

**THE**  
**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**  
**OFFICIAL REPORT**

[VOLUME 5]

**PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE NATIONAL  
ASSEMBLY OF THE SECOND PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE  
CONSTITUTION OF GUYANA**

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**2<sup>nd</sup> Sitting**

**2 p.m.**

**Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> May, 1971**

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**MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**Speaker**

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

**People's National Congress**

**Elected Ministers**

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

**(Absent)**

Dr. The Hon. P.A. Reid,  
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture

The Hon. M. Kasim, A.A.,  
Minister of Communications

The Hon. H.D. Hoyte, S.C.,  
Minister of Finance

The Hon. W.G. Carrington,  
Minister of Labour and Social Security

The Hon. Miss S.M. Field-Ridley,  
Minister of Education

The Hon. B. Ramsaroop,  
Minister Trade (Leader of the House)

The Hon. D.A. Singh,  
Minister of Housing and Reconstruction

The Hon. O.E. Clarke,  
Minister of Home Affairs

The Hon. C.V. Mingo,  
Minister of Local Government

### **Appointed Ministers**

The Hon. S.S. Ramphal, S.C.,  
Attorney-General and Minister of State **(Absent)**

The Hon. H. Green,  
Minister of Works, Hydraulics and Supply

The Hon. H.O. Jack,  
Minister of Mines and Forests **(Absent)**

Dr. The Hon. Sylvia Talbot,  
Minister of Health

### **Parliamentary Secretaries**

Mr. J.G. Joaquin, J.P.,  
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Finance

Mr. P. Duncan, J.P.,  
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture

Mr. W. Haynes,  
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister

Mr. A. Salim,  
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture

Mr. J.R. Thomas,  
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister

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

### **Other Members**

Mr. J.N. Aaron  
Miss. M.M. Ackman, Government Whip  
Mr. K. Bancroft  
Mr. N.J. Bissember  
Mr. J. Budhoo, J.P.  
Mr. L.I. Chan-A-Sue  
Mr. E.F. Correia  
Mr. M. Corrica,  
Mr. E.H.A. Fowler  
Mr. R. J. Jordan  
Mr. S.M. Saffee  
Cde. R.C. Van Sluytman  
Cde. M. Zaheeruddeen, J.P.  
Cde. L.E. Willems

(Absent – on leave)

### **Members of the Opposition**

#### **People's Progressive Party**

Dr.C.B. Jagan,  
Leader of the Opposition  
Mr. Ram Karran  
Mr. R. Chandisingh  
Dr. F.H.W. Ramsahoye, S.C.  
Mr. D.C. Jagan, J.P.,  
Deputy Speaker  
Mr. E.M.G. Wilson  
Mr. A.H. Hamid, J.P.  
Opposition Whip  
Mr. G.H. Lall, J.P.  
Mr. M.Y. Ally  
Mr. Keepu Daman Persaud, J.P.  
Mr. E.M. Stoby, J.P.  
Mr. R. Ally

Mr. E. L. Ambrose  
Mrs. L.M. Branco  
Mr. Balchand Persaud  
Mr. Bhola Persaud  
Mr. I.R. Remington, J.P.  
Mrs. R.P. Sahoye  
Mr. V. Teekah

(Absent)

(Absent – on leave)

**United Force**

Mrs. E. DaSilva  
Mr. M.F. Singh  
Mr. J.A. Sutton

**Independent**

Mr. R.E. Cheeks

(Absent)

**OFFICERS**

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

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

**The National Assembly met at 2.p.m.**

**[Mr. Speaker *in the Chair.*]**

**Prayers**

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2.05 – 2.30 p.m.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

**Letter from Leader of Parliamentary Delegation from Yugoslavia**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I receive a letter from the Leader of the Parliamentary Delegation from Yugoslavia. It is dated 7<sup>th</sup> May, 1971 and is as follows:

**Dear Mr. Speaker,**

On behalf of the Yugoslav Federal Assembly Delegation and myself I would like to thank you for a friendly and cordial reception extended to us during our stay in your beautiful country.

The visit was an excellent occasion to get acquainted with the endeavours of your people and political leadership to develop Guyana. You may be quite certain that our short but valuable experience will serve further improvement of the relations and co-operation between our two countries.

In the hope to have the opportunity of reciprocating your courtesy in near future in my country, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

(Sdg.) Peko Dapcevic  
Vice-President".

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### Leave To Members

I also wish to announce that leave has been granted to the hon. Member Mr. Bissember from the 16<sup>th</sup> May to 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1971, and to the hon. member Mr. Teekah for five weeks from today.

### PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers were laid:

1. Report of the Ombudsman for 1969. [**The Speaker**]
2. Customs Duties (Amendment) Order, 1971 (No. 24), made under section 8 of the Customs Ordinance, Chapter 309, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, 1971 and published in the Gazette on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 1971. [**The Minister of Finance**]
3. Annual Report of the Transport and Harbours Department for the year 1968. [**The Minister of Communications**]
4. East Demerara Water Conservancy Board Report for the year 1970. [**The Minister of Trade (Leader of the House)** on behalf of the Minister of Works, Hydraulics and Supply.]

### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The following Bills were introduced and read the First time:

1. Teachers Pensions (Amendment) Bill, 1971. [**The Minister of Education**]
2. Town of Christianburg/Wismar/Mackenzie (Change of Name) Bill, 1971. [**The Minister of Local Government**]

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3. Valuation for Rating Purposes (Amendment) Bill, 1971. [**The Minister of Local Government**]

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

### **COMMITTEE OF SELECTION**

**The Minister of Trade** (Leader of the House) (Mr. Ramsaroop): Mr. Speaker, in pursuance of Standing Order No. 70(1)(b) of the National Assembly I wish to nominate the following persons to comprise the Committee of Selection for this Session of Parliament:

The Honourable B. Ramsaroop, Minister of Trade (Leader of the House)

The Honourable J. R. Thomas, Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister.

Miss M.M. Ackman, Government Whip.

Mr. M. Zaheeruddeen, J.P.

Mr. A. M. Hamid, J.P., Opposition Whip

Mr. R.D. Persaud, J.P.

Mr. M.F. Singh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Are there any other nominations? There being no other nominations I declare those members duly elected members of the Committee.

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER**

**Mr. Ramsaroop:** I wish to move the suspension of Standing Order 23(3) to enable the Motion at item 2 to be proceeded with at this sitting.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mrs. DaSilva:** Mr. Speaker, I wish, once again, to protest very forcefully against the way in which this House is being carried on. We seem to be starting off this new Session of Parliament in the manner in which we carried on the past Session, that is, paying absolutely no attention to the Standing Orders and for the slightest whim and folly asking for the suspension of the Standing Orders. Again, we have the suspension when there is absolutely no necessity for it to be done. We wish to forcefully protest.

As I am talking about 23(3) may I crave your indulgence to point out a mistake, probably typographical, which should be put right. It says on page 20 of this typewritten copy “except Standing Order77”. I think if it is checked, it should read “except Standing Order No. 76.”

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much. The hon. Member Mrs. Willems.

### MOTION

#### Debate on President's Address

“Be it resolved that this National Assembly approves of the Government's policy adumbrated in the President's Address for the present Session of Parliament made to the National Assembly at its Sitting on Friday, the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, 1971. [Mrs. Willems]

**Mrs. Willems:** Mr. Speaker, it is a little over a year, to be exact, Friday 23, 1970, since Guyana became a Co-operative Republic. In the words of the Prime Minister Mr. L.F.S. Burnham, Leader of my party, the People's National Congress and of the Government, when speaking on the policy of the Co-operative Republic, I quote from this booklet:

“The co-operative has been chosen because structurally it lends itself to organizing the small man in groups for economic purposes. By definition also it is democratic, in that the principle of one man one vote, instead of one share one vote, ensures the value and importance of the man as distinct from those of mere coin. It further gives to him an opportunity participation in policy decisions which he can never enjoy in a limited liability company. His ownership and influence are real and the scope for his development of managerial and technical skills and the meaningful exercise of these skills are unlimited; and such as the present system has never made available to him



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With others of his ilk he can be master of his own and his country's destiny.”

2.35 p.m.

During this year, many outstanding efforts have been made and have proved successful in getting more and more Guyanese to accept and appreciate the meaning and reason for this change, and we are confident that with further education, as planned and outlined by Government, the unnecessary fears of those who may still be dubious as to the wisdom of this momentous changeover to a Co-operative Republic will be allayed for good.

The nation has seen the birth and successful management over the past year of our own Guyana National Co-operative Bank. Again many were dubious of the wisdom of this move by Government. The Guyana National Co-operative Bank has proved itself to be a great boon of assistance to the small man in giving him loans for small projects, loans that he could not under circumstances obtain otherwise. This Bank has been used by co-operative societies throughout Guyana, and, with the support of all true and patriotic Guyanese, can and will grow from strength to strength and be able to offer greater facilities to anyone as time goes on. This is the intention of Government. The time has come for Guyanese to mobilise and control their own financial resources.

We have seen the Guyana Defence Force do a good job of defending our borders and our soldiers have already started on a programme of assisting to feed and house themselves. This will continue and will be intensified. They have worked and continue to work on the national self-help road project and also on other self-help projects.

The national self-help road is now a reality and persons from all walks of life, Guyanese and others, have made it what it is. This project will go on until Government's objective has been achieved.

The new operational development plan for the period 1972 – 1976 will be completed in draft this year, as stated in the President's Address to the Members of the National Assembly on Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> May. This will entail the complete involvement of all the nation's resources, human, material and financial. These resources will be used in the widest sense, in other words, to put it briefly, population involvement at all levels, consultation at all levels, and above all, the spirit of self-reliance at all levels. In so doing Guyana will be able to own, to control and manage efficiently all her resources, and Guyana will be able to establish an egalitarian society with Justice for all. The co-operative and self-help movements will be the main channels used in the achievement of this objective.

**Agriculture.** It has been proved that through proper experimental programmes, new crops, such as sorghum and soya bean, can be produced in Guyana, and that corn, peanut and blackeye of a high quality can also be produced. The Guyana Rice Marketing Board and the Guyana Rice Corporation are being re-constructed. Farmers are being encouraged to use different methods and to modernize their facilities. Every effort is being made by Government to encourage small cane farmers to produce more cane.

Greater production of all forms of livestock is also being encouraged. Seminars are being run, money is being loaned, and feed is being given on credit. Assistance of a technical and research nature is being provided. Trained officers are going daily into the fields, thus assisting farmers in all categories to overcome their problems. Advice on the formation of the right type of agricultural co-operative, according to the area, and in the interest of those concerned, is being given.

The Guyana Marketing Corporation is being geared to assist farmers to dispose of their produce. With all the land at our disposal, Government is confident that with proper management, hard work and self-help, Guyanese can and must indeed in the near future be capable of feeding themselves, and also, in the foreseeable future, Guyana can and will become the food basket of the Caribbean.

**Housing.** Government has pursued measures to give relief to this pressing problem, both by self-help and at other levels. Government will continue with its implementation of the housing Development Act which established the Housing Development Fund, thus, persons in the lower income bracket will be able to purchase with smaller down payments – a guaranteed mortgage of up to 90 per cent of the cost of house and land at no more than \$15,000. The new local government authorities will also be brought in to assist in this vital project. As a further incentive, in order to stimulate housing development, Government will encourage the manufacture of clay bricks to be used in house construction and is committed to seeing that such factories are set up throughout the length and breadth of this country, to service the need of the unhoused and ill-housed people of Guyana.

**Youth and Training.** Government will continue to emphasise the necessity for the training of Guyana's youths in countrywide programmes, as teachers, as agriculturist and in various other trades such as clay brickmaking, etc. the Government's Youth Division will put greater emphasis on economic programmes for youth.

**2.45 p.m.**

The Guyana Youth Corps will continue its significant role for youth development in Guyana.

The youth of our country will be thought the proper methods of raising livestock and growing fresh foods so as to enable them to become self-sufficient.

There have been exchange programmes between the youth of Guyana and youths from other territories and it is Government's intention that this should be continued and expanded. The youth of Guyana will continue to work on the national road project and assist in other self-help projects.

It is this Government's intention to make our youths aware of their responsibilities, to assist them in building their country, and to help them become self-reliant, because it is only by this method that their hopes and aspirations can and will be achieved.

There are many other areas in which Government has plans -- preventive health education, continued Teacher Training programmes in school education, to name but a few.

DEMBA has been nationalized with the consent of all Guyanese, much to the interest of Guyana. I am proud to say that under the leadership of the P.N.C. Government, headed by Forbes Burnham, Guyanese can now own Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, with the aforementioned I now move the Motion standing in name.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member Mr. Budhoo.

**Mr. Budhoo:** I beg to second the Motion to approve Government's policy which was so ably moved by my colleague Mrs. Willems. I reserve my right to speak at a later date if the occasion arises.

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member Mr. Stoby.

**Mr. Stoby:** Mr. Speaker, when we consider all the points that were mentioned in this speech, we come to the conclusion that many of them do not exactly concern the situation in our country. Our country is faced with many problems. There is uneasiness all over the country. Some people are silent but many have severe grievances. There is great frustration all over the country.

According to the President's Address, it appears that the main objective of the Government is in the field of Agriculture. Since this Government assumed control the P.P.P. has constantly reminded it about agriculture. However, we have noticed that great emphasis will be placed on agriculture, for instance, rice and sugar.

There are two industries which receive no attention in the President's Address. The coffee industry, for instance, is an important industry. Thousands of people in the Pomeroon and North West Districts depend on the coffee industry for a living. Instead of increasing its production and helping the economy of our country, the coffee industry is going down. The death rate of trees is great. The proprietor of each coffee estate has nurseries and has to keep transplanting trees. The soil is old and this also causes many trees to die.

What I should like to have explained now is whether the Government will go into the coffee industry, make a thorough investigation and see what really the problem is. We think that the price of coffee should be increased. The price must be increased because the cost of living has been constantly increasing, especially since the establishment of the External Trade Bureau. In the coffee industry there is a lot of work, apart from the upkeep of the estates.

Let us look at the cost of production. The average cost of picking berries for one bag of coffee is \$40 because ten barrels of coffee berries produce one bag of coffee of an average weight of 200 pounds. In addition to that, the farmer has to clear the trees and maintain the trenches. He has to transport his produce to the Guyana Marketing Corporation and if more than 10 per cent is broken, the whole is rejected by the Corporation and the farmer will then have to take his coffee beans to the hucksters. Government should have a reasonable control over the price of coffee so that it could pay the farmers to grow it and so that those farmers who employ labour could be in a position to pay attractive wages to labourers.

I should like to mention the coconut industry also. In this industry, too, the death rate of trees is great. Although there is great unemployment in this country, farmers cannot hire labour.

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2.45 – 2.55 p.m.

The price of copra should be increased so that they could offer attractive wages to labourers. But it appears that Government is doing nothing. I remember that farmers once formed a Coconut Producers Association and the Government went all out to see that that Association failed. At present the Association is not functioning.

2.55 p.m.

I feel that the Government should set up an enquiry to investigate these disputes, to check the difficulties that these estate owners are facing. Many of the coconut estates have big bushes because the owners cannot get the labour. My point is that if the Government ensures that the price is increased the estate owners in turn would offer more wages to the labourers so that they will be able to cope with the cost of living which is so high at present.

There is another pressing problem which faces the labourers on these very estates. I speak now of the housing situation. Since the colonial days we had these logies and there has been no improvement. The logies are open and you have married people living on these estates and the children and grownups live under the same roof. There is no privacy. Government should see that the estate owners provide proper houses for these people, because these are problems which have been outstanding for some time now.

We have achieved Independence and now we have a Co-operative Republic but the problems are the same. I think things have got worse, not only in the Pomeroun, but in the North West District. For instance, we have the sawmill industry and the logging industry. The owners of these sawmills are threatening to close down. It means that dozens of families will suffer. There is a shop there, with the closing of the sawmill it would also mean that the shop will be closed and the people will not be able to get food. Food is very expensive up there and remember that people must have the essential commodities. The Government should work out proper tariffs. My party agrees with price control but this should not only be with respect to essential things but control the price of motor parts, machinery which is increasing year by year.

The Government should control spare parts. A 6 horse power motor propeller costs \$32.

I am calling upon the Government to investigate the problems of the Charlestown Sawmill immediately and also to see whether it could take over the assets of this sawmill and run it. The Barama Mouth has a lot of trees but we need tractors. People have to continue to cut these trees using the old system. I think if the Government wants to bring development it could take over that sawmill and get lumber cheap to Georgetown, then it could talk about easing the housing problem. There are millions of trees in the Interior.

These points which I am raising affect a section of the people but people everywhere in Guyana have a problem. I feel that the people who have been existing in the remote areas are contributing to the development of Guyana but they are not really being considered. For instance, let us take a look at the Mahdia/Annai self-help road. Who are the people doing a lot of work? The Amerindians did the hardest work; they felled the biggest trees. They are the pioneers, they have to go in front. I feel that if this Government is really interested in the people more facilities can be found.

In the President's Address no mention was made about the Kumak/Quebana Scheme. There was mention about the Matthews Ridge/Arakaka/Kaituma area, also the Konawaruk area. What is needed is machinery; shovels and spades cannot do the work. If you have a big forest to clear it cannot be done with shovels and spades. I remember the Government sent ten power saws and made a lot of fuss about them. Not one of them is now in a working condition. They are not even being repaired.

This Government is talking about increased production. We can produce if we get the machinery – tractors, ploughs, so that we can go and plant to make a living. In years gone by there was a lot of employment, but now the population has increased therefore Government definitely has to do something about providing machinery so that people will be able to produce more.

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2.55 – 3.05 p.m.

People cannot get employment, their children cannot go to school naked. They have to get books too. Where are these people to get the money to buy clothes and books for their children? They have to feed them too. The Government should rent these machines at a very cheap rate to the people so that they will be able to increase their production. At present there is no encouragement. People want to earn a livelihood; people want to plant.

**3.05 p.m.**

The next thing I want to talk about is the position of the land. Up to now there is absolutely nothing done. Nothing is being implemented. Will it take another ten years before the recommendations of the Amerindian Lands Commission Report are implemented? Presently, the people are worried; they want to have their security. People are trespassing on the land which they were given. I know the Pomeroon Sawmill is trespassing on Amerindian territory. A halt should be put to all these things.

When the External Trade Bureau was introduced, we saw that certain prices went down. Consumers, especially in the river districts, were glad. They said they believed the shopkeepers were robbing them all the time. Let me show how that helped us. A five-pound tin of milk cost \$4.50 prior to the E.T.B.; \$4.39 when the E.T.B. was established; it now costs \$5.15. People in the river area cannot obtain fresh milk like the pole on the coast. It is difficult to secure condensed milk and the price is 40 cents for a fourteen-ounce tin in certain places that stock it. These are our problems which the Government should discuss. I went to the Stabroek Market and somebody decided to sell me one tin. I do not know if the Government thinks these are problems.

In the Greater Georgetown area, people can obtain fresh milk but the people in the interior cannot obtain it, and if the profit margin is so small and if you cannot get when you order from the stores – they do not have them, that or the other – how can a shop continue in business without many of the items it formerly stocked?



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3.05 – 3.15 p.m.

I feel that this Presidential Address sets out to let the people of Guyana feel that everything is going well and that the Government has a new policy. It has tried to project this idea but these are just machinations. As I said earlier, many people are frustrated. Why? Because it is the policy of the Government to have them in confusion. Many people are selling out and leaving the country. Something is wrong and I would feel the Government must change its attitude before it becomes more unpopular.

On the day when the Speech was made, there was no real enthusiasm on the part of the people in Georgetown. When any little thing happens in Georgetown, the people come by the thousands. Many of the chairs outside on the lawn were empty because the people do not appreciate the policy of the Government and that policy is laid out here. I think the Government should rethink and change its policy. To do that would meet the majority of people. I cannot agree entirely with the President's Address. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Ram Karran:** Mr. Speaker, one may refer to the hon. member who moved the Motion for the approval of the Government's policy, as adumbrated in the President's Address, as ex-defender of freedom, but certainly, she stands in the tradition of the Saffees and the Zaheerudeens in moving the Motion for the adoption of the President's Address. I also wish to congratulate her on her agility and the Government on its consistency in using turncoats to move the Motion on the President Address. I congratulate the President on having been able to read such a lengthy and empty address without falling asleep. The Hon. Member Mrs. Willems must have looked in this empty document the whole week-end in order to find something to speak about. In all my years in the House I have never seen anything so empty.

With your permission, sir, and some interest on your part, I should like to refer to page 4 of this document.

**“External Trade Bureau**

While this policy of agricultural expansion goes on, my Government has intensified its efforts to keep a firm hold over our trading patterns especially in goods and services essential...”

and it goes on.

**3.15 p.m.**

My colleagues who will speak on agriculture, including rice and related matters, will undoubtedly develop adequate arguments to deal with those subjects, but I wish to point out that in this important sector, namely, rice, which provides surplus grain for export and which earns money for the country, there has been a significant contraction rather than an expansion. The figures I have here are:

1964/1965	-	165,000 tons
1965/1966	-	149,000 ”
1966/1967	-	137,000 ”
1967/1968	-	135,000 ”
1968/1969	-	95,000 ”
1968/1970	-	140,000 ”

The estimated production for the year 1970 to 1971 is a meager 120,000 tons.

Where is the expansion referred to in His Excellency’s Address? The table from which I have read confirms what the P.P.P. has been saying all these years, namely, that the Government is opposed to agricultural development, especially in the rice industry and has almost succeeded in destroying it. I do not want to touch again on Blue Belle, Star Bonnet, and I.R. 55 etc. I leave that for my colleagues who are more knowledgeable in this field.

I make the point, however, that the figures to which I have referred squelch and the contention of the Government that there is expansion in agriculture. Where is agricultural development taking place? In the Mahaicony River, from which the terrorists who have been placed there at the Government's expense are now running away? Surely there is no agricultural expansion there. It is significant that this falling off in production started in 1964 when political harlots took and raped the Constitution.

I wish to read a sentence on this very important subject, the cost of living. I quote from page 4 of the President's Address:

“We are determined that the cost of living should be stabilised and that there should be no importation of foodstuffs, except from the CARIFTA area, where Guyana is in a position to produce her own economically.”

I should like to deal with the first part of the sentence, “We are determined that the cost of living should be stabilized”. What did the Government say when the External Trade Bureau was established? What has this Government said ever since it came into office? It is going to reduce the cost of living. Since the time when my friend the hon. the Deputy Prime Minister was demoted to Minister of Agriculture the Government has been fishing for sharks who claim it have been black marketing. It has not found any sharks.

What we have found is complete incompetence on the part of the Government. It is now going to stabilize the cost of living. There must be a joke in this verbiage, but unfortunately I cannot see it. The day after this document was presented to this honourable House we read in the newspapers that the prices of a number of essential commodities were going up again. I am not quoting from the Mirror, but from the Guyana Graphic of Sunday, May 15. [*Interruption.*] I do not know why my friend the Minister of Home Affairs wants this to be a security question: it is public business:

A number of essential commodities, including evaporated and powdered milk on

which prices were increased last month, are now to be sold at further increased prices, according to a statement yesterday by the Minister of Trade.

Last month, evaporated milk was increased by six cents a tin and powered milk went up by almost one dollar for a five-pound tin.

In yesterday's announcement the Ministry of Trade stated that the 'control prices for milk, both skimmed and evaporated, rolled oats and toilet soap, have all had to be increased because of the increases in the price quoted by the foreign suppliers.'

I shall deal with that later.

I wonder whether the hon. Minister was not aware that his Ministry was going to issue an Order for further increases in the prices of these commodities when he wrote this short paragraph in the President's Address and thus allowed the President to fool the people.

We on this side of the House have every sympathy with the Government's desire to control essential commodities. We are not speaking for our friends in the Water Street. We want genuine control of the prices of commodities so that the so-called 'small' man, about whom the government talks, should benefit.

The Chamber of Commerce and some big businesses in Water Street have adopted certain techniques and the Government has fall end for them and has agreed to carry up the prices of these essential commodities. My friend the ex-Minister of Home Affairs knows what Mr. X and Mr. Y. say at any meeting in the county. The Government must know that some of these merchants who are carrying up the prices of commodities are getting their commissions deducted at source. What does the Government do? It obliges them by raising the prices of these essential commodities. We want genuine control, the type of control that will benefit the working class.

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3.15 – 3.25 p.m.

To come back to the External Trade Bureau: it will be recalled that this Government did not set out to reduce the cost of living. One of its first acts in its consistent reduction of quotas from the Sino-Soviet bloc was to impose a 10 per cent levy for itself. With what purpose was this done? In order to help its imperialist friends from the United States, the United Kingdom, West Germany and Japan so that the prices of goods which were imported from the soviet Union and socialist countries would be increased. These goods from the eastern countries are cheaper than others and thus are able to benefit the Guyanese people. The Government is not interested in helping the working class.

3.25 p.m.

The Ministers have said, “We cannot allow free importation from the Sino-Soviet Bloc because they do not do any trade with us.” What about Holland and the other countries from which we make massive purchases? Do they trade with us? It must not be left unsaid that the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries are willing to trade with Guyana. But our friends across there whose hands are tied, and whose navel-strings are all buried with the imperialists are not prepared to trade with the Socialist countries. [*Interruption*]

I was going to say a minute ago that when my friend the hon. Minister of Agriculture – they change so often one has to stop to think where they are – was Minister of Finance he cold shouldered the representative of the People’s Republic of Czechoslovakia who had come to this country to offer what I would refer to as favourable conditions of trade. What is more this Government breached its own understanding with G.A.T.T. Although Czechoslovakia is one of the oldest members of that organisation and although it is listed as one of the countries with which our businessmen may now trade, this Government arbitrarily discriminated against Czechoslovakia.

Let us take again, the current problem which is facing the country where all the rice bonds are cover-flowing. [**Dr. Reid:** “They are?”] It is for that reason that this Government tried

to get the Rice Producers Association again to sit on the Rice Marketing Board in order to help it out – [Interruption] – to get some knowledge on how to handle this problem. The rice mills are always over-flowing. There is nobody to buy. But we want to tell the Government that Cuba is willing to buy rice from Guyana at competitive prices, prices perhaps better than the West Indian prices, after Guyana has entered into an arrangement whereby it would buy commodities manufactured there or from other sources. But this Government is taking instructions and operating on the dictate of the United States. Why does it fail to trade with the Caribbean country, Cuba? A lucrative market has been dropped like a hot potato.

These actions on the part of the Government are not in the best interest of the people of this country. As I said, we do not speak for the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber of Commerce says that the E.T.B. must be blamed. What should be blamed is not the E.T.B. as such, but the policy and the philosophy of the Government, the incompetence of the Minister and the incompetence of his officers who fail to recognise the problems in our country. Let us take one case, to which I have already referred in this House. The E.T.B. is operating in the interest of the big boys: people like Stokes and Bynoe, Musson (Guyana) Limited and Tangs. These firms are associated with the big imperialists abroad; they own sole agency rights. Since the introduction to E.T.B., the small importers in Water Street, in Camp Street and in the country side are no longer allowed to import goods which they used to import before. They used to pay five per cent to Bookers or to the agents and they imported their own goods. They would bring items down at cost plus five per cent and sell a part wholesale and retail the balance. There were hardly any shortages then. Most goods were in plentiful supply.

This Government which beats its barren breast and talks about helping the small man has now rigged the E.T.B. It is allowing Musson, Stokes and Bynoe and about 18 other importers alone to bring down all the goods to wholesale them to these people who formerly imported, so that they gravy does not go right down, and there is a shortage of supply and the small many pays more. I know that the hon. Minister cannot deny it. I think that he has the ability, and the knowledge, to operate the system in the best interest of the people. If what the hon. Minister told

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me when he telephoned me that these big boys – [*Interruption*] What I am saying is that the hon. Minister admitted that these big boys are prepared to bring pressure on Guyana because Guyana has taken courage in her hand to introduce the E.T.B. What about the other parts of the world. What the hon. Minister has to do is to get his technical men, the doctors, and the pharmacists, to write out what is good for high blood pressure, what is good for this, and what is good for that, and send an order to the Soviet Union and some of the countries in the Eastern parts of the world. Let him place his orders and throw the Western sharks in their proper places.

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This Government simply does not think of doing that, for its friends are in Water Street. The Government's policy is dealing with socialist countries like the Soviet Union is to keep its Ambassadors at long range in Brazil.

What we see around Georgetown and on the Coast is not all. I invite the hon. Minister to make a trip, to go into the Berbice River or the Essequibo River and see how the poor people in those areas live. Let the sole agent take their 5 per cent but Government must know – if the hon. Minister is unaware of it, surely some members know – that the PPP subsidized the cost of cooking oil. Without a conscience this Government removed the subsidy and yet the Members are brazen enough to say that they are helping the small man. I urge upon the Minister to remove the 10 per cent.

I wonder if I may be permitted to deal with the other commodity which has made the hon. Minister so famous. Cement will be used until such time as the Prime Minister is able to get his clay blocks manufacture in operation, and his paste. I understand the Prime Minister told the engineers, when they met at the Pegasus, that they must do research to find a paste so that they do not have to use cement. The hon. Prime Minister told the engineers that the absence of cement was creating hardships for a large number of people who are depending on it for a means of livelihood.

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When I discussed the questions of cement with the Ministry, I was told the usual thing about Mr. John Fernandes and the strike in Trinidad and the re-arrangement, but the real thing is, after John Fernandes decided not to bring cement, the Minister and his officers said that they had no boats to transport the cement.

I want to know when the Minister of Communications get up to speak – he is a man of few words – what has happened to the “Ambrosio” which was previously chartered for the transportation of cement from Puerto Rico. It might not be on record because there are so many rackets. Is the hon. Minister of Trade unaware of this? What happens at Cabinet Meetings? Do they not discuss these problems so that the Minister of Communications can say that the “Ambrosio” is sitting in fresh water, incurring a tremendous sum for maintenance? Instead they are looking for bush rum with the “Maripa” equipped with radar. No wonder the cost of living goes up and noting can be done about it. They have neither the ingenuity nor the ability to keep down the cost of living. This little circus which we have here gives us the opportunity to speak out for the Guyanese people and for this we are grateful.

But the President’s Address once a year is not enough to satisfy the hunger or the anger of the Guyanese people and this is not going to help the small man or the country. It is studied cynicism to come here and tell us they are trying to make the small man a real man. What they mean to do is to keep the small man in his place. What I want to ask the Government to do is to stop fooling the working class and stop harassing the people.

3.45 p.m.

**Mr. Ramsaroop:** Last week Saturday a very significant thing happened. I understand a few members of the People’s Progressive Party, my brother in this House, sought, without success, to align themselves with the very persons they have been criticizing a very short while ago, the members of the mercantile community. That incident is significant because not so long ago, to be precise when the debate on last year’s President Address took place, the hon. Leader



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of the Opposition, among other things said:

“We have advocated that the commanding heights of the economy must be nationalised. Sugar, bauxite, banks, insurance companies, foreign trade.” (See Hansard of 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1970.)

It does appear to me, as a layman and not a psychiatrist, to be a Jekyll and Hyde political posture to be professing the cessation of foreign trade in Guyana last year and to be courting and cojoling members who represent foreign trade in Guyana today.

But, sir, we live in strange times and I understand that one man and “Politics is the art of the possible.” In politics you have permutations of all types and I conceded this is strange conduct but maybe significant also. I heard my friends talking about turncoats and so on a short while ago, but if this is not political “turncoatism”, if I may coin a phrase, it is political apostasy. It is an abandonment of one’s political philosophy when an Opposition can reach a stage of ignominy that it has to shed its long-cherished political axioms and articles of faith. I would say that such an Opposition must have its epitaph written for ever.

In 1963, I think, an attempt we made to commandeer foreign trade in Guyana. We all know that attempt was frustrated. Today we would have thought that the leopards who had shown their spots in 1963, would have shown the same spots in 1971, but I suppose historians will record the colossal hypocrisy that seems to be a part of the “entrenched” philosophy of the People’s Progressive Party.

There is another matter of equal significance that I think I ought to refer to. We hear a lot about prices and about the rise in the cost of living, but the true picture on prices apparently is not being painted in the right places. Let me refer to the present situation. One speaks about the articles controlled by the External Trade Bureau as if some articles are in a vacuum. That is a mistake. The truth of the matter is: one has to judge the impact and effectiveness of the Bureau having regard to all the items controlled by the Bureau and what I am seeking to do is what

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others have professed they would have done. Again I refer to last year's debate. The Leader of the Opposition is on record as having said this:

“Only the price of sweet drinks is controlled by not essential foods and medicines.” (Hansard of 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1970.)

This is precisely what the external Trade Bureau is doing but one swallow does not make a summer and one must not condemn the competence of an institution because of spiraling prices occasioned by forces and factors beyond our control. Let us see the whole picture. Although it is true – and I shall refer to these factors in a short while – that prices have been upped since the Bureau was established last year, it is equally true that the prices of drugs, medicinal and pharmaceutical products have been reduced.

Let me quote a few examples. Before the External Trade Bureau came on the scene a 16 oz. bottle of Rydemin was sold for \$16.90. The new price of this same commodity is \$14.35, a decrease of more than \$2 for one commodity. Maltevol, a widely used popular item across the counter, was sold before the establishment of E.T.B. for \$4.80. It is now being sold for \$4.37. And so it is along the line. Diabenes tablets have fallen from \$21.60 to \$18.60. before tablets, which some of my friends need for iron in their bloods, have fallen from \$7.26 to \$6. Last but not least, Andrews Liver Salts, which some of them also use for very commendable purposes, has been reduced from \$1.70 to \$1.40.

In the final analysis, therefore, one has to look at the effectiveness of the Bureau, having regard to the impact on prices. We are not only concerned about food prices. We must be concerned with all items which are consumed by the people of this country and which have some impact on the cost of living.

That is the reason why we said last year that we must move on essential items of food and drugs. That is what we have done. Therefore, in sum, one has to look at the question of prices, not in a little corner, but in their total impact and when one looks at them in this way one sees

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that the rising prices in some items are balanced out, if not proportionately, to a large degree, by falling prices in the case of drugs.

It is also not appreciated that before the establishment of the External Trade Bureau, when freight rates were increased or production costs rose, merchants in this country were wont to increase the margins on their products by twofold, that is, if that was an increase of five cents on one commodity, there would have been an increase of ten cents locally on the same commodity. Since the External Trade Bureau has come on the scene, prices abroad have gone up and I submit that had it not been for the Bureau, prices locally, high as they are now, would be higher.

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The truth of the matter is that since the Bureau came on the scene there has been a fixed margin of profit for a considerable number of items which means that the PROFIT MARGINS on items would always remain as constants although the swift quotations, which are variables, may go up. But when you operate in an institution where you have two variables, external prices and freight, going up I do not know by what stretch of the imagination these prices will down.

Therefore, the second point I wish to make is that had it not been for the Bureau these prices would have been increased considerably.

The External Trade Bureau may be a two-edged weapon in that although it seems to have been the instrument for increased prices, on the other hand, it has strengthened prices on consumption goods to such an extent that there is an unprecedented outcry on prices in Guyana today. But prices have been going up in this country for years and there has been this country and many of my friends seek to lend support to such forces. Many forces seek to bring this institution into dispute. It is a fact of life that in any society where countries are dependent on circumstances manipulated by external factors prices must go up. Last year prices went up and

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this year prices have gone up. But I submit with respect, that rising prices have not been a new phenomenon in our society. Rising prices have been taking place for a long time, but because of the establishment of the Bureau there has been a greater consciousness of this. There are many who gain by rising prices; one knows that hoarding is sometimes encouraged because of the imminence of rising prices. And although the consumer loses there are many cases where the merchants gain.

I wish to explain some of the nonsense about rising prices in Guyana. It is also worthwhile to make a reference, because although I said a short while ago that food prices have increased, there are a few instances where food prices have decreased since the Bureau came on the scene.

Only today, details with respect to food prices for perishables, namely, potatoes, were brought to my attention and I commend them to this honourable House. The price of potatoes in May of 1970 was 53 shillings per 100 pounds. Since the Bureau came on the scene, in May 1971, with its capacity for bulk purchasing the comparable price is NOT 53 shillings but 33 shillings. Let us see the prices of onions at a similar period last year. In April the prices quoted were \$5.15 to \$6.00 per 50 pounds. Today, in May of 1971, the prices quoted are \$3.15 to \$3.60 respectively. Here again, one has to see the picture as a whole. You do not condemn an institution because of the spiraling prices. You have to see the total impact; you have to look at all aspects of this measure to know the truth.

Your Honour, I do not know if you wish to adjourn or shall I continue for fifteen minutes in which time I will wind up?

**Mr. Speaker:** If it is the wish of the House that you continue. Are hon. Members in agreement to sit after 4 o'clock?

**Mr. Ramsaroop:** Those are some of the instances. My friends talk about apparent discrimination with respect to Sino-Soviet goods. If this government was bent on squeezing out Sino-Soviet trade it would not have established the E.T.B. principally to promote Sino-Soviet goods. This is the nonsense that is being peddled by the hon. Members on the opposite side. If we were bent on destroying the Sino-Soviet trade all we had to do was to instruct the Competent Authority not to issue licences to the Sino-Soviet countries. When members of the Opposition seek to pull wool over the eyes of the public, the public must know the truth. This Government has set up an institution to promote and encourage, notwithstanding obstacles, trade with the Sino-Soviet countries. Yet we get this nonsense about miniaturising trade. We hear about the Ministry of Trade being afraid to destroy the distributorships of this country. The same people who for many years have had the power and the capacity to initiate such a move like the E.T.B. is telling us that we are on the band-wagon of distributors. Imagine the gumption, when it was in the competence of the same members to initiate this all the time.

No Opposition would want to commend a Government for a good move. But I appreciate the capacity they have to survive. I do not think that hon. members opposite have the guts to get up and applaud the Government for what it is doing. An institution must take some time to consolidate its position, and there are valid reasons now, and I stress now, why some distributors who are now wholesalers should continue their occupation. It is a known fact that those distributors have been stripped of some the functions that they have been performing in the past.

**4.05 p.m.**

The hon. Member Mr. Ram Karran got up and said that the distributors of this country have not been affected. The distributors in Guyana used to occupy a multiplicity of roles, as agents, distributors, stockists, and wholesalers. Under the new scheme of things enunciated by the External Trade Bureau, they deal only as importers, so I had better tell them that to make a statement like that betrays a total ignorance of the role of the External Trade Bureau. As the

position exists, person who used to occupy a multiplicity of roles in the past, have today to content themselves with being wholesalers.

My friend talks about drugs, but let me inform him. Under the External Trade Bureau we have two tiers, the wholesale tier and the retail tier. He talks about the distributor monopolizing but the truth of the matter is that he monopoly in that trade has been cut out. If the monopoly has not been cut out, how is it they are stripped of their agencies, their stockists' ranks and also their promoting? It seems strange that a man like the hon. member Mr. Ram Karran should make such a statement. If this is done through ignorance, I would condone it. If it is a piece of mischievous propaganda, I want to make it quite clear to him that his time has long passed when these distributors ought to have been stripped of their considerable powers.

Further, the External Trade Bureau has now chalked up arrangements with contracts abroad. Before the establishment of the External Trade Bureau, this nation was held to ransom by importers. They now have to avail themselves of two services, either to be town agents, or distributors. Today, under the External Trade Bureau, people can buy drugs on direct indent. They can go to the Bureau and place orders. I should like at some length to explain this aspect because I want to correct some of those inaccuracies which have been detailed by my friend. I do not think it is fair to have the record incorrect because in their endeavours to marry their efforts with those of the mercantile community, they may embark on another vicious campaign to denigrate the External Trade Bureau.

The hon. Member Mr. Stoby made a very good point, and let me be man enough to accept. He made the point that the freight structure that exists does not look at the problems realistically. At this moment, a committee is looking at the freight structure of commodities, and having regard to the recent local government changes and the recent economic changes in the country, we will have to revise that structure in a short time. Outlying districts that have not been covered or not properly covered by the percentages we allow will have a re-appraisal shortly.

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My friend also made the point that the Government should not only think about consumer items but also producer items and see about controlling them. When I addressed the Chamber of Commerce on the occasion of the enlargement of the External Trade Bureau, I announced that we were looking at the matter and indeed, recommendations will be put to Cabinet on controlling vital producer goods which are in very respect just as important for improving the economic life of the people of this country, as consumer goods. I want to give my friend that assurance.

It is a good thing to criticize. I think it was Disraeli who said it is easier to be critical than to be correct and in a parliamentary democracy one has to make allowances for speeches, one has to make allowance for irresponsibility, but I would wish that in further, when members seek to speak on the External Trade Bureau, they apprise themselves of the implications of this institution and all matters that touch on its operations, so that we may not be treated with half-truths and fabrications which are more dangerous than lies.

#### ADJOURNMENT

**Mr. Speaker:** Will the Leader of the House move the Adjournment.

**Resolved,** “That this Assembly do now adjourned until Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1971, at 2 p.m.” [Mr. Ramsaroop.]

*Adjourned accordingly at 4.12 p.m.*

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