

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2010) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

139TH Sitting

Thursday, 30TH December, 2010

The Assembly convened at 2.17 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Brief account of accomplishment of work for the past year

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to take this opportunity, of this being the last sitting of the year, to give you a brief account of the kind of work we have accomplished during the past year.

“NUMBER OF SITTINGS

There were thirty one [31] sittings of the National Assembly for the year 2010.

Two [2] new members took the oath of office during the year.

PAPERS AND REPORTS LAID

Sixty eight [68] Papers and Reports were laid in the National Assembly for the year 2010. These included Annual Reports, Loan Agreements and other Policy Documents submitted by various Government Ministries and Departments.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

Seventeen [17] reports, including periodic reports, were submitted to the National Assembly by Parliamentary Committees.

ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

One (1) oral question without notice was answered.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Forty four [44] questions (33 written and 11 oral) were answered in the Assembly during 2010. All questions submitted to the Assembly were answered.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

Ministers of the Government made nine (9) statements to the Assembly during the year.

MOTIONS

Forty Motions were approved by the National Assembly during 2010, comprising of fourteen [14] Government Motions, three [3] Opposition Motions and nineteen [19] Committee Motions.

Four Motions were not proceeded with and remain outstanding on the Order Paper.

Committals to Committees

For the period under review, one (1) motion, that is, Criminal Responsibilities of HIV/AIDS Infected Individuals, was referred to a Special Select Committee.

BILLS PASSED

Twenty nine [29] bills were passed by the National Assembly for the year, seven [7] were considered by Special Select Committees, and five [5] bills are still under consideration by Committees.

All twenty nine [29] bills passed by the Assembly were assented to by His Excellency the President.

BILLS INTRODUCED

Twenty five [25] bills were introduced in the National Assembly during the period under review.

COMMITTEES

One hundred and fifteen [115] committee meetings were held as follows:

	<u>No. of Meetings Held</u>
1. Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services	10
2. Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources	7
3. Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services	10
4. Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations	6
5. Parliamentary Management Committee	3
6. Committee on Appointments	11
7. Committee of Selection	4
8. Public Accounts Committee	18
9. Parliamentary Standing Committee and Constitution Reform	Nil
10. Committee of Privileges	2
11. Standing Orders Committee	Nil
12. Statutory Instruments Committee	Nil
13. Assembly Committee	Nil
14. Special Select Committee on the Conclusion of the Consideration of the 2004 Report of the Disciplined Forces Commission	9
15. Special Select Committee on the Court of Appeal (Amendment) Bill 2008 – Bill No. 12 of 2008	4
16. Special Select Committee on Guyana Fiduciary Oversight Project	Nil
17. Special Select Committee on the Report of the Draft Standing Orders	1
18. Special Select Committee on Maritime Zones Bill 2009 – Bill No. 36 of 2009	11
19. Special Select Committee on Credit Reporting Bill 2009 – Bill No. 37 of 2009	3
20. Special Select Committee on Persons With Disabilities Bill 2009 – Bill No. 44/2009	4
21. Special Select Committee on Legal Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 2009 – Bill No. 45/2009	4
22. Special Select Committee on the Allied Health Profession Bill No. 15/2009	4
23. Special Select Committee on:	

(1) The Custody, Conduct, Guardianship and Maintenance Bill – Bill No. 29 of 2009	2
(2) The Childcare and Development Services Bill 2009 – Bill No. 31 of 2009	Nil
24. Special Select Committee on the Sexual Offences Bill 2009 – Bill No. 30 of 2009	2
25. Special Select Committee on the Fiscal Transfer Bill 2009 – bill No. 25/2009	Nil
26. Special Select Committee on the Municipal and Districts Councils (Amendment) Bill 2009 – Bill No. 26/2009	Nil
27. Special Select Committee on the Local Government (Amendment) Bill 2009 – Bill No. 23/2009	Nil
28. Special Select Committee on Criminal Responsibilities of HIV/AIDS Infected Individuals	Nil
29. Parliamentary Standing Committee on Oversight of the Security Sector	1
30. Special Select Committee on the Impact of Global Food Rice Increases	Nil

Presentations

Eight [8] presentations were made by senior Government Officials before the following Committees:

- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations
- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services
- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services
- Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources

Establishment of Commissions

As a result of the work of the Committee on Appointments the following Service Commissions were established:

1. The Rights of the Child Commission
2. The Women and Gender Equality Commission
3. The Indigenous Peoples' Commission"

ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

The Mandela Dumpsite

Mrs. Lawrence: Despite the pre-empting to answer my question in the media last evening, I will still like to direct this question to the Minister of Local Government. The Mandela

dumpsite is being used beyond its original design and has been over-utilised to the extent that it has encroached on Cemetery Road and the cemetery. Garbage is just a few feet away from Cemetery Road. The stench, rodents, traffic and health hazards and acrid smell of smoke, which play havoc with your eyes and lungs and can lead, possibly, to all kinds of respiratory diseases, are unbearable for the residents of the surrounding communities. We are a day shy of ending the year 2010 in which the Hon. Minister told this Hon. House that the Mandela Dumpsite will be closed and the new site in Region 3 or Region 4 will be in operation. Could the Hon. Minister inform this House, and the residents of the communities surrounding the Mandela dumpsite, when will this eye soar be ended so that the residents can get some relief? And, how soon will the new site become operational?

Secondly, could the Hon. Minister also say whether he has consulted with the Minister of Health to provide any emergency and/or preventative health services to the residents of the areas who have been suffering from the health hazards from this dumpsite? If so, could he elaborate on this service?

Mr. Lall: The Hon. Member is quite correct. I had occasion, only yesterday, to deal with some of these issues based on queries from the media. I want to start off by saying that I think it is a great dishonour for us to use the name of Mr. Nelson Mandela to refer to this landfill site. I would prefer to refer to it as the Le Repentir landfill site.

It is true that, a few weeks ago, there has been a very evident mismanagement of that location which has caused the Central Government to intervene to ease the situation there in the Le Repentir. I want to emphasise this point because over the years, since I have been Minister, I have been urging the City Council, especially the Solid Waste Management Department of the City Council, to recognise the importance of this location – not because it is a place where waste is dumped that it loses its significance. It plays a very important role in the lives of the citizens of Georgetown and its environs. Unfortunately, my urgings have not been heeded, and it has resulted in a total mismanagement of that site.

The Hon. Member referred to the over-utilisation of that site. That is not so. In my humble opinion, and in the opinion of many of the technical people, that site has been underutilised. It could have gone up at least two and half metres higher than it is at the moment. That is exactly what is being done. A few cells are being open up which can take more wastes and is backing up the load that has been left on the ground over the past months.

There is a contractor on site, contracted by the Municipality. I thought that it was logical for the contractor to be given the objective of removing all the garbage placed there in a 24-hour period. That contractor has only been removing about seventy-five per cent and I have been urging the Head of the Solid Waste Management Department, Mr. Hubert Urling, to get the contractor to bring in additional equipment - especially in this season where there is an increased amount of garbage - to get the garbage from the dumped location onto the cell. He has failed to do so. That is the reason why the garbage was backing up on to Cemetery Road. A week ago, it was about twenty metres away from the gate. In addition to that, the Municipality has allowed the pickers to sort out a huge amount of "garbage" – quote and unquote - and to park them right at the side of Cemetery Road. A few days ago all those things that were picked and left there had to be bulldozed. They were told that no more picks will be allowed to be parked in that area. If people want to sort things and pick them for some use, they should remove them immediately.

The whole place is very chaotic. There are little children at the dumpsite – boys and girls. I have urged the City Constabulary to take possession of this site, years now, to prevent people from sorting out wires and burning them on site to extract the copper. It has failed to do so. Even at the point in time when Minister Benn and I went there, a few days ago, people were still burning on the site.

We recognise the situation and we recognise the sufferings that have been going on in the surrounding areas. The Ministry of Health – as I try to answer the second part of the question, now – is quite aware of the situation there and has made several interventions, especially when some of those irresponsible people caused fires to be lit on the dumpsite.

I said, already, that this is a very important activity within the city and the City Council has not been taking this matter seriously. It has not been giving the contractor proper guidelines. The contractor is being paid huge sums of money. We have intervened a few days ago and we have already, at the Central Government level, expended \$40 million. It has brought in additional equipment - heavy-duty equipment - to take the garbage, once it is dumped there, onto the cell. A new entrance has been created to cell two, the pit that is opened, and we are thinking – we have not started as yet – of perhaps utilising the entrance from the Mandela Avenue on to the dumpsite to ease the pressures on the Cemetery Road area. It all has to do with some creative thinking of how to deal with the situation and that department has been deficient. I would say the entire City Council has been deficient in managing this place.

[**A Hon. Member:** Who is running it?] The PNC is running it. This is a perfect example of PNC management style. It is employing a lot of people and nothing is being done. The people do not have tools to work. There are nine hundred people who are utilising \$110 million a month. They do not have forks, rakes, cutlasses and files – no equipment at all. They are just being paid to sit. When I speak of these matters, to deal with that situation at the City Council, I hear a lot of racist talks.

We are going to continue, at the Central Government level, the Ministry of Local Government, and especially the Ministry of Public Works, our intervene to see to it that there is easement. We will continue until that site is closed. In fact, the present Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) loan, or project, that we are executing at Haags Bosch, includes a component for the closure of the dumpsite at Mandela Avenue. I believe we are on stream. We have been visiting the Haags Bosch site. The contractor has the capability, there. I have never said that the Haags Bosch site will be ready this year. [**Mrs. Backer:** It is next year.] It will be ready in January next year. I have already said that. That is the date. That is a contractual obligation on the part of the contractor. I, as Minister, cannot go and tell the contractor to finish by December, 2010 when he has a written contract stating by January. I have never said that. That is the figment of somebody's wild imagination. We are on stream. The first cell at Haags Bosch will be opened before the end of next month. It is being prepared. I think, at the moment, the leachate system is being prepared. The filtration system is being worked on, and to complete, within a few days, the leachate system.

The Haags Bosch site will be a modern, well-managed dumpsite unlike the one that is on Mandela Avenue. It will have a modern leachate system where the leachate will be made inert, having passed through a proper system. The first cell of four will be 6.5 hectares, fifteen acres. It has a depth of three metres and on top of the surface area could be extended to, I think, another nine metres. It will be a site that will take waste for the next ten years comfortably. Hopefully, that period can be extended by creating some new landfill sites across the Demerara River, in Region 3, so that that waste from that area will not come across to Haags Bosch.

Additionally, this project entails a significant amount of sorting of various materials: tyres, bottles, different plastics and so on. So small entrepreneurs will be encouraged to recycle what is called waste and to make them into raw materials for other things. That, in itself, when implemented, will assist us in extending the life of the Haags Bosch dumpsite.

I want to repeat. We are aware of the situation at the Mandela dumpsite. We are sympathetic to the residents of the communities nearby. We have made significant intervention, at the City Council level and at the Central Government level, to deal with that situation. Hopefully, by the end of January, we will be able to close that site in Le Repentir. I am very optimistic but, Mr. Speaker, if you were to go there you would see dozens of extremely heavy-duty equipment moving tens of thousands of tons of earth. Whenever it rains, it becomes extremely challenging. I am very optimistic that the equipment can move all the earth away from the side so that the road to the dumpsite can be built. I think the contractor is optimistic and the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) is very optimistic. At the Central Government level, even at the highest level, we are very optimistic. Even His Excellency, President Bharrat Jagdeo, is involved in this matter to see to it, because of the importance of this site, that we are on schedule.

I also want to state that there has been, in recent times, some misguided citizens who believe that they can assist the situation by upsetting the operations at La Repentir. They are free to protest because it is a free country, but I would urge them that their actions to stymie the operations at the site will not help the situation. It will only aggravate the situation. It will not help the citizens and the communities around the dumpsite. **[Mrs. Backer:** I am wondering where the Magistrate will get the fine from...] I am not talking about the law at the moment. The law will take its course if they try to block the place. If they want to assist they can come to us and give us a helping hand. We need the cooperation of everyone. We do not need any obstruction at the moment.

Thank you very much Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Members are allowed two supplementary questions per question. I do not know if this is one or two questions. It was asked in one but it has two parts. In view of the length of the Minister's answer, I will see how it goes.

Mr. Corbin]: Supplementary question, Your Honour: It is said that one should not use this Chamber to speak on issues when people cannot defend themselves. I understand the Minister to be throwing all the blame of this burden on the Georgetown City Council, called it the PNC Council. My supplementary question to the Minister is whether it is not true that in the award of contracts for that specific Mandela dumpsite, that the Central Government had a managing hand throughout all the awards of those contracts.

Secondly, whether it is not true that the Government of Guyana had given the assurance that the Haags Bosch site would have been finished four years ago and therefore, planning on the Mandela dumpsite, had to have taken that into account when it was being operated. As a resident of Peter's Hall, I was invited to presentations, more than five years ago, and I saw some Members of the other side of this House who were present as pickets at the time when we, as residents of the East Bank, were told of the schedule of this new Haags Bosch dumpsite and the implications for the residents of that area. The question is whether it is not the Central Government which has been negligent and failing in its responsibility to honour its commitment to have the Haags Bosch site done on time so that the Mandela dumpsite could have been closed at the scheduled time.

Mr. Lall: There seems to be ten different questions asked. I do not know which one to answer. I can only answer two.

The first answer is that it is not true that the Central Government had any hand in the awarding of the contract to the contractor that is on the landfill site. This was always the responsibility of the City Council and the Hon. Member knows that there is no tender procedure in the City Council. Crawler and Wheeler Waste Disposal Service was hand-picked by the Municipality and it is still there. It has been there for ten to twelve years. There is no new contract. The same contract has been repeated. That contract states no responsibility. It does not define any kind of obligation of the contractor - what he should do. It just states that he must be paid \$18,000 a hour. That is all. It was not done by the Central Government.

It is not true that the Government had committed itself to finish Haags Bosch in four years time. Four years ago it did not have the funds. This site cost US\$18 million. Four years ago it did not have the land. The environmental study, itself, took a few years. I do not know who, in Government, at least not a Member of Cabinet since I have become a Minister, ever made such a statement that it was supposed to be done within four years. I know nothing of that sort.

The management of the site is the statutory responsibility of the Mayor and City Council (M&CC). It is not the responsibility of the Ministry of Local Government. The Ministry of Local Government is a monitoring agency. The Opposition Members normally criticise us for micro-managing. They are urging and begging me to micro-manage. I could only give advice and urge the City Council on what to do. I cannot go and do it myself, but the situation has

reached such a disastrous proportion that the Central Government had to intervene. As I have said, already it has utilised \$40 million in just a few days to deal with that situation.

I want to repeat. The Central Government did not have anything to do with the contractor being on site, and I want to emphasise that the same old contract that was there, since Noah built his ark, is still there. I want to debunk this idea that the disastrous situation there has anything to do with the Central Government. Had it not been for the intervention of the Central Government, at various intervals,...For instance, when there were fires, the entire City Council would fold its arms, sit and do nothing. The Central Government had to expend millions of dollars to mobilise the police, the private sector, and other citizens to deal with those fires. The City Council had never been able to deal with them. It cannot blame the Central Government for this. The Central Government wants it to be managed properly. It is its responsibility. That is why a special Solid Waste Management Department was set up which I think, perhaps, reports directly to the Mayor. I see it very unseemly that that Department is the only Department that is not under the City Engineer's Department. It is quite outside of it. Mr. Urling does not report to the City Engineer.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, it was two questions, so I want to ask a supplementary to the next one.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed Hon. Member. We have to bear in mind that our time is going.

2.47 p.m.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker the Minister said that the Central Government was considering using the Mandela Avenue entrance to the dumpsite. Could the Minister tell this House, based on policy analysis from the scientific environmental and social standpoint, what factors, for and against, emerged that led to his conclusion?

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear what was said after "for and against what."

Mr. Norton: If he is considering it, I assume that there was policy analysis. Could the Minister tell us the advantages and disadvantages that emerged from the policy analysis that gave him the proclivity towards his dispensation?

Mr. Lall: I said Central Government is considering if needs be, the use of the Mandela entrance. A decision has not been made as yet. [**Mrs. Backer:** That is what Mr. Robeson Benn told us] I am on the floor and not Mr. Robeson Benn. That is chatter between the two of you. Central Government is considering it. We may not do it. If we are going to do it, obviously, we are going to take some of the things the Hon. Member just mentioned into consideration.

Mr. Norton: I have a follow-up question. I did not suggest that a decision was made. The Hon. Member said it was being considered. I assumed that a senior policy making Government will consider all the policy implications. I am merely asking him what these policy implications Central Government is considering. It will help us to understand why the decision was made, if it is made.

Mrs. Lawrence: The Minister said that the Central Government has just spent over \$40 million to do some work there. I would like to know whether the Minister has given any consideration to having some work done to the right side of the dump to clear the debris that is presently on gravesites. Persons cannot go and visit their loved ones' place of rest.

Mr. Lall: Part of the closing operation will entail clearing the area as Mrs. Lawrence has suggested.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker on a Point of Order. I asked a legitimate question and I thought that I would have gotten an answer.

Mr. Speaker: The Minister heard the question and he did not answer. There is nothing that I can say. I cannot go to the Minister and force him to stand.

Mr. Franklin: Just for clarification, could the Hon. Minister tell this Hon. House how much money was spent on the Haags Bosch site and what percentage of the work is complete?

Mr. Lall: We have already expended approximately US\$2 million and I think that the first cell which will be utilised is more than 60% complete. The leachate and filtration system will account for the other 40%.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Presentation and First Reading

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

PENSIONS (PRESIDENT, PARLIAMENTARY AND SPECIAL OFFICES AMENDMENT) BILL 2010/ BILL NO. 26 OF 2010

A Bill intituled

“AN ACT to amend the Pensions (President, Parliamentary and Special Offices) Act [*The Prime Minister and Minister of Communications*]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

FINANCIAL PAPER NO. 5 OF 2010

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members we can now consider Financial Paper No. 5 of 2010 – Supplementary Estimates (Capital) totaling \$3 Billion for the period ending Friday 31st December, 2010. The Assembly will resolve itself into Committee to consider the Paper.

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman in accordance with article 171 (2) of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended for consideration by the National Assembly the Motion for the approval for the proposal set out in Financial Paper No. 5 of 2010 – Supplementary Estimates – Current and Capital for the period ended 31st December, 2010 totalling \$3 billion and I now move the motion.

Motion proposed

Item 1 45-451 Ministry of Housing and Water – Housing and Water - \$3,000,000,000

Mr. Corbin: I just wish to reiterate my earlier remarks which were made at the previous sitting.

Mr. Chairman: You do not need to go into that.

Mr. Corbin: I am just reiterating what I said the last time that such a huge figure was brought to the House for approval. I think the Hansard would have my remarks from then. With a voted provision of \$680 million in the Substantive Budget and a supplementary provision already approved for \$3.7 billion and now with the added \$3 billion, making it an additional sum of \$6 billion since the Budget, does the Minister not feel that he owes this

National Assembly a proper project profile to explain how \$6 billion will be sent with some details? This is so many more times than the original Budget.

Mr. Ali: The further supplementary provision of \$3 billion allows us, in this People's Progressive Party Civic (P.P.P/C) Government, to further satisfy the needs and aspirations of many Guyanese.

Mr. Chairman: The Project Profile Hon. Member.

Mr. Ali: I am getting to that.

Mr. Chairman: This is not the speech making time.

Mr. Ali: The call for a Project Profile must allow for the opportunity to weigh the qualitative benefit that the project brings to the people. Let me say that this \$3 billion that we are reviewing today would further add to the investment that is necessary to ensure that thousands of Guyanese have access to housing and realise their dreams of owning their homes. In addition to that, Government is committed to the task of ensuring that development is equitable in nature and, as such, it would ensure that existing and old housing schemes are part of the development thrust of this Government and that the people who reside in these schemes benefit from upgraded infrastructural development. Mr. Chairman, I think that the \$3 billion would be welcomed by the Guyanese out there and us, as a Government, is committed to ensuring that every cent is spent in the interest of our people – the Guyanese people.

Mr. Corbin: Mr. Chairman it appears that the Hon. Member thinks that this is a general debate for a Budget. We are here dealing with the taxpayers' money. The law requires that this Government bring a Budget to this National Assembly with estimates with explanations and developments with project profiles so that this National Assembly could monitor how expenditure is allocated so that it can be monitored how it is spent. That is what the Public Accounts Committee would have to do at a later stage. The Minister has deliberately not answered my question. I want to ask him to answer my question.

Secondly, I would like to ask whether any of this money is being paid to Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). Also, would any of this money be used to develop the new site at Sparendaam – Pradoville II? In the absence of a Project Profile, with an election year coming up, this money can be spent for pure political purposes. We, in this National Assembly,

would have no idea of how it is spent. This National Assembly is owed a duty to have a detail of how \$6 billion will be spent. It is okay to tell us in a big speech that it will be spent well. We expect that all moneys will be spent well. What we want to know is where it will be spent, how much will be spent and on what it will be spent so that this National Assembly can monitor it. It is not a political question!

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman the amount of \$3-odd billion was debated last week. We are dealing with \$3 billion today. I am happy that the Hon. Member raised the issue of transparency and accountability. Let me make it very clear that it was this Government that brought back the Auditor General's Report. We are accountable to the Auditor General. We have established the Public Accounts Committee that is chaired by the Opposition. We all go before the PAC and every single cent that we spent can be questioned.

Mr. Chairman: Now concentrate on the question Hon. Member.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, as I said earlier the \$3 billion would be spent on the expansion and delivery of housing service and house lots for people in this country. I will now proceed to list for members of the Opposition some of the roads that I am speaking about in the old housing schemes. They are: Redwood Crescent, Mc kenzie; Curly Road Network, Blue Berry Hill; Lot 22 Network, Linden; Main Access Road, South Amelia's Ward, Linden; Bruce Alley, Section B Christenburg, Linden; Stewart Park, Section 3 Christenburg, Linden; Gaskin Road, Kara Kara Housing Scheme, Linden; Pine Street Nursery School, Mc Kenzie, Access road to Wisburg Secondary School, Linden, Middle Walk Mary Dam, Region 5, Ferguson Street, Region 5; First Cross Street No. 9 Village, Region 5; Middle Walk Road, Region 5; Health Centre Village Road, Region 5; First Cross Street, Woodley Park, Region 5.

Mr. Chairman: Just hold a minute Hon. Member. How many more of those roads do you have to enumerate?

Mr. Ali: Would you allow me to list all the roads?

Mr. Chairman: No. I asked you

[Interruption by Members of the Opposition]

Mr. Chairman: Hon Members would you all me to proceed please? If you do not allow me to proceed when I am on the floor, I will terminate the session until you can restore yourself to some kind of proper conduct. Hon. Minister how long is that list?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman I can assure you that it is a very long list.

Mr. Chairman: The rules say that answers to these questions must be short. If the list is very long, I would recommend that you print the list and circulate it to Members of the House. You have given a sample of what you have. We understand that the list is very long and we have a lot of roads that this money is going to be spent on. I would recommend and rule that the list be printed and circulated to the Members of the House. Apart from the issue of roads, is there any other part of the question that you want to answer?

Mr. Ali: Yes Mr. Chairman. I can proceed to tell you that the expansion of the Housing sector, as I said earlier, include the infrastructural development work that is necessary along the East Bank Demerara corridor so that the people of this country can have expanded housing.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Minister could you indicate whether the \$3 billion now being sought approval for was not planned prior to last week as spending necessary for housing when you came for \$3.7 billion?

Mr. Ali: I have a very strong sense of history. The Hansard for the last Budget Debate was circulated today and if the Hon. Member looks at my speech he would see that I made it very clear that the housing demand would require far in excess of \$680 million that was provided for in the National Assembly at that time.

I also made a call in the National Assembly to the Minister of Finance that should the economy outperform the projection, I would make a further stake in having additional revenue come to the Ministry of Housing. I am delighted that our economy has outperformed projections and the Ministry of Housing and the people of Guyana can now benefit from this additional resource.

Mr. Ramjattan: I have read the Hansard. You had indicated answers like this, but the \$4 billion requested for last year went to GuySuCo and this was proven by the President's statement that it did not go to Housing but to GuySuCo. Will any of this money go directly to GuySuCo?

Mr. Ali: Unlike the establishment of an auto sale, in order for houses to be built, land is needed. In order to get land, you have to go to the owner of the land to purchase it. In order to

purchase the land you have to get financial resources that we paid to GuySuCo and we got the land for housing. I hope this satisfies the Hon. Member.

Mr. Ramjattan: Does any of the land that you have to build the houses on belong to GuySuCo so that GuySuCo will be a beneficiary of the \$3 billion?

Mr. Ali: If it is that the Hon. Member wants to open a debate on the housing sector, I will seek your permission to do so. If he wants to know who in the sugar industry benefitted, I can tell the Hon. Member all who benefitted from house lots distribution.

Mr. Trotman: Mr. Chairman, I rise on a Point of Order. The Minister has a duty to provide an answer. He said that moneys have to be paid to those who own the land. Who is the owner of the land that you are paying?

Mr. Ali: The Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan raised the question about the spending of \$4 billion which is not on the Order Paper. What I said to him was the \$4 billion that he pointed to was indeed paid to GuySuCo for land so that we can have housing development. How clearer can I be?

Mr. Corbin: The Hon. Member, obviously, does not feel that this House deserves proper explanations. My first question about project profile would have prevented him from having to read all those details because we would have had that information in front of us. If he had circulated that with the Estimate, then we would not have had the need to ask this question. I want to be sure first of all that your advice is taken as a commitment by the Minister for the circulation of those details.

The Minister on this note states, "Provision for development in new housing areas and improvement to existing housing schemes."

It is interesting that the Hon. Member mentioned some streets in Linden, an area with which I am very familiar. I would like the Hon. Member to elaborate on which housing schemes are at Stewart Path and Bruce Alley. Which housing schemes is the Hon. Member improving there?

Mr. Ali: A housing area, old or new, wherever Guyanese people reside in a community oriented fashion. Wherever Guyanese form themselves into a community and reside, that is a housing area and will attract the attention of this Government.

Mr. Ramjattan: I just want some specifics. Will any of the \$3 billion go towards the payment of the \$720 million to sugar workers for the 5% increase?

Mr. Ali: I have outlined in great detail where the \$3 billion will be going. I have even been curtailed to fashion the detail in another form and present it to this Hon. House. The Hon. Member asked a question outside of this and I have already defined where the \$3 billion is going. If the Hon. Member has a problem with the payment of \$720 million to sugar workers, let him tell and the public out there that, “I, Hon. Member, Ramjattan has a problem with it.”

Mr. Corbin: I am going to try one more time but clearly, the Hon. Member has no regard for us in this National Assembly. I have asked for the housing scheme in accordance with this note for Stewart Path. There is no housing scheme there and in many other areas. There are a few houses here and there. Among the places that the Hon. Minister mentioned a few minutes ago was the East Bank development corridor. Could the Minister explain what he means by the East Bank corridor? I understand the East Bank corridor to be the road to Timehri. If I am wrong, please correct me.

Mr. Ali: I referred to the East Bank development corridor and this concept has been well defined publicly by the Hon. Minister of Finance. The development corridor that we speak of is one that has seen expanded services in banking – there are three new banks; one that has seen expanded services in the gas station industry, one that has seen expanded housing services and the corridor now includes from Agricola/Eccles to Mocha. It is now being expanded to connect to the existing houses in the Diamond Housing Scheme. This is a macro development agenda that the East Bank Development corridor refers to and it will see expansive infrastructure development over the next two years. The language is very clear: improvement to existing housing areas. The Hon. Member can have his own definition of what is a housing area, but I have sought to put forward to him what is the policy directive and what constitute a housing area for us.

Mr. Corbin: I am quite correct, Sir. Despite the meandering in assuming that the East Bank Development corridor refers to the East Bank, I want to know whether the Minister does not feel that such an expenditure, quite correctly, should not be an expenditure within housing but one which falls within the Ministry of Works in terms of the development of roads around this country. I will present the Budget and show that all the ancillary roads around this country are accounted for in the Budget under the Ministry of Works. All that the Minister has told us so far refers to roads here and there, but it does not fall within the purview of the

Ministry of Works where the Hon. Minister Mr. Benn can supervise. I do not know if there will be another situation such as the one with the Supenaam Stelling which Minister Benn claimed was done by the Ministry of Local Government and not his Ministry.

Does the Minister not appreciate that this expenditure is not really for housing, but based on what he has said so far, for roads development in various parts of the country that should properly fall under the budgetary line of the Ministry of Works Roads division.

Mr. Ali: What I can say is that I appreciate the fact that this is the Government of Guyana's expenditure for the people of Guyana. What I can also appreciate is that this Government has an integrated approach to development. Let me say that all of the housing schemes roads have to be built. Roads have to be built in Diamond, Parfaite Harmonie, Block 22, Amelia's Ward and Fort Ordance, Corentyne. Roads are now a cup of tea for the Ministry of Housing. Wherever people reside in community-oriented areas roads fall, rightfully, in the ambit of the Ministry of Housing. I see nothing wrong with that. If I may further elaborate, within the Ministry of Housing there is an inter-agency coordinating group. That group comprises representatives from Local Government, Public Works, Finance and Housing in order for us to be a structured development pathway.

3.17 p.m.

Mr. Ali: I am very confident that the resources are placed in an execution agency that has the necessary capacity and capability to do the works. Thank you.

Mr. Corbin: My final question, because I am getting nowhere, but at least the people of Guyana will know and hear the kind of misinformation and lawlessness that we are having in this country: Will the Minister not agree with me that putting these \$3 billion in such a way in this Supplementary Provision to undertake the works which he has outlined, which we hope we will see a copy of, is not an attempt by the Government to have an omnibus sum somewhere in the Ministry of Housing to be used at the whims and fancies of the political directorate for political purposes in the period ahead? Does he believe so or not?

Mr. Ali: I categorically say that we do not believe so. That is the first thing. The second thing is that it is not a political maneuver in any way to deliver improved infrastructural services to the people of this country. What it is the responsibility of the Government that has been elected to ensure that this service is delivered to the people and that is what it is here? It is the delivery of what we are elected to do. It is a constitutional responsibility.

The omnibus of funds that resides in the Ministry of Housing is for the benefit of the people and for that we have no apology. How can we apologize for making resources available for the people? I thank you.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Minister, what time period do you see these \$3 billion being spent in? Is it from now, to the 31st, tomorrow or how far into the future?

Mr. Ali: The resources that are requested here are resources that, when we approve it here, would be made available and would be spent within the project cycle timeframe of the project. I outlined in great detail and if you allow me, I can repeat all of the roads for the benefit of the Hon. Member, but I will follow your direction and have it circulated but those are the infrastructural developments that we have in place. We have to go through the process of public tendering, award of contracts and then we will proceed forward.

Mr. Ramjattan: Is the Minister aware that under the Constitution, Article 219, he only has four months now into the succeeding year to spend that kind of money? Are you aware of that?

Mr. Ali: If this relates to the question, I am aware of the financial regulation. I am aware of the guidelines and regulations that govern the expenditure of public financing. I am fully aware of this. Thank you.

Mr. Ramjattan: If I may ask, knowing very well that we are going to have a Budget within a four-month period...

Mr. Chairman: This sum can be rolled over.

Mr. Ramjattan: Yes, but only for the four months...

Mr. Chairman: No. This sum can be rolled over...

Mr. Ramjattan: Is it not proper, in view of a new Budget that is some weeks away for us to have that money coming there which would have a project profile on all of the spending?

Mr. Ali: What we thought was proper is that we ensure that wherever resources are available our emphasis must be on delivering those resources to the people in a timely, efficient and reliable manner. That is what is proper for us, so today this supplementary provision will allow us to steamroll into the future. Thank you.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Sir. In the absence Mr. Minister of a project profile, which I shall not ask you to provide, would you concur that this exposes a serious lack of planning and, if you have planned, would you agreed that there is an urgent need to re-examine the basis for executing your programmes? If you have planned, tell us what provisions you have made for the poor in your projects for people.

Mr. Ali: What I can agree on is that the reflection of additional inflows and revenue collection are indications of the strong economic performance of Guyana. That is what I can agree on. I can agree that the Ministry of Finance in executing its programmes and policies in negotiating new loans and programmes has done well, and a result of the additional inflows and loans that came forward as a result of aggressive negotiating that we had planned well.

What you are seeing here in the Supplementary Provision is a reflection of strong performance of the P.P.P/Civic Government. Thank you.

Mr. Scott: At the beginning of the year you told us that you needed only \$600 million to perform for the entire year, now, at the 12th hour, you have come to us for virtually \$7 billion. This shows that at the start of the year you had no plans whatsoever to spend \$7 billion. Now that you have come for \$7 billion you should be able to tell us what programme there is and how you plan to spend it within 1st January to the 31st December, 2010. What is your programme?

Mr. Ali: This shows our strong commitment to social development. This shows our strong commitment to achieving the housing development. I cannot see how this is related to a laxity of planning. If additional revenue comes into a country, how is that correlated to bad planning? I cannot understand this. I cannot understand the question. If the Ministry outperforms the portfolio how is that related to bad planning?

Mr. Norton: Based on what the Minister just said he has a plan, I assume. Could the Minister go to his plan and tell me specifically:

1. What is it that they are building in Stewart Path?
2. What will it cost?

Could the Minister also go to his plan and tell me what it is that he is building in Bruce Alley and exactly how much it costs? I do not want to correct the street on Blueberry Hill, but the

street you called on Blueberry Hill you can do the same; tell me what you will do and how much it will actually cost and then I will come back to you.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Chairman, you have ruled on this matter. I will not elaborate on this again.

Mr. Norton: Rule on which matter?

Mr. Ali: On the provision of the extended list.

Mr. Norton: The ruling, as I understand it, is that he will provide it to us in writing later but the assumption is made that he has it but he lacks the facility to give it to us with immediacy. I am asking a specific question that he must have the information for now. If you say that you are going to build something in Stewart Path you must have had a plan and its cost. I am merely asking him, before I consider him totally contemptuous of everybody, what it is that he is building, how much will it cost these three areas?

Mr. Chairman: Do you have that information here, Hon. Member?

Mr. Ali: I have here the elaborated list of projects that would be financed under this programme...

Mr. Chairman: Answer my question please. Hon. Member, could you please listen to me. Do you have that information that the Hon. Member asked for here with you?

Mr. Ali: We have all of the information that relates to these projects.

Mr. Chairman: Can you answer the question that the Hon. Member asked?

Mr. Ali: To be fair I have to outline all of the projects, the roads that we have...

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Member is not in a position to answer. Thank you. No answer. Is there any other question?

Mr. Norton: May I ask that he provides the specifics, but I want to ask him a simple question for which one does not have to go to high school to answer, is it a road that you are building in Stewart Path? Is it a road, Mr. Chairman? Is it a misplaced question?

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Member indicated that he is building roads there.

Mr. Norton: He cannot say... Is he building a road?

Mr. Chairman: Well that is what I understood when he was reading the list out.

Mr. Norton: I would like for the Hon. Member to tell us if in Stewart Path he is building a road. He mentioned Stewart Path.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Norton. Are you building a road in Stewart Path, Hon. Member?

Mr. Ali: The information I was providing at the time I was stopped...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you keep reporting that I stopped you. There is a rule in the Standing Orders – I will ask the Clerk to get it up – which states that under this process lengthy answers to questions are not permitted. We have a time restraint here this afternoon. All I did was ask you to do what is normal. I did not stop you. You were saying.

Mr. Ali: I totally respect the ruling, but the Hon. Members are asking questions that require me to go back into the details.

Mr. Chairman: When you are ready to pay attention to me I will continue. It is quite permissible for a Minister of the Government to say, “I do not have that answer available at the present time.” I do not know what the big problem is with that answer. That is a perfectly permissible answer.

Mr. Norton, the Hon. Member is not in a position to answer your question. We cannot prolong this.

Mr. Norton: I want to record in this House...

Mr. Chairman: Just a minute, Hon. Member. What you have said has already been recorded.

Mr. Norton: I want to record something else.

Mr. Chairman: If you have a question, I will allow you. If you want to record something, I will not allow you.

Mr. Norton: Alright, may I ask a question?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Norton: Could the Hon. Minister tell this House what it is that he is building in Bruce Alley?

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Minister has said that in relation to these matters he does not have this information readily available at this time.

Mr. Norton: It should be recorded that the Hon. Minister needs to be cited for...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, that is out of order.

Mr. Ramjattan: I just want to finally ask the Minister: Is it not a guideline that you must follow, when you seek Supplementary Provisions like this, that you must indicate “what” and “what”, to all Members of Parliament for their scrutiny, the projects and the sums spent on each project are? Are you aware of that?

Mr. Ali: What I am aware of is that for every single project here not only is Parliamentary scrutiny accessible, but scrutiny at the community level and at the individual level is possible for every single project.

We have a tradition in the Government where Bills of Quantity are delivered at the community level to ensure scrutiny.

Mr. Ramjattan: Well for the scrutiny of the \$3 billion here would we get any documentation, and how early, as to each project and the sum spent? Could you tell us?

Mr. Ali: I have provided all of the information I currently have and I do not have a problem providing it.

Question put, and agreed to.

Agency Code 45-451 Ministry of Housing and Water – Housing and Water

Motion carried

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, this completes consideration of all of the items.

I now put the motion that the Committee of Supply approves the proposal set out in financial paper No. 5 of 2010, Supplementary Estimates for the period ended on the 31st December, 2010, totaling \$3 billion

Motion carried

ASSEMBLY RESUMES

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker I beg to report that the Committee of Supply has approved the proposal set out in financial paper No. 5 of 2010 and I now move that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in the said resolution.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in its resolution.

Motion carried

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we must consider and pass the Appropriations Bill.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, with your leave I move that Standing Orders 13 (n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Supplementary Appropriation No. 3 for 2010, Bill No. 25 Of 2010, to be introduced at this stage.

Question Put

Standing Orders 13 (n) and 54 be suspended.

Motion carried

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Article 171-2 of the Constitution I signify that Cabinet has recommended the Supplementary Appropriation No. 3 for 2010, Bill No. 25 Of 2010, for consideration by the National Assembly and I now present the Bill to the Assembly and move that it be read the first time.

Question put and carried

Supplementary Appropriation No. 3 for 2010, Bill No. 25 of 2010, to be read for the first time

Motion carried

Supplementary Appropriation No. 3 for 2010, Bill No. 25 of 2010

Dr. Singh: I move that the Supplementary Appropriation No. 3 for 2010, Bill No. 25 Of 2010 be read the second time.

Question put and carried

Supplementary Appropriation No. 3 for 2010, Bill No. 25 of 2010, to be read for the second time

Motion carried

Supplementary Appropriation No. 3 for 2010, Bill No. 25 of 2010.

Dr. Singh: I move that the Supplementary Appropriation No. 3 for 2010, Bill No. 25 of 2010 be read the third time and be passed as printed.

Question put and carried

Supplementary Appropriation No. 3 for 2010, Bill No. 25 of 2010, to be read for the third time

Motion carried

Supplementary Appropriation No. 3 for 2010, Bill No. 25 of 2010

DEFENCE (AMENDMENT) BILL 2010 – Bill No. 23/2010

Mr. Ramson: Cde. Speaker, I am rising to seek that this House consider the Defense Amendment Bill in its second reading. I wish to commence by inviting this Hon. House to recognise that the amendments before this House, albeit brief, need to be placed in their historical context so that a holistic record would be made in this National Assembly, and that there be no ambivalence as to the need to have the current amendment before this House and for its approval.

This House is being approached to give its *imprimatur* to this amendment in the light of our accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I believe some time in August of this year we had the foresight and the responsibility in the light of our Constitutional obligations which can be viewed or considered under Article, which I believe is, 154 (a) which requires us that international treaties set out in the 4th Schedule and which deals with human rights must be respected and upheld by, among other agencies, the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary arms.

It is with that backdrop that I invite this House to consider the Defense Amendment Bill of 2010 which speaks of an amendment by way of a substitution of the words “16 years” and “14 year” for the words “18 years” and “16 years”, respectively. I do not believe that I need

to expatiate on the reasons for the increase in the years save and except to say that the Principle Act which was given Parliamentary affect in the Ramfield Edition by L.R.O. 1 of 1973 speaking of recruitment of a person in the regular force, the Defense Force as it then was, not under the age of 18.

But subsequent to the change in policy direction of the then Government it sought and succeeded in amending the very Section 18 to reduce that age to 16. Having done that it did not have the prescience to recognize that municipal policy may one day violently collide with our international obligations. I do not propose to elaborate save and except to say that by Amendment 32 of 1975 that amendment to the Principle Act was done and lower the age to 16 allowed for the then creation and implementation of something called the Guyana National Service. If my memory serves me correctly and if I am not saying anything out of turn, I would invite you to recognize that since the early 1960s there was a gentleman – I believe it was a gentleman because he carries the name Robert F. Landor – who was a consultant at the United Nations, persuaded the then administration that there was need for the creation of an entity outside the normal and formal employment agencies.

It is with that report that the then Government in 1973 sought to create what eventually evolved into the Guyana National Service. That was no brainchild of the then administration because they sought the assistance of Tanzania after the then President, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, who had visited. He invited the then administration to send persons who were government-oriented or within the umbrella of that administration, several of whom are still alive today, some of whom became Directors General; one I believe is a current aspirant to the candidacy of the Presidency for the P.N.C. There is another who sits in a very high office at the University of Guyana and there is another who is still alive and is a “Buxtonian” by birth. They will remain nameless so as to avoid any controversy.

The reason why I do not want to disclose their name is that it would be unfortunate that they were associated with an organisation created by that administration and then wound down by it.

3.47 p.m.

After the death of the then Kabaka, the late Linden Forbes Samson Burnham. It was his successor who caused its diminution until, eventually, in 2000 our current Government under the tutelage of comrade Gail Teixeira, who at that time was the Minister of Culture, Youth

and Sport, found it necessary to bring an end to that institution, divest it of its military character and convert it totally into a civilian entity.

It is known that at one stage a former President of ours regarded the National Service in two papers written in 1974, *An Act of Coercion*, and in 1977, *An Examination of the National Service* where that service was deemed a P.N.C para-military force to back up the coercive operates of the state in maintaining a minority party in power. I give you that historical background so as to make it part of the record that the current Administration in keeping with the a vanguard nature of its policy making and in keeping with our responsibilities in the International arena we have had occasion to re-examine the wisdom of the 1975 amendment and that is why we are before this House the substitution for the words “sixteen years and fourteen years” the words “eighteen years and sixteen years” respectively. I invite this Honourable House to recognise that where ever it is legislatively possible we should not have municipal legislative provisions that collide with our international obligations. That is the reason these amendments are being sought today. I thank you.

Mrs. Riehl: I rise to make a few brief remarks on this short amendment to lift the age limit for enlistment in the regular Guyana Defence Force because this is the Defence Force Act that we are dealing with.

Firstly, I must say I have a fundamental problem with allowing a sixteen year old to bear arms on behalf of our country when he or she cannot even vote in that country. I have a fundamental difference with that whether or not the parent of that sixteen year old, as section 18.2 wants to happen, consents to him or her going into the force. I think that we should go back to the full version of things where no one can enter the force until he or she is eighteen years old. This Act speaks of the proper enlistment into the Defence Force. I know there were many amendments made by the previous Administration to this Act. This is not the first one being made. There were ten if you count the orders and the regulations and actual amendments made by the previous Administration. I am saying at this juncture of history that we should not have sixteen year old whether with the consent of their parents enter into the force and holding arms on behalf of a country for which they cannot vote. That is the first point I wish to make. We should go back to eighteen. If you want to make a sensible amendment to the Act then cut out all of the parts about getting the consent of the parents etc because this is a way out for parents to get rid of their sixteen year olds when they cannot find jobs in the country. The army is no place for them to go. What the Government should

do, if they do not want or they have a difficulty with the National Service, is find some means... [Mr. R Persaud: Mrs. Riehl, it is fourteen now.] Yes that is what I am saying. It was fourteen because as the Minister was saying it was the National Service. Because of the Rights of the Child Convention, where a child is deemed to be eighteen years old, we do not want to accused of having children in the army, like some of the more unsavoury African countries that have child soldiers. We see pictures of youngsters baring arms. This should not be tenable in a society such as ours.

I know that this Act is now compliant with some of our local laws like raising the age of consent to sixteen but it is not compliant with the Sexual Offences Act which says that childhood is up to eighteen. It is not compliant with the Custody, Contact, Guardianship and Maintenance Bill which, also says that childhood goes until eighteen and a host of children Acts which flow from the Rights of the Child Act. If you want to bring about some change then why not make a sensible change and go back to the eighteen years. As I said, Mr. Speaker, I would not be long.

Those are the points I wanted to make. I had suspected that it was in compliance with some international treaty that the Government has brought this amendment. I always rue the situation where the Government comes with these piece meal things. That is why we keep hammering that we should have, I know because I have been introduced to some people in our library that we are having law revision, but law reform is what we also need. I am again calling for the reinstatement of some body, if not the National Service, then call it what you may to cater for those leaving school at fourteen. The Education Minister, Mr. Sheik Baksh says that he will pass then through all of the different forms of the school so they will be coming out uneducated. There has to be someplace where they can go and that place is not the army. That is why I have this difference with this amendment which says that with the consent of the parent and where the parent cannot be found that the persons who is doing the recruitment can find some way of agreeing to, as it says, if there is no parents, parent or guardian. If after reasonable enquiry has been made to ascertain whether there is such a person. By any person whose care whether in law or in fact the person offering to enlist may be." Even a person who does not have a legal guardian any person who is caring for them can send him into the army as long as they prove that he is sixteen. I feel that that is the fundamental issue here and I do not agree with it. That is all I have to say.

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett: I rise to add my support for the amendment before us today which seeks to amend the Defence Act. I want to speak about the genesis of the amendment and, in so, doing provide a few clarifications to the Hon. Member Mrs. Riehl. As you are aware if there is one subject, regardless of which side of the House we sit on, that we can agree on is that of the protection of children. This is exemplified in the many actions that we have taken in this regard; not only these protocols that we have signed on to but also the Bills that we have passed including the Sexual Offences Act. Minister Priya Manickchand has been in the forefront in addressing some of these issues.

Going back two decades ago the Government at that time signed on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and ratified in 1991. That Convention is filled with many laudable inclusions. However, for the purposes of the amendment before us I will concern myself with Article 38 which speaks to State parties taking measures to ensure the protection and care in certain situations of armed conflicts. In particular, Article 38.2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states as follows... I know that the Hon. Member Mrs. Riehl has read this but I want to point out that the Convention does not say that the age should be eighteen period. However I understand the points that she has made... Article 38.2 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child states as follows:

“States parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take part directly in hostilities.”

Article 38.3 states:

“States parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years State parties shall endeavour to give priority to those that are the oldest”

No doubt these particular provisions stems from the recruitment of children, commonly referred to as child soldiers, in armed conflict was a major cause for concern at that time, and needed to be clearly adumbrated in the Convention. I want to reiterate that the fore mentioned provisions do not prevent State parties from recruiting persons that are between 15 and 18 but in encourages them to only recruit those that are older. Unfortunately the recruitment of child soldiers continues to be a major problem or several countries and by extension the world today, children wherever they are should be protected and cared for. The information on child

soldiers and the countries in which they are located is widely available on the United Nations' web site and many other web sites. I would not detain the House with its many examples except to say that as recent as the December 2nd, 2010, mere weeks ago, the United Nations Security Council sanctioned Lt. Colonel Innocent Zimurindaa of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for

“grave violations against children including recruitment and use of child soldiers, killing and maiming children, sexual violations and denial of humanitarian access, arbitrary execution of child soldiers, failure to release child soldiers and denial of humanitarian access”

namely a refusal to allow the UN mission in the DR Congo for a screening of his troops to remove children from his ranks.

According to the UN there are an estimated 27.1M internally displaced persons, as a result of armed conflict, and about half of this 13.5M are children. Among this number is where we find child soldiers. It is for this reason; the continued intensification of this problem that the optional protocol on children involved in armed conflict became necessary. It came into force in 2002. Guyana, while not a country in armed conflict which involves the recruitment of child soldiers, is nevertheless concerned about the situation. Consistent with its position on the protection and care of children we have decided to accede to the optional protocol on August 11 of this year. As I mentioned earlier the Convention, itself, speaks of not recruiting persons in the armed forces that are younger than fifteen years old. However, Article Three of this additional protocol speaks to raising the minimum age from that stated in the Convention, in other words raising the age from 15. That is what this protocol is about. More specifically Article Three of the optional protocol states as follows:

“States parties shall raise the minimum age for the voluntary recruitment of persons into their National Armed Forces from that set out in Article 38.3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, taking into account the principles contained in that Article and recognising that under the Convention persons under the age of eighteen years are entitled to special protection.”

How is all of this relevant to the amendment before us? As the Attorney General rightly pointed out Section 18.2b of the Defence Act at this time provides for children to be recruited into the armed forces as young as fourteen years old, of course with the consent of their parents. Section 18.2 provides for persons to be recruited 16 years and over. That is what it

states right now. The amendment changing the recruitment age from eighteen to sixteen was done in 1975. What we will now do is allow for recruitment between sixteen to eighteen years with parental consent. Of course, at eighteen a person is an adult and can make their own decision.

The Hon. Member Mrs. Riehl had a difficulty with why we want to stay at sixteen. Why not just raise the recruitment age to eighteen period? The truth be told we have children who have graduated after writing the Caribbean Examination Council's examination who may enter the armed forces as apprentices for training. It is not a huge number but we do not want to prevent that from happening. This is consistent with what many countries across the world has done including the United States, the United Kingdom, Jamaica and several other countries. We are not engaged in war at this time.

Legislations are amended from time to time and at this time we feel that it is important to move the parental consent from fourteen to sixteen to allow the seventeen year olds who want to enter for training etc. to do so.

I want to end my short presentation by saying that the changing of these two figures will send a clear signal to the international community that we are very serious about our obligations. It is one thing to accede to a Convention but it is another thing to actually make the changes in our domestic law. Here we are, a few months after we acceded to that convention, making the necessary changes to our laws bringing us in full compliance with both the Convention and the optional protocol. With that I beg this House to support the amendment.

Meeting suspended

Meeting resumed

The Speaker is in the Chair

Mr. Ramjattan: Having heard the rationale which underlines the reasoning behind this Bill, the Alliance For Change... [Mrs. Holder: from the Foreign Affairs Minister.] Yes, the Foreign Affairs Minister. The Alliance For Change supports this Bill.

Mr. Ramson: I rise mainly to congratulate those who have concurred from the other side and I thank my learned colleague, the Hon. Foreign Minister for apprising this August House on some of the details of the Articles in the Convention.

I wish also to say, quite briefly, for the record, that for those persons who can be enlisted with the consent of the parents there is a policy where those persons are made apprentices in the army musical bands. They are not involved in any kind of weaponry training or bearing of arms. I have been assured by the Chief of Staff that, that is the position.

I thank you and ask that the Bill be read a second time.

Question was put and carried

Bill read a second time

Assembly in Committee

Bill considered and approved

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND EXTENSION INSTITUTE BILL 2010 2010 – Bill No. 24/2010

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to promote greater efficiency in crops and agricultural product industry, to provide enhanced services in Agriculture Research and Extension and Crop Protection and to establish the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute, so as to make provision for effective administration and regulation of trade, commerce and export crops and agricultural products and for matters related or incidental.” *[The Minister of Agriculture]*

Mr. R. Persaud: I wish to assure Members that I intend to be very brief in the presentation of the second reading of this very important piece of legislation. The changing global agriculture, especially food supply, requires, in Guyana as well as other food producing, consuming and exporting nations, to look at our policies and our programmes and to carefully examine the type of projects that we implement. In carrying out that ongoing review and assessment, from time to time we will, and we are compelled to, make changes. In this context, giving what is taking place globally, the challenges that face the agriculture sector and agriculture, and agriculture business globally, we can talk about the issue in terms of climate change and the threat to food supply in the future. We can also look at the impending population explosion, as some may say, and the need for us to produce more and to feed more with limited resources. We can, also, talk about decades of under investment in agriculture and food production and the need for countries, as it were, to catch up. We can, also look at the emphasis and the focus that has been placed on this area by international institutions and

agencies. Certainly, more Governments and their populations are recognising the importance of responding and of preparing and improving their agriculture and food production system.

For us, whilst we have attained a status of being the only country within Caricom, to be food secure and to have, also, a high level of food sovereignty. Because we are not only satisfied with food security we also want to ensure, in Guyana and across the Region, that we enjoy food sovereignty. We see ourselves as moving to the next stage, which we have already started and made some progress, of becoming a leading food producer, processor, and exporter, supplier to the Region and beyond. In pursuant of that objective and to build on the progress that we have made so far within the sector we have carried out with international support working collaboratively with a number of Regional and multi-lateral agencies as well as indebt consultations and interactions with local stakeholders. Over the years we have embarked on a number of adjustments. These are institutional as well as programmatic adjustments within the sector so that we gear the sector to respond to the challenges. Whilst I talk about the global challenges many of those challenges if not attended to can if fact be, as it were, a bug bear to our efforts in developing a vibrant agriculture sector. More so, looking at how it is, we can position ourselves for the opportunities that lay ahead. In that review we have been able to conclude an agriculture diversification project, a very comprehensive agriculture diversification project, with full support from the Inter-American Development Bank (I.D.B) and, also, from the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD). In addition to working with agencies such as the USAID, working with our partners in India, Brazil, China and elsewhere we have been able to come up with this comprehensive agriculture diversification programme. For us to fully realise the objectives of this programme we were advised and, certainly, we recognise the need for us to look at the institutions and the policies that we have in place. I must say and I must admit that there are weaknesses and inadequacies, and in that review we constantly look at ways in which we can reduce or eliminate those weaknesses and improve weak areas and insufficient services. In so doing we have also looked at what the trend has been internationally because we want to learn from best practices of other countries which have gone through a similar phase. We can talk about Brazil, we can look at what India has done, and we can look at the Chilean model, which we have studied very closely, in deriving and concluding our agriculture diversification programme. We have, also, looked at some of the developed countries and what policies and approaches they are pursuing. In that total review we have recognised that in Guyana the mechanisms and the institutions to facilitate and support agricultural development needed to be restructured; some needed to be reformed; some needed to be revamped and others need to be closed and looked relevant and pertinent institutions.

5.16 p.m.

In fact about three months ago we undertook an effort to address the livestock development aspect of our agricultural sector, and that saw the creation of the Guyana Livestock Development Authority which came to the National Assembly and certainly which we are currently implementing. In the coming weeks we will see much more activities coming in this regard.

Having looked at the crop sector, especially the non-traditional crop sector, we have noticed that there has been as it were some gaps, the gaps between research, the gaps between extension services as well as the gap with plant health services. These three important components of crop protection and crop development have been managed historically in our country by different entities and different agencies, but because of what is taking place, the modernisation, what we are required to do to be competitive globally and also recognizing that nationally we have challenges of resources both human as well as financial and even material. We have recognized and based on a lot of technical work; in fact, before this bill came to the National Assembly it went through about twenty-four months of studies of review of interaction. We have recognized, and it was concluded by all stakeholders, that the time has come for us to integrate research with extension services and plant health. That is the main objective of this bill in the National Assembly, to integrate those three vital components which up to this point in time are managed and operating at separate institutions. We found that because of that state of affair, it has not been adequate or sufficient for us to fully realize or maximise the potential of the crop sector in our country, especially looking at where we have more investments in the non-traditional agricultural sector, as well as the traditional, but we have more investments there. We have also not only seen a growth in production, but also a growth in export.

As we seek to prepare ourselves to be a leading agro processing country as we develop hydro, because the main stumbling block to Guyana becoming a major agro procession or developing an agro industrial base has been the cost and reliability of energy. We also recognize that we need to have an institution that is able to deliver these vital services; Research – that is coming up with the appropriate technology and the appropriate solutions that the sector requires, Extensions Services – which is how we can transfer deploy and make those solutions and technologies available including capturing technologies that exist elsewhere and transferring, but also looking at plant health too. Plant health is important not only within the national context, but if we are going to pursue the objective of having an export oriented agricultural sector.

The work has been done and we have recognized that the best institution that we have at this point in time, which is the National Agriculture Research Institution, that if we are able to build within that institution as we are seeking to do here today, create a new body out of that particular institution to give it the mandate of extension services as well as plant health we will be able to benefit from synergies, we will be able to ensure there is coherency, but also at the same time we are in a better position. Whatever we do now for the sector in going forward must be market oriented and demand driven. If we are able to have this type of institution as we are seeking to have the National Assembly's blessing to create, it will allow us to be responsive but more importantly, and I want to stress, be able for us to provide services and resources in a way that they respond to the needs of our farmers and the needs of other stakeholders across the country and even the stakeholders who are external, who depend on Guyana for some of their food supplies.

In so doing, taking this approach, we must also recognise that what we are doing fits into a larger national development objective, and the vision of our Government in terms of

diversifying our economy and maximising the rich agricultural base of our country. If we look at the 2006 Manifesto of the PPP Civic you will see there that a commitment was made that the PPP Civic if elected as it was elected in 2006 would pursue policies to ensure we have a vibrant, competitive and sustainable agricultural sector. This effort, or this bill, and what we are seeking to do, is in fulfilment of that promise. In addition to that, if we look at the National Competitiveness Strategy (N.C.S.) whereby there is a lot of emphasis in terms of developing the non-traditional sector and having the relevant institutions – because as we go to the N.C.S. it speaks directly about having an enhanced role and enhanced capacity of our crop support services in our country, giving the vast potential that this sector has in terms of bringing economic opportunities. We will all know that the National Competitiveness Strategy came about of work and collaboration and interaction between the Government and other stakeholders, particularly the private sector in this regard.

This particular bill, and what we are seeking to do here, also fits into realizing the objectives of the National Competitiveness Strategy. Further to that, in the Low Carbon Development Strategy, there is also a lot of emphasis and resources that are being placed on developing the non –traditional agriculture. It recognised that if we are able to fully realize the objective and the potential and to make the low Carbon Development Strategy alive and bring benefits to our people, particularly our farmers and other stakeholders within the sector we also need to carefully relook, adjust, improve and better the institutions that we have.

In presenting this, the National Agriculture Research and Extension Bill No. 24 of 2010, I want to make it absolutely clear, it is about a proactive policy that we are taking, that is preparing for the future, but also allowing us to respond to current challenges and current weaknesses. I want to admit, we do not have a perfect system. When we do not have perfect system the onus is on us, all stakeholders, but more so those who are mandated and given the charge as our Government is in looking after and administering the welfare that we must constantly look at ways of bettering institutions, bettering our society, but more so providing opportunities for all our people, and in this instance, the end result is to allow us to respond to the needs of the sector and also create in Guyana a much more vibrant and competitive agricultural sector. Thank you very much.

Mr. M. Williams: Mr. Speaker, as I begin my presentation with respect to Bill No. 24 of 2010, I wish to call on the Hon. Minister of Agriculture to place the third reading of this bill on pause. Let us, Mr. Minister, have conversation with those who are involved in and would be affected by this transition to a new entity. Let us, in the spirit of good will, spare no effort in addressing the significant and far reaching implications of this move. After all agriculture is the bedrock of our country's very existence.

Let us for example find out from the Hon. Minister, what is the Government's plan to deal with the erosion of the current NARI's technical capacity. With only two trained scientist at NARI, what has been done in the last ten years to address the strengthening of NARI's technical capabilities, and how does the administration propose to deal with this new and expanded mandate in the face of technical personal crisis. The crops and livestock division's similar predicament is also a humbug.

The Hon. Minister can do well to appraise this National Assembly of the Ministry's success in overseeing the transition to the Guyana livestock development authority which came into being on September 1st of this year. My information is that this transition process is in total chaos. That is not surprising. The Minister must be aware that following the passage into law of Act No. 19 of 1984 it took all of two years to complete the administrative framework and policies and procedures for finance, administration and human resources. The Minister must be aware as well that these documents were all derecognized within recent years and consequently must now be redeveloped. How then does the Hon. Minister propose to deal with two major transitions at the same time? For example, the Public Service Commission, and I note that the Hon. Subject Minister will be speaking later on, has not yet abolished the job description of those affected by the transition to G.L.D.A. Those who were previously entitled to duty free cars had one last duty free letter issued to them in October of 2010. There will be no more duty free cars for those employees.

The Minister may wish to let us have the benefit of the legal advice he may have obtained, prior to establishing a G.L.D.A. bank account and transferring \$17 million from the crops and livestock division into that account. This move was followed by a request for \$17 million as additional inflows for crop and livestock support services last Thursday in this National Assembly. Was this a lawful move? If it was not, will the same mistake be made with the new N.A.R.I.? Why after all this, are veterinarians still being paid by the crops division? Where is the management plan for G.L.D.A. after four months of operation? Is the same faith awaiting the new entity? Has the Minister considered that plant phytosanitary inspection services being integrated in this new entity may not be the best way to go? Has he considered that animal and plant health inspection services are in some countries accorded national security treatment? If he has, then this bill before us ought to have provided for plant phytosanitary inspection services to be an independent body and not one hidden away in the new entity where it will never function in the nation's best interest.

On the surface this bill appears to be quite a nice bill without any provision that will be of major concern to anyone, but the deep under current and the far reaching implications runs strong. Let us take crop extension services; there are regional coordinators in charge, then there are farmer's fields schools headed by PPP activists. Is it the Government's intention to use this entity to regionalise extension services and to bring it under the purview of the political Regional Democratic Councils? Could the Minister explain the disbursement of resources to these entities present and future?

N.A.R.I.'s operations, historically, required about one hundred and fifty extension officers to service the entire country. The current extension officer strength is between 15 and 25. Regionalising the service allows for the bringing on board of some political types at the expense of technical people, this sir is a serious concern which needs urgent attention.

Early in the bill, that is to say at Section 3(2), the Government makes its political objective clear, I quote from the section sir, "the board comprises thirteen directors who shall represent government and interest groups". No longer will there be the requirement of a technical and scientific background as in Section 3(1) of the existing Act No. 19 of 1984. There are many

other deep-rooted political bits of mischief afoot. Is it not true that all labourers and security of NARI will be sent home? Is it not true that Government's intention is to seek contractual security services and contract labourers to replace these staff members? Have you, Mr. Minister, considered that these people have families? The Minister is behind hand in many aspects of the game, but he is ahead of everyone in positioning the big wigs in the new entity while not giving a hoot about the little people.

The top jobs at the new entity have all been filled. The incoming people will have to take the crumbs. For example, the Chief Crops and Livestock Officer, is at this time senior to the director of N.A.R.I. He is a Public Service Commission appointee. The Chief Crops and Livestock Officer is the programme director, GMC, GSA, MMA, MDDP and NARI, and I hear rumblings in the corner that he is the one who is talking, so I expect him to be fired instead of being transferred on the pretence that he may be speaking.

The Chief Crops and Livestock Officer is the person who controls the finances of these projects and reports to the Minister. This is the officer who prepares the annual reports which are tables in this National Assembly. The holder of this office will be drafted into the new entity as Assistant Director of Plant Health, and the Minister can deny that if he wishes. That is right; the office of Director of the new entity has already been filled by the officer who headed the old N.A.R.I., while the Registrar of the Pesticides Board of the Deputy Director of this new entity, positions filled.

A point to note is that NARI has not done any scientific work in five year. The Minister may wish to prove me wrong by presenting research papers and detailed scientific reports to the National Assembly. NARI has not solved the Sigatoka disease affecting plantains. It has not solved the Scarlet Tip disease affecting pineapples, nor has it solved the fungal disease affecting pumpkin. NARI has not been able to provide proper variety advice to producers of pepper. In short NARI has not supported the development and expansion of the Government's much touted four P's of agriculture.

The appointment of the head of the whole entity to the office of the head of the new entity cannot solve this problem. Bringing this proposed Act into force in a rush cannot solve these problems. Let us look at Section 13 of the Bill. Section 13(3) says that the CEO has the power to discipline staff. Section 13(4) says that if you have been disciplined and do not believe that you have gotten a good deal, you can appeal, but you have to appeal to the CEO, his boss and three other subordinates. That cannot make sense to a person who has had in the past the Public Service rules to be guided by and the Public Service Appeals Tribunal to appeal to. Let us look at section 20. Section 20(2) says, and I quote, "The officers of the Division and National Agricultural Research Institute shall be employed on terms and conditions as may be agreed upon between the Board and each person so employed". Two issues arise here sir. Firstly, there is no room for voluntary retirement or cashing in on benefits regardless of years of service or any other consideration. One must go to the new entity. Section 20(6) clearly states, if there was any doubt before, Section 20(6) puts that doubt to rest. The second issue is that there is an opening provided for negotiating of contracts and super salaries for favoured persons, something that we have grown accustomed

to in recent times. Even though section 20(3) speaks of conditions not being less favourable in those which applied before, the case of duty free letters for cars being withdrawn from GLDA employees hang ominously overhead. I challenge the Hon. Minister to state openly here today in this National Assembly that persons entitled to duty free cars in the crops and livestock division will continue to enjoy that entitlement while in the employ of this new entity. What if you are the Chief Crops and Livestock Officer, for example, you will lose seniority, authority, security of tenure and recourse to appeal in the case of injustices, and now you will have to be supervised by your juniors. You will be three pairs down. In spite of all this you are not allowed to cash in on your benefits and move on with your life. This is the same story in the case of every senior person who will be affected by this transition and by this bill becoming law.

I would like to ask two things of the Hon. Minister additionally before I take my seat. Is it not true Minister, that the chief motivator behind this bill is your intention to intercept USD \$6 million of donor money? Is the Government not anticipating that the private sector agricultural entities may be able to, through project proposals and a competitive bidding process, secure funding from an international financial institution, if per chance the Government does not appear to have its house in order? Secondly, after this donor funding would have dried up, is it not true that the Government plans to charge farmers for extension services in the name of cost recovery? I respectfully submit that too much is in stake for too little, so I end as I began; I urge the Hon. Minister to place the third reading of this bill on pause until the kinks are smoothed out. We of the PNC/R-1G cannot in good conscience support this bill in its present form. Let us have that conversation with the players in this process, get their perspectives on the issues and then take it from there. Let us take this bill to a Special Select Committee for further consideration before its third reading.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you Mr. Speaker. We could all too clearly recall the troubled times not only Guyana, but the rest of the world went through just two years ago when in 2008 we saw major disruption in commodities being traded, major disruption in commodities being traded, major disruption in the prices set not only for fuel but also fertilizers. We also saw reaction by major food importing countries, a panic reaction when the world storage of grains and cereals dipped to an alarming low. When from a comfort of just about thirty-five to about thirty seven percent of stock to use ratio with grains and cereals, it went right down to just about seventeen percent. I think what happened from since then served as a catalyst here in Guyana to get our policy makers to speed up the process of looking at legislations that basically govern the way we operate in the agriculture sector. We have seen some changes since then; prior to that we have had the Guyana Rice Development Board Act being revised and that provide basically for the re-organisation of the rice sector, and we all know that notwithstanding the challenges of climate change of prices in the situation there, the erratic whether pattern, the high intensity rainfall over the short period of time, the sector has really performed well. It is because of the policy changes which address that sector in particular, we were able to meet these challenges head on and overcome these challenges. Mention was made earlier by the speaker before me about farmer field school activities. Farmer field schools activities are a tested method of ensuring development of the agricultural sector, and

by extension, of rural communities by the active participation of the farmers themselves in an environment that is conducive to them speaking what they are comfortable about.

It is refreshing to note that the other sectors and this bill that is being piloted by the Minister himself here today speak to addressing the concern in the other crop sector. I am happy that Mr. Williams the Hon. Member mentioned farmer's field schools. This will also reduce the bureaucracy in the extension services which he talked about, people being concerned about duty free concessions. I fail to see how it is that you can draw the nexus between an efficient operating extensions service and duty free concession. We do not enjoy that in the rice sector, but we have been successful. All our extension officers are answerable to the farmers through active participation. Duty free concession has nothing to do with efficiently performing your duties, and that is of providing services to the farming sector.

This bill in no way speaks about taking away duty concession from extension officers. I am very surprised that the Hon. Member will seek to make duty free concession to extension officers a priority in his presentation. I do not know what the issue is. Are you only joining the extension services to get duty concession and to join the ranks of people just opening the auto sales company? The act also speaks about officers joining the new entity of not receiving less favourable benefits. It states that very clearly. So I cannot understand where the Hon. Member is coming from to make this an issue. What we want is an efficient extension service. What this Bill is seeking to address is some of the existing deficiencies, and to ensure that you have one clearing house for all the issues that are affecting the stakeholders.

We do not want our farmers running to three or four different places in a day to get to the different areas. What we are seeking to do in this bill for the establishment of the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute is to bring together all the areas that deserve revamping, under one umbrella body that can enhance the services being provided for the farmers. I am on the ground daily. The crops and livestock services area, basically the Minister mentioned it but he was a little bit diplomatic by saying that it is not working too well. The farmers themselves are complaining that what we have existing is not working. How can we address agriculture development if we do not respond to the needs of the farmers? The world is responding to that need. Mention was made by the Hon. Minister about the challenges that we are to face in the future; the growing demand for food is going to be one of them, the major one, not only because of population boom, but also because climate change is going to affect some of our major food producing countries in such a way so as to limit the capacity to expand both horizontally and vertically. Some of those major highly populated countries cannot in any way expand horizontally. They have met their peak, the plateau in terms of major crops in terms of productivity itself. There is a limit to what the crops can do. With all the different methods of trying to enhance productivity, you still have a plateau which you will reach.

5.46 p.m.

And there are major concerns being raised by food health experts, about the safety of some of the foods we are eating, when we try to genetically modify genes to enhance productivity. So

there is scope here in Guyana for us to enhance our productive capacity in both areas, to enhance our productivity and also to expand our production itself.

This Bill itself is paving the way to provide services to the farming community in an enhanced manner. It is to increase efficiency and ensure that our extension officers go out there and do what they are supposed to do – to be answerable to the farmers, to ensure they provide services, and to ensure they give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. We don't want them to hide behind different schemes. They must be answerable. This Bill is providing that avenue, the framework to ensure there is greater efficiency in delivering services to the farmers themselves.

Mention was made about technical capacity. The Hon. Member went on to say that NARI did not provide any scientific work during the last five years. Do you want us to continue in the same way? (*Mrs. Backer: You accepting then it is true.*) No, no, I am not accepting that. We cannot just carte blanche stand up in this August Assembly and, without reference to any study, say that NARI has not produced or done any scientific work during the last five years. (*Interruption*) The Minister will answer to that. But I am telling you clearly that the hard-working people at NARI were part of this process of reviewing the National Agricultural Research Institute of Guyana Act of 1984 over a two-year period. They were part of it. And it was based on their recommendations that we see being piloted here today this new Bill which gives formation to the National Agriculture Research and Extension Institute itself. And it also provides for the establishment of a board to overlook, and have oversight for, the operation of this Institute. It is a board that will comprise interest groups – people who are stakeholders in the different sectors. It means specifically serious stakeholders. (*Interruption*) And we saw that happening with the Livestock Authority, where the Board comprising of major stakeholders, who have oversight of the work of the Guyana Livestock Development Agency itself. This Agency is following suit, and I see no difficulty in the National Assembly giving unanimous support for the establishment of this authority itself via this Bill. It is very clear; every section is clear.

I want specifically to say, that the Bill addresses the terms of employment for persons from the existing Agency. There are no less favourable conditions, no break in services, and a guarantee of their pensions and all such. This Bill provides for that. And it is going to enhance their work environment. They are going to start taking pride in what they do, because they will be working more directly with the farming community itself. They will enhance the efficiency of delivering the services which they are supposed to deliver. So I don't see anywhere at all in this Bill what gave rise to some of the concerns the Hon. Member raised. They are all red herrings that basically seek to make politics out of a simple piece of legislation which is seeking to address some technical deficiencies in the existing way we operate.

We have to change these things because globally we have noticed these changes, and the Minister made mention of that. World-over, we have seen legislation being revamped to reflect the new reality. And I am happy and we all should be proud that we are here in Guyana, this country that has the capacity for us to develop the agriculture sector across the

board, whether it is fisheries, livestock or crops. We can provide a more enhanced service to our farmers, to ensure we fulfill that noble role of not only satisfying our people locally, in terms of food security and sovereignty, but also to move on and satisfy the region itself. We have the capacity. From time to time we on this side of the House will be looking at the way we operate; we will be looking at what is happening globally, and will make the changes where necessary to ensure that we increase and improve on our productivity and production.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have no hesitation, whatsoever, in recommending the unanimous adoption of this Bill in this National Assembly. Thank you. (*Applause*)

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, let me forthwith state that this Bill before us is but an ingenious way of literally retrenching the existing set of officers and officials that constitute field superintendents upwards, excepting the Board members. This Bill is not going to, in any way, 'efficitise' our agriculture as the Minister so proudly states. It cannot.

The efficiency of NARI depended on one umbrella organisation that used to be, prior to the compartmentalising now of the Livestock Development Authority away from this umbrella. As to why that was created, I have my personal opinion. I would not exhibit them here. But what was done over the past four months can never, in any way, be regarded as 'efficitising' the actual livestock department of our agriculture sector.

What we have here is but an expansion of the bureaucracy. There is now a Livestock Development Authority and now there is what is called a NARI which is degutted of that Livestock Authority.

Under the 1984 Act there is a definition for agriculture. This is the definition:

“agriculture includes horticulture, fruit growing, dairy farming, fisheries, livestock breeding and keeping, and bee keeping.”

We come to this Bill now and notice quite clearly that it does not include anything to do with livestock; largely because another authority has been created. That other authority now has a lot of the boys with jobs, and also a lot of other staff - an expansion of the bureaucracy. Many of the NARI workers and officials have to go to the assistance of that Livestock Authority to help the farmers. So, to come here and state (that of this old Act of 1984, which we amended in 1997, and which amendments are not here) that this new Bill will create more efficiency, no. It is about breaking up and creating two instead of one umbrella organisation.

Now, in addition, what we have is that which I will regard as very incoherent. This other umbrella, now that it is excluding Livestock Development, has in it a set of advisories. There is the Research Advisory, the Crop Advisory, and the Extension Advisory. Bureaucracy within bureaucracy! And this is a very, very difficult condition to operate under.

The incoherence is magnified also as a result of what is here: that the Board is regarded as the corporate entity, not the Institute. I thought the Institute would be the entire body and the Board will supervise all the officials, the staff, the employees and the security. What is here at Clause (2) is:

“The Board shall be a body corporate.

That is incoherence.

If, like the Guyana Forestry Commission, you have the Board and then all the other staff, and the Board will now deal with policies and also advise the Government like the Forestry Commission... We have a kind of distinction here which makes it obviously look very awkward.

In Clause 7 this is what it says:

“The Board shall appoint three Programme Advisory Committees...”

So there is the Board which is a corporate entity, and now there will be three advisory committees to be known as:

“Research Programme Advisory Committee, the Extension Programme Advisory Committee and the Crop Protection Programme Advisory Committee.”

Under the earlier regime of one umbrella organisation, this kind of programme advisory, Extension and Crop, could have been accommodated under that umbrella. And you are using that to say you are going to ‘*efficientise*’ agriculture by virtue of all of this. What prevents a board from doing it without coming here with the repeal of one law and now making this new law? It is not necessary. But this Government obviously has some surreptitious motive to create this bureaucracy for jobs for the boys as Mr. Williams has indicated.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it quite clear that this is not anything proactive to deal with world agriculture. This is proactive for an elections coming up, obviously. I want to inform this National Assembly that the erosion of technical capacity is going to be even worse now. Who were the technical people in NARI when it was under that one umbrella with livestock even included? The technical people were largely those extension officers, the vets and so on, who in a sense provided the services. What this Bill seeks to do with all those officers is to delink them from the regime of the Public Service Commission. Largely those persons, I understand, from the Government departments that used to provide the services in the regions and so on, are now going to be put on a one year contract basis. They have to sign a one year contract. As a matter of fact, for certain officers, I know they were forced to sign that contract. The Livestock Development Authority has not started doing its work in any functional way and they have been ordered to sign up certain contracts.

I must say that it is indeed the truth that the duty free concessions are now going to go. Within that umbrella organisation these staff members would have been in the vicinity of \$100,000 and would have been entitled. The Government all of a sudden feels these persons ought not to be entitled. They are not being paid big wages. I think their salaries are in the vicinity of \$98,000. To give these persons who have to do the hard work a duty free concession is something good. It is like what has been done with headmasters and deputy headmasters. Now to take it away and state “look, you have to now forego that and you also

have to sign a contract for one year” leaves a lot that will cause plenty of these technical staff to leave. They are not going to work under these conditions.

But do you know what they did? Through a very coercive provision they have stated that all those now existing there are going to be deemed employees still. That sounds nice, Mr. Speaker. But very many of these employees, staff members and officials of the old NARI, are stating that assuming within the very first year, because of the contract they had to sign or will have to sign - because some of them have not - it has the provision that the CEO could sack an employee by giving a month’s notice. What happens? Prior to that the Public Service Commission was the authority that could have heard their complaint of wrongful dismissal or disciplinary proceedings and then they could proceed to the Public Service Appellate Tribunal. Now it has been made semi-autonomous. As I indicated the farce mentioned about world agriculture and for us to move on is to get at the workers. That is what it is, to get at the workers. And there might be some other underlying reasons.

Mr. Speaker, I want to state that this Bill, also in keeping with the argument I am making specifically now, has denied those officers, those workers, of their severance benefits. This is a brand new authority, as they are stating. This authority now, if the employee or official does not want to work with this they are entitled... I know several workers who came to me for legal advice on this issue have been saying “but we don’t want to work with them; we would like to have our severance benefit paid, because this is a brand new employer”. And do you know what was said? “No, you cannot.” So they are now compelled, they do not have a choice as to their employer anymore. So it is a brand new body with new, powers and the employee can’t regard that as severance because what existed before is not the same that exists now. So some who have been working for 28 years and 25 years are entitled to a huge severance package but have been told very directly “you are not entitled”. (*Interruption*) I am not making a joke. This is what their complaints have been. I would like to urge the Government to ensure that those who do not want to be employed by NARI No. 2, because this is what it is excluding the Livestock section now. It is NARI No. 2 because literally NARI No. 1 has been degutted of the Livestock Authority, but largely what was NARI No. 1 is there. The additional portions of this Bill largely deal with employer employee relationships. That is what it deals with. So I am urging the Government that those workers which do not want to continue working with NARI No. 2 now are they going to be entitled to their severance benefits. No. What they have done is say very emphatically because they knew that the silence in NARI No. 1 would have meant the TESPAT (Termination and Severance Payment Act) would have been operational.

In Clause 20(6) this is what is stated to ensure that the workers are going to be compulsorily or mandatorily embraced into this institution:

“No person employed under subsection (2) shall be entitled to receive any payment or compensation or any benefit by reason of this Act.”

What is that? Now, if you are not in any way stating that you are going to erode technical capacity, this is one thing that would erode it. Very many of the extension officers, very

many of those vets, very many of those other officials with technical capacity, can perform jobs privately. And very many of them, I understand, are going to opt out, especially if they get their severance benefits. We were not hearing anything about that. But now it is in the Bill.

Those whom I have spoken to said they asked whether they would be paid and were told a lot of things which are obviously *circuitous*, not very direct, but we see it here. We are going to tell them this is what it is.

Mr. Speaker, this obviously is not good for those technical people that matter to agriculture in this country. It is not good for them because it is going to create a huge loss of confidence. Moreover, I also want to emphasise a couple of other things. This unnecessary ancillary of what is called corporate governance. We have here in some portions of this Bill that the Board could be sued now. In a certain provision at the very beginning we see the Board ought to be sued. But at the very back we notice it says at Clause 34,

“...from the date of commencement of this Act all assets... shall stand transferred to, and vested in, the Institute.”

Why not state the Board in accordance with Clause 19(3) which seems to be contradicting that when it says,

“All the property of the Institute, whether movable or immovable, shall vest in the Board and shall be held by or on behalf of the Board.”

And yet Clause 34(1) states,

“...from the commencement of this Act all the assets and liabilities of the Division and the National Agricultural Research Institute shall stand transferred to, and vested in, the Institute.”

And, of course, it goes on to say a couple of things. For all debts and obligations incurred the Institute is to be sued and not the Board that would be created by this Bill. That is an element of incoherence that I find difficult in the drafting. It seems to have a humongous contradiction to Clause 34(5) which reads,

“All sums of money due to the Division and the National Agricultural Research Institute immediately before the date of commencement of this Act shall be deemed to be due to the Institute, and all suits and other legal proceedings instituted or which could have been instituted by or against the Division and the National Agricultural Research Institute immediately before that date may be continued or instituted by or against the Institute.

So Clause 19 is stating one thing and this Clause 34 is stating something else.

The Alliance for Change sees that this Bill was not properly conceived. Indeed there might have been some difficulty when Livestock was shifted and an Authority created, but this Bill is not going to solve the problems the Minister is talking about. This Bill is rather going to

create other serious problems. I want to state that one such problem would actually be the Board itself. Under the old Act this Board was made up of people who we, parliamentarians, were specific about. Section 3,

“representatives of such bodies, including the University of Guyana and the Institute of Applied Science and Technology, engaged in teaching, research in, agriculture...

Representatives of such organisations of agriculturists or scientists...

Two persons to be nominated by the Secretary-General of the National Science Research Council...

What do we have now? We have at Clause 3 (2),

“The Board comprises thirteen Directors who shall represent the Government and interest groups and shall be persons qualified for such appointment as having had experience of, and shown capacity in, such matters which the Minister considers will be beneficial...”

This again is an aspect of “*control freakism*”.

So the old Act states consultation with University of Guyana, scientists, agriculturalists. But now the Mr. Minister will say “look I feel you have the capacity Mr. Nandlall, to plant *bora* and do research in *bora*, you will be a director.” What is that? It is not going to any way enhance the efficiencies that even the last speaker talked about. Here it is that the old Act specifies these things and now it is indicated that, yes, because the world has changed, we have to change.

I want to also make this point. In the old Act, Section 32... (it was not there in 1984. It is there however by a piece of legislation I think I spoke on whilst a member of the PPP in 1997)... Preservation of Secrecy, something that is necessary in scientific research. I have gone through this new Bill and don't see anything of a similar nature except... (*Interruption*) Well, of course we know this secret and secret ballot is very prominent these days. They don't want it this time. It is like Donald, he doesn't want that.

Section 32 as amended by Act No.6 of 1997, which we supported, states:

“Except for the purpose of the exercise of his functions or when lawfully required to do so by any court or under the provisions of any court or under the provisions of any written law, a member or officer or other employee of the Committee, the Institute, the Programmes Committee or the Council shall not disclose any information which he has acquired in the course of the exercise of his functions.

Any person who contravenes...shall be liable...”

6.16 p.m.

This was fought for in 1997 to ensure that there is not going to be a diffusion of whatever is discovered and unearthed by virtue of your working in this scientific department. Why is it not here, again? What is the reasoning behind this? Are you now going to literally make it public? Then you are not going to get the technical capacity of persons, who are going, literally, internal to the corporate governance, see a confidentiality of their scientific work. No. Because the secrecy is not preserved; that is not preserved. It is gone.

These are the things sometimes that help the technical persons. When they know that they are going to discover something in their field of work, especially in an institute that dealt with research, science and agriculture, and all those natural things, in laboratories or in the stand they want to open, and so on, will help them. But then their work might just be dissipated to probably friends of those who are on the Board - sold. What is that? They are not going to feel satisfied at all. So that will further cause the erosion of technical capacities when there is not going to be - just to use an inverted word - patent, literally, within the corporate structure because there is no preservation of secrecy. I remember that we argued that in 1997. Why all of a sudden it has gone out of the window?

This Bill, which we have here, Mr. Speaker, has a lot of underlying motivations that I feel very suspicious of. It is getting at the workers. Apparently, they feel that those officials who are not supportive of them, this is a beautiful way, as how Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) was used in a sense, to privatise public servants - de-gut them from the regime of the Guyana Public Service Commission. That is what it is getting at, and, then, they will literally be at your beck and call - one-year contract. You do not do this or do not go to whatever. Their instructions are, even if it might be against your scientific experience, you have to do it as per instruction or you are going to be knocked off. And that is real bad.

The Alliance For Change is not, in anyway, going to be supportive of those grand objectives spoken about by the speaker and Mr. Seeraj, no, and will, therefore, not support it.

Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Dr. Westford: Like my colleagues before me on this side of the House, I rise to give my support to this Bill. We have heard lots of misconceptions here, tonight - deliberate misconceptions. Let me say, there is no truth in what was said here, tonight, that persons who are currently employed by NARI will not be given - I reiterate, Mr. Speaker, that they will

not be given - the opportunity of resigning if they so want to do. [**Mrs. Backer:** Is it with benefits? It is not a matter of just resigning.] It is with benefits, Mr. Speaker.

Actually, we have had discussions with the union, with the workers and the reality is that those pensionable workers, their service will be put on hold - they will be signing a contract - until they attain the age of 55 years old. If they opt to retire they will then get their benefits - all of their benefits.

We have heard so much of talks about duty-free concession. I do not think people understand why and how a duty-free concession is given to workers. It is not an individual thing for a person, it goes with a position; it is attached to a position. Even if you are a pensionable worker and you move from one position to another that does not carry a duty-free concession, you will not get it. Nobody is taking any thing away from anyone. They are going to be in positions that do not carry with it a duty- free concession.

Every entity... , and I hope my colleagues, on the other side, will take some time off to look at the structure of the very Ministry of Public Service they want to speak about. I can show, in different institutions, in different Ministries, the very nomenclature of a position that carries a duty-free concession in one entity and does not carry it in another because of the duties which will be performed. So there is nothing absolute in getting a duty-free concession. And as my colleague said, a duty-free concession does not mean that it is going to make a worker more efficient. Yes, it is going to be no less favourable. I think the Member should take some time off and look at the salaries of those individuals who are going across there. I think that Member should take some time off and look at that before sitting here and talking about a duty-free concession, as if that is the be-all and end-all of it.

My dear friend, on the other side of the House, kept harping that NARI has done no scientific research in the last five years. May it be that that was true, it shows us that it is very important for us to have this new entity because we need to have efficiency. If it did nothing in five years, if it were true, that is more reason for us to have this entity. It is more reason for us to have it.

It is not true to say that it has only two scientists. Within the last two years there have been fourteen plant scientists infused into NARI, and currently there are twenty-two persons in training who will soon be coming home. [**Mr. Mervyn Williams:** How many of them are holders of a PhD?] Mr. Speaker, he is now talking about PhD, may I inform him that come

the 2nd September five persons will be sent overseas - two to London and three to the USA - to study for a PhD, whether it will be ten years or twenty years. Let them, on the other side of the House, show me how many person they have sent to be trained for a PhD... [Interruption]...I am a medical doctor. I did not study for a PhD in plant science.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please be quiet.

Dr. Westford: Let the Opposition show me how many persons it sent to be trained for a PhD.

Mr. Speaker: We cannot hear the Hon. Member.

Dr. Westford: Tell me how many persons the Opposition had sent. We will continue. We have been enhancing the human resources of the agriculture division and we will continue to doing so. Currently, there are one hundred and forty-six agriculturists overseas being trained and thirty-three in Guyana, and we will continue.

For the last ten years we have been placing emphasis on the agricultural sector and this is just one of the facets of making this whole process a holistic process. Yes, we may need four hundred, but we are getting there. At least we started with four and we now have two hundred and twenty. We are going to get to that two hundred very soon. Under the former administration we may have never got there. We are getting there now.

I think my colleagues are harping on... The Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan...[**Mrs. Backer:** You like him.] I like everyone in this House... kept asking...[**Mr. Ramson:** Give him a PhD, free.] He can do so if he applies. Mr. Ramjattan kept asking for us to allow persons to be given their benefits. Mr. Speaker, anyone who wants to go can have his or her benefits. I dare the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan to bring to this House anyone who would have told one of the staff of that entity that he or she cannot and will not be given his or her benefits if he or she opts to resign, or if he or she opts to retire. I dare him to say so, Sir.

We are not desirous of robbing any worker. All of the staff, we have had meaningful negotiations with them, along with the union. [**Mrs. Backer:** Is it the Guyana Agriculture & General Workers Union (GAWU)?] It is with the Guyana Public Service Union, not GAWU. We negotiate. We have been speaking and they all know what their benefits will be...[**Dr. George Norton:** Why do you not give Mrs. Issacs her benefits?]. She does not work with the Ministry of Agriculture. They all know what they will get and what they will not get. So this

red herring that is being thrown here is all misinformation. I think my colleagues, on the other side, should appreciate when there is progress and, at least, give some credit where credit is deserved. I am not going to be much longer because I dare anyone from the other side of this House, with the staff issues they brought here, to bring the facts forward. I dare anyone of them.

I therefore would like to reiterate my support for this Bill and my colleague will deal with the other misinformation that were said here a short while ago. [*Applause*]

Mr. R. Persaud (replying): First let me thank the speakers who have made contributions on this particular Bill, even if those contributions were a bit misplaced or whether they reflected a poor understanding of the agricultural sector in our country. Notwithstanding that, I was disappointed that there was an effort, particularly by Mr. Ramjattan, to present this very noble and necessary policy intervention that we are making within the sector and to dress it up as if we had some political design or political scheme up our sleeves. I want to remind the Hon. Member that we, on this side of the House, have an obligation - an obligation to ensure that we provide the best services; that we have the institutions in place, and we will not fail in providing and fulfilling our responsibilities. And if every time we do something that is required to benefit, because ... Every time I see the Opposition a bit agitated about our programme it makes me happy. Do you know why? It tells us that we are doing something good, and we are doing something good for the people of Guyana. Whenever we do good things and there is progress in the land it limits its political objectives and political ambition.

Notwithstanding that, there were a number of issues raised by the various presentations. The first issue spoke to the issue of erosion of technical capacity. I am quite sure, having listened to the Hon. Minister of the Ministry of Public Service, we all would be convinced that a dedicated effort is being made by the Government, because, not only within the public sector but across the country, we all recognise that we need to enhance our human resource capacity. We all recognise that. No one in any part of our national economy, public or private, can say that we have the full complement of numbers as well as the full complement in terms of competence. No one can ever say that. But the point is we need to recognise the efforts that are being made to continue to augment and improve. In fact, taking this approach, and also creating this institution, we will be in a better position to attract the skills, the requisite technical skills, so that we can enhance both research, and also in terms of extension services.

The other issue that was raised was whether or not we were creating more compartments and greater bureaucracy. In so doing, I wish to point out where we were and where we are going. Let us talk about the Guyana Livestock Development Authority. The Guyana Livestock Development Authority was created out of four different other entities. So it is not that more entities are being created. What has happened with the Guyana Livestock Development Authority is that we have fused and brought entities and agencies together to get better services. Similarly, too, with NARI, we are fusing three distinct units into one agency. I find the bit of disconnection in the argument whereby we are accused, on the one hand, of creating more entities when, in fact, we are dealing with two entities. We are dealing with two agencies which have brought together six entities, or six units, so that we ...[**A Hon. Member:** It is one division]. No. They are not one division. You need to do your research and do it better.

The other issue is the issue of staffing. Let me make it absolutely clear that the Members of the Opposition were unable to point to the technical weaknesses of the Bill. They were unable to point to what it is that could go wrong. So what has happened is we saw this journey into scaremongering and trying to scare the public that, here it is, there is this Government that is trying to disenfranchise and trying, as it were, to take away benefits from our workers. I want to make it absolutely clear that this is not the situation. In fact, as we have done with the Guyana Livestock Development Authority, and we are committed to do in the Bill, where we say “no less favourable conditions”. In all instances the remuneration packages of the staffers in the new agencies have been improved and that is a fact that no one can dispute. It is a bit contradictory. The Opposition Members are saying we are trying to get rid of workers and treat them badly and, on the other hand, here it is, the remuneration package and the conditions under which they are working will be improved. I wish to say that the workers within the sector are fully mobilised and this is what they wanted too. The last two years consultations involved the workers and there were active consultations with the workers in this regard.

It is also a disservice to sit here and to say that we are not giving recognition to the workers, and then Members, here, would stand up and say that the hard-working people within NARI and the other agencies have not done any technical and scientific work...[**Mr. M. Williams:** But that is true.] But the point is how can you stand here and condemn those workers? How can you stand there and condemn their performance when you know the opposite is true? You said that you wanted evidence...[*Interruption*].

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, just pause a minute.

Mr. R. Persaud: Sorry Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: You cannot have a shouting match in the National Assembly. This is a disgraceful behaviour. Proceed Hon. Member.

Mr. R. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, sorry if I contributed to that shouting match.

I was talking about the evidence. Over the last two years, for two consecutive years, we have had two international research conferences. There have been twenty scientific papers - that is research material on spices, cassava, organic control, integrated pest management and looking at new technologies to deal with climate change. Those are available, Comrades. I can provide them to you.

Further to that, the work that has been done by NARI and the staff, five papers have been published in international journals. So please let us not misrepresent and discredit the work of our hard-working officers within the sector and particularly within NARI.

Reference was made to the Black Sigatoka. Let me cite an example. Were it not for the proactive and the consistent efforts being made we would not have been able to see higher level of the production of plantains this year. Notwithstanding that disease, we have been able to see higher levels of production of plantains as well as export. If we were not able to do the research and technical work in this regard... There is another issue...

Mr. Mervyn Williams: On a Point of Order, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: What is the Point of Order?

Mr. M. Williams: Sir, the Hon. Minister is talking about increase in plantain...

Mr. Speaker: That is not a Point of Order.

Mr. M. Williams: But Sir, the Bank of Guyana records state zero...

Mr. Speaker: What rule of the Standing Order are you referring to? Name the rule. A Point of Order is based on a violation of the rules of a Standing Order.

Mr. M. Williams: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: The first thing you do on a Point of Order is to say, “Mr. Speaker, I refer to Standing Order number so or so...”

Mr. M. Williams: Sir, the Minister needs to be honest because this report states zero.

Mr. Speaker: Let me have the Standing Order. Continue Hon. Member.

Mr. R. Persaud: Yes Mr. Speaker. The other issue that was raised, and which Mr. Ramjattan pointed out, was the issue of secrecy. This entity is intended to be an entity to serve stakeholders – to serve our farmers. This is not an entity for us to do research and technology and then put them away. This is an entity that is intended to develop appropriate technologies as well as transferring those to the farmers. It is not about hiding away science for any individual staff. Also, whatever research is done remains the property of the institution. I want to refer the Hon. Member, and urge that he reflects very carefully, to clause 22, whereby it speaks to discoveries and invention. This is what it states:

“All discoveries and inventions made by the Institute or by any of its officers or other employees or agents in the course of the performance of its functions under this Act, shall be the property of the Institute and shall vest in the Board and the Board may make any such discovery or invention available to the public on such conditions and subject to the payment of such fees or royalties as the Board may think fit.”

This is an enlightened way in terms of managing discoveries and inventions. It is no longer about hiding and putting things away. This is how we want to shape the sector, to be service oriented - service oriented that is intended to provide and respond to the needs of our farmers.

In conclusion and in commending this Bill for the third reading I wish to say that, this here, there is no ulterior motive. The objective is very transparent and that single objective is to have an institution that is able to respond, as I said, to the market oriented and public demand of the agricultural sector and to realise the true potential of our sector as spoken to by many Members, but at the end of the day it is to ensure that our farmers - they are very important - and other stakeholders are better served.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I wish to commend this Bill.[*Applause*]

The question was put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved without amendments.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this brings us to the end of our business for today. I would like, before the Hon. Prime Minister seeks the adjournment, to extend a new year best wishes to all Members and their family for a happy, prosperous and peaceful New Year, and for our Parliament to continue in service to the people of Guyana. I would like to extend those sentiments to the Clerk and the members of our staff and to the press corps who have been very diligent in their efforts.

Mrs. Riehl: Mr. Speaker, I rise, on this side of the House, to wish yourself and yours, the leader of the Government business, Members of the Government side, and indeed to all Parliamentarians here, to those who are not present, the Clerk and staff of Parliament Office, members of the media, the people who feeds us, the caterers for this National Assembly, all of us and them a happy and prosperous 2011. It is an election year, as we all know, and we pray, as we are on the verge of this New Year, for peace and prosperity to reign in Guyana notwithstanding the election. Again, to you all, I say a happy and very prosperous 2011. Thank you.

Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications [Mr. Hinds]: Mr. Speaker, I too would like to take this opportunity to extend to yourself, and all the supporting staff at the Parliament Office here, our thanks for your service during this year and to wish you the very best in the coming year. I want to extend similar sentiments to all the Members of this House and to call on all of us to work together and make 2011 one of the best years that Guyana and Guyanese would have ever had.

I now move that the House be adjourned to, when we start to work early in the new year, next Thursday, 6th January, 2011.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House is adjourned to Thursday, 6th January, 2011.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.43 p.m.