

**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**

171st Sitting

2 p.m.

Thursday, 7th December, 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 – on leave)

Deputy Prime Minister (1)

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

(Absent – on leave)

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 **(Absent – on leave)**

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

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

*Cde. F.E. Hope,
Minister of Finance **(Absent)**

* 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 **(Absent)**

Cde. V.R. Teekah,
Minister of Education,
Social Development and Culture **(Absent – on leave)**

*Cde. R.E. Jackson,
Minister of Foreign Affairs **(Absent)**

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

Ministers (2)

Cde. S.M. Field-Ridley,
Minister of Information and Culture **(Absent)**

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

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)

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

(Absent)

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

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

(Absent)

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

(Absent)

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

(Absent – on leave)

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
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

(Absent)

(Absent – on leave)

Members of the Opposition (16)

(i) People’s Progressive Party (14)

Leader of the Opposition (1)

Cde. C. Jagan
Leader of the Opposition

(Absent – on leave)

Deputy Speaker (1)

Cde. Ram Karran
Deputy Speaker

(Absent – on leave)

Other Members (12)

Cde. J. Jagan	(Absent)
Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, J.P., Opposition Chief Whip	
Cde. Narbada Persaud	
Cde. C. Collymore	(Absent)
Cde. S.F. Mohamed	(Absent)
Cde. I. Basir	
Cde. C.C. Belgrave	(Absent)
Cde. R. Ally	
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	

Officers

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

Acting Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly – A. Knight

PRAYERS
ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave to Members

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to the Cde. Prime Minister, the Cde. Deputy Prime Minister, Cde. Mingo, Teekah, Wright, and Willems for today.

REPORTS IN “MIRROR”

The Speaker: I also wish to take this opportunity of making a comment which I regard as very serious. In Sunday's *Mirror*, there appeared a report that Motions were submitted to the Speaker as well as a letter. I have not received any such. In addition to that, unless a Motion or a Question is on the Notice Paper, it is contempt of this Parliament for any publication to be made of it and the *Mirror* has been doing this constantly. In addition to that, there was inaccurate reporting in respect of what I said and what transpired in this Parliament. I propose, if this thing should happen once more, to exclude the *Mirror* from sitting in this Chamber and participating in these proceedings.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS ETC.

The following Papers were laid:

- (a) Demerara Harbour Bridge (Amendment) Regulation 1978 (No. 35), made under section 25 of the Roads Act, Chapter 51:01, on 24th November, 1978, and published in the Gazette on 2nd December, 1978.
- (b) Roads (Demerara Harbour Bridge) By-Laws 1978 (No. 4), made under section 24 of the Roads Act, Chapter 51:01, on 24th November, 1978, and published in the Gazette on 2nd December, 1978.

[The Minister of Works and Transport]

The Minister of Works and Transport indicated that there was a slight amendment to the

by-laws, which he proposed to bring up when the Motion was being debated.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTIONS

APPROVAL OF SMALL INDUSTRIES CORPORATION

(DISSOLUTION) ORDER 1978 (No. 122)

“Be it resolved that this National Assembly, in terms of section 63 (1) of the Public Corporation Act, Chapter 19:05, approve of the Small Industries Corporation (Dissolution) Order 1978 (No. 122), which was made on 20th November, 1978, and published in the Gazette on 21st November, 1978.”

[The Minister of Economic Development and Co-operatives on behalf of the Prime Minister]

The Minister of Economic Development and Co-operatives (Cde. Hoyte): Cde. Speaker, in February, 1974 the Small Industries Corporation was established under the Public Corporation Act. That Corporation took over the assets and liabilities of two corporations which had been dissolved contemporaneously with the establishment of the S.I.C., the Guyana Credit Corporation and the Guyana Development Corporation. In terms of the Order, the function of the Small Industries Corporation was two-fold, first, to promote generally small industries in Guyana and to all things consistent therewith; for example, to provide advisory services, to provide training services, and to engage in other promotional and developmental activities, and secondly, to act as a financial intermediary, that is, to provide the financing for small industries.

Since the establishment of the Corporation, the Corporation has deployed some \$3 million to small industries and manufacturing enterprises. The loans represented by this amount were made to a variety of enterprises such as enterprises engaged furniture-making, toy-making, in food-manufacturing and food preservation, garment manufacturing, the making of cosmetics, drugs, jewellery and so on. In addition, the Small Industries Corporation acted as the principal Government agency in administering funds which the Government was deploying for industrial

development which was the responsibility of the Central Government. For example, the Small Industries Corporation was the agency responsible for the Textile Mill and the Glass Factory, just to mention three of them.

However, it became apparent that the Corporation was not having the impact which the Government felt it should have had upon the industrial sector in which small manufacturers operated. Consequently, the Government commissioned two studies of the Small Industries Corporation. The first was a study undertaken by Dr. A. R. Sen who is the Industrial Extension Expert of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation and he submitted his report in May, 1977 which was entitled *Operational Assets of the Small Industries Corporation (Guyana) Inclusion Extension Services for Small Industries*. There was another study which was going on by experts from the Caribbean Development Bank. That study was submitted in August, 1977 and is entitled *A Report on the Small Industries Corporation (Guyana)*. Now, both of those studies pointed to a very serious structural and operational weaknesses in the Small Industries Corporation. Without descending to particulars, I would say that these weaknesses may be classified under three broad headings, first, poor management, secondly, unsound procedures both in evaluating and appraising of projects and in the lending of resources, and thirdly, an organisational problem or perhaps, a conceptual problem which arose out of the fact that the Small Industries Corporation was both a promotional organisation and a financial intermediary. But, the sum total of the reports was that the Small Industries Corporation as established, as organised, was ineffective and unviable.

Naturally, the framers of the two reports put forward a number of possible solutions to this problem, leaving it to the Government to decide what was the best solution in all the circumstances. Having studied the reports, Cde. Speaker, and having studied the structure and operations of the Small Industries Corporation, the Government came to the conclusion that the best course was to dissolve the Corporation. The rot was too deep-seated for any successful reorganisation based upon the established Corporation.

2.25 p.m.

Perhaps it would be unfair to leave this House with the impression that it was the workers, both management and non-management, who were responsible for the ineffectiveness of the Corporation. To some extent this is true, that a high degree of indiscipline and non-performance did help to put the Corporation in a position where it could not be restructured successfully, helped to make it as unviable as it did become. But that apart, I think that there was a deeper problem which resulted from the fact of the Corporation being both a promotional agency and a financial intermediary. Because it had this dual function, it did not fall properly within the group of financial agencies which are controlled by the Ministry of Finance, and because it was not exactly a commercial enterprise, although it fell notionally within the Guystac Group, it really did not fit in neatly into the organisations and enterprises which came under the Guystac umbrella, so, to some extent it was a hybrid. Being a hybrid, it was difficult to exercise the control which specialised Ministries were exercising over other agencies.

The fact is that the Corporation went from bad to worse in terms of its operational effectiveness. In the circumstances, therefore, the monitoring committee which has been established by the Government advised that this Corporation should be dissolved and this is in keeping with a general policy which are unviable. Unavailability in financial terms will be tolerated only in those corporations which are classified as providing social services and therefore entitled to a subsidy.

I would say that all workers, whether they are in the management category or the non-management category, have a vested interest in ensuring that the corporations in which they work are maintained as viable enterprises because if they are not maintained as viable enterprises the Government will not permit those corporations to be subsidised by the rest of the workers in the country.

This Order, Cde. Speaker, which the Parliament is being asked to approve by an affirmative vote, seeks to transfer the functions of the Small Industries Corporation, insofar as

those functions relate to financing of manufacturing industry, to the agricultural bank, that is, the Guyana Co-operative Agricultural Development Bank, and to transfer the promotional work, the work of appraising projects, evaluating projects, to the Ministry of Economic Development. Obviously, in this particular task the Ministry will be supported by the State Planning Secretariat. The assets and liabilities of the Corporation in terms of paragraph 4 of Order 121 of 1978 will be transferred to the Bank; and it is proposed that the Agricultural Development Bank to take account of the new functions which will devolve upon it in terms of financing small manufacturing and industrial activities.

In conclusion, I would like to say that this decision is an important one in that it gives a clear signal of the toughness with which Government will approach public corporations and public agencies which are expected to be viable. It also gives a clear signal that the minority committee which the Government has set up to oversee the economy will not flinch from recommending to the Cde. Prime Minister and the Cabinet that any given enterprise which is malfunctioning ought to be drastically dealt with. I think that this is important at the time when the strictest financial and management discipline needs to be observed if we are going not only to stabilise our economy, but to ensure that the economy advances and prospers. I would say, too, that it is important that there should be some organisation responsible for industrial development in this country.

The fact that the Small Industries Corporation has been dissolved does not necessarily mean that in time some new organisation might not be established to have responsibility for this particular activity. However, before any such organisation is established, the matter would have to be very carefully studied, evaluated, the best advice obtained and the organisation established upon a basis which is both operationally and financially sound. I say this because the S.I.C. found itself in a difficult position which is this, if it were to have the impact which one expected it to have, it would have had to have resources not only from the Government or drawn from internal resources, but it would have had to attract external resources. I said, its structure was such that none of the multilateral financial agencies was prepared, on the basis of its existing

structure, to make any loans or advance any money to it. So, in all the circumstances, I think that this decision is a right one. It is a sound decision and, therefore, I commend for the approval of the House the Motion standing in the name of Cde. Prime Minister.

Motion proposed.

Cde. M. Persaud: Cde. Speaker, we are asked this afternoon to approve the Small Industries Corporation (Dissolution) Order 1978. The Minister of Economic Development in his presentation a little while ago outlined a number of weaknesses as far as the functioning of the S.I.C. was concerned. He ended up by saying that the decision is a right one. We on this side of the House have no quarrel with that. I think we agree that the decision is a right one, but we cannot allow this opportunity to go by without making some observation and some comments on the Motion.

2.35 p.m.

This Order came into force on the 1st January, 1974, and it is clearly stated here that the function of the Small Industries Corporation was to undertake, stimulate and facilitate the establishment of small industries for the purpose of promoting the economic development of Guyana. We would recall, as the Minister pointed out, that we had first the Guyana Development Corporation and it was from the dissolution of the Guyana Development Corporation and the Guyana Credit Corporation the Small Industries Corporation emerged.

Now I wish to refer the Minister to a statement made by him in this very House on the 9th March, 1978 reported in the Chronicle of the 10th March, 1978 and I quote:

“Speaking in Parliament yesterday, he said that the Corporation has done reasonably good work since it was set up.”

This is March. We are told by the Minister that two studies were carried out, the first one by the experts was handed in in May of 1977, the second one by the C.D.B. was handed in in August of

1977, and all these short-comings and weaknesses, I am to understand, were incorporated in those two reports, May and August 1977 respectively. But in March of this year, the Minister informed this very House that the Corporation had done reasonably good work since it was set up.

In this very article, in that very contribution by the Minister to those two reports:

“The Corporation was given a preliminary study by the Caribbean Development Bank which was followed up by a more intensive review by an Indian expert whose services were provided by the United Nations Industrial Development organisation.

‘Following on the two reports, the structure of the Corporation is being reviewed and some changes are to be made; the Minister said. He added that the changes will be intended to make the Corporation play its role of promoting industries more effectively.’”

Now, I am to understand this afternoon, that the decision to dissolve the Small Industries Corporation arose out of the reports of these two organisations. But it was after these reports were presented that the Minister made the statement saying that they were going to restructure. Of course, in his talk he said it was extremely difficult to restructure the existing Corporation because of all of the short-comings.

We have time and again been criticising this Government on its policies for industrial development. We charged that enough emphasis was not placed on the development of industries. We have charged that priority was not given to the development of industries in this country. About two years ago, however, the Government did come around to accept that point and declared its intention of placing more emphasis and giving priority to the development of agriculture and industry in Guyana. Cde. Speaker, it is now two years after when we are told that it was intended to promote small industries. Perhaps that was intended but as we all know it later took on work of a bigger proportion. For example, it embarked on large national projects like the construction of the Senate textile mill, it embarked on the construction of the glass factory, the

leather factory and also the bicycle factory. May I use this opportunity to enquire from the hon. Minister as to what the present position is as regards the leather tannery. Now, perhaps the Minister might be in a position to inform us what is the position in relation to the bicycle factory and what is the position in relation to the shoe factory. According to the 1978 Budget Speech, these were all to be completed by the end of 1978, this month. They were all undertaken by the Small Industries Corporation and obviously the Government has its task when presenting a Budget to have clear-cut policies, to know its deadline, to know its limitations, economic and otherwise, before it makes these pronouncements. We have been told, for example, by the Cde. Minister that by the middle of 1978, we would be having our first yard of cotton from the Sanata textile mill. Now this is going on and on.

Having had these objectives in mind, having had these reports from these two organisations, one would have concluded that these objectives, these targets cannot be reached. But still despite these reports in May and August, the Minister of Finance comes here and includes in his Budget Speech that work will be completed on all of those projects by the end of 1978. Now is the end of 1978, or am I to understand that will be finished in the next 24 days. No! Impossible!

Now, it is clear here that while the Government has accepted and recognised the importance of accelerating the process of industrial development, what has been really going on is pure talking, blowing hot air. No real effort has been made and perhaps I may be precipitating. I personally do not agree that transferring the functions of the S.I.C. to the Agri Bank will solve the problem. That is my humble opinion. Now, where is the development? Any country in the world having moved away from colonialism must embark on a very extensive programme, of course, with its limitations, of industrialisation. We must. Where are we today after 12 years of Independence? We have been told about a cement factory; we have been told about a paper recycling plant. Money has been voted for both of these projects since 1976. In the Budget Speech it is clearly stated: “X” million dollars for this and for that.

If we are going to vote money to carry out studies, is that not really embarking on it? What happened? Are we going to vote millions of dollars and then abandon the projects. How serious is the Government when I understand the Minister to say that since the establishment of the Small Industries Corporation a sum of \$3 million was given out? From my research, I see that \$1.7 million was voted in 1976 and \$3.5 million in 1977 for the Small Industries Corporation. I did not see any for 1978. Perhaps if it is a question of interpretation the Minister would have the opportunity to correct me. Now the Minister informs us about these shortcomings. The Corporation come under a Minister and obviously all these shortcomings that are there, all these weaknesses referred to by the Minister, the blame for those must be placed on the Government. The Government cannot escape the blame.

The Minister spoke about poor planning, poor management. Poor management at the corporation level reflects on poor management at the Central Government level and the Government must be responsible for that. Unsound procedures. Who is responsible for that? If the Corporation fails, is it not the responsibility of the Government? Surely it is the responsibility of the Government: A Minister here is responsible for corporations, so it is a clear case. But, after we had these reports, did we examine what was going on at the Small Industries Corporation? If so, where is that report? We are dissolving that corporation based on that report but, where is the report? We are told about poor management, unsound procedures, organisational problems. Let the report be made open and then we shall see what has really taken place.

Heavy spending. What about the bureaucracy that exists there? No financial control. Can the Minister deny that at 31.12.76, the S.I.C. purchased \$47,000 worth of goods from Guyana Stores and there is a big query about it? Can he that for the year 1977, \$119,000 worth of goods was taken from Guyana Stores and again there is a big problem about it? Why are these things not investigated? Why are we not told about these things? As I said earlier, it is time that this Corporation either be dissolved or re-structured and put on its proper footing and some of the people, who are involved in high corruption against this nation, weeded out.

The Chronicle of Saturday, October 14, 1978, in an article headlined “GUYCONSTRUCT TAKES OVER TEXTILE MILL WORKS” states:

“A recent examination of the project by the Director of Audit revealed a number of irregularities in the operations.”

What irregularities? Are we not to be told what the irregularities are and if those irregularities were proven, what action was taken against those responsible for these irregularities with Government funds, with taxpayers’ funds? No! All we were told is that a recent examination of the project of the Director of Audit revealed a number of irregularities in the operations. I ask again, what are these irregularities? Let the nation know about them. It is the taxpayers’ money. Are these irregularities that grave that they warrant dissolution of the Corporation? The reports came since last year and nothing was done. Now, there is a big scandal at the Sanata Textile Mill and the Government is running to dissolve the Corporation. Now, I think we should have some more information on this matter.

I would like the Minister to state what is the position in relation to the investment by the S.I.C. at Stanette Electro Chemical, whether an investigation took place in relation to that investment. I would also like the Minister to say why \$165,706 was invested in the Daily Chronicle Limited by the S.I.C. Is that keeping with the promotion of small industries? Can the Minister also tell this House why \$83,054.06 was invested in Guyana Gajraj Ltd? We have to know. It is clearly defined here what the S.I.C. was supposed to do. This, what it has done, has it done it in keeping with what it was supposed to do?

Joint ventures. Can we be told why \$66,286.67 went to the joint venture with Guyana Transport Services? Can we also be told why \$59,334.69 went for a new printer? What printery? Where is this printery? We do not know about it. Is it the National Service Printery? That has been the only new one. We ought to have that information. This is an official document from the Small Industries Corporation. Cde. Speaker, it is far more than what we have been told.

Now, I recall that there was an Indian national who was recruited from Uganda on a contract to work with the S.I.C. I do not recall whether it was earlier this year or last year but he was deported from this country. He was deported because he spoke out against corruption and the high-handed manner in dealings at the S.I.C. Of course, he had to go and not only was he dismissed and had his contract terminated but he was deported from this country. I think he is presently employed and living in Trinidad. Why did we not then start to investigate if we are so involved and so interested in the promotion of industrial development? When things like these happen, are we going to sit idly by and wait for monitoring committees to come and say “well, okay, we are monitoring now and we have seen so, so, so”? There was enough proof all along. Cde. Speaker, with all these irregularities, with all the shortcomings, with all the weaknesses as pointed out by the Minister in his presentation this afternoon, can we be told whether an audit has taken place now that the corporation has been dissolved, to find the rascals, or are they going to transfer that also to a new body? I think that there is so much inside of the dissolution of this corporation that a public enquiry ought to be held into this affair.

What about the murder on high seas? What about that? Cde. Speaker, it is a shameful episode, very shameful. It is because of all this cover up and all the nasty things that have been going on that there is this undue haste now to dissolve the corporation, but it is being exposed. It is going to come out.

Now, I would have liked the Minister to look into the files and the accounts and so forth and check. The General Manager is also on appointment in another country. He has gone. We are dissolving now but he has already been employed. He was allowed to go. Nasty things like these are going on, serious things like these are going on but there was no investigation. I think all the mistakes the Government inherited when it had the G.D.C had been transferred to the S.I.C. and they got worse. I think that somebody in the Government department should have an investigation and perhaps write the history of the G.D.C. and also the S.I.C. As I said, I do not see it being solved by this new thing that the Government is setting up and the time will come and those of us who are around will see in a very short time that they are going to move again:

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from the G.D.C. to S.I.C. to Agri Bank and it will go again. If the Government is seriously interested in industrial development, it must be removed again. The Government has to be more serious than that.

2.55 p.m.

What about the great leather scandal when a number of people – I would not like to call their names here, Cde. Speaker – went on a trip abroad. There was an Indian who went with them. I think from the name he is an Indian national. I would like the Minister to tell us the things that happened while they were abroad. I mentioned what took place on the high seas when ammunition bought with S.I.C.'s money was used to kill somebody.

Cde. Speaker, as a citizen I feel very strongly about the way we are treated, the way the people of this country are being treated by this Government which claims to be working class. Things like this are going on, millions of dollars are going down the drain and there is a cover-up like at Jonestown. I am sorry, I understand that matter should not be raised. A cover-up has taken place and it is only clear from the Minister's own words that these reports were presented since last year, and these reports pointed out all these short-comings yet nothing was done about it. The Minister came in March and told us about this. The Finance Minister came and said all these projects will be completed. Where are they? There has been a clear breakdown.

It is not a case whereby financial organisations would not lend the agency money because of the mess it was in, but it also has to do with the Government itself. If the Government puts Mr. "X" to run the Corporation and Mr. "X" is a scamp, it would be the Government's fault. The lending agency would say it is not lending the Government. Here is where the international reputation goes right down the drain and this is why the Government must be more serious in handling and managing the financial affairs of the country. It is a clear indication and a clear confirmation of what we have been talking about, this new elite that has developed, and it is this

new elite that is taking this country down financially. Every man who is put into a corporation becomes a big one and he wants to live it up like the Joneses – not Jim Jones.

As I said, I am very much hurt to know that all these rascalities are going on. What I have here came into my possession long before this Order was put out but the opportunity has now presented itself for me to do something about it. As I said, Government is right to move but I do not think that the move is making will solve the problem. Apart from that, I think an enquiry should be held into that Corporation before it is too late.

The Speaker: Cde. Minister, do you wish to reply?

Cde. Hoyte (replying): Yes, sir. I am reminded of a well known passage from Shakespeare:

“It is a tale told by an...

Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

The member who spoke for the P.P.P. Opposition found himself with a fundamental difficulty, which is a failure to understand the Estimates passed annually by this House, a failure to understand the nature of the organisation and function of the Small Industries Corporation and a failure to understand the provisions of the Small Industries Corporation (Dissolution) Order 1978, and a further failure to understand the Guyana Agricultural Co-operative Development Bank (Amendment) Order 1978. Perhaps, I should spend some little time trying to explain to him things which I thought I had said quite clearly in my initial presentation but which he does not seem to understand.

In the first place, it is incorrect to say that the functions of the Small Industries Corporation are being transferred to the Agri Bank. I made it quite clear that it was the function as financial intermediary which is being transferred to a financial institution which has

developed the required business discipline and which comes under the administration of the Ministry of Finance. I pointed out that this was the difficulty with the S.I.C., that being a financial intermediary it still did not fall under the discipline, so to speak, of the Ministry of Finance.

Secondly, the Cde. Member averred with conviction that the S.I.C. had undertaken large projects and he cited the glass factory and the textile mill. Again, I had anticipated this point and explained that the S.I.C. did not undertake these projects. These are Central Government projects, the funds for which the Cde. Member concurred in voting and approving in this honourable House from year to year. These funds are voted under the Ministry of Economic Development in the Capital Estimates. The Small Industries Corporation was a conduit pipe. Being a legal entity it was the agency through which funds were channelled for the disbursements of expenses related to those projects and also for the conclusion of contracts which had to be made. Being a legal entity it was easy for the Corporation to make contracts with a host of people, with consultants and with suppliers of goods and services. If the Cde. Member does not understand that basic and simple position, well then all the criticisms he has made really do not make any sense and cannot stand.

I heard him referring to corruption and such things. I heard him say that S.I.C.'s money was spent to buy ammunition to kill somebody. He knows killing, his Party indulges in that sort of thing. But I am saying that if he has that kind of information he must publish it and give it to the people whose responsibility it is to investigate crime.

I heard him refer to some Report of the Director of Audit, now called the Auditor-General, in which he said there has been allegation of corruption and irregularity. But as usual, these wild and irresponsible statements are made within the protection of the walls of this House. He has not referred to the Report, he has not produced it so that we can know what he is talking about. I will say this, that if the Member has this kind of information showing criminal activity on the part of anybody, he has a duty as a citizen not to keep it in his pocket or locked up in his

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desk, but to pass it on to the proper authorities so that proper investigation and necessary action could be taken. He ought not to come here and make wild statements.

The hon. Member seems to find, too, some discrepancy between what I said today and the statement I made in this House in March this year in the course of the general debate on the Budget, that the S.I.C. had performed reasonably good work. I reiterate that here. I said here today that within the context of the problems it had, it did reasonably good work, but it did not have the kind of impact we expected it to have, and it did not have that impact for all the reasons I have given. I hope I was quite fair when I said that all the blame for the unavailability and for the difficulties which the Corporation encountered cannot be properly laid against the people who managed the Corporation.

3.05 p.m.

Cde. Speaker, the member alleged that I said that the Corporation lent about \$3 million. The member added up monies voted by this House and I think he came to \$4 million. He says, "How is it we gave them \$4 million and they lent \$3 million?" And the member who according to the *Mirror* is alleged to be a G.D.R. – trained economist, does not understand that an entity like the S.I.C. has operating expenses. Some of the money must go to pay staff, some of the money must go to pay for the services supplied to the Corporation. It must have overheads. Therefore, for the member to raise a niggling point like that, in an effort to show that there is some discrepancy in what I am saying or what the facts are, is really a bit disappointing, to say the least. I do not propose to follow the member in all the irrelevant things which he talked about such as what is the state of this project and that project and the other project. If he wants to table a substantive question I will answer him. To comment upon ridiculous statement, that this Government has not been pursuing a policy of industrial development, would really be to waste breath.

Anybody who takes the time even to read the newspaper, much less to go around this country, would know about the massive investment in industry by this Government represented by the glass factory, represented by the textile mill, represented by the Bel Lu clay brick factory, represented by the Upper Demerara forestry complex to mention the major ones that are reported every day in the newspapers. These are developments which you can see. These are projects that are on-going. You can see the work that is going on. So I brush that one aside.

Cde. Speaker, as I said, the decision as to what to do about the S.I.C. was left to the Government by the people who reported. I said that, yet the hon. Member gets up and says that the reports advised the Government to close the thing. No person makes a report as dogmatic as that. A person gives possible solutions and it is for the political Government to assess what is the best course in all the circumstances. In this case the Government has taken what it perceives to be the best course. I do not want to take up too much time following all the little ridiculous points and question raised by the Member, such as where is the cement project? The Parliament voted money for the cement project. Sure Parliament voted money. Parliament voted money to pay for the feasibility studies which were done. Nobody who has any knowledge of how industrial projects are developed will know that one has first of all to establish the feasibility of the project, one has to get the technical drawings, specifications and so on as a basis for getting the funds to finance the project. If the hon. Member wants to know I can tell him, we have the study and only today the representative of one of the multilateral financial agencies indicated that that agency was interested in funding the project.

If he believes that one can talk about a cement project today and get it tomorrow he is entitled to continue in his folly.

Cde. Speaker, I do not think I should take up any more time of this honourable House. I ask that the Question be put for Members to approve the Motion standing in the name of the Cde. Prime Minister.

7.12.78

National Assembly

3.05 -3.15 p.m.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

**AFFIRMATION OF ROADS (DEMERARA HARBOUR BRIDGE) BY-LAWS
1978 (No. 4)**

The Speaker: Cde. Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Cde. Naraine): I beg to move the following Motion:

“Be it resolved that this National Assembly, in terms of section 24 of the Roads Act, Chapter 51:01, affirm the Roads (Demerara Harbour Bridge) By-Laws 1978 (No. 4), which were made on 24th November, 1978 and published in the Gazette on 2nd December, 1978”,

With the following addition at the end of the Motion:

“subject to the substitution of the words ‘three months’ for the words ‘six months’ in By-Law 14 (2).”

Cde. Speaker, these by-laws are required to regulate the vehicular and pedestrian traffic on the bridge as well as the navigation on the river by vessels using the river. The by-laws are made by the Chief Works Officer under the Road Act and place responsibility and authority for maintenance and operation of the bridge in a bridge manager.

The bridge, Cde. Speaker, unlike the normal type of bridge on a road, requires the operation of a certain part of that bridge so that river traffic can pass at certain times; and during these periods it becomes necessary for road traffic and pedestrian traffic to cease and to be regulated. So it becomes necessary that much care has to be exercised in terms of having the bridge operated in such a manner that we can have the safety not only of the traffic but also the safety of the bridge. This is particularly relevant in terms of river navigation.

3.15 p.m.

Because of the complex nature of the exercise and because of the number of organisations or bodies which were involved in the exercise of the operation of the bridge, these by-laws required substantial and detailed discussions so that the arrangements which will be made will not interfere unduly in the river navigation as well as the use by road, that is, vehicular traffic and pedestrians. Obviously, since the bridge has to be open, then there will be need for some disruption. Discussions went on for some time and after detailed consultations, it was possible to work out arrangements which were satisfactory to all parties concerned. We hope, therefore, Cde. Speaker, that with the following of the schedule which has been laid out for the use of the bridge and by following these by-laws which are before the House today, that there will be a smooth running of vehicular/pedestrian traffic as well as of river traffic.

An important factor in this exercise was the difference between three types of craft. There was the type of craft which could pass under the higher portion of the bridge at any stage of the tide. There was the type of craft with relatively shallow draughts, draughts less than 13 feet, but which could not travel under the higher portion of the bridge because of the height of the superstructure of those craft. That type of traffic had to travel through what is known as the retractor span. Then, there are the very large ships with draughts greater than 13 feet, and then craft also travel through the retractor span. The present arrangements are that since the much larger craft going either to the oil installations but more particularly to GUYMINE – and this is quite regularly, every day – would need to use the tidal conditions on the river so that they can make that journey without many stops and delays, then those larger ships would be able to pass

on demand at the particular tidal condition. The smaller craft that use the retractor span would of course use the retractor span but at certain prescribed times of the day.

Now, the only time that is not really known with too much advance notice to the pedestrians and road traffic users is the demand time, but, we are hoping to work out notices which can be put on both sides of the bridge possibly an hour or two hours before that time so that the public, the users of the bridge, can be informed when the bridge is likely to be opened next out of the regular openings for the smaller craft. These are not details in the by-laws, Cde. Speaker, but to really understand the rationale behind these by-laws, Cde. Speaker, but to really understand the rationale behind these by-laws, it is necessary for one to understand how the bridge in fact operates. Now, all of this would intensify supervision and intensify operational during particular times when the bridge will be in active use or will be activated for one kind of traffic. These are the periods sometimes – and it was so at the beginning – when the greatest confusion arises.

During this period as well as outside of this period, there can be and have been abuses to the bridge by persons not following set regulations or agreements which we have reached with the various parties concerned in relations to how the bridge is to be used. For this reason, we have had one or two mishaps. One has dealt with only recently in a particular way. And, up to now, because of the consultations which have taken place and because of the period of training that is going on at the same time, whenever an accident occurs resulting in some damage to the bridge, invariably the owner of the vessel would stand the cost of the repairs because, up to now, I believe without exception, it has always been the fault of the vessel.

3.25 p.m.

Cde. Speaker, these regulations, in a way, are very essential in terms of giving certain powers to certain officers who will be controlling the operations of the bridge, as well as the law-enforcing

officers both in terms of the river, the harbour and the road and bridge to make sure that certain things are done and certain things are not done in relation to passage over or under the bridge.

A lot has been said about the bridge itself from time to time and I would not weary this House by repeating all of that again. I would just like to mention that the bridge, so far from our checks, has served a very useful purpose and every day the use of the bridge is increasing. I know that there have been some fears in relation to the adequacy of road transportation in terms of cutting off the ferry service completely and relying only on the bridge. I do not know if I mentioned this the last time I spoke on the bridge, but I would like to re-emphasise this point, that it is not the Government's intention to close the ferry service until we have studied both services in much greater detail, and until there is an adequate provision of buses and other vehicles to take all the users of the bridge and the ferry over the bridge. But even at that point, I am saying that it would not be just a sudden closure of the ferry. We feel that because of the very nature of the type of bridge which has been constructed there that in any case there will be need from time to time for a stand-by ferry service. That is why whatever we do and whatever use is made of the facilities on both sides of the river, at Vreed-en-Hoop and Georgetown, that portion of stelling which accommodates the ferry boat, the gangway, will be an alternative means of transporting passengers across the river.

We have gained quite a lot of experience in the operation of the bridge and at the beginning when we were having teething problems, sometimes it took quite long periods to have the bridge opened and closed. Most of those problems are now behind our back. What we have to be careful with in the future is that users of the bridge – the traffic over and under the bridge – make sure that such use is made of those two – waterway and roadway – so that at all times that use is made with the bridge being intact. If this is done, I have no doubt that the bridge will give even greater service than it has done in the past and the efficiency of its opening and closing will improve even more than it has done so far.

I thought that I should give an up-to-date position as to the operation of the bridge so far and the reasoning behind some of these by-laws. One would see, for example, under by-law 3(a) where the power is being given to the bridge manager, that authority is given to search vehicles if it is suspected that they may be carrying explosives or dangerous things. One will readily see that a bridge of that kind – and any bridge for that matter, and I take it that in most places where services like these are given there is need for this type of by-law – could be easily put out of commission by some unkind act by some individual or individuals. Similarly, this kind of by-law and regulation will also have to be implemented in relation to the river users.

I would like, in putting this Motion, to inform this House that these by-laws are not an end to the issue. There are other matters which have to be rectified but these would involve changes in the Principle Ordinances controlling the roads and navigation and may over involve an extension of the limits of the harbour authority. Those will be coming to the House a little later. One will realise that this bridge has made a major geographical change in terms of the two banks of the river and therefore a lot of subsequential changes have to be made.

I am please, therefore, to move this Motion standing in my name, as amended.

Amended Motion proposed.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, no one will deny the Government or the Minister concerned the right to make regulations to ensure that the bridge is used in an orderly way. In fact, I go a step further. I thought regulations would have come into being simultaneously with the opening of the bridge. We are conscious of the fact, however, that the deadline for the opening of the bridge was 1st July, roughly a week or 9 days before the Referendum day so that it could be one of the big projects the Government could speak about during that final stage of its campaign.

No one denies the ability of the Minister in this field. I am speaking about the technical aspect of the operation. But we see, sir, that though the bridge was opened on July 1 – and we are in December moving into the new year, the entrances on both sides have not been completed. My information is, and I could be wrong, that the clay bricks that were put on the road leading to the bridge from the East Bank were found to be not as durable as was expected – as I said, that is a technical question – and I understand that a decision has already been made to remove them and lay them again. The fact is the Government rushes through things. Nobody denies the importance of the bridge and to use the Minister's own language, one can call it a geographical change. It makes link easier with the West Bank.

But, Cde. Speaker, the Minister referred to one single regulation or one single by-law and I am tempted to pose the question to see whether section 24 gives the Government the right to put in that particular by-law to which he referred. In fact, when he made the point I looked at the section 24 of the Roads Act which states:

“Subject to affirmation resolution of the National Assembly, the Chief Officer may make by-laws for –

- (a) regulating the traffic over any bridge;
- (b) the times during which a swing-bridge or draw-bridge may be opened;

3.35 p.m.

- (c) the passing of boats and vessels going through or under a bridge, and the payment of tolls by those boats or vessels;”

the last subsection deals with compensation.

I would like to stretch the section. This is a Parliament and layman as I am, if I see a point that provokes discussion I must draw it to the attention of the House. By view is, paragraph (e), to which the Minister refers, is repugnant to section 24 of the Principal Act and, in fact, the

Minister does not have the power to include (e) in the regulations that he has tabled and for which he is seeking the approval of the House. I must add that, that if there are explosives in a vehicle, the laws are there, put the vehicle aside, the police can carry out any such search, and all the full impact of the law should be brought to bear on any such person who wants to be involved in any such heinous set of crime to endanger the lives of ...

The Speaker: What I think the Minister was saying is, give the Chief Roads Officer the power or those who are in charge of the bridge, not the police. That was why the regulation was made.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: I do not want to argue, with due respect, but what I am saying is I do not think section 24 permits the inclusion of (e).

The Speaker: Another forum may decide that.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: One has to be guarded because the powers are very wide. Some person designated by the Chief Works Officer to exercise all these powers under the regulations might not refuse to use that section if he wishes to harass any individual. Though this is speculation, we are not without experience that this kind of thing does happen and it is vitally necessary for Parliament to discuss it and make a pronouncement so that despite the fact that it is included in the regulations, those who are going to operate the regulations must know that we were anticipating that it can be misused.

My original point stands, that section 24 as framed does not permit the inclusion of (e). It spells out what the Minister must do. Of course including € the regulations went on to state –

“Whether any explosive or dangerous and noxious matter contain therein.”

The point is the regulation can be used to harass anyone and I hope that this does not happen. I hope a second look will be taken at that inclusion.

The Government has drafted these regulations and I looked at them and there can be no doubt that many of them are admirable. There is need to ensure that the bridge is protected because when there is damage to the bridge as there was on Sunday morning last, people suffer. I myself was coming from the West Coast and I was caught there until around midday that day, when I crossed.

We are for regulations to ensure that every care is taken in using the bridge, both by vehicular traffic as well as by high vessels in the river. But I wonder if all the mechanisms that are mentioned in the regulations are available, such as the barriers, whether all the indicators that will be required in order to comply with the regulations are there. For instance, indicators showing certain distances from which point there should be communication, and that type of thing, I wonder whether there are visible indications on both sides of the river and in other places, for those who are going to be using the water traffic. Driving through, I have not seen them. They might be there, but then, I have not been looking for them. There is need for a number of other things to alert the public to ensure that there is a breach, there is no damage and there is no serious occurrence on the bridge.

We must take care and we are not going to push our heads in the sand. We are all concerned with the safety of the people and we are all concerned that regulations and laws must be there to ensure that that safety is preserved. Quite a lot of work has to be done, a number of things have to be installed, in my humble opinion, and I hope that that will not take as long as the regulations opening of the bridge. If these things to which the regulations refer are not there, the Government will not be able to prove the offences in court. People will only have to allege that

light was not there, the barrier was not there, and that was not there, and that would have been the end of the regulations. Simply making regulations will not prevent accidents and damage, but education, alertness will. I think there should be some media used to educate and alert the public as to what is required of them and not simply tell them there are regulations and if you do not do this, you are going to be fined. We need education, it is a new bridge. I hope the Government is also thinking in that respect, apart from simply bringing regulations to the Parliament.

Now, Cde. Speaker, the Minister said that great study and care and consideration will first be given before the ferry is closed down, if it is to be closed down. I hope I take all care in quoting. I want to say that if the Government even contemplates closing down the ferry, it would be a fatal error, like closing down the railway. The Government can carry out an exercise to find out the reaction of the public on the closing down of the railway. I would say at no stage the ferry should cease operating and while I am on my feet I want to implore the Minister and to appeal on behalf of the public that the Sunday ferry service should resume as early as possible. The absence of the Sunday ferry is causing great hardship. People from various parts who are living near to the ferry are compelled to spend more money to go all the way round to come to Georgetown and for people from Georgetown going, say, to the Best Hospital, it means they have to travel along the East Bank, come back, and then go to the Best Hospital.

In fact, I think there is a strong case for the resumption of the Sunday ferry and this is not simply the opinion of those of us who sit on the Opposition benches, this is the opinion and the feeling of the people who make use of that facility. I trust that the Minister this afternoon will tell us whether the decision to stop the Sunday ferry came after a detailed and careful study or it was just a spontaneous and haphazard decision. In whatever way it was made, it was not a wise one in our opinion and we call for the Sunday ferry.

Cde. Speaker, if the ferry is to be closed down, I will pose this question: What would have happened after the accident on Sunday morning? The Government would have had to look for people all over again. It would have had to look for people to drive the boat, to man the boat

and all of that. I think there is need for both. While the bridge is a commendable venture, the ferry boat is an absolute necessity and no thought must be given to closing it down. I hope that my appeal, or warning, or however it is treated, is coming well in advance.

Cde. Speaker, we look at some simple regulation, and the Minister has not told us, but I assume that sno-cone carts, cattle and so on will not be permitted. I am referring to By-laws 9 (2) (b) to be precise:

“No cattle, ridden, driven or led on the hoof shall be on the Bridge at any time;”

The Speaker: Cde. Persaud, that fortifies your position. They will not pull off the boat; they will have to keep the boat to carry these things.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: The Minister is saying there is consideration but you have fortified me. I will take your position sir, that it is only common sense that if you are going to restrict these people from using the bridge, you have to have some regular facility for them to operate on. You have strengthened my hand. It is common sense and I agree with you. Thank you for the intervention; it was very timely. What I would say, sir, is that the Minister should tell this House so that it will be filtered on to those who probably have already been prevented from using the facility of the bridge so that they can come and earn their living, whether with sno-cone carts or what have you. That man who might have one cow that he wishes to bring across will not remain there or else he has to put that cow on a vehicle, in a tractor or trailer drawn by tractor or a lorry, and one can imagine the expense. So, one assumes that in view of this regulation, which will become operative soon, that these people will be permitted to live a normal life and to use the facility of the ferry. The Government must so announce.

Then, sir, I want to deal with sections 12 and 13 of the regulations. Those two are very objectionable. I am not saying that section 24 does not give the Minister the right, because it does give the Minister the right as stated in Chapter 51:01, 24 (d):

“for the determination of the amount of compensation payable by the owner of any boat or vessel for damage done to the bridge by the boat or the vessel, or by anyone employed therein.”

But when these two sections are read closely, one sees that a person or some persons may constitute – if I may call it – a tribunal, I assume, to listen to the evidence of an accident or evidence dealing with damage done to the bridge by whatever means. But, what I see here in section 12 is that “a representative of the owner of such vessel shall be permitted to be present during such investigation.” To be present! This clearly means that while the investigation is going on, he is there. One would have expected that if an accident occurs or if a vessel runs into the bridge, what must be established before compensation can be claimed or demanded is negligence and the normal law of negligence as we all know it should be permitted to operate here. To my mind, these two regulations...

The Speaker: “Present” does not necessarily mean physical presence only. It means present to point out discrepancies and so on. It does not necessarily mean just to be present and to be like a mummy. However, sorry I intervened.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: I move a step further, sir. I would feel that if such an occurrence takes place, that the tribunal should operate as a court. If the Minister is going to say so, I have no quarrel because then, when the regulations are going to be interpreted in court, I hope the court is going to be guided by what was the thinking at the time in relation to the regulations. But, I would prefer, and I am sure you too, sir, would prefer, clear and unambiguous language. It is very equivocal. There should be no doubt as to what is meant and one expects that the owner of a vessel must be permitted to call evidence and to establish whether he is negligent or whether the person operating the bridge or opening or closing it or what have you, is negligent, because that is a vital factor in arriving at a decision.

There might be contributory negligence and that can lessen the quantum in so far as the award of damages is concerned.

There can be no doubt, therefore, Cde. Speaker, that these two by-laws did not take into account the obvious right of the other person involved and the Government would be wrong to assume that as soon as a man in his vessel collided with the bridge – though this assumption is not there – there will be some sort of enquiry; somebody will be appointed. But what I am saying is that the law should be such that justice must prevail at the conclusion and if it is found that somebody is liable, once negligence is established beyond a doubt, with both sides being heard, then the question of quantum could be gone into. And, even the question of quantum should be questionable. It must not be left on the officer or persons appointed to investigate to decide what the amount ought to be. That amount should be subject to all scrutiny and then a decision arrived at. I know, and the Minister is not without information, that they have already collected compensation from people even before the coming into being of those regulations. I feel 100 per cent right about that information. Whether it was done rightly or wrongly is a different question. I do not think it was done rightly; a sum was fixed and it was paid.

What we need is a clear understanding and to my mind, these two by-laws do not envisage the type of enquiry that would be required if there is an accident, because the lights might not have been there. While the bridge was open, a man might have struck something and the bridge started closing. So many things can happen in such an operation and it is clear that not at all times the vessel operator will be right and I think these two clauses ought to be re-organised. They are not framed bearing in mind the concept of natural justice; they are not framed bearing in mind that the other man is entitled to be heard and to be heard positively and whatever decision is arrived at, that decision should be made after both sides are heard and all the concepts of equity are taken into account. To me, these sections will permit arbitrary fixing of damage though some evidence will be taken as to who hit the bridge. The man might not be a legal mind and I thought a better thing would have been to establish the offence of negligence and then proceed in the normal course for...

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