

**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
CONSTITUTION OF GUYANA**

29th Sitting

2 p.m.

Monday, 18th February, 1974

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Speaker

His Honour the Speaker, Mr. Sase Naraine, J.P.

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

Prime Minister (1)

The Hon. L.F.S. Burnham, O.E., S.C.,
Prime Minister

(Absent)

Deputy Prime Minister (1)

Dr. the Hon. P.S. Reid,
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of
National Development and Agriculture

(Absent – on leave)

Senior Ministers (7)

The Hon. H.D. Hoyte, S.C.,
Minister of Works and Communications

*The Hon. S.S. Ramphal, S.C.,
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Justice

(Absent)

***Non-elected Minister**

*The Hon. H. Green,
Minister of Co-operatives and National Mobilisation (Absent)

The Hon. H.O. Jack,
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources

*The Hon. F.E. Hope,
Minister of Finance

*Dr. The Hon. K.F.S. King,
Minister of Economic Development

*The Hon. S.S. Naraine, A.A.,
Minister of Housing (Absent – on leave)

Ministers (6)

The Hon. W.G. Carrington,
Minister of Labour

The Hon. Miss S.M. Field-Ridley,
Minister of Information and Culture (Absent – on leave)

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

*The Hon. Miss C.L. Baird,
Minister of Education

*Dr. the Hon. O.M.R. Harper,
Minister of Health

*The Hon. G.A. King,
Minister of Trade

Ministers of State (9)

The Hon. M. Kasim, A.A.
Minister of State for Agriculture

The Hon. O.E. Clarke,
Minister of State – Regional
(East Barbice/Corentyne) (Absent)

***Non-elected Ministers**

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

The Hon. C.A. Nascimento,
Minister of State, Office of the Prime Minister

The Hon. M. Zaheeruddeen, J.P.,
Minister of State – Regional
(Essequibo Coast/West Demerara) **(Absent)**

*The Hon. C.V. Mingo,
Minister of State for Home Affairs

*The Hon. W. Haynes,
Minister of State – Regional (Mazaruni/Potaro) **(Absent)**

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

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

Parliamentary Secretaries (8)

Mr. J.R. Thomas,
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Housing

Mr. C.E. Wrights, J.P.
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Works and Communications

Miss M.N. Ackman,
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the
Prime Minister, and Government Chief Whip **(Absent)**

Mr. E.L. Ambrose,
Parliamentary Secretary, (Agriculture),
Ministry of National Development and Agriculture

Mr. K.B. Bancroft,
Parliamentary Secretary (Hinterland),
Ministry of National Development and Agriculture

Mr. S. Prashad,
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of
Co-operatives and National Mobilisation

***Non-elected Ministers**

Mr. J.P. Chowritmootoo,
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education

Mr. R.H.O. Corbin,
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of
Co-operatives and National Mobilisation

Other Members (18)

Mr. J.N. Aaron

Mrs. L.N. Branco

Mr. M. Corrica

Mr. E.H.A. Fowler

(Absent – on leave)

Miss J. Gill

Mr. W. Hussain

Miss S. Jaiserrisingh

Mr. K.M.E. Jones

Mr. M. Nissar

Dr. L.E. Ramsahoye

Mr. J.G. Ramson

Mr. P.A. Raymon

MR. E.M. Stoby, J.P.

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

Mr. C. Sukul, J.P.

Mr. H.A. Taylor

Mr. R.C. Vansluytman

Mrs. L.E. Williems

Members of the Opposition

Liberatory Party (2)

Mr. M.F. Singh, Deputy Speaker

Mrs. E. DaSilva

(Absent – on leave)

OFFICERS

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

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly – Mr. M.B. Henry, AMBIM.

18.2.74
2.15 p.m.

National Assembly

2.15 – 2.25 p.m.

PRAYERS

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Leave to Members

The Speaker: Leave has been granted for today's sitting to the hon. Member Dr. Reid, the hon. Member Mr. S.S. Naraine, the hon. Member Miss S.M. Field-Ridley, and the hon. Member Mr. Fowler.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS ETC.

The following Paper was laid:

Consumption Tax (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 1974 (No. 18) made under section 4 of the Consumption Tax Act, Chapter 80:02, on the 30th of January, 1974, and published in the Gazette on the 31st of January, 1974.

[The Minister of Finance]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

FINANCIAL PAPER NO. 1/1974

“Be it resolved that the Committee of Supply approve of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 1/1974 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$1,525,605 – Uncovered Advances from the contingencies Fund in 1973.”

[The Minister of Finance]

The Speaker: The Assembly will resolve itself into Committee of Supply to consider Financial Paper No. 1 of 1974.

Assembly in Committee of supply.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Hope): Mr. Chairman, in accordance with article 80(2) of the Constitution of Guyana, I signify that Cabinet has recommended this Motion for the consideration by the National Assembly. I now move the Motion.

Question proposed.

The Chairman: Page 1. Hon. Member Mr. Singh.

Mr. M.F. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I should like to make short general remarks particularly in reference to items 1 and 6, and then speak on items 4 and 7.

Mr. Chairman, you will remember not so long ago, in December last year, we spent a lot of time and indeed, I would hope, energies also in debating the 1974 Estimates, this nice big book which I have in my hand at the present moment. The book gave revised figures for 1973 and projected figures for 1974 and the question that immediately springs to mind is: How does this Financial Paper affect those figures? Does it mean that the figures in the Estimates for 1974 are, as this Financial Paper states, approximately \$1.5 million out? Does it really mean that already we are short an additional \$1.5 million on our budgeting? If that is so, as we have so often said before, some serious attempt should be made to be more accurate in our budgeting. For example, if we look at items 1 and 6, the legend talks of voted provision being inadequate on account of revision of salaries. You will remember, Mr. Chairman, that we had Financial Papers Nos. 5 and 6 in the latter part of last year and these, by and large, dealt with revision of salaries. If these figures are in fact as a result of revision of salaries one would naturally ask the question: Why did they not appear in Financial Papers Nos. 5 and 6 in the latter part of last year?

[Mr. Singh continued]

2.25 p.m.

Why are they only now coming before Parliament? That is the general question. With regard to item 6, Public Free Library, I took the trouble to look into the Estimates. If we look at page 52 of the 1974 Estimates we will see under Ministry of Information and Culture, subhead 19, Public Free Library, which does in fact reflect a revised figure in these 1974 Estimates. We see that for 1973 the sum of \$240,000 was voted but the revised figure would be \$288,600. IF it was known at that time that he revised figure would be \$288,600, why did we not have an application to Parliament at that time for the additional amount that was thought to be required. The additional amount that was thought to be required at that time was \$48,600. The additional amount being asked for now is \$49,000. What is the real difference? Surely we would have had a much better idea of what our budgeting was like if we had had the figures towards the end of last year.

Unfortunately, not all of the items are like this. Some of them, it is true, have reflected in the Revised Estimates the amount of money that Government thought would be required for 1973 but others are completely silent on it. Other items have not made any provision for these additional amounts that are asked for so, in fact, the position that we have is that some have reflected a revised amount in accordance with these figures that we are being asked to approve now and others have been completely silent on it. So make the point that he 1974 Estimates – and we will see how significant this is in a moment – which list revised figures for 1973 are very inaccurate in relation to what we are looking at here in this Financial Paper.

This is where I appeal to the Government again for us to have a more realistic approach to this whole problem of Government budgeting. If we can get things done at the right time with the proper figures reflected then we can at least know what we are about here rather than have figures which we study and debate at great length and at the end of the day they have all proved to be wrong because of supplementary provisions. We are not saying that supplementary

provisions are unnecessary, we are not saying that supplementary provision are unnecessary, we are not saying that supplementary provisions should never be; but we are saying that where we can avoid having to come for supplementary provisions or where we can bring the request earlier, then it should be done.

I will deal specifically with item 4, under subhead 1, Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Personal Emoluments Item (24) (New) Domestic Staff – Residence. Since this is new, the question naturally arises that the residence must always have had staff before and these people must have been paid before. Where were they paid from? And since they must have been paid from vote, what is the reason for now putting them here on this new subhead? I would like the hon. Minister to answer that.

Item 1, Ministry of Information and culture, subhead 43, sports and Games. \$36,000 was originally voted and a supplementary provision of \$4,268 is now being sought. The legend states “Voted provision inadequate”. That is all it says, nothing more. The old financial regulations which I knew for eight years in the Civil Service – if they have not been thrown aside as yet – did, in fact, provide that if any Financial Officer overspent a vote he could be surcharged. This is obviously a vote that has been overspent and it was covered by an advance from the Contingencies Fund.

If the Ministry at the beginning of the year put forward a figure of \$36,000 as the amount to be spent, then surely the Ministry has an obligation to keep to that figure, particularly at this present time when there is such a grave crisis as far as finance is concerned. There must be no excess expenditure and there must be no extravagant spending. What is the reason for this? It may be a relatively small amount but every cent counts and this is \$4268. We voted \$36,000. This was the amount estimated by the Ministry. What special reason was there for this amount to be overspent by the sum of \$4,268? Why, indeed, should the vote have been exceeded to that extent?

The Chairman: Hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Hope: Mr. Chairman, if I may reply to the general remarks made by the Member of the Opposition. In fact, the Member touched on but glossed over, what must be the real answer to the fact that we are bringing now to the House a Schedule of Supplementary Provisions for 1973 while, indeed, we have presented to this House Estimates giving revised figures for 1973. Sir, in those revised figures for 1973, you will find in most cases that the Ministry would have given a Revised Estimate for 1973 which would have taken into account the fact that they had asked for supplementary provisions and had, in fact, got some money on the basis of the Contingencies fund.

There might be other cases where this amount might not necessarily have been reflected in the Revised Estimates and this arises from the fact that a request may have come late in December. But, sir, the important issue is that what are we are dealing with here are really Estimates, a Ministry's projection in, say, September of one year, as to what that Ministry is likely to spend for the twelve months beginning January and ending December of the following year. And circumstances do change in a way to make it necessary for expenditures to go beyond what was previously estimated and, in some cases, to make it necessary for expenditure to fall below what was previously estimated.

It is for this reason, sir, that we come to this House, in the first instance, with an Estimate of Expenditure; we come twelve months later with a Revised Estimate and then we come twelve months after that with actual expenditure and this is a practice which dates back from immemorial, from the time we have been submitting Estimates to this House. It is no strange development that the figure which was presented as the Estimates in one year are revised months later and are given as actual figures spend twelve months after that, based on what are the final accounts for the year. This is the problem, it is not anything really strange that we have come here with supplementary provisions for 1973. These represent funds which have been made available, because of the urgency, on the basis of the Contingencies Fund.

In most cases, and it is possible in more than ninety per cent of the amounts involved here, the amounts would have already been incorporated in the Revised Estimates, they, therefore, do not necessarily throw the total estimates out because, after all, we are estimating and there might be a few hundred dollars out in one way and a few hundred dollars out in another way and when the final figures are available the plusses and the minuses will tend to balance out each other.

2.35 p.m.

So, sir, I am not really troubled with this and I should like to assure the hon. Member that the Government's operation is a very dynamic thing; it changes from day to day, from month to month. We can estimate but none of us can feel that what we are estimating is final expenditure, otherwise we never would have had a term in these Estimates referred to as "Actual Expenditure" and which does not occur for one year until two years after.

The hon. Member pointed to item 1, Personal Emoluments, and asked why this was not reflected in the Personal Emoluments Schedule which came to the House late last year. This, in fact, arises from the revised salaries, and it is one of those revised which were not really affected by the agreement which was signed with the Unions. The figures appearing under Parliament Office – I think this is the one the hon. Member was referring to – relate to particular salaries which are settled under the Constitution by a different group of people, and were settled after the normal --

The Chairman: Hon. Minister, the hon. Member was saying – and I think he was particular to say this – that this is "new"; he was emphasizing the word "new", and he wanted to know how payment was affected prior to this, if it is "new" under item 4.

[Mr. Hope contd.]

Mr. Hope: Sir, as I was explaining, this arose from that fact, that a special group as provided for in the Constitution sat and provided for these emoluments, and this came some time after the Schedule which dealt with the revised salaries for all the Civil Service.

In the case of item 4, it is “New” in this sense. The item is new but the purpose of the expenditure is obviously not new. In the past, this money was met from a vote in Parliament Office. It was presented as a receipt by the hon. Prime Minister, from Parliament Officer, for payment of his staff. What was done was to recognise that the Prime Minister’s staff had to be paid. We all recognised that; we all accepted that. For that reason, we decided to put it as a separate subhead under the Prime Minister’s Ministry rather than making it a personal payment to the Prime Minister. That was all. It was merely a shift from a vote which was provided under Parliament Office to one now provided under the Prime Minister’s Office. I am not sure whether I have answered all the hon. Member’s preliminary questions.

The Chairman: Page 2.

Mr. Singh: Sir, before you move on, I just wanted to know what that particular vote was. I like to keep an orderly mind on these matters. In respect of item 4, I wonder what was the particular vote under Parliament Office, that the hon. Minister is talking about. I do not seem to be able to identify it as the present moment.

Mr. Hope: If the Hon. Member looks at his Estimates of Expenditure, page 24, under subhead 1 item 3, he will find there an item called, “Provision for Remuneration of the Speaker, Members of the Cabinet and members of the National Assembly.” The amount under question is to be found in that block vote.

The Chairman: Page 2.

Mr. Singh: Item 8 and 12. Item 8, Ministry of Home Affairs, Republic Day Celebrations: Supplementary provision now sought is \$7,000 and this is being asked for in February, 1974, but the legend says: "To meet unforeseen expenses in connection with Mashramani Celebrations in 1973." Well, Mr. Chairman, I had always been told, and I am of the opinion, that Mashramani is usually in February, so that we are being asked in February in this year to approve of \$7,000 unforeseen expenses for February last year.

I have admitted that we would not have anything like supplementary provisions if it were not recognised that there would be genuine cases of supplementary provision, but why not let us bring these supplementary provisions, but why not let us bring these supplementary provision before the House as early as possible so that we can at least look at our figures and have a fairly realistic insight into the position?

It may be a small amount, \$67,000, but if this was in respect of February, 1973, surely we could have brought it before. What really were these unforeseen expenses? We would like to know what these unforeseen expenses in February, 1973, were and why they were not brought to this House before.

I am not saying we must not have supplementary provision, but let us have a realistic picture. It is no point our discussing Estimates on the basis of figures when we can have them a little more accurately by being a little more vigilant in respect of presenting figures. We know they are estimates. We know they have to be approximate figures, but if we can get them a little nearer to actual figures, then we should always try for that.

I now refer to item 2, Ministry of Works and Communications – Post Office, Transport and Travelling. The sum of \$72,000 was originally voted; the supplementary provision now sought is \$9,000. The legend says: "To provide for the payment of additional cycle allowances and transfer expenses of postal employees." It certainly would be very revealing to know what part of this \$9,000 is really for additional cycle allowances and what part is for transfer expenses

of postal employees. Is the hon. Minister in a position to say that? If not, we will have to bring it in the form of a question. Perhaps at the same time we can be told what the cycle allowance was originally, and what the new rate of cycle allowances is. This is always an interesting piece of information. The cost of living has gone up generally. It would be interesting to know what these people used to receive as cycle allowances and what they are receiving at the present moment.

Mr. Hope: What the hon. Member must not lose sight of is the fact that these items before us are in fact expenditures which have already been incurred and which have been provided for out of the Contingencies Fund. I think the hon. Member should remember that the last supplementary provision came to the house some time in November. It is very that at year end, we put a notice in the Press asking all suppliers and all creditors of the Government to submit their accounts for the year, members of the public take the opportunity to ensure that all outstanding bills that they have against the Government are brought forward for payment. It is sometimes at that stage that the Ministry recognises that it has these amounts outstanding and it then makes a request for payment. In a bid to ensure that these payments are made promptly, we provide funds on the basis of a Contingencies Fund withdrawal.

Although it may appear that in the case of the Mashramani celebrations 1973, we are coming only now for the provisions, I think the hon. Member should remember two things; but that the accounts came in last, and secondly, that since the amounts were already provided for by withdrawals from the Contingencies Fund, there was not that urgency in view of the Budget to bring these figures for the confirmation of the House.

2.45 p.m.

The important point, however, is that these figures are all reflected in the Revised Estimates for the year 1973. In most cases this would be the position.

[Mr. Hope contd.]

With regard to item 12, I am not now in a position to make a separation between additional payment for cycle allowances and the transfer expenses of postal employees. The year all met from one subhead and we do not have the details with us at this moment to make that distinction.

The Chairman: Page 3. Hon. Member Mr. Singh.

Mr. M.F. Singh: Mr. Chairman, page 3, item 15 and 16. I think the hon. Minister of Health will be called upon to answer item 15.

Item 15, Head 54, Ministry of Health – Bacteriological, subhead 8, Post Mortem Fees, Laboratory Attendants. The voted provision was \$800 I ask for an explanation because the supplementary provision sought is so much more than the provision originally voted. It does prompt the question in view of the legend. The legend says. “To provide for an increase in fees and also in the number of post mortem examinations.” One wonders – that is why I asked the question – what fees have been increased. Have the doctor’s fees for post mortem examinations been increased? If so, what were the old fees and what are the new fees? Or is it the fees to laboratory attendants that have been increased? If that is so, could we have the rates and by how much they were increased?

Of course, we do note that the numbers of post mortem examinations have in fact increased also but we would certainly like to know what are these increases in fees which the legend speaks about.

We come to item 16, and this is where I made reference to what the hon. Minister said a moment ago. Item 16, Ministry of Health – Hospitals and Dispensaries. Subhead 4, Dietary. The voted provision is \$1,200,000. The provision supplementary provision granted is \$120,000. The supplementary provision now sought is \$100,000. The hon. Minister did say that in the

majority of cases the supplementary provision now being sought is reflected in the Revised Estimates as shown in the 1974 Estimates revised figures.

Let us look at what is in the 1974 Estimates so the revised estimate for 1973. If we look at page 143 of the 1974 Estimates, subhead 4, Dietary, we will see that the 1974 figures asked for is \$1,400,000 and the Revised Estimates for 1973 is \$1,320,000. What does \$1,320,000 represents? This represents the voted provision for 1973 plus the previous supplementary provision already passed for last year. It does not include the \$100,000 what we are now being asked to provide. It means definitely and positively that these revised figures for 1973 are out by \$100,000. It is not reflected here.

That is a lot of money. One must necessarily ask the question: was there not somebody in the Ministry who would have realized that it needed \$100,000 more to be voted to feed the people for 1973? Why was this not at least reflected in the 1973 Revised Estimates?

It is that the cost of living has risen so astronomically from November 1973 to December 1973? It may well be but the Government has been denying it. It is that the cost of food stuffs has risen so astronomically that it resulted in \$100,000 extra being requested here? I have to agree with the Government. I do not think that it has risen to that extent. And therefore it must be a lapse on somebody's part not to have at least reflected in the Revised Estimates that \$100,000 more would have been needed for this particular vote.

Again, I repeat *ad nauseam* the only way we can realistically deal with Estimates is if we have figures that represent as near as possible what we really would be spending.

The Chairman: Hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Hope: Mr. Speaker, I thought the hon. Minister of Health would have been given the opportunity to answer the questions on item 15.

I did say that in the majority of cases the amount which is being requested but which has already been provided out of the Contingencies Fund since last year was in fact reflected in the Revised Estimates. I also did say that was in the majority of cases which meant that there were other cases where this was not the case.

But I did explain – the hon. Member will recall – that as we come towards the end of the year we deliberately ask creditors by notice in the Press to submit their accounts to the Government as soon as possible and no later than the 15th of December. Usually in response to that advertisement creditors do come forward with what the Government is supposed to owe them.

Item 16 is one of these cases where suppliers of food – and in many cases these are small suppliers of vegetables and so on to the hospitals – presented bills representing debts owed by the Government. This is one late in the year after the Estimates have been presented. Therefore, rather than allowing those small creditors to wait until the following year when the amount would be provided for in the following year's Estimates we decided to put it in the form of a supplementary provision and provided it by means of a withdrawal from the Contingencies Fund to expedited payment to those small people and that is why it is here.

I am not sure, sir, that the hon. Member is really standing on very good grounds when he makes a great play of the fact that this is one case in which it was not reflected in the Revised Estimates. I did say in the majority of cases and I also did explain that there were cases when the accounts came in late and had to be provided for by the withdrawals from the Contingencies Fund.

The Chairman: Hon. Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Dr. Harper): Mr. Speaker, item 15, Post Mortem Fees, laboratory Attendants. My hon. Friend on my right well knows that in August last year there was a job evaluation exercise which reevaluated the salaries and remuneration of all the people in the Public Service. As a result of this the fees paid for the last three decades for certain services, especially for post mortem and exhumation of bodies, had to be increased in order to keep these workers in line with the unions and the other categories of workers. It was for this reason, I think, that this sum appears to be larger than it ought to be.

In respect of the question of exhumation fees, I think for that type of question notice should be given but I will be quite happy to give the information the next time we meet. The fees as they are not are exorbitant.

I was very amused to hear the hon. Member's question because five minutes before I came here I was accosted by a laboratory attendant who was complaining that he had not been paid. When I made certain checks with the Chief Accountant, the Chief Accountant told me that that he sums of money claimed for overtime were pretty high and he refused to pay some of these until he had checked them out. The hon. Member must remember that our laboratory attendants are required not only to perform exhumations in Georgetown but in Matthews Ridge, Rupununi, Potaro and so on. So, many of these fees here are for services rendered all over Guyana and not only in Georgetown.

2.55 p.m.

The Chairman: Schedule "B", Capital Estimates.

Mr. M.F. Singh: Mr. Chairman, item 1, 2, and 5. Item 1, Ministry of Information, Culture and Youth, Purchase of Equipment. The original amount voted was \$169,000, Supplementary Provision now south is \$132,180 and the legend states "To provide for the purchase of miscellaneous equipment." Everyone knows that figures are debated and approved,

in Parliament here on the basis of a particular Ministry's plans, its programmes, what it intends to do during the year. We see here the amount of \$169,000 originally voted.

We presume that the Ministry had made their plans, had thought and felt that all it needed was \$169,000 for the purchase of equipment, yet an almost equal sum is now required. It is \$30,000-odd less than the amount originally voted, but when compared with the amount originally voted it is very significant. The sum of \$132,180 is being asked for as supplementary provision to purchase what miscellaneous equipment? What miscellaneous equipment did the Ministry purchase that it did not foresee or to purchase during 1973 when they made out its estimates? What is it that came up so suddenly to cause it to want to spend this sum of \$132,180? One would hope that it had nothing to do with the July 16th Elections last year.

Item 2, Ministry of National Development and Agriculture, subhead 17, Kibilibiri Land Development Project: The voted provision or 1973 was \$354,000. There is no supplementary Provision; Supplementary Provision now sought is \$484,500. I should like to take very serious issue with the hon. Minister in respect of what he has said previously. I have a note of what he said just now, namely: "In the majority of cases the amounts are reflected in the current estimates", so one would expect to see this nearly half a million dollars reflected in the 1974 Estimates. The hon. Minister also said in explanation, that there are some exceptions and the reason for these exceptions, he said, is that at the end of the year the Government normally invites all creditors to submit their accounts, as these accounts, on the basis of how they come in, would give Government, presumably, an idea of what is necessary to be asked for as Supplementary Provision

I respectfully submit that the system has changed radically from the days when I used to be a member of the Civil Service dealing with Estimates for eight years. In those days what used to be done is whenever there is expenditure he would put in pencil the approximate figures. It would be either the actual amount but unpaid, or the amount that he thinks it would be; it would be a fairly realistic figure.

The officer has an obligation to see that this vote is not overspent. He cannot willy-nilly allow expenditure and merely wait until the end of the year to see whether or not the vote has been overspent on the basis of what accounts the small traders or other people may send in. He cannot afford to do that. He has an obligation to keep within the limits. An amount say, x dollars, is provided in the Estimates, he must see that that X dollars is not exceeded. He cannot merely abrogate his responsibilities and rely on figures submitted by creditors at the end of the year. [Mr. Hope: "Things have changed since then."]

It may have changed radically, this is true. But in my days the figures were put in pencil and you went along all the time you kept checking on these figures to see whether you were exceeding the vote or not to give you an idea as to whether you need to make an application for supplementary provision. So, with great respect to the hon. Minister, I cannot, at the moment, accept his explanation of these excesses.

But let us look and see what the position is in respect of item 2, Kibilibiri Land Development Programme. If we look at page 77 of the Estimates for 1974 we will see under subhead 18, Kibilibiri Agricultural Project that the Approved Estimates for 1973 is \$354,000. It is the same figure \$354,000 in the 1973 Revised Estimates. What are we being asked for now? We are being asked for nearly \$½ million more for 1974, and that is not reflected as the 1973 revised figure. So what happened? So what happened? Did we have accounts by small traders to the extent of nearly half a million dollars that could not have been reflected in these Estimates? This figure is out by nearly half a million dollars. Why could we not have put it in?

3.05 p.m.

Surely at the end of the year when these Estimates were being prepared as significant a figure as nearly half a million dollars would have been known by somebody who had something to do with the Kibilibiri Land Development Project. You cannot overspend nearly half a million dollars over and above your vote and not be able to put it in your Revised Estimates which you

[Mr. Singh continued]

present to Parliament at the end of the year.

The hon. Minister said that in the majority of cases it has been done. In this case nearly half a million dollars has not been put down here and we note that the 1974 figure is about average of what is being spent. The figure is back to \$400,000 so what we are being asked for 1973 is \$484,500 plus the original amount of \$354,000 and now the vote for 1974 is back to the lesser figure of \$400,000. What is being spent? Over \$800,000 will have been spent on this project because it has been spent already. This is the amount that has been advanced from the Contingencies Fund, whereas at the beginning of the year the project was planned, conceived and estimated to spend only \$354,000. So that the amount being asked for now is even more than the amount originally sought. There must be some explanation for this, I cannot think of any.

Item 5, Ministry of Co-operatives and Community Development, subhead 2, Co-operative Development. Here again, Mr. Chairman, we have the unexplainable position. The voted provision for 1973 was \$975,000. The Government is now asking for \$501,461 which is over half a million dollars more. Is this reflected in the Revised Estimates? The hon. Minister says in the majority of cases this is reflected in the Revised Estimates. Let us look and see whether it is reflected there.

Let us turn to page 157 of the 1974 Estimates and look at subhead 2, Co-operative Development. The Approved Estimate for 1973 was \$975,000; the Revised Estimates had no amount reflected; and the total amount to be spent in 1974 is \$900,000. What really is the position? The position is that his Ministry estimated that it would spend \$975,000 in 1973. It has, in fact, overspent that by \$501,461 which is over half a million dollars. It did not put it in the 1973 Revised Estimates. It was not included at all so this figure for 1973 is out again, as in the case of item 2, by half a million dollars.

What kind of Estimates are being presented to us when we can have a significant figure of over half a million dollars actually spent and not being reflected here in the Revised Estimates? Will the hon. Minister tell us that these were unpaid bills which the small creditors presented towards the end of the year to the tune of over half a million dollars? This is what needs an answer. What is the total spent for 1973? The total spend for 1973 was the original amount of \$975,000 plus this amount \$501,461 for which approval is now sought.

Therefore, during 1973 the sum of \$1,476,461 was spent, that is \$1.5 million. But in 1974 the sum being asked for on page 157 of the 1974 Estimates is \$900,000 which is a difference of approximately \$600,000. Obviously, one must ask the question: What is happening with Co-operative Development? Has there been a cut-back in the programme? Is it that having spent \$1.5 million in 1973, 1974 will require only \$900,000. Is there any special reason for this? We know what events took place in 1973 but one wonders whether there is going to be retrenchment in respect of Co-operative Development which would account for the reduction in expenditure from \$1.5 million to \$900,000 and, more significantly why could we not have had half a million dollars reflected in the Revised Estimates but if you take these two Heads alone, item 2 and item 5, you have a million dollars difference in respect of the figures shown in these Estimates. On these two Heads alone there are a million dollars out.

The Chairman: Hon Minister of Finance.

Mr. Hope: Sir, I will answer with respect to item 1. I think the Minister of State for Agriculture will answer with respect to item 2 and I will answer for the others.

With respect to item 1, here we have the problems which arise from the fact that delivery dates for equipment ordered are uncertain. They vary from time to time and they really cause problems of estimation. You estimate in one year that, based on the supplies and the estimate of time for delivery, you expenditure for those items will be "X" dollars. In fact, one of two things may happen, the items are not delivered in the year and suddenly they come up in the following

year and you have to seek additional provision to pay for them; or you assume that they may not be delivered at the time, you do not make any provision and, in fact, they do come quite unexpectedly earlier.

This is a case in point. The equipment was ordered, it was not delivered within the time expected and then the items arrived in this country late last year.

These are really a number of public address systems and photographic equipment essentially for the Ministry of Information and Culture. I do not know what other equipment the hon. Member will be looking for, but they have to be paid for. Arriving late, we could only do one thing and that is to provide the money on the basis of a withdrawal from the Contingencies Fund to pay for equipment which was very late in arrival and for which, unfortunately, the Ministry had not made an estimate because it did not realize that the equipment would have arrived at that time. Sir, these problems do arise with respect to the accurate estimation, vis-à-vis, uncertain delivery dates for equipment and we have no control over delivery dates and shipping availability.

3.15 p.m.

With respect to item 5, Ministry of Co-operatives and Community Development, Co-operative Development, most of this expenditure arose out of the rapid progress made in the construction of the Kuru Kuru College and, in fact, the contractors had to be paid by year end for work done. The Ministry may not have in fact originally estimated for the rapid progress made by the contractors and therefore the lower estimate, but in fact, large as this sum was, it was largely for supplies, contractors, and so on, suppliers of the furnishings of the College and the contractors who were owed for work done.

What could have really been done was for this amount to be put on this year's Estimates but I think we wanted to have the matter a little tidier than that. It was expenditure arising in

[Mr. Hope contd.]

1973 and even though coming to the attention of the Ministry of Finance late, we thought that we should clear the expenditure for 1973 in 1973, and pay people whether they were contractors or whether they were suppliers, large and small, of goods and services provided to the Government. This really is the explanation for this particular item.

The Minister of State for Agriculture (Mr. Kasim): The hon. Member, I must say, is not a farmer and he is not aware of the difficulties that the farmer suffers at certain times due to unfavourable weather conditions. He belongs to the elite profession and he would not know what the poor farmers suffer.

With respect to Kibilibiri, item 2, this is an agricultural project and it is subject to the same unfavourable weather conditions as the agricultural crops in this country. We are all aware of what happened to our sugar industry and our rice industry last year, and to the farmers on the whole. Many a time I have heard the hon. Member championing the cause of some of the farmers in the Pomeroon, in the case of flooding and other conditions. I should like to state that the sum provided, \$354,000, was requested to meet limited capital expenditure on the project for 1973 but because of the unfavourable weather conditions, due to a drought the first crop of last year, which is known as the spring crop, suffered tremendously. We are all aware that in the early part of the last year we had severe drought not only in Guyana but in the entire Caribbean. I must say that all over the world, farmers suffered tremendously.

In relation to the second crop, which is known as the autumn crop, we all know what really happened. We had a tremendous amount of rainfall and farmers could not reap what they planted. Kibilibiri is subject to the same conditions as other agricultural crops. Last year it was anticipated that the recurrent expenditure on this project would have been met from the proceeds of the crops grown in this project but, unfortunately, we did not have the result that we had anticipated. Because of that, tremendous amounts had to be paid to the various creditors.

I will give the hon. Member the breakdown of the amount because we had owed quite a lot for various inputs into the agricultural sector in the Kibilibiri project. For instance, insecticides, pesticides, and fertilizers had to be bought. The project had to purchase these from Bookers Stores Ltd., and we owed them \$270,000. We also had to purchase from Jubal Sales Corporation and we owed \$59,500. Advances from the Ministry of National Development and Agriculture to meet certain recurrent expenditure totaled \$130,000. We had an overdraft from the Guyana National Co-operative Bank for \$25,000, making a total of \$484,500 which had to be paid in December. This money had to be advanced from the Contingencies Fund to make these payments, otherwise, we would not have been in a position to secure further credit from these firms in order to continue with the project at Kibilibiri.

Mr. M.F. Singh: Mr. Chairman, my good friend the hon. Minister of State for Agriculture made remarks about farming and that sort of thing. I am not prepared to go into that sort of thing. I shall not reply to the caustic remarks which I think are unbecoming of the hon. Minister, from whom I have the highest regard as an individual, I am very surprised at the remarks he made.

It is a simple matter, it is a matter of Government budgeting. Did we require \$484,500 to meet 1973 expenses? Yes, we do. We require that as an additional amount. The hon. Minister had gone to great lengths to list fertilizers, advances, overdrafts, Jubal Sales. We knew exactly what we required. Why then was it not reflected in the Estimates?

We all know that the crops failed. If the crops failed, the income you expected is not there, then you must make the necessary provision to meet your liabilities, and if you make necessary provisions to meet your liabilities, then you must put that figure down.

As the hon. Minister quite rightly said, in the majority of cases it would be incorporated. It should have been incorporated in the Revised Estimates so that we would have a more realistic picture of what our expenditure is like.

I am not questioning the expenditure, why the money was spent, what it was spent for, exactly how it was spent. This whole business of Government budgeting is what I am looking at. If we are to be realistic, then we know we incurred this expenditure, let us make provision for it.

The Chairman: This completes consideration of all the items

Question –

“That the Committee of Supply approve of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 1/1974 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$1,525,605 – Uncovered Advances from the Contingencies Fund in 1973”.

Put, and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Hope: I beg to report that the Committee of Supply has approved of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 1 of 1974 and I now move that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in the said Resolution.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion carried.

BILLS – SECOND READING
RICE FARMERS (SECURITY OF TENURE) (AMENDMENT) BILL
HOUSING OF LABOUR WORKERS ON SUGAR ESTATES
(AMENDMENT) BILL

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, items 2 and 4, I understand, by agreement have been deferred.

Item 3. Hon. Minister of Finance

Bill by leave, deferred

GEMMEL BACCHUS (WIDOWS AND ORPHANS PENSION) BILL

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the payment of a pension to the dependants of Gemmel Bacchus under the Widows and Orphans Pension Act.” [The Minister of Finance.]

Mr. Hope: I beg to move that the Gemmel Bacchus (Widows and Orphans Pension) Bill 1974 be now read a Second time. The Bill is a simple one. Apparently, Gemmel Bacchus was a dispenser employed by the Ministry of Health. He had been employed for a number of years before his death in 1971.

3.25 p.m.

In that period he had been paying, as is normal, his contributions to the Widows and Orphans Fund. Unfortunately, however, he had not undergone the medical examination to make him a contributor under the Widows and Orphans Fund laws.

[Mr. Hope contd.]

The fact that Gemmel Bacchus did not undergo the necessary medical examination was not due to his own fault. Apparently the Secretary of the Fund had written to the Ministry of Health from time to time asking that the necessary arrangements be made for Gemmel Bacchus's examination but this had not been done. Therefore when he died in 1971 he was not a contributor under the law governing the Fund.

But the Directors of the Widows and Orphans Board met. They considered Gemmel Bacchus's case and thought that the fact that he did not undergo the medical examination was no fault of his. They also took account of the fact that he had been paying the contributions during the nine or so years he was employed as a Dispenser. Therefore they recommended to the Government that a lenient and a liberal view be taken and his Estate – and this really means his wife and children – should get the benefits arising from his membership of the Fund for those years as if in fact he had been a contributor under the definition of the law.

But the only way that this could be done is by the presentation of a Bill to this House for that purpose. This, therefore, explains why we have this Bill before us seeking in fact to enable the widow of Gemmel Bacchus to receive benefits under the Widows and Orphans Fund as if Gemmel Bacchus has been a contributor during his employment in the Ministry of Health.

Question proposed.

The Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Singh.

Mr. M.F. Singh: Mr. Speaker, we are always very happy to agree to any measure of this nature which provided for payment as stated by the hon. Minister of Finance. It is a just and proper cause where Parliament should give its approval to this measure.

It leads us to probably another point which I would crave the indulgence of the hon. Minister of Finance to look into. You will remember, Mr. Speaker, that we were happy to advocate and support the increase in the rates of pensions of former Government officers as a result of the revision of salaries. Indeed, once of the last things we did in the latter part of 1973 was to approve money to pay pensioners the additional monies which the Government had agreed to. Hon. Members will remember that the hon. Minister of Finance gave the undertaking that work had already started and the pensioners would be paid. I think he agreed that they would be paid before last Christmas or, at least, before the end of last year.

It seems as if something went wrong in respect of the payment to these pensioners because I have received several letters in respect of this. I would refer very briefly to only two of these letters and ask the hon. Minister of Finance for an explanation. Perhaps the situation may well have been remedied. It certainly would be very nice for the pensioners to know that their problem was being looked into and that as they had given such good and devoted service to the Government in the past they were not being merely kicked aside.

“I wish to draw to your attention that despite the fact that the Minister of Finance had openly boasted that Government pensioners would have been paid increases in pension by Christmas of 1973, up to now, quite a lot of us have not yet been paid.

I inquired about the reason for this and was told that the treasury has to recomputed the pensions of those who have retired from 1st January, 1970 and 31st December 1971.

But when a check was made at the Treasury, I was told something else, that is, that the Department concerned have to do it.

It is rather heart-rending to know that the majority of pensioners have got their increases and the minority have to go on suffering ...”

This letter was dated the 1st February, 1974.

I will be very brief with the other letter. It came from Springlands, Corentyne, Corriverton town, and it was dated 26th January, 1974.

The letter states:

“Sir, although it was printed in the Headlines of the Daily News Papers of this Country that the money will be paid before Christmas 1973 the pensioners who retired 1970, 1971, 1972 and 1973 have not been paid up to now. I went to the Government Treasury and was told that that money will be paid later in the year because they do not have O.K. from the Ministry when to start work on it. Sir we are getting a hard time with the New Price List and I would be glad if you can put this up in parliament in the next sitting. Sir, I beg you to do your best for the poor pensioners.”

It is only now I am having the opportunity to raise this point so it may well be that the situation has been remedied. If not, will the hon. Minister of Finance please tell us what is the position.

There can be no doubt that the Government agrees that pensioners are worthy of consideration. If the Government did not, it would not have agreed to the increases in the pensioners salaries. I do not think there should be any clash about whether or not these pensioners are to get increases. Obviously something has happened somewhere along the line. I implore the hon. Minister of Finance, whatever it is that may have happened in respect of these increases for pensioners, will he please see that he situation is corrected if it has not already been corrected.

It is quite clear that in spite in spite of the fact these pensioners quite rightly expected to be paid so it may well be that the situation has been remedied. If not, will the hon. Minister of Finance please tell us what is the position.

There can be no doubt that the Government agrees that pensioners are worthy of consideration. If the Government did not, it would not have agreed to the increases in the pensioners' salaries. I do not think there should be any clash about whether or not these pensioners are to get increases. Obviously something has happened somewhere along the line. I implore the hon. Minister of Finance, whatever it is that may have happened in respect of these increases for pensioners, will he please see that the situation is corrected if it has not already been corrected.

It is quite clear that in spite of the fact that these pensioners quite rightly expected to be paid sometime before last Christmas or before the end of 1973 up to January and February 1974 they had not been paid their increases, whatever the reason is. Will the hon. Minister of Finance please give these pensioners the assurance that the amount will be paid to them very shortly? If the pensioners have got their money they do not need an assurance.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance, do you wish to reply?

Mr. Hope (replying): Mr. Speaker, I should like to give one bit of information. The revision of pensions is not such an easy matter as say salaries.

I did give the assurance that the pensioners will be paid by last Christmas or at least by the end of last year. In fact the staff of the Treasury worked late in the evenings until early in the mornings to try to get the amounts paid.

There were a few cases where payment was not effected. This arises largely in areas where not only was the revised pensions payable but the interim allowances that these people have received had to be worked into their basic pensions before the additions could be computed.

It is for this reason that most of the references were for the years 1970, 1971 and 1972 because it was in those years that interim allowances were applicable, it meant that those people's pensions had to be recomputed and that meant getting out old files and working the whole thing over again.

I am not sure who were the writers of the letters but one would probably have found, if they were policemen that there might have been a problem if they had gone to the Treasury because if recomputation was necessary then it would have meant that the police department would have had to do the recomputation and they might have been going into the wrong Ministry in the first instance.

I think the same thing applies to teachers because the Ministry of Education, in the case of teachers, and the Ministry of Home Affairs, in the case of police do their own recomputation and the Treasury okays and pays subsequently.

I want to assure the hon. Member that the massive amount of work that is in fact involved is being tackled continuously and we hope that all persons will be paid very quickly.

3.35 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

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

GUYANA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Miss Jaiserrisingh: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the Second reading of the following Bill:

“A Bill intituled an Act to incorporate the Board of Trustees of the Guyana Presbyterian Church to hold the property in Guyana of the Canadian Mission Council in Guyana and for purposes connected therewith.”

Bill read a Second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon: Hon. Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, “That this Assembly do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.” [**Minister of Parliamentary Affairs (Leader of the House)**]

Adjourned accordingly at 3.45 p.m.
