many times by this Government. I would have tried to persuade my colleagues that this matter was of grave importance, very great importance, that we can possibly agree for the rushing through in all its stages of the Trade Union Recognition Bill which we have worked on so hard to get it into the hands of the Government so as to ensure that that act is stopped.

We are discussing a matter that could have been clearly dealt with next week. We would have convened here and discussed it and I am positive that this side of the Table would have seen to it because we understand some of its implications. We only hope that when the law is passed – we know that it will be passed – that the Minister will not use it discriminately; that the Minister will use his powers to ensure that even in the co-operatives which the Government gives blessings to, the law is maintained. Several co-operatives complain, among them the Goed Fortuin co-operative and other co-operatives, that people are being employed like slave labour and are unable to get a decent wage. I hope that the Minister will be using that power to extend to these very areas to make some people comfortable.

There is one thing of which I must warn the Minister and that is the contradiction that will exist. He knows and I know that there is a Labour Code that is now being drafted and in the Labour Code there are strong recommendations for the procedure to be respected and adhered to: The procedure of setting up the necessary advisory body for I could not see where the Minister

did not have the time at his disposal to set up the advisory body. Long before Wednesday, this Bill was printed. The Ford Commission reported since around last month. He could have set up that body long before, given the necessary instructions so that that particular part of the law could be respected and adhered to.

We are now giving the Minister wide powers. It is a wrong thing for us to assume that because some person or persons are aligned to us, are with us, that powers cannot be abused. Not because the Minister sits on the bench of the People's National Congress powers cannot be abused. I trust that these wide powers given to the Minister will be used – and I am hopeful that the Minister will give this undertaking – not discriminately but in the interest of the nation as a whole.

I urge the Minister to give some serious consideration and if possible, not now so that next week we can have before this Parliament the Bill concerning the trade union recognition because I know as a fact that the restaurant owner is attempting one way or the other to slip out. I do not know how he will do so because I understand that some action is to be brought against him to prevent him from leaving but his intention is to slip out of this country. He has already sold some of his acquired property and his intention is to slip out. We know how they can slip out because the Jonestown affair has given us now the key ad understanding that one can slip into Guyana and one can slip out as one likes. The Deputy Prime Minister himself said that it is a free country; there is no holding as long as you conform to the law. But, this is a Chinese national; he is not Guyanese ad the law seems only to be listed for the restriction of Guyanese. I trust that the Minister will not act with haste. We have our daughters, our mothers and our sisters in the streets for over 140 days struggling; struggling not to destroy the right of workers, not to destroy the trade union movement but struggling to develop in this country what is needed, and that is, a strong trade union movement to look into the interest of the workers.

If the interest of the workers is looked into and if there is democratisation of that particular organisation, the trade union movement, I am positive that fruitful results of what the

24.11.78

National Assembly

3.50 – 4 p.m.

Minister spoke of a little earlier – production and productivity – will be seen. But, because there is suspicion, because there is talk of subversion in the trade union movement from the top to the bottom, the workers themselves have a lackadaisical attitude at the moment. I am saying that this assists the trade union's movement's struggle and I ask the Minister not only to think in terms of having this Bill passed this afternoon – with which we do not have too much quarrel other than asking for safeguards and guarantees from the Minister that it will be used in the best interest of the nation, the people of this country, and there should be no discrimination when he applies this regulation – but to act with speed to ensure that that bit of legislation, the Trade Union Recognition Bill be brought speedily before this House so that we can pass it and ensure that the livelihood of many our Guyanese woman, sisters and mothers, is properly looked into in this land of Guyana.

Suspension of Standing Order No. 9(2)

The Presiding Member: Cde. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

Cde. Ramsaroop: Cde. Speaker, as we are likely to go beyond the 4 o'clock deadline, may I ask for the suspension of Standing Order 9(2) to complete the business of the Order Paper.

The Presiding Member: Is that agreed?

[Cde. Members indicated in the affirmative.]

The Presiding Member: Well, we will proceed. Cde. Minister of Health, Housing and Labour.

24.11.78
4 p.m.

National Assembly

4 – 4.10 p.m.

Cde. Green (replying): Cde. Speaker, there was not much said and therefore there is not much for me to reply to. I am not sure whether the Opposition is supporting the amendment. The hon. Member Janet Jagan says there was no consultation. I wish to observe, the situation building up within the T.U.C. is that whenever there are serious matters to be discussed, the P.P.P. members are never present. So I do not know how she can speak with such certainty. In fact, right now the leaders of the P.P.P. and the T.U.C. executive are out of the country and they very often are. Bangaree is away, Ram Karran is away. I do not know where they get their currency from, but they are always travelling. Jagan is also always away. They are not here to be consulted and the business of the State must go on and I get on with my business. So I am not sure what she means by that.

I would like to repeat the undertaking I gave, that the powers which this Bill seeks to give will be wisely and judiciously exercised in the interest of the working class people of this country.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clause 1 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2.

Cde. Green: Cde. Chairman, I just ask for a very minor amendment. I ask that the “(1)” appearing after 9A be deleted. It should be “9A”.

The Chairman: Comrades, I will treat this as a correction, please delete “(1)”.

Clause 2 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

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

WAGES COUNCILS (AMENDMENT) BILL 1978

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Wages Councils Act to confer additional powers on the Minister responsible for matters relating to labour in the making of wages regulation orders.

[The Minister of Health, Housing and Labour.]

Cde. Green: Cde. Speaker, I beg to move that the Wages Council (Amendment) Bill 1978 be now read a Second time. There is no point in my repeating what has already been said except to repeat that the previous Bill is intimately bound up with the present Bill. I propose that to save time we should proceed to the next Stage of the Bill.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

24.11.78

National Assembly

4.10 - 4.13 p.m.

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

ADJOURNMENT

RESOLVED: “That this Assembly do now adjourn until Wednesday 29th November, 1978 at 2 p.m.”

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

Adjourned accordingly at 4.13 p.m.