

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE 33<sup>RD</sup> SITTING OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE THIRD  
SESSION (1983-1984) OF THE FOURTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA HELD

AT 14:00 hrs

ON MONDAY 1984-08-27

IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, GEORGETOWN

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (74)

Speaker (1)

\*Cde. Sase Narain, O.R., S.C., J.P., M.P.,  
Speaker of the National Assembly

Members of the Government – People's National Congress (61)

Prime Minister (1)

Cde. H.D. Hoyte, S.C., M.P.,  
Prime Minister

Other Vice-President and First Deputy Prime Minister (1)

Cde. H. Green, M.P.,  
Vice-President, Social Infrastructure and  
First Deputy Prime Minister (Absent)

Other Vice-Presidents and Deputy Prime Ministers (2)

\*Cde. Dr. M. Shahabuddeen, O.R., S.C., M.P.,  
Vice-President, Deputy Prime Minister and  
Attorney General  
Cde. R. Chandisingh, M.P.,  
Vice-President, National Development  
And Deputy Prime Minister.

Other Deputy Prime Minister (1)

\*Cde. W.A.L.H. Parris, C.C.H., M.P.,  
Deputy Prime Minister, Planning.

Senior Ministers (8)

\*Cde. R.E. Jackson, M.P.,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
\*Cde. J.R. Thomas, M.P.,  
Minister of Home Affairs

\* Non-elected Member

- Cde. R.H.O. Corbin, M.P.,  
Minister of National Mobilization (Absent)
- Cde H. Rashid, M.P.,  
Minister of Energy and Mines (Absent -on leave)
- \*Cde. C.B. Greenidge, M.P.  
Minister of Finance
- Cde. Sallahuddin, M.P.,  
Minister of Forestry
- Cde. Dr. R.A. Van West-Charles, M.P.,  
Minister of Health and Public Welfare
- \* Cde. M.L. Parris, M.P.,  
Minister of Education

#### Ministers (6)

- Cde. Urmia Johnson, M.P.,  
Minister within the Ministry of National  
Development
- Cde. Yvonne V. Harewood-Benn, M.P.,  
Minister within the Ministry of Education
- \*Cde. K.W.E. Denny, M.P.,  
Minister of Manpower and Co-operatives
- Cde. R.C. Fredericks, A.A., M.P.,  
Minister of Youth and Sport within the  
Ministry of Education
- Cde. S. Prashad, M.P.,  
Minister of Transport within the Vice-Presidency  
of Social Infrastructure
- \* Cde. Dr. S.P. DaSilva, M.P.,  
Minister within the Ministry of Agriculture

#### Ministers of State (2)

- Cde. M. Corrica, M.P.,  
Minister of State within the Ministry of  
Internal Trade and Consumer Protection
- Cde. H.L.B. Singh, M.P.,  
Minster of State within the Ministry of  
Regional Development

#### Parliamentary Secretaries (3)

- Cde. Agnes W. Bend-Kirton-Holder, M.P.  
Parliamentary Secretary, Housing, within the  
Ministry of Health and Public Welfare
- Cde. D.A.N. Ainsworth, M.P.,  
Parliamentary Secretary, Youth
- Cde. B. Bhaggan, M.P.  
Parliamentary Secretary, National Development

#### Government Chief Whip (1)

- Cde. Bidiawattie Tiwari, M.P.,  
Government Chief Whip

\* Non-elected Member

Other Members (24)

Cde. O.E. Clarke, M.P.  
Cde. R.E. Williams, M.P.  
Cde. J.P. Chowritmootoo, J.P., M.P. (Absent - on leave)  
Cde. Philomena A. Rayman  
Cde. J.B. Caldeira, M.P. (Absent)  
Cde. E.H.A. Fowler, M.P.  
Cde. Joyce Gill-Mingo, M.P.  
Cde. M. Ally, M.P.  
Cde. M. Armogan, M.S., J.P., M.P.  
Cde. Bissoondai Beniprashad, M.P.  
Cde. A.A. Chin, M.P.  
Cde. Elaine B. Davidson, M.P.  
Cde. H. Doobay, M.P.  
Cde. A.B. Felix, M.P.  
Cde. Patricia Fredericks, M.P. (Absent)  
Cde. E.F. Gilbert, M.P.  
Cde. A. McRae, M.P.  
Cde. Joyce M. Munroe, J.P., M.P.  
Cde. R.N. Primo, M.P.  
Cde. C.G. Sharma, M.P.  
Cde. C. Vandenburg, M.P.  
Cde. Edwina Melville, M.P.  
Cde. Y. Khan, M.P.  
(One seat vacant)

Members from the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs (2)

Cde. R. Bishop, M.S., M.P. (Absent)  
Cde. Bhagmatee Latchminarayan, M.P.

Members from the Regional Democratic Councils (10)

Cde. Dianne Abraham, M.P. (Region No. 8 – Potaro/Siparuni)  
Cde. W. Bipat, J.P., M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)  
Cde. Nellie R. Charles, M.P. (Region No.7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni) (Absent)  
Cde. I. Chowritmootoo, M.P. (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/ Corentyne)  
Cde. D. Hinds, M.P. (Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Berbice)  
Cde. K.V. Jairam, M.P. (Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supernaam) (Absent)  
Cde. K.N. Jones, M.P. (Region No. 1 – Barima/Waini)  
Cde. H.I. London, M.S., M.P. (Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice)  
Cde. Cora A. Singh, M.P. (Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)  
(Vacant) (Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo)

Members of the Minority (12)

(i) People’s Progressive Party (10)

Minority Leader (1)

Cde. Dr. C. Jagan, M.P.,  
Minority Leader

Deputy Speaker (1)

Cde. Ram Karran, M.P.,  
Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly (Assembly)

Other Members (8)

Cde. Janet Jagan, M.P. (Absent)  
Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, J.P., M.P.,  
Minority Chief Whip  
Cde. N. Persaud, M.P.  
Cde. C.C. Collymore, M.P.  
Cde. S.F. Mohamed, M.P.  
Cde. I. Basir, M.P.  
Cde. C.C. Belgrave, M.P. (Absent)  
Cde. H. Nokta, M.P. (Absent)

(ii) United Force (2)

Mr. M.F. Singh, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.  
Mr. M.A. Abraham, M.P. (Absent)

OFFICERS

Clerk of the National Assembly – Cde. F.A. Narain, A.A.  
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly – Cde. M.B. Henry.

PRAYERS

**TAKES**

**14:00 – 14:25 HRS**

**MISSING**

The Minister within the Ministry of Education: (Cde. Harewood-Benn): Cde. Speaker, on behalf of the Cde. Prime Minister, I am piloting the National Equivalency Board Bill.

This Bill, Cde. Speaker, seeks to organise an arrangement where our certificates, degrees and diplomas are made equivalent to those which our students acquire from different countries. You may be aware that right now we are sending our students to nineteen different countries and those who have studied have certificates and diplomas which are different from those to which we have grown accustomed and we have, as a result, established certain equivalence. We have a proliferation too, of local diplomas and certificates – some with similar names but indicating various levels of competence. We are unable so far to provide to the local institutions in any ordered way evaluations of the qualifications of non-nationals who because of bilateral arrangements are here for study in Guyana. We do not, right now, have a national body whose specific task is to establish equivalence to qualifications. We have been advised, Cde. Speaker, that many Foreign Governments, are prepared to consider equivalence, to establish qualifications, but they need to be able to make contact with an informed and responsible body, hence our National Equivalency Board.

We need a forum in which employees and graduate students can share experience with those responsible for training and education. We need a collection, and a sharing with other countries, of relevant documentation and ultimate decisions about equivalence. Relationships with other countries and with equivalency agencies will facilitate all of the above. Agreements are fashioned with friendly countries to have alternatives to GCE 'A' level and 'O' Level examinations.

As of now, only two of the countries to which we send students accept equivalence. We need to correct the situation. We have held discussions in and out of Guyana. I think we have a fairly sound basis for the efficient running of such a Board and this is in an effort to correct many anomalies, many inconsistencies and, to some extent, some dissatisfaction among our students when they return and

cannot get placed properly because of our inability to assess their awards. We think that this Bill will do just that.

You will notice that we have many agencies involved. This list, Cde. Speaker, is not comprehensive; it is not total. As the occasion arises, we can ask other personnel from other relevant agencies to give their opinions on whatever matter comes up. I think it is a Bill that is necessary. I think it will fulfill the objective of bringing much needed order to the system of awarding degrees, certificates and qualifications, not to mention salary adjustments which will go a far way to achieving those objectives and as such Cde. Speaker, I recommend this Bill to the Assembly.

Question proposed.

Cde. F. Mohamed: Cde. Speaker, may I, on behalf of my colleagues here, say that we are favourably disposed towards this Bill. We are particularly interested in that aspect which seeks to evaluate the qualifications or the institutions of socialist countries which is referred to in this explanatory memorandum and having evaluated those qualifications, to relate them to these accepted and established by tradition.

Coming at this time, one is prompted to remark that it has arrived rather late. To our mind, it is a Bill long overdue. However, it is better late than never.

**TAKES**

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**MISSING**



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Cde. Ram Karran Continues:

14:45 hrs

That sort of thing is not going to be helped by the Equivalency Act that you pass here. That sort of thing is not going to be corrected by the personnel whom you put on the Equivalence Board. It has to be people who are dedicated to the advancement of education. It is not going to be developed; it is not going to be helped by picking “party hacks,” putting them on the Board and giving the nod to people who they think will serve the country. In fact, at one time one university Professor told me that a “big wig” in the PNC asked if these people who are coming out of the University are the people who are going to give him a run for government. In other words, suggesting that since these people did not have any ethnic origin, then they are going to be disloyal to the Government. That sort of thing, in this country like this, cannot continue and the Government, if it wants real development in this country, will have to abandon what it has done in the past all these twenty years and will have to build an institution that will bring freedom, justice and a real thrust to the development of this country. You cannot look at the colour of a person’s eyes and say that this person is going to be good to help the Government, because the Government of the PNC is not going to last forever. It is not going to run forever. Guyana, the State, is going to remain forever and that is why whoever happens to be functioning in those positions, whether by fraud or otherwise, must ensure that whatever is done properly. Away with discrimination! Let us go forward for the best students.

Cde. Dr. C. Jagan: Cde. Speaker, I too, would like to join my colleagues in saying that this measure, though long overdue, is welcome. Cde. Feroze Mohamed referred to the large number of people whom this country lost. When the PPP was in power, we sent over eighty persons to study in socialist countries. I think if you can find five today in Guyana, you will find plenty. This is because of two factors,

not only discrimination in employment practices, but also other factors. And that is first, the non-recognition of the degrees and secondly the fact that there was a yardstick which prevented people from entering into private medical practice, for instance, let me amplify this.

In colonial times, only doctors trained in British Universities or say, in Jamaica, at the medical school there, could practice in Guyana. Degrees from the United States and other highly developed capitalist countries, even western capitalist countries, even though they were equivalent, were not put on the same basis. In other words, while a dentist from the United States could come here and practice, a doctor could not. This created big problems for us, because we had recurring shortages of doctors. That was one of the reasons why the PPP Government sent so many people abroad to study. Jamaica University was graduating for us only a few doctors each year. By the way, we did not have only a shortage of doctors. I remember when we first started to set up the Embryonic Planning Unit, we couldn't find one Economist in Guyana nor a Statistician, so bad was the technical infrastructure and professional infrastructure. That was the other reason why not only did we send students to the socialist countries, but also embarked on the University of Guyana so that we could have trained not only doctors, but a superabundance of professional and technical people for our needs, engineers included.

The PPP Government went ahead to amend the law since there was so much opposition coming from the Medical Board at that time and the British establishment. We amended it, you may say, part way, because our wish was to make the medical degrees in the western capitalist countries equivalent to the degrees of Great Britain or Commonwealth countries. But, because of the opposition, we had to go half way and we met the Medical Board by saying, "Okay, they will have to practice here in an institution say for a year or a year and a half." I cannot remember exactly how long. "After that, the person can go into private practice." In other words, there was still a discrimination against the non-British

trained or non-Commonwealth trained doctor. I am sorry to say that that persists even today. We were thinking not only of doctors who had graduated from the United States, but also of those who were coming back from the socialist countries.

I hope that, while this Board will look into the question of equivalence and degrees, not only will consideration be given to the fact that degrees from socialist countries will be evaluated and recognised, but, as my colleagues Cde. Ram Karran pointed out, that discrimination will be removed in employment; people who have passed through these Universities and who have an equivalent degree, that discrimination will not be applied in giving them jobs, because this was so in the past; secondly, the point taken by my colleague concerning the intake of students, that there should be no discrimination and no lowering of standards because that clearly would affect the future development of this country.

I would like to put to the Minister in charge of this matter, whoever he or she is, to remove this one year or one year and a half bar which still exists on doctors who come from non-Commonwealth countries. I do not know if it still exists. If it does, then please remove it, because we do not see any reason why it should continue. As I said, we had to do that years and years ago because of the tremendous opposition than from the Medical Board and the British establishment. We do not have that at the present moment and therefore, if that stipulation still exists, then it should be removed forthwith.

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Cde. Harewood-Benn: Cde. Speaker, in answer to the comments made by the members of the Minority, first of all on the questions of lateness, I would like to assure them that this is not something that we have just discovered. As a matter of fact, since 1982 we have been working on this and in fact some positive results have already been had, but they must appreciate that much preparatory work was needed. It wasn't a question of just accepting the degree. You had to know how they got those degrees. To me that was basic, perhaps the preparatory work was not done. We have tried to do that and we have finished doing the preparatory work now.

I would like to assure you, if assurance is needed, that employment opportunities are legion and the Government has a commitment to employ people whom they have sent abroad to study. It would be a waste of time and money not to provide employment for the people to whom the tax payers' money has been paid.

On the question of the scholarships to the City and Guilds being recognised. Here we have the problem of a feeling of self-worth being able to do things and then having to be respected for doing it. The GDR recognises the qualifying examinations that the Technical Institute has now. The Patrice Lamumba University does the same thing. It accepts the examinations. It recognises them as worthy as compared with the City and Guilds. We have discarded the City and Guilds for a reason. We want our own curriculum based on our circumstances. That should be a 'given' for all of us in Guyana here. What we are trying to do now is to get other universities and other agencies of higher learning to accept them and they will because they are good.

On the scholarships not taken up, just tell us where they are. We will be happy to accommodate the donors because, as you know, finance is scarce and we are willing to accept any offers provided, of course, they fit into our scheme of things

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and they will benefit the country.

On the question of discrimination, there are fourteen agencies involved. They will send their people to sit on the Board. In addition to that, to answer your question about the TUC Cde. Persico is the TCU representative on the Board. We do have a TUC input, a knowledgeable informed person, who, I am sure will help us Cde. Speaker.

Question put and agreed to

Bill read a second time

Assembly in Committee

Bill considered and approved

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported with Amendment, read the Third time and passed as printed

#### ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, “That this Assembly do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.” /The Minister of Home Affairs/

Adjournment accordingly at 15:03 hrs