

BELIZE

No. HR 24/1/11

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, 19th January 2015

10:24 A.M.

Pursuant to the directions of Mr. Speaker on the 14th January 2015, the House met on Monday, 19th January 2015, in the National Assembly Chamber, Belmopan, at 10:24 A.M.

Members Present:

The Hon. Michael Peyrefitte, Speaker
The Hon. Dean O. Barrow (Queen's Square), Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economic Development
The Hon. Gaspar Vega (Orange Walk North), Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture
The Hon. Erwin R. Contreras (Cayo West), Minister of Trade, Investment Promotion, Private Sector Development and Consumer Protection
The Hon. Patrick J. Faber (Collet), Minister of Education, Youth and Sports
The Hon. Michael Finnegan (Mesopotamia), Minister of Housing and Urban Development
The Hon. Manuel Heredia Jr. (Belize Rural South), Minister of Tourism and Culture
The Hon. Anthony Martinez (Port Loyola), Minister of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation
The Hon. John Saldivar (Belmopan), Minister of National Security
The Hon. Wilfred P. Elrington (Pickstock), Attorney General and Minister of Foreign Affairs
The Hon. Rene Montero (Cayo Central), Minister of Works and Transport
The Hon. Pablo S. Marin (Corozal Bay), Minister of Health
The Hon. Santino Castillo (Caribbean Shores), Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
The Hon. Hugo Patt (Corozal North), Minister of State in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Agriculture
The Hon. Herman Longworth (Albert), Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
The Hon. Mark King (Lake Independence), Minister of State in the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation
The Hon. Edmond G. Castro (Belize Rural North), Minister of State in the Ministry of Works and Transport, Deputy Speaker
The Hon. Omar Figueroa (Cayo North), Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister
The Hon. Elvin Penner (Cayo North East)
The Hon. Francis Fonseca (Freetown), Leader of the Opposition
The Rt. Hon. Said Musa (Fort George)
The Hon. John Briceño (Orange Walk Central)
The Hon. Florencio Marin Jr. (Corozal South East)
The Hon. Michael Espot (Toledo East)

The Hon. Julius Espat (Cayo South)
 The Hon. Dolores Balderamos Garcia (Belize Rural Central)
 The Hon. Rodwell Ferguson (Stann Creek West)
 The Hon. Oscar Requena (Toledo West)
 The Hon. Ivan Ramos (Dangriga)
 The Hon. Jose Mai (Orange Walk South)
 The Hon. Marco Tulio Mendez (Orange Walk East)
 The Hon. Ramiro Ramirez (Corozal South West)

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

PRAYERS by Pastor Conrad Arzu.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE OF A NEW MEMBER

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Clerk, kindly administer the Oath of Allegiance to the newly elected Member for Cayo North, the Honourable Dr. Omar Figueroa. (Applause)

HON. O. FIGUEROA (Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister): I, **OMAR FIGUEROA**, do swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Belize, and will uphold the Constitution and the law, and that I will conscientiously, impartially and to the best of my ability discharge my duties as **MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES** and do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will. **SO HELP ME GOD.**

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Member, for Cayo North I welcome you to this Honourable House of Representatives. Fortunately for you whenever there is a by-election and you are the only one, I'll give you the opportunity to say a few words on your newly elected post. You may have a few brief words.

HON. O. FIGUEROA (Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And with your permission I would like to just make reference to some notes that I have here.

I rise, Mr. Speaker, today, with great pride and on behalf of the people of Cayo North. (Applause) As a person born and raised in San Ignacio Town within the constituency of Cayo North, it is indeed an honor and a privilege to now hold this seat in Parliament. I am grateful and indeed, humble by the overwhelming vote of confidence that the wonderful folks of Cayo North clearly expressed.

And as the dust now settles on the by-election of January 5, Mr. Speaker, I just want to sincerely thank all those who participated. To the many first time voters, the relentless campaigners who pounded the streets, the tireless team who worked 16 hours a day in the computer room. To those who knocked on doors and those who drove to pick up voters, whether you wore an "Omar" T-Shirt or whether you held a Harrison sign, whether you voted red or whether you voted blue, you made your voices heard and you made a difference. (Applause) Cayo North is stronger today because of you. To the best campaign teams and volunteers that worked tirelessly I am forever grateful. To the hundreds who stayed outside the polling station until the last vote was cast and the hundreds who stayed outside the ITVET compound until the last vote was counted. I thank you. (Applause)

To our brothers and sisters who descended on Cayo North from across this

country, thanks for the support and thanks for the solidarity. To all Members of Cabinet and all Standard Bearers of the United Democratic Party you embraced Cayo North and Cayo North is grateful. (Applause) A most special thank you to the Leader of the United Democratic Party, the Honourable Prime Minister, (Applause) on behalf of the people of Cayo North I thank you for your help, for your support and for your encouragement. You played a critical role in this clear and decisive victory.

To my core group of campaign managers and advisors I thank you for your unwavering dedication. To my wife, my kids, my parents, my entire extended family I will always be grateful for the unwavering support. And to end it all, to every single voter of the Cayo North constituency, who took the time, who made the effort to go out and to cast your vote. I say thank you, thank you. We all have a collective responsibility to make Cayo North a better, more stronger, more vibrant constituency. I will work tirelessly to ensure that I do my part. I want to remind you that the role of Belizeans in our democracy does not end with the vote. We must continue working together and together, with your help and with the blessing of the Almighty Father we begin our journey forward. Thank you. (Applause)

PAPERS

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise to lay on the Table Sessional Papers No.HR251/1/11 - Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment of First Schedule) (No.9) Order, 2014; No. HR252/1/11 - Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment of First Schedule) (No.10) Order, 2014; No. HR253/1/11 - Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment of First Schedule) (No.11) Order, 2014; and No. HR254/1/11 - Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment of First Schedule) (No.12) Order, 2014.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, those Papers are ordered to lie on the Table.

HON. E. CONTRERAS (Minister of Trade, Investment Promotion, Private Sector Development and Consumer Protection): Mr. Speaker, I rise to lay on the Table Sessional Papers No. HR255/1/11 - Supplies Control (Prices) (Amendment) (No.42) Regulations, 2014; and No. HR256/1/11 - Supplies Control (Prices) (Amendment) (No.43) Regulations, 2014.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, those Papers are also ordered to lie on the Table.

INTRODUCTION OF BILL

1. Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

HON. G. VEGA (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a Bill for an Act to amend the Sugar Industry Act, Chapter 325 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000-2003; to bring the Act into conformity with the Belize Constitution; to secure to all cane farmers the freedom to belong to an association of their own choice; to facilitate the commencement of grinding seasons in a fair and equitable manner, taking due account of the legitimate interests of all stakeholders; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, that Bill is referred to the Public Service, Labour, Industry and Trade Committee for examination, consideration and report.

Bill read a first time.

HON. G. VEGA (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Orders 49(1), I move that the Bill be taken through all its stages forthwith. (Applause)

HON. F. FONSECA (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, we object to this in the strongest possible terms. How can we come here today, how can this Government come here today to this Honourable House, place before us a Bill of such importance affecting a vital national industry, which is the sugar industry, placed that Bill on our table at 10:00 A.M., (Applause) when the meeting is scheduled to start, (Applause) and they expect us to engage in a debate on this Bill. Man this is absolutely outrageous. It is absolutely outrageous and distasteful and I appeal to the Honourable Prime Minister to withdraw the Bill so that we would have an opportunity to properly review the Bill, consult with stakeholders, and so that we can have a proper debate and discussion on the Bill. (Applause) Man that is the only way to go forward on this Bill, so we object on the strongest possible terms, Mr. Speaker, and we wish to place that on the record. And again, I appeal to the Honourable Prime Minister to withdraw the Bill and let us have a proper discussion and review of the Bill and have an opportunity to do so. (Applause)

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): It you would allow me, Mr. Speaker, since he is appealing to me, and I usually try to accede to his appeal when he said roll the elections now, I acceded. (Applause) But in this case, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition well knows that there was going to be this House Meeting this morning and he well knows that we have to pass this Bill today, because we need to get the crop on the way. (Applause) A crop that has been delayed, Mr. Speaker, in consequence, of the machinations, bad mind, and sabotage of a number of people including the Leader of the Opposition. (Applause) We serve public notice some time ago, that in accordance with the order made by the court, we would be in introducing this Bill. We explained that it would not go beyond the remit set out by the Supreme Court in that order, a copy of the order has been available to all of them on the other side. And the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that in consequence of their intrigues and bad mind, and efforts to derail the sugar industry and in particular the start of the crop new associations they have now engineered a kind of splintering of the Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association. New associations have come into being under this Bill and in accordance with the constitutional mandate they must take their place around the table together with the Belize Sugar Farmers Association. (Applause) They must participate, Mr. Speaker, in the infrastructure that governs the operationalisation of a crop. That crop will start no later than next week and in order for all that I've just said to take place, in order for the new associations together, with the existing BSCFA, to be centrally involved on a basis of equality and equitability we must pass this Bill today. So get with the program man! You've done enough to try to sabotage the economy of the north, to try to hurt the national interest of this country, to try to drive away the investor you were the one who said you were nationalize, you were the one who said last week, let them go. Mr. Speaker, how absolutely outrageous, I gather that your master from London had to call you and tell you to take it back.

(Applause) So, Mr. Speaker, exigencies of the situation absolutely require that we pass this Bill today. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Deputy Prime Minister, as the mover of the Motion do you wish to go through it in all its stages today still?

HON. G. VEGA (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the next stages of the Bill be taken through all its stages forthwith.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it. (Applause)

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I moved that at its rising today, the House adjourn to a date to be fixed by the Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the House at its rising today, adjourn to a date to be fixed by the Speaker.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

A. GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

I MOTIONS

1. Write-Off (No.1) Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, this is the Write-Off (No.1) Motion, 2015, I moved- WHEREAS, on 3rd April 2007, Government of Belize vehicle license plate BZB-1472 attached to the Ministry of Health was involved in a traffic accident and sustained extensive damages;

AND WHEREAS, the Police investigation found the driver to be at fault, however, no charges were brought against him and the Solicitor General advised that it would not be prudent to surcharge as the limitation period had elapsed; as a result the Accounting Officer made recommendation for the write-off of this loss;

AND WHEREAS, the Accountant General, the Auditor General and the Financial Secretary are in support of the write-off;

AND WHEREAS, the total cost of repairs borne by the Government of Belize is \$14,647.21;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this House approves the write-off of \$14,647.21 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, that Motion is referred to the Finance and Economic Development Committee for examination, consideration and report.

2. Write-Off (No.2) Motion, 2015.

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, this is Write-Off (No.2) Motion, 2015, I move - WHEREAS, on 26th February 2013, Government of Belize vehicle license plate BZB-0214 attached to the Police Department was involved in a traffic accident where Police Officer O. Gabourel accidentally lost control of the vehicle and crashed into a building; the officer died on the spot unfortunately;

AND WHEREAS, the vehicle was valued at \$30,000.00 at the time of the accident; the Accounting Officer made recommendation for the write-off of this loss;

AND WHEREAS, the Accountant General, the Auditor General and the Financial Secretary are all in support of the write-off;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this House approves the write-off of \$30,000.00 as a loss to the Government of Belize.

This Motion has the recommendation of the Cabinet.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, that Motion is referred to the Finance and Economic Development Committee for examination, consideration and report.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, it has been agreed that the Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015, pass this day.

As you are well aware, under Standing Order No. 74, all proposed Legislation, Messages, Petitions, Motions and other matters relating to the subject mentioned under the title of each Standing Committee shall be referred by the House to such Committee for examination, consideration and report to the House.

The only logical way for this to be done, other than by suspension of Standing Orders, is for me to suspend the Sitting to enable the Public Service, Labour, Industry and Trade Committee to examine, consider and report to the House on the Bill.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

The Sitting was therefore suspended until the Public Service, Labour, Industry and Trade Committee concluded its business.

The meeting was suspended at 10:54 A.M.

The meeting was resumed at 11:30 A.M.

PRESENTATION OF REPORT FROM COMMITTEE

HON. H. LONGSWORTH (Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports) Mr. Speaker, I rise to report on a Meeting held by the Public Service, Labour, Industry and Trade Committee on the Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015, referred by the House of Representatives on 19th January, 2015.

In considering the matter referred to them, Mr. Speaker, your Committee held its meeting on the 19th January 2015.

Your Committee considered the Bill and has agreed that it be returned to the House for second reading without amendment.

Copy of the minutes of the proceedings of the meeting held is attached and forms part of this Report.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, that Report is ordered to lie on the Table.

II BILL FOR SECOND READING

1. Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

HON. G. VEGA (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I move the Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015, for second reading. Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like the opportunity to open the debate and therefore, pass some remarks.

I first of all would like to inform this Honourable House and all guests that BSCFA Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association has already signed the contract with BSI. (Applause) Therefore, we will soon start out sugar cane season.

I also want to make special recognition to Mr. Wilfredo Magana, one of the leaders of the Corozal Sugar Producers. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the Opposition and the naysayers have been promoting in the media, the amendments in this Bill are being made at the request and wish of the cane farmers of all cane farmers. Equally important, Mr. Speaker, the amendments contained in this Bill are also in conformity with the consent order of the Supreme Court of Belize. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, these amendments will ensure that all cane farmers regardless of their association to which they belong are equally recognized and respected within the laws governing the sugar industry. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, these amendments will also make it possible for farmers if they so wish, or if they so choose to not belong to any association. This is clearly their constitutional right to operate on their own if they so wish. Most importantly, these farmers will still have every right to deliver and sell their sugar cane. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, because of the many years of severe and often times contentious internal rambling within the Sugar Cane Farmers Association a group of farmers decided to form a separate association called the United Cane Farmers Association. After trying and failing to implement meaningful reform of the BSCFA, in 2008, leaders of the United Cane Farmers Association decided to petition the courts for them to be fully recognize as a separate association and to be provided with equal rights of representation within the operational bodies of

the sugar industry. This, of course, Mr. Speaker, was well within their rights as cane farmers. Even the most cynical and critical naysayer will have to agree with me that the United Cane Farmers Association was well within their rights to take this issue up in the courts. This decision to form separate associations was most definitely encouraged by the previous court ruling within the citrus industry which establish that the Citrus Industry Act violated the constitutional rights of citrus farmers who wanted on their own free will to be a part of an association of their choosing. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the legal precedent was already set yet the PUP and PUP sympathizers and supporters would want the Belizean public to believe that it is the UDP Government whose intention was to break up the BSCFA. However, our Belizean people have come to realize that the PUPs intention is only to create havoc in the sugar industry in order for them to gain political mileage. This is course, is without any regard to the interest of the caneros. Mr. Speaker, because this precedent was already established in the courts the United Cane Farmers Association challenged the constitutionality of the Sugar Industry Act on the same grounds that the citrus farmers had challenged the Citrus Industry. The Citrus Industry Act recognizing that legal precedence was established. The Government of Belize and the Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association as defendants and the Belize Sugar Industries Limited as an interested party decided to settle the matter with the claimants.

In 2010 the parties agreed to a consent order of the court that included and undertaking that the government would amend the Sugar Industry Act to make sure that the Act will not continue to violate the rights of cane farmers who wish to join the different association of their choosing. Mr. Speaker, it is these very amendments that are now being presented to this Honourable House. Mr. Speaker, the obvious question that arises is why did government take so long to bring these amendments, the same amendments that have been agreed to by all parties including the BSCFA in 2010? The answer is quite simple and straightforward, Mr. Speaker. The Government, this UDP Government was very reluctant to see a breakup with the longstanding Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association especially, at that time when the industry was already in very deep financial crisis. We felt that unified under one association farmers would be best place to address the many issues affecting them and the industry.

This UDP Government at every opportunity assisted the cane farmers by ensuring unprecedented investment in sugar road improvement made \$10 million loan facility as well as ensuring subsidize fuel to farmers. Mr. Speaker these investments by the GOB show for all to see that this Government is committed to the sugar industry. Despite Central Government's assistance over the years, Mr. Speaker, the Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association fail to resolve their many internal problems led by those within their ranks whom for selfish reasons, political reasons, misdirected the cane farmers not to sign the commercial agreement with BSI even after their negotiation parties and leadership had already approved it. This, Mr. Speaker, was the proverbial last straw. It was that decision, Mr. Speaker, not to sign the commercial agreement that has brought us to this Honourable House today to amend the Sugar Industry Act, to ensure conformity with the consent order issued by the Supreme Court of Belize.

Mr. Speaker, for obvious reasons this is not a decision that this administration has taken lightly. Even during this current crisis as the Prime Minister outlined at his January 8, Press Conference, he would only move to amend the Act if there were clear signs of other groups or associations forming. I too, Mr. Speaker, am deeply committed to the success and prosperity of the sugar industry. And like all right-thinking Belizeans want the crop to start. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, we have arrived at a time and place where the

government cannot delay the amendment any longer. Formers are organizing their representation and to date we have three associations. The Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association, the Corozal Sugar Cane Producers Association, and the Progressive Sugar Cane Producers Association. We know that all three associations have now signed for the commencement of a crop. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I want to be crystal clear on the scope and the extent of the amendments being made here today. The amendments before this Honourable House are limited to the obligations of the consent order of the Supreme Court and only that. It now allows for multiple associations to be established and recognize under the Amendment Act. Three seats are provided for Cane Farmers Associations to be appointed to the Sugar Industry Control Board and other regulatory bodies of the industry. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Sit down! Don't be immature sit down man.

HON. G. VEGA (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture): This will provide fair representation for farmers. Representational balance is preserved as the manufacturers also have an additional Member. All regulations of the regulatory bodies are being amended to ensure equity of representation for the associations and those that choose not to be associated. Mr. Speaker, we need to start the 2015 sugar cane crop without any further delay. We are urging all farmers to quickly re-register with the SICB to ensure we have a clean list without any duplication of their membership. Meeting of the new board and various committees will take place this week, to ensure that we have an agreement on a start date for the crop and clarity on the operations of the harvest.

Mr. Speaker, we truly hope that this is the last crop to be delayed in this fashion. The farmers and their families deserve better. The cane industry as it is has very serious challenges to overcome both domestic and internationally especially with the European market in the coming years. These amendments will bring stability to the industry and will go along long way to restoring confidence to the sugar industry. Mr. Speaker, the sugar industry is of national importance. When the sugar industry prospers cane farmers and their families prosper. When the sugar industry prospers the *northenos* prospers and indeed, all of Belize prospers. Let us work together and put political differences aside to ensure we continue to make this industry the best it can. This government, Mr. Speaker, is even more committed and determined to ensure that this crop starts and that the sugar industry continues to be successful. As such, we will continue to subsidize fuel. The Prime Minister has already indicated that he will spend no less than \$2 million to rehabilitate the sugar roads. (Applause) Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, this UDP Government will continue to waive the licensing fees for all farm equipment that is used for the haulage of the sugar cane. Mr. Speaker, these are in addition to the duty exemption on fertilizer, herbicides and different equipment that farmers apply for. Mr. Speaker, our commitment have never waiver nor will it ever waiver. We will continue to do all that is in our power to make the industry prosper for all its stakeholders, regardless of which association you belong to, or if you don't belong to any, cane farmers deserve it. Our economy depends on it. Our country needs it.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that I am in full support of this Bill and call on every Member of the Honourable House for their unwavering support for this truly is the wish of all cane farmers as you can hear all associations have signed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. F. FONSECA (Leader of the Opposition): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at the outset of my contribution to the debate I wish to, once again, place on the record our condemnation of the ongoing disrespect malpractice by this Government. (Applause) We come here, Mr. Speaker, we are asked to participate in the amendment of this very important piece of legislation the Sugar Industry Act amidst as you know widespread discussion taking place in our country about the future of this vital industry. And we only get, as I recorded earlier, we only get to see these proposed amendments at 10:00'o clock at the onset at the start of this meeting. No opportunity for reviewing, for discussion, for consultation very important, I know this government and this Prime Minister does not believe in consultation but it's very important, consultation with the stakeholders in the industry. So it's disrespectful and it is disgraceful and I wish to place that on the record. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, the sugar industry we all know is the lifeblood of the north its survival, its success, its growth, its development is vital to the families and communities of the north but also to our national economy and to the nation of Belize. And we pay tribute to our hard working *caneros* who worked the land they are the ones out there who are working the land, dedicating their lives to this important industry, which allows them, Mr. Speaker, to provide housing and shelter for their families, to provide food and clothing, to educate their children, Mr. Speaker, that is what this is all about. That is what the industry is all about. And we absolutely salute our *caneros*. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, it is their dignity, their honor, their pride, their future that is what we are here to protect and defend, it is for them that we rise and stand in this Honourable House today. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendments are an attack an assault on that dignity, on that future of our *caneros* and on the future of the sugar industry which they have built as I said, with their hands working the land, their blood, their sweat, their tears. This industry, Mr. Speaker, as anyone who knows that is involved in the industry has had a long history of growth and development based on our working partnership a working tripartite relationship and partnership which has had its problems from time to time. No relationship, no partnership is perfect but it has worked for the industry, it has served the interest of the industry it has served the interest of our cane farmers, it has served the interest of the miller and it has served the national interest, the interest of our nation economy. And that tripartite relationship, Mr. Speaker, is, of course, the cane farmers, the *caneros*, the miller BSI now BSI/ASR, and the Government of Belize, all three of those parties, Mr. Speaker, plays a very vital and critical role in ensuring the viability and success of the industry. So all three partners are vitally important to that partnership and each must be valued and respected. That long standing partnership is now under serious treat by no other that this very very same UDP Government. (Applause) which has formed an alliance with the multinational ASR to destroy the valuable institution that is the BSCFA (Applause) which has served this country for 55 years, Mr. Speaker, what a shame and a disgrace! We, Mr. Speaker, we condemn this decision because it was a deliberate decision. We condemn this decision by the Prime Minister, his Deputy Prime Minister (Applause) who is also the Minister of Agriculture and who should be standing up and defending the interest of the *caneros* (Applause) but instead he has turned against them. So we condemn, Mr. Speaker, this deliberated decision by this UDP Government to abandon the *caneros*, to abandon the national interest. It is this UDP Prime Minister and his government, Mr. Speaker, that has turned their backs on our cane farmers are actively, Mr. Speaker, working to divide and tear apart the BSCFA. (Applause) It is they, Mr. Speaker, they talk about politics, it is they who brought politics into this very serious national issue by exploiting their political relationship with the chairman of the BSCFA, that is what you have done.

(Applause) Ezekiel Cansino exploited that and exploited your relationship with other directors of your nephew in particular, Arturo Hernandez, he exploited those relationships (Applause) to divide and tear apart the BSCFA. That is what the record will show, Mr. Speaker. It is they who brought politics into this, it is the Deputy Prime Minister and the Member for Orange North, it is he who tried to whole a secret meeting with Cansino and other Directors to get things approved. (Applause) And that is what destroyed the agreement. That is what destroyed the entire leadership the unity that the leadership had because you tried to whole those meetings.

Mr. Speaker, history will record that it was this UDP Prime Minister and his Government whose treachery and betrayal forced our brothers and sisters, forced our *cañeros* brothers and sisters onto their knees to bow before the mighty ASR; (Applause) with the Government right there standing beside ASR it was their treachery and betrayal which forced the *caneros* to their knees and to sign on to (Applause) I didn't even hear what he said, Mr. Speaker, he signed on to a one sided unfair deal and the question that arises, Mr. Speaker, is why and what does ASR have over this Prime Minister and his Government? What is really behind this deal? Why is t Prime Minister so nice and courteous to MacNacklan and so rude and disparaging, and offensive and insulting towards some of our very own caneros? (Applause) And then he wants to turn his wrath on the lady Ms. Audrey Matura, that's what he specializes in, personal petty attacks. (Applause) Why are you attacking this lady who is fighting a just cause on behalf of good hardworking *caneros*? (Applause) Leave the lady alone, man! You are the Prime Minister of the country, you must learn to accept criticism (Applause) and learn to understand that even when people don't agree with you, you must respect them; you must learn that (Applause) that is a lesson you never seem to learn.

So, Mr. Speaker, we all want an agreement, we all want the crop to start but that agreement, Mr. Speaker, we insist must respect our farmers. We must respect them as equal partners in this sugar industry and must value their role not only today but today and into the future. (Applause) Destroying the BSCFA, Mr. Speaker, as this legislation seeks to do is not in anyone's interest. It is certainly not in ASRs interest if the government and the Prime Minister believe they are here to do the bidding they talked about masters, you seems to be following your master ASR. (Applause) So they are here presenting legislation on behalf of ASR, but that is not even in the interest of ASR because the BSCFA, Mr. Speaker, is the only association and we seem to be forgetting this it is the only association certified by the fair trade labeling organization for brown sugar grown in Belize. That is the reality the BSCFA, Mr. Speaker, is the only body, the only association with the infrastructure and the resource capacity, the human resource capacity in particular, but the infrastructure and resource capacity to properly and effectively manage and organize and deliver cane to the factory that is the reality, you could form all these other little associations that you believe are loyal to your political party or loyal to your interest (Applause) but they don't have the capacity to do what the BSCFA is doing, and you are destroying an institution that serves the interest of the industry.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know we heard the Prime Minister backtracking, talking about well, we make sure the BSCFA is preserved and they will be able to, you have a role we don't want to see, how hypocritical we done want to see the demise, how hypocritical suggesting that you are going to preserve the BSCFA when you and your government have been actively working to orchestrate the demise and the destruction of the BSCFA. (Applause) It is too late for that, Sir, too late. The farmers and the Belizean people see you...

(Suspension of the debate on the Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015.)

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 (8), I move that the proceedings on the matter on the Order Paper may be entered and proceeded with at this day's Sitting at any hour though opposed.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the proceedings on the Order Paper may be entered upon and proceeded with at this day's Sitting at any hour though opposed.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

I'm sorry about the timing Honourable Member, but its 12:00 'o clock and we have to do that announcement.

HON. F. FONSECA (Leader of the Opposition): No. I understand, Mr. Speaker. I'm almost finished. So the Belizean people will not be fooled by that, Mr. Speaker, they understand who this Prime Minister is and what this UDP Government stands for and represents. So, Mr. Speaker, today in this Honourable House let the record show that on this date in history January 19, 2015, we on this side of the House representing the People's United Party, on this day, we stood united and strong with our *caneros* and their families. (Applause) We stand with our *caneros* and their families, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) To the Belizean people we say, let us united behind our farmers. Let us stand with our *caneros*, (Applause) and let us not allow this Prime Minister and this UDP Government to divide us and to tear us apart as a people, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) We stand with our brothers; we stand with our *caneros*, let us get the sugar roads fix you talked about the sugar roads, let us get those roads fix and let us get the crop started. *Viva los caneros, viva BSCFA*, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. J. BRICEÑO (Orange Walk Central): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to participate in the debate on the Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015. I wish to take this opportunity to speak not only to yourself and to our Members here but also to the Belizean people, especially to our people in the north because the amendment that they are doing here today, is going to have some far-reaching implications in the lives of our cane farmers in the north. Mr. Speaker, since 1993, I have had the privilege to represent the people of Orange Walk Central and as such felt that whenever I am here I also have the responsibility to speak for our people in the north. Now I listened earlier to the Prime Minister when the Leader of the Opposition pointed out that we have great difficulty in having a meaningful debate on a Bill that has just been presented to us this morning. I mean this is so important, Mr. Speaker, that I believe that we should have been given more time so that we as a party, we as parliamentarians, can discuss this and also meet with the stakeholders that they could also advise us on how the changes are going to be affecting them being it positively or negatively. For instance, Mr. Speaker, I was just quickly going through this and for instance on page 3, when you look at section 5 (2), when they say that one representative of each association, provided that if there be more than three associations at any time. That they are going to nominate three persons and that if they can't have an agreement then the Minister is going to appoint these people to represent these associations on the Board. My concern is what if two laws, as the leader pointed out earlier, or when two of these associations seems to be

politically motivated that they could easily say, well we are not going to accept whatever recommendations the association is doing just so that the Minister can then appoint UDP Representatives from the Association on the Board. I mean this is something that we really need to consider and I'm just quickly reading on it, Mr. Speaker, and will not be in a position to come up with probably another alternative but it is certainly a concern.

The other ones, Mr. Speaker, but this is the ones that really jump at me of which certainly we would have some concern. Also I think that when the Deputy Prime Minister was talking he was saying that every member needs to register with their association. But here in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, on page 11 section 35 (2) it says that "A cane farmer who is a member of an association before the commencement of this Act, shall not be required to apply for registration with that association and shall be entitled by virtue of this section to automatic registration based on his membership to such association." For instance, I am a member of the Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association, and I have every intention to remain as a member. So therefore, I would not need to apply to that because I'm already a member, but I think I have heard him saying that everybody has to register so maybe you may need to correct that if indeed, that is what you said Deputy Prime Minister.

MR. SPEAKER: But the Bill also said if he chooses to apply for a membership of another association.

HON. J. BRICEÑO (Orange Walk Central): Yes, but here it is saying that if you are already a member of the BSCFA, you don't need to apply. And I thought I heard him say that all cane farmers have to apply to join an association. And, Mr. Speaker, we cane farmers because I'm also a cane farmer, Mr. Speaker, I think that when the Prime Minister pointed out that we have to pass this Bill, make this amendment today, so that there can be a crop. I don't think that really holds, Mr. Speaker. I say that simply because, all the cane farmers, both PUP, UDP or no "P" and concern and want the crop to start and they want it to start now, so that I don't think anybody, Mr. Speaker, would attempt to stop the crop from starting. Actually I was hearing the members of BSI on a talk show this morning and they were saying that they are ready to start the crop and now that the Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association at a general assembly have rescinded the previous Motion and passed a new Motion asking that they sign so that they can start the crop so I don't see why we have to hurry do this in one day, Mr. Speaker. We can start the crop and then have proper consultation and discussions with this Bill so that then we can make a meaningful contribution to what is being presented right here, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

And, Mr. Speaker, the sort of importance of the sugar industry cannot be understated for us *northeños*, I mean for us it's a way of life I mean there is not a single person in the north, whose life is not being impacted by some way or the other by the sugar industry. So anyone of us on either side of the House, be it on this side or on the other side, who represents a constituency from the north, whenever we speak on the sugar industry, Mr. Speaker, we know that it plays a very important role in the lives of the people that we represent. Now, I have seen one commercial that the Prime Minister and his government has put on the TV showing that how much they have supported the sugar cane industry and we take nothing away from that, Mr. Speaker, but if we on this side, the PUP were to list all that we have done for the sugar cane farmers (Applause) we don't need one ad we need several programs to say all that we have done for them over the years.

(Applause) And let me remind the Prime Minister and his government, Mr. Speaker, on some of the things just a few of them, if you allow me.

1. The Father of the Nation, the Right Honourable George Price and a People's United Party brought in Tate and Lyle (Applause) that created the modern sugar cane industry. (Applause) It was the PUP Government that negotiated with Tate and Lyles to pass thousands of acres of cane land to Belizeans cane farmers in the north, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) That is true social justice. Not the social justice that the Prime Minister is talking about. We passed the cane fields to the farmers so that they can deliver the cane to Tate and Lyle or to BSI.

2. The successive PUP Government opens hundreds of miles of sugar cane roads for our cane farmers. And true successive PUP Governments in the 70's, 80's and 90's and all to the 2000's, Mr. Speaker, we loan millions of dollars to the cane farmers to help the small cane farmers in the north. So, Mr. Speaker, and, yes, this is also important, it was during the first UDP Administration, we need to remind them that they closed down the Libertad Sugar Factory between 1984 and 1989. (Applause) And it is a PUP Government between 1989 and 1993 that opened the Libertad Sugar Factory once again. (Applause) And once we opened it, Mr. Speaker, when they came back into government between 1993 and 1998, do you know what they did? They closed down the Libertad Sugar Factory once again, Mr. Speaker, and they are saying that they are fighting for the cane farmers. (Applause)

3. We also, Mr. Speaker, it is our government that modernize the Sugar Act, the same Sugar Act that they are now amending, that allowed the real cane farmers to own their cane quotas (Applause) Do you remember when Mr. Manuel Esquivel was Prime Minister, they made over 4,000 fathom cane farmers by giving them 50 ton quotas, Mr. Speaker, so that they could control the association. Many of them didn't even see a cane field but they had a quota. We change the ad so that all those cane farmers disappeared and now we want real cane farmers that owned the land, that owned the cane and deliver the cane to the sugar mill. (Applause) And it is the PUP Government, when we were in government this last term, Mr. Speaker, it is we, under our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Said Musa, we negotiated with the European Union about \$240 million that they are using right now to try to help the sugar industry, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) All those roads that they are paving and all the work that they are doing for the sugar industry it is the work of the People's United Party Government. (Applause)

So today I speak as a *cañeros* because I also have cane fields and I have some cane that was not delivered last year because of the problem. And I want to see the cane crop open as quickly as possible, because if they don't open it on time, that cane is going to spoil. And like me, there are many, many other cane farmers that did not deliver all of their cane last year. But more importantly today, I speak for those 5,000 cane farmers whose sole life depends on the sugar industry, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) And I dislike the idea that we are playing politics with an industry that is so vital to our national development.

I'm also angry with the actions of some of the UDP Government including the Deputy Prime Minister, who are creating more chaos in the industry instead of finding how they can fix and find workable solutions (Applause) for our cane farmers in the north. We cannot play politics with the sugar industry, Mr. Speaker.

We on this side, we pride ourselves in saying that we have always reach across the aisle to work with the government when it's needed. In 2010 when BSI could not pay the cane farmers we on this side pressured the government to lend BSI \$10 million so that they could pay the cane farmers. (Applause) We on this side we put the pressure on them. Remember when they wanted to give away BSI at a crack price to the Atlántida group from Honduras, we were ones that made noise and stop that from happening, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) And when the government needed support for the incentives that were given to ASR, Mr. Speaker, we on this side, we gave them the support so that ASR can get the incentives. But we also pointed that whatever incentives you give to ASR you need to give those same incentives to our cane farmers. (Applause)

Belizeans may be wondering why is the sugar industry such a big deal. But let me point out a few facts and statistics, Mr. Speaker, last year the sugar industry brought in \$105.6 million of which \$75.6 million was paid to the cane farmers. This represents 3.5% of GDP which is second only to the tourism industry. We have over 40,000 acres of cane lands that we have planted in the northern districts, that is the Orange Walk District and in the Corozal District. And BSI/ASR they have invested about approximately \$180 million in the industry, but more importantly, Mr. Speaker, we have about 50,000 Belizeans or 14% of our entire population that depend solely and directly on the sugar industry, Mr. Speaker, that is why we cannot play politics with this industry, and that is why it is important for Belizeans to understand why we are making such a big deal about the changes that are being ram through this House today in one sitting. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the sugar industry it is a big deal, and more importantly, Mr. Speaker, it's not only important Sir, just to the north, but also important to the entire country. The truth is that neither the UDP nor us in the PUP want to see this industry fail or to fall apart. We want to see it prosper not because of politics, but because it is the right thing to do. It is important to our people in the north, and it is important for the people of Belize. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, today I would like to make a few recommendations to the government, to the Deputy Prime Minister, to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet. Why, Mr. Speaker, is that I think that the Government needs to pass legislation to allow cane farmers to be represented on a sugar marketing committee. Why do I say that? For so long the cane farmers have been saying that when they deliver their cane and BSI processes that cane into sugar, they take it on their own and give it to their parent company which was Tate and Lyle, and now to ASR to sell the sugar. And we don't know if they got the best price, we don't know if that is the price or they could get a better price or a lower price we don't know that. But to avoid the suspicion that has been growing up in the industry, I think it is important that we have legislation where a cane farmer represents the cane farmers on that board so that they could be assured that whatever price BSI/ASR gives to farmer for their sugar it is the best price that they can get. So that's my first recommendation, Mr. Speaker.

2. I think it is high time the government of Belize owns about 2% of BSI and by virtue of that 2% they also have a member or 2 members on the Board of Directors of BSI. I think it is high time that the government should decide, well, at one time we were suggesting that that 2% should be passed on to the BSCFA, but we can't do that anymore because there are more than one association. But at the very least, Mr. Speaker, what the government can do is allow a true cane farmer to sit on that Board so that they could see what are the decisions that are being made that is going to impact the cane farmers being positively or negatively.

3. With the farmers now having more than 1.4 million tons of cane on the ground to supply to BSI, I think we need to put a limit on the amount of cane that BSI/ASR can grow that is very important. (Applause) We need to allow our Belizean *caneros* to plant more cane because if they plant more cane they make more money and that money stays in Belize it does not leave Belize. So it is important that we do that, Mr. Speaker.

4. We have been hearing so much discussion about the issue of bagasse and the price of payment for bagasse. Both the Cane Farmers Association and BSI have come up with two different formulas in how they priced the bagasse. And those discussions are at an impasse so I think it is high time, Mr. Speaker, that the government should tell both parties since there is an impasse and they cannot have an agreement that they should bring in a third person, an arbitrator to study the two formulas and come up with a formula that is fair and equitably not only to BSI, but also, to the cane farmers, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

5. The government must work with BSI and the farmers to increase the sugar industry from 1.3 million tons right now where the factory can mill to 1.8 million tons. An increase of 500,000 tons, Mr. Speaker, will make this industry not only sustainable but even more profitable for everyone. Why do I say this? I say this, Mr. Speaker, because if we were to use the 2014 price for a ton of cane by increasing the sugar industry or expanding it by half a million tons more, that would bring in \$46.6 million into Belize, of which \$30.6 million would go into the pockets of our Belizean cane farmers, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) And I am happy to hear that the Deputy Prime Minister mentioned that the Prime Minister is saying that they are going to invest immediately, \$2 million more for the sugar roads because if we can't fix the sugar roads, we can't deliver the cane. So Deputy Prime Minister, please make sure that we start to fix the roads them starting today, Mr. Speaker. And do it well, yes, because they like to use them UDP contractors you know, they have one in from Orange Central. I won't mention name (Applause) they go and do a real terrible job that the same Ministry of Works have to go and fix and the man is still collecting for money, Mr. Speaker, so make sure they get good contractor and not like the one who fixed the Philip Goldson Highway through Orange Walk that is already breaking up and we spend how much, Mr. Prime Minister? About \$5 million and the place is already breaking up. Please let us get good contractors to do a good job. Yes, value for money that's what the Prime Minister like to say. Value for money.

To borrow from an often used term in the financial world you know for us in Belize, sugar is too big to fail. Our sugar is sold in international market and we need companies like ASR who understand the markets and to help our farmers to get the best price for our sugar. Now, we don't have a quarrel with ASR. We support foreign direct investment in Belize and we support them to expand the sugar mill to the capacity to 1.8 million. But we want ASR to understand that whatever they do affects the livelihood of over 50,000 Belizeans, and we in the People's United Party will stand by and fight for our Belizean brothers and sisters, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) We have no apology for that. We are talking about the lives and the futures of hard working and humble *caneros* who get up very early in the morning, Mr. Speaker. There are times when some of us who are just coming from partying or from the club, those *caneros* are already up because they have to go to the canfield, and they work long hours on with their machete in their hand under the sun; and when it rains they have to work through the mud. Its hard work, Mr. Speaker, that they do and because of that, we on this side, we in

the PUP, we make no apology and we are going to stand by their side each and every time. (Applause)

Let us not forget also that even though it is very important to grow the pie that we will have more cane to deliver, where we've reached to \$1.8 million it is equally important or maybe more important that we share the pie equitably as equitably as a possible that if we are going to expand the industry by 1.8 million tons we have to make sure that the Belizean *caneros* benefit on that expansion not only BSI. Let us not lose sight that the northern districts who are previously know at one time as the affluent districts are now relegated to the poor districts. That is to say Corozal right now is the second poorest district in our country. And, Mr. Speaker, when societies grow too unequal history tell us that something will happen, they either become more economically inefficient or they become subject to social unrests. In many cases both can happen concurrently, Mr. Speaker. The Banana Republics of Central and South America are some examples. We cannot and will not allow Belize to become a banana republic. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. F. MARIN (Corozal South East): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to comment on this Bill, which we only just saw, I want to align myself with my two previous colleagues who are putting it as a protest that this Bill should be hold on for proper consultation and proper debate, Mr. Speaker, please ensure that is written on the record for all of us.

Mr. Speaker, I have, as a Christian man I believe that 2000 years ago the Lord and saviour came on earth and I know he will come back, but I don't believe it is the Prime Minister who is here who claims he is saving the industry. He is not no saviour to this Sugar Industry, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, if you noticed from the year 2008, this industry has been mired in one controversy after the next where I believe you yourself was a first hand witness to this, and the way in which this industry is being handled all because they are not listening to the farmers they are only listening to the farmers they are only listening to one side. We have to be very careful, the industry is not BSI/ASR, the industry is BSI/ASR/Sugar Cane Farmers and Government of Belize that is the sugar cane industry, it is not just one side, Mr. Speaker.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the government is attempting to play politics with this industry trying to put blame on this side but just simply mathematics, Mr. Speaker, tells you that over here we have more representatives in the north. We also have more cane farmers represented in the House than from the government, Mr. Speaker, so we are not playing politics. We are not playing politics, Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we are standing up for this industry and we have a personal stake. I am a cane farmers as well, this is the second season where, if there is a delay in the crop two months of revenue we are losing, Mr. Speaker. As well, Mr. Speaker, I noticed the government is attempting to, or was attempting during the week to convince the Belizean public about their side of the argument. The problem I have with that, Mr. Speaker, is that these two Area Representatives whom neither of them are cane farmers. One does not represent anyone, the other one is represented from the city, and how can they speak of cane farmers. We have three people here from the northern belt you guys should have been the one speaking and defending the industry and defending the cane farmers not them. So please, gentlemen, please!

As well, Mr. Speaker, they talk about support for the farmers and support

for the industry again, it was I who brought that up in the House about the problems BSI had back in the day when they needed that \$10 million for their final payment.

As well, if you noticed, Mr. Speaker, the farmers when they needed help for the froghopper they never got any. Only \$1 million was being requested and they didn't get any. Ten million for BSI but they couldn't give the farmers \$1 million for the froghopper support. Now, Mr. Speaker, many people are criticizing the farmers on the issue with Fair Trade Funds. Now what I want to say to these guys is roll it, pass it to the cane farmers and help them out to replace the Fair Trade Funds.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to comment that yes, the Party Leader said that if ASR cannot respect the farmers they must go that is quite clear. But, Mr. Speaker, a dream has been placed into the hearts of the cane farmers, a dream that they want to own this industry eventually. This dream has started, Mr. Speaker, it reminds me of when The Right Honourable Price, the Father of the Nation, years ago, when he started on this road to Independence, he never wavered, he never gave up. He started the peaceful constructive resolution, Mr. Speaker, and here today, the People's United Party will start the new peaceful constructive resolution to begin the eventual ownership by the farmers of this industry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Toledo West, your brother had indicated to me, do you want him to go first, or he could defer to you if he wants. I recognize the Honourable Member from Orange Walk South.

HON J. MAI (Orange Walk South): Thank you. Mr. Speaker, what should have been an event recognizing progress in our sugar industry, what ought to have triumphant as we embrace technology. What should have been the cause for jubilant moments in the history of the sugar industry has been reduced to a charade. A charade, Mr. Speaker, by the intentional deception and the equivocation of the government's handling of the sugar industry crisis. If this government, Mr. Speaker, had chosen to act with sincerity to support our cane farmers with their just caused to improve their economic situation. This amendment of the Sugar Industry Act, Mr. Speaker, would never in the eyes of the entire world appear to be one that appeases and clearly accommodates ASRs and BSIs interest. Mr. Speaker, the Belize Sugar Cane Farmer Association is the association with the largest membership in the nation of Belize more than 5,000 members. Not only in Belize, Mr. Speaker, the BSCFA is one of the largest associations in the entire region serving thousands of families or more than 50 years. It is indeed the only association that has a comprehensive, organized structure and logistical framework with trained expertise in place for an efficient delivery of sugarcane to the mill.

One, Mr. Speaker, that has come about through years and years of trial and error, one that has evolved and is close to perfect. Mr. Speaker, slanderous remarks for merely political and malicious intentions like the association has spent millions of fair trade money and has nothing to show for it is a complete fabrication. It is completely deceitful and nothing but nothing close to the truth. The records speaks for itself, Mr. Speaker, through the associations fair trade premiums productivity grew from 980,000 tons of sugar cane in 2008, to 1.4 million tons of sugar cane we have today. The mill is practically choking with so much cane that we have, Mr. Speaker. Thanks to whom? Certainly, Mr. Speaker, not to the government, certainly not to the EU and they are distressing pain-causing, embarrassingly, sluggish delay of the accompany measures for sugar. No,

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association and the fair trade premiums. Thanks to the BSCFA, Mr. Speaker, that the cane farmers now are effectively able to control what is now considered the endemic froghopper outbreaks. Thanks to the mother institutions farmers are able to fertilize their fields on a timely basis and therefore, increased their productivity. Thanks to the mother of all associations, Mr. Speaker, weed control is being done timely. Schools were repaired; bridges were constructed; health centers were repaired; sugar road alleviated; school grants issued; and eco-parks upgrade, Mr. Speaker. These are all accomplishments of the BSCFA with fair trade premiums. So, Mr. Speaker, and all that should have been the responsibility of the government of the day, is being done by the mother of all associations with the fair trade funds and people dare say, Mr. Speaker, that there is nothing to show how wrong.

Mr. Speaker, I dare not say that everything has been fine and dandy with the association. But I also think that the Prime Minister can confess that not everything is fine and dandy in his administration also. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I dare say, that the government's administration today, is no better than the BSCFA. I would go further to say, that should government's administration be subjected to flosorts auditing, not only would they be suspended, they will be decertified a hundred times. And oh, Mr. Speaker, we the cane farmers all pay our import duties. We all pay our GST. We all pay our environmental tax. We work for the benefit of this country. How much import duty does ASR pay? How much GST does ASR pay? How much environmental tax does ASR pay? Zero. Mr. Speaker, the truth be told from the time the Supreme Court ordered that the Sugar Industry Act be amended the Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association began preparing itself to adjust to the changes. Changes which enable and prepared individual farmers group, groups of farmers and other associations in the making to deliver sugarcane to the factory. It actively participated in the stakeholder meetings that were held to prepare for the revising of the Sugar Industry Act, recognizing the importance of this for the future economic security of all the cane farmers.

Simultaneously, Mr. Speaker, the BSCFA redoubled its efforts to strengthen its capacity to better manage the affairs of its members which it achieves with remarkable success. Its appointment of a negotiating team, Mr. Speaker, to address this issue of the new commercial agreement with Belize Sugar Industry Limited is testimony to this. Expecting that the association was still immature and ill prepared. BSI thought that it would be business as usual, a walk in the park, BSI soon realized it was facing a team of expert dedicated negotiators, radicals, or extremist as they have been recently described. The names mentioned by the Prime Minister on more than one occasion Ortega, Javier Keme, Cervantes, Teck, are persons that are some of the most knowledgeable and experienced in sugar industry and are valued and respected by thousands of *cañeros*. (Applause) Yes, they are radicals, Mr. Speaker, for a great cause. On the other hand, the same cannot be said of the person who supposedly wrote and sent a letter to the Prime Minister indicating that he wanted to break away from the BSCFA. Mr. Speaker, the individual who signed that letter, Mr. Arturo Hernandez, has no known credibility and inspires and motivates no one. He has no organizational skill, less any intellectual agility to be a leader of anything. He is simply, Mr. Speaker, the nephew of the Deputy Prime Minister, just another baloney, another Nestor, another, my good friend, Imer Hernandez. The strength of the negotiating positions tabled by the BSCFA team led to a number of actions by BSI to frustrate and undermined the entire process. Mr. Speaker, the mojour bone of contention was over bagasse and whether it qualifies as by a product that could be priced. At the critical point in 2013, Mr. Speaker, when the government for its own political reasons, declared that it recognizes bagasse a suitable product, BSI then, Mr.

Speaker, sinisterly, changed its strategy and set out to find ways to weaken the Belize Sugar Cane Farmer Association with the end game being its destruction. Mr. Speaker, BSI's attempt in November to loosen and explode the BSCFA membership failed. It failed, Mr. Speaker, with the active collusion of government's through its Minister of Orange Walk and Corozal. The BSCFA was subjected to a systematic weakening of its committee of management which led, Mr. Speaker, to the delusion of the association's strong negotiating position and the mess we have been coerced in today.

Now, on Friday, Mr. Speaker, we witness the hypocrisy of the government's side. We now hear the government's proclamation of support for the Belize Sugar Cane Farmer Association. Mr. Speaker, this is merely a political attempt to do damage control. An attempt to slow down ASR's unscrupulous and ruthless end game to see the BSCFA totally removed from the industry. (Applause)

Today's amendment to the Act now appears instead as a necessary first-step along the path to muzzle the farmers' ability to collectively negotiate for benefits in the not too distant three years scenario contemplated in the new agreement. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the Government has been reminded that there is an irreparable political cost to hunting with the hounds and running with the hares. The spectacle, Mr. Speaker, of a Prime Minister negotiating with a lonely representative of ASR to accept cane deliveries to the BSCFA tells the story. Not a story of high-mindedness and caring on his part, but of political bankruptcy of his party that can provide no real benefits to poor struggling cane farmers that are suffering in this country. Mr. Speaker, we the cane farmers have a right to feel humiliated and betrayed. There is no other way to truly describe, Mr. Speaker, what has happened and who is responsible. Siding with the rich and the powerful, Mr. Speaker, at the expense of the poor and weak is the opposite of what government's are supposed to do. Weakening instead of strengthening institutions that are vital to the development of any productive sector should not be the objective of any government. What has taken more than 50 years to construct, to build is being destroyed in one day, only for short-term games, Mr. Speaker. Should not the Prime Minister and his government, Mr. Speaker, appreciate what a competent, efficient, and resourceful BSCFA can do to the cane farmers, Mr. Speaker, and the entire sugar industry. Let us not forget, Mr. Speaker, or should I say let me remind you, that dividing and conquering is a proven destructive strategy that colonizers, economic predators, Mr. Speaker, and even governments employ in their agenda of slavery, manipulation, and subjugation, Mr. Speaker. Especially governments who are not for and nor for the people. Governments who are corrupt employ these strategies.

Who, Mr. Speaker, has benefitted or stands to benefit from this deplorable situation, Mr. Speaker, who? ASR most of all, and certain attorneys. Isn't this a blatant shame, Mr. Speaker? This Sitting of the House today places our small cane farmers in a historic crossroad. Either it clings to their debt belt as producers in the sugarcane industry, Mr. Speaker, or it signals the beginning of a new era. A new era when the government can endeavor to regain their confidence. Confidence, Mr. Speaker, that is sincere, sincere about supporting their efforts to improve their economic future. I am not optimistic about this, Mr. Speaker. The government's track record, so far, has been extremely dismal unless they seized to be the "brown- nosers" of big capital multinationals, Mr. Speaker, and govern for the benefit of all as they were elected to do.

Mr. Speaker, lest we forget, let it be explicitly and affirmatively said that never will this party, the People's United Party, ever do something like this,

abandon the weak, abandon the farmers, abandon the defenseless like what the UDP Government has done. Personally and politically, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this amendment principally made to splinter the BSCFA. If I did such action, Mr. Speaker, on my part, would be shameless, would be despicable and unpardonable of the highest degree in the eyes of the people that I represent and the eyes of every single Belizean. May God fall on us, Mr. Speaker, for our collective cowardice and our civic failure to stand up for what is right and what is good. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. M. ESPAT (Toledo East): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for the record and in support of my Party Leader, it is very unfair that we are in this House today, with this Bill that was presented to us this morning at 10:00 o'clock. But nonetheless, we are going through with the debate, and what I see, Mr. Speaker, that is not right for the cane farmers in the north is the fact that it seems to me that they could just make any number of associations that they wish to make under this Act. Right now we've heard about three different associations that have already been formed. But according to the Act, it is saying that any group that wants to create an association can do so. This is only room and giving more room to division within the industry. And when the big boys want something done, they just have to try and manipulate one of those groups to start to engineer what they want to achieve. And what was, again, surprising to me was the fact that in the rice industry, in the citrus industry, all the divisions that occurred during that time, was because of cess and the collection of cess that is how those arguments started in the rice industry and also in the citrus industry. And what I see in this Act today is that they no longer use the word cess but there is a membership fee that will be collected. It's on page 13, alright and the Act authorizes the deduction, collection of membership fees from any cane farmer who is a member of that association. And each association shall in writing, annually notify, manufacturers of the membership fee and shall deduct such fees as authorize by the association. And yet you have others complaining about paying cess.

That brings me to what happened to us in the rice industry in the Toledo District. The large farmers who had the equipment who had more than the milpa farmers decided that they should not be paying any membership fee or any cess to belong to an association or at that time, the Grain Growers Association, which was enacted sometime in the 1980's. So they broke up, they split up. The mechanized farmers created their own association. The milpa farmers, I believe the numbers are around, right now, membership about 1,200 farmers in that association that use a machete and they use an axe to burn the jungle and to plant rice. Today that industry, Mr. Speaker, is dead. The Ministry of Agriculture has shown no interest.

And furthermore, I just recently had a conversation with someone who was telling me that, "Oh you guys have been subsidizing the industry in the Toledo District" which is far from the truth. The subsidy came because at the time the Prime Minister, Mr. George Price, he did not give out pantry and boost, you know, he wanted to teach our farmers how to farm, which is totally different than what this present administration is doing. And that is where that subsidy came in. They set up the Belize Marketing Board that time, and the Belize Marketing Board was the main buyer of rice from the Toledo District. In order to subsidize and keep the price of rice at \$.50 a pound, I don't know if you all recall that \$.50 a pound, he maintain \$.50 cents a pound so that the poor people in Belize City and Belize country could afford to put a pound of rice on the table in their homes, which is something that we use every day in most homes in this country. And how

did he subsidize it? He took away condense milk from some of the agents in Belize City and put that under the Belize Marketing Board and the profit that was made was there to keep that rice price at \$.50 a pound. And a lot of people don't realize what occurred during that time. Today rice, Mr. Speaker, is a \$1.15 or \$1.10 depending on where you are in this country. So, this one really amazes me of this membership fee.

I would like to also, Mr. Speaker, support what the Honourable Member from Orange Walk Central said because I believe that what he said in this House today is very important and something that we seem and the Government is not addressing that would benefit cane farmers more than this piece of paper that we are here trying to pass today in one Sitting. The marketing committee for example, that he raised, it is very important that we have legislation to include our farmers on that committee to decide whether or not they will accept the prices that is thrown down at them. The ownership of the 2% let's give them 1% if we can't give them 2% but let them have that avenue so that they have that door open to them. To allow the farmers to plant more cane is also an area and something that we also saw in the banana industry where one group decided this is it guys, this is the quota and nobody can't go outside this quota. But today you see a total difference in that industry where there is expansion in that industry today. And, again, the vision of the People's United Party to privatize that industry. It was the People's United Party that privatize the banana industry. And that is why today it is a success story in this country and more and more we got to help our farmers to be the owners of the assets in this country. It belongs to them. They deserve it. And we need to start working in that direction.

The problems we are having with bagasse and how much should farmers get, and whether it belongs to the farmers or not, the same will happen in the citrus industry where the pulp of the citrus is turned into animal feed. Who owns the pulp after the pulp is delivered at that factory? These are all problems that we have facing us and we need to come up with a decision, whether or not we want to help our people or whether or not we want to keep them down.

Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister said that he has 3 groups now, the Corozal group, the Progressive group, and the BSCFA, three different animals to deal with, three different group of people that will have their own ambitions, they will have their own dreams of where they want to go. And the fact that the farmers at the BSCFA had abused and I did not hear my colleague mentioning that the fair trade money that was given to them. Why is it the Sugar Control Board did not intervene to see that these monies were spent properly? That is there job. We had the same in the banana industry. We had a Banana Control Board and the same thing with the sugar industry. We have a Sugar Control Board but inactive, actually an inactive board. So, then they want to throw the blame on the farmers. Mr. Speaker, when I look at the Member from Port Loyola saying that was I talking about sugar when we come from a rice producing area. Well, I want to remind him that I was also the Minister of Agriculture for 5 years and spent many days on those sugar roads in Orange Walk and Corozal. And my recommendation to them at that time and I told them and I still see the same problem existing in that area that the material that they have in that area to construct roads is no good. The minute it gets wet it is gone it turns to 'lab'. So, every single year the Government has to be pumping money, pumping money, repairing the same roads every single year. The other problem we see there we are not engineers but no farmer want to put culvert and all the drainage comes right back to the road. Once the rain starts that road will be damaged and deteriorate rapidly. The same is happening in some of our other roads in this country. It was the PUP, when I look at the point with the shipment of sugar out of this country and the cost; they are

telling you around \$15 million, I hear some bigger figures because we could never get the figure what it costs us to ship the sugar out of this country. It was under the PUP where the Orange Walk bypass was paved, put in two bridges. It was under the PUP that the Burrell Boom road was also paved so that they could bring, this was the dream, this was the goal, to bring the sugar by trucks to Belize City rather than putting the sugar in these barges in that creek and towing out them to sea because that was very expensive. You are from Port Loyola, stay on that side. Mr. Speaker, it was the People's United Party, why that project failed when they bought the piece of land by Barton Canal, the same people from the sugar company and our ex Prime Minister can remember, they started to drive the piles out there and the piles I believe went down to 75 feet and they condemn the project because of that. Man, there are other parts of this world that have more swamp than Belize and they have skyscrapers. So, that was no excuse for them to not complete that project after the government had spent over \$60 million or more to start changing the way we were shipping sugar out of this country. We want to help our farmers more than we got to help our farmers to cut cost. That is what we should be addressing here today, to cut cost, to help them so that that industry can grow. And you know, many times we just tend to ignore that.

As our colleague said a while ago the benefits that we give to ASR compared to the benefits we are giving to our farmers. I heard the Deputy Prime Minister saying that there will be some help in that direction to the farmers, they need that. They need it because it is very expensive to maintain those equipment under the condition in which they work. Those trucks and those tractors are working in mud and water every single day, and they are not cheap to maintain. So these are some of the areas that our farmers need assistance, Mr. Speaker. And, again, I would like to say that I cannot support this Bill that is here before us today, especially, the way it was presented to us like a thief in the night. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I made some notes regarding what the speakers on the other side had to say. But before attempting to answer in any detail, allow me to make a general observation. I believe when we look back at today we will find that this would have been a historic Sitting of the House. Because, of course, the presentation of this Bill comes at a juncture when the industry has been in crisis and the attention of the nation has been riveted on sugar for upwards of perhaps two months now. But that's not the real reason why this particular Sitting in retrospect, will have to be viewed as particularly historic. The real reason is because of this. I serve notice that it is most unlikely that there will be another Sitting of the House before the budget presentation in March, barring anything dramatic, this is the last Sitting of the House until March. And the budget presentation in March will come after the countrywide municipal elections on March 4th. When next the House meets then, I am here to say that it is my expectation indeed firm conviction that at that time we will have a new Leader of the Opposition. (Applause)

Today then was the sort of valedictory speech of the current Leader of the Opposition. (Applause) And, Mr. Speaker, if you will allow me to get into it just a little more. There will be a new Leader of the Opposition at the next Sitting of the House for various reasons, including the fact, that the unrelieved loosing ways of the current Leader of the Opposition. We all expect to continue in consequence of those March 4th municipal elections.

Perhaps the Member for the Orange Walk Central shares my conviction.

Perhaps the Member for Orange Walk Central also, is of the view that when next we meet there will be a new Leader of the Opposition. (Applause) And furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Orange Walk Central, behaved today, as though he fully expect that he will be that new Leader of the Opposition. (Applause) And I must commend him. He didn't do so in any form or fashion with which his colleagues can find fault. He did so merely, by making a presentation that was substantial, that contained a good deal of sense, that had merit, and therefore, stood in stark contrast to the hapless, hopeless, presentation of the current Leader of Opposition. You had only to listen to the two to recognize that today is the chronicle of a death foretold, a political death foretold. (Applause) But this Leader of the Opposition appears to me, Mr. Speaker, to be living in a kind of a bizarre world. There is a deceit comics that created this notion of a bizarre world and it has now passed into the culture, and I will trouble people to go and check on it because there is hardly any doubt when you examine the performance of the Leader of the Opposition that is very much living in this bizarre world. He started off today, by condemning the passage through all its stages of the Bill. As I said when he, in fact, lodge his protest in before he got into the debate to take that position, Mr. Speaker, in the current circumstances is to put on record the fact implicit and perhaps explicit that he is against the start of the crop. He and others tried to suggest that in fact, we could proceed with the crop and not pass the Bill. But that makes no sense. What the legislation is doing is to bring the law into conformity with the Constitution of this country in accordance as well, with the mandate set out in the consent order of the court. But at the most practical level, it is providing for the fact that there are now 3 associations. It is providing for the fact that at the level of the knots and boats of the governance structure of the sugar industry. At the level of the various entities and agencies the S.C.P.C, the Sugar Industry Control Board, those bodies that are responsible for auctioning the machinery set up to supervise the implementation of the crop. There must now be representation from all 3 associations and the protection of all 3 associations of all farmers belonging to all 3 associations and of all farmers period. You can't start the crop except you provide for them. And that is why, Mr. Speaker, it was absolutely necessary to introduce and pass this Bill today. And we gave fair notice that we are going to do this. From the time of the press conference when they thought we were coming on the Monday following, and I indicated no, but as was already becoming clear. I said if it turns out that there are new associations, associations additional to the Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association, then we would have to come back to the House posthaste and pass the legislation.

When the Leader of the Opposition goes on to say that these amendments are an assault on the dignity of the cane farmers. Is he saying that to enshrine in law the rights that the Constitution of this country gives to all cane farmers, somehow is an assault on the dignity of the very people whose rights are being vindicated? It makes no sense and you see why I continue to say this really is his swansong. This really is his last performance as Leader of the Opposition and what a poor performance it is. The fact that there are now 3 associations is used or there is an attempt to use that to suggest that the government has now completed this enterprise, on which it's set out, said enterprise being to destroy the Belize Sugar Cane Farmer Association.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat that this is nonsense and a historical; it flies completely in the face of history and recent history. The BSCFA remains in place. There have been those that have gone off on their own to form the new associations. That is not necessarily a bad thing. And even it were a bad thing. This did not happen in consequence of any actions on the part of the government. This happen as a result of the unrelenting campaign waged by the minority in the

BSCFA that lead itself with the People's United Party, to derail the agreement that had been reached with ASR, as a consequence of negotiations, protracted negotiations, resulting in a deal that the leaders of the BSCFA, all bless, all subscribed to. Thereafter, the few took up with legal advisors, including the legal representative of the People's United Party Mr. Anthony Sylvestre who is their Chief Legal Officer, and let's not forget that he is my opponent in Queen's Square, you will forgive me for not always remembering that because it's like he is no existence. But Anthony Sylvestre was part and parcel of the legal games and maneuverings that were being played as part of this campaign to stop the signing of the agreement and to say to the farmers that if in fact supported what ultimately turned out to be sabotage. They would end up with a better deal that the two legal advisors would somehow manage to procure for them from the courts of this country to the extent that any undoing of the BSCFA almost took place. That is the real reason for the particular course of events.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat, again, this government makes a distinction between the real BSCFA and this fringe group of, you know I must be kind, the Leader of the Opposition says that I don't like it when people don't agree with me, and so he says I get personal. Let me therefore restrain myself and absolutely refrain from calling these people a lunatic fringe. I cannot do that. But, Mr. Speaker, for certain there was this mix of ego on the part of some members of the BSCFA an ambulance chasing on the part of those who said they were coming to the aid of the BSCFA and it is that concoction, it is that brew that almost resulted in the undoing of the BSCFA. In the end it was avoided. In the end after all the twist and turns we had the meeting yesterday in which the real BSCFA was finally allowed to stand up, and a twitch passage of the resolution to authorize the signing of the agreement that had been reached. Passage of the resolution yesterday was unanimous.

What the public needs to know is that Ortega and Keme, who are part and parcel from the start of the effort to derail the progress that had been made part and parcel leaders of the campaign to in fact, withdraw and overturn the original approval for signing that had been given at the first general assembly of the BSCFA, Ortega, and Keme, were nowhere to be seen yesterday. When those across the aisle suggest that the government, this government, was playing politics with the BSCFA, this is a flagrant naked attempt to stand the truth on its head. I've already pointed to the fact that one of the lawyers representing the group that tried so hard to derail the agreement is a candidate of the People's United Party and People's United Party's legal representative. Let me now point to the fact that in talking as the Leader of the Opposition or somebody else did about the Chairman of the Committee of Management, Ezekiel Cansino, and his supposed collaboration with the United Democratic Party. Let me point to the fact that Cansino has never run for any political office. It is Ortega who offered himself in a PUP Convention to try to become the candidate to go against the Deputy Prime Minister in the general elections. Who is playing politics with the BSCFA? And the person against whom he stood in that convention is Munchie Cervantes, a member of the negotiating team of the BSCFA and who is now, in fact, the duly elected standard bearer of the People's United Party in the Orange Walk North constituency. Who, then, was playing politics with the BSCFA?

Man, now you see, Mr. Speaker, I have already said that I don't want to give any impression that I don't want to give any impression that I am in truth a name caller. but when the Ex-Prime Minister, the Member for Fort George, will say that Munchie Cervantes will beat the Deputy Prime Minister, I have to call him senile. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, you know this whole saga has thrown up as many heroes as villains. I want to pay tribute to Mr. Magaña, who from way back

when was the person who took the matter of freedom of association to the Supreme Court. I want to pay tribute to Cosme and Arturo Hernandez, the Deputy Prime Minister's nephews who in fact, helped to lead the charge when it turned out that the BSCFA was being held hostage by Munchie Cervantes and Fred Ortega, what his is name, Ricardo Keme. They decided that because they knew that majority of the farmers wanted a crop they would go off and do their own thing. I need to pay tribute to Abisur Loza from Patchakan, who completely against the time, took his branch out of the BSCFA, because again, as he make clear he was not prepared to put up with the political game playing on the part of that minority element of the BSCFA. I need to pay tribute to the same Ezekiel Cansino who was buffeted, who was pummeled, who was attacked relentlessly by the extremist fringe of the BSCFA, but who ultimately stood firm and led the association yesterday to the proper vote so that in fact the crop is now able to start and they signed at this morning at 11:00 AM and who preserved against all odds, the integrity of the BSCFA. I need to pay tribute to Don Ramon Aban, biggest PUP you could find. Florencio Marin Sr. compañoero, he is from the village of San Joaquin. But he is a man of principle, he is a former chairman of the BSCFA, who puts the interests and the welfare of the cane farmers and the BSCFA above partisan politics. That is another hero.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's a nil-win that blows no good. And all that they tried to do, all the conspiracies, all the evil plots that were hatched, ultimately, admittedly after tremendous stress and strain came to north. We now have this agreement signed by all parties and those misfits, those evil doers have been isolated and hopefully sidelined in the BSCFA that has now emerged under the leadership of Canseno and Aban, and Adolfo Patt, and Ronnie Navarro, and Romero, people like that.

Mr. Speaker, you heard what I had to say earlier, Mr. Member for Orange Walk Central, you don't agree with me? You know yesterday there was a PUP Convention if I can divert for just a minute. Well, I was going to say, it put a licking. Actually, I am a little disappointed that his candidate won only by 12 votes but he defeated the old guard again, you know. I am telling you, this is the new Leader of the Opposition. Again, it is not just to rub salt in huge gaping wounds that I believe have been open up with respect to the current Leader of the Opposition. It is not to point out once more, the contrast between the twaddle he spouted and the enlarge measure good sense of the Member for Orange Walk Central. It is just to say that overall, how can the people of Belize have any faith with respect to the position of the Opposition on this issue when, Mr. Speaker, it appears that there is no one position. I heard the Leader of the Opposition, accused me and the Deputy and this Government of being in league with ASR. Well, that is unadulterated nonsense. And I will show that in some detail in a minute. But the assumption implicit in that charge is that ASR is somehow the devil's hand maiden. Yet the Member for Orange Walk Central says that he welcomes ASR, he wants them to increase the capacity of the factory. We need for ASR to stay, contrast that with the Leader of the Opposition who first threatened to nationalize ASR, and who, just like last week turned around and said let ASR go. Let them depart Belize. So, what are the good people of Belize to make of these huge divergences, these schisms between what the Leader of the Opposition is saying and the ones and future kings from Orange Walk Central is saying. But this business of suggesting, I like the post on Facebook from your lovely wife, from your lady wife, after the convention last night, where she tells you that a 'W' is a 'W', get over it! Ouch! (Applause) She wasn't addressing that to the UDP because we were not in the convention.

Mr. Speaker, what was I saying? Oh, but to say that we lead ourselves with

ASR again, counter historical not just a historical, counter historical. Let me just repeat really quickly, we were the ones that leaned on ASR to agree payment for bagasse. We were the ones that leaned on ASR when they did that back door thing and snuck in a clause in the agreement that had been reached trying to give themselves sole decision making power on quality. We were the ones that leaned on them to say, "You better take that out and make whatever additional concessions are necessary." I repeat in terms of the negotiations between the BSCFA and ASR, governments intervention consisted of basically getting the BSCFAs position from their leaders, and then taking that back to ASR and negotiating with ASR, to secure the BSCFA position. How can you say that we were in league with ASR?

Mr. Speaker, I didn't really hear the Honourable Member for Orange Walk South. But somebody told me that he suggested, he, I believed questioned the incentives that the government gave to ASR. When, again, the ones and future kings supported those incentives. I believe he raised this whole issue of government somehow not allowing the BSCFA to purchase factory. He has to be another inhabitant of cloud cuckoo land. Mr. Speaker, nobody stop the BSCFA from attempting to raise the money to purchase the factory. They couldn't do it and it's no fault of theirs. Remember what happened, when BSI was near collapse, when the banks pulled the plug on the financing, government tried to get new entrance, government tried to get a new strategic partner so that the industry might be rescued. Indeed, we spoke to Banco Atlántida, somehow now that has become a stick with which to beat us, somehow we did something wrong by even talking to Banco Atlántida. We spoke to Banco Atlántida because while there was a professional outfit that was hired to go to solicit financing to save the industry. That professional outfit came back empty handed. Nobody was interested, so we spoke to Banco Atlántida that went nowhere, when there was suppose to me a meeting with them and the cane farmers one time, as you will recollect that was to happen at the Atlantic Bank Headquarters of Banco Atlántida here in Belize, and there was a bomb scare. We can't say who phoned in the threat but five will get you ten, that the hand of those same extremist was very much involved with that. In any case that fell through because Banco Atlántida was insisting that the first thing that would have to go if they ever assumed control of BSI was the 65/35 revenue split. When we spoke ultimately to ASR that's the first thing that was agreed on, that there would be no change to the prejudice of the *cañeros*. Indeed, I recollect it was a meeting at the conference room of the Chamber of Commerce in Belize at Coney Drive; we got ASR to agree on the payment of a premium for the upcoming sugar crop. All because we were doing two things ensuring the future of the industry, ensuring that the factory would remain open but at the same time protecting the position of the cane farmers. So this kind of nonsense that we league ourselves with ASR really, Mr. Speaker, must be rejected out of hand.

Now, Mr. Speaker, again, I want to place on record that we are entirely happy at the outcome that this long ordeal has produce a result in which we now see 3 associations taking their equal place at the table with the BSCF A still remaining the dominant association. We do say to Messer Canseno, and Aban, and Patt, and Navarro, and the others of goodwill, please do not ever let us have a repeat scenario. The extremists those that in fact, are for whatever reasons, I don't know if it's in addition to politics ideological, those that are against the partnership, the tripartite partnership which is an absolute essential if we were to take this industry forward, must be isolated. They cannot ever again, be allowed to take center stage. And, Mr. Speakers, we like the ones and future kings, put on record one more time that we believe in foreign investment. We believe in the need for an equal partnership in sugar between the miller, the manufacturer and the cane farmer. We will never apologize for not giving in to the blackmail of the

extremist when they said that we must place a gun at ASRs head and compel them to open the factory even in the absence of an agreement. An agreement that had been reached as a consequence of arms length negotiations but that was overturned because of the high jacking, because of the holding hostage of the majority of the BSCFA by the minority. We are happy that we stood our ground. In the end it has all worked out. The farmers can be sure that we will continue to have their backs. Somebody raised the question over there of putting some cap on the production of BSI, remember that in addition to being manufactured there also goes off some cane.

Well, let me just make clear, Mr. Speaker, and in doing so, refer to the fact that the current quota of BSI was the quota given to them by the People's United Party Government in 2001/2002. They increased the BSI's quota to 150,000 or 140,000 whatever tons it is. Let me make clear that there will be no, well, let me frame it very carefully this is for the farmers. There will be no repeat of that scenario where this government says in the way that government did, well, we have to increase BSI quota to make up the production shortfall on the part of the farmers, no. In going forward the SCPC will always make certain, Mr. Speaker, that the farmers quotas are protected and that as the factory increases capacity, quotas for the cane farmers will increase accordingly. We will not and cannot place some arbitrary cap and say that, "No matter what, BSI will only be able to mill this 150,000 tons of their own cane." The hope is that factory capacity will increase by leaps and bounds in consequence of the financial investments that ASR is obliged to make now as consequence of the agreement that we had to broker and when the factory capacity increases in this giant fashion, then everybody can have a quota increase, particularly, and especially the farmers but as well BSI. The SCPC, which under this legislation will now always be chaired by government, is responsible for the allocation of quotas, right now; there has been a request on the part of ASR for an increase in their quota. The SCPC has refused because in the circumstances and with respect to doing what is equitable, it is not possible. ASR/BSI knows that they are free to make renewed representations and they will always be given a fair hearing but the SCPC as long as this Government is in office will absolutely ensure that no advantage is given to ASR/BSI to the prejudice of the cane farmers. (Applause)

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I do not quarrel with the ones and future kings, in terms of what he says historically, the Right Honourable George Price, did for the sugar industry. But in terms of recent history our record in aid of the sugar industry cannot be match. And don't tell me about roads that we build being some sort of holdover from the EU program. Before we won in 2008, and I met with the then EU Ambassador to Belize, he made it plain that nothing would move under the Bilateral Cooperation Program between the EU and Belize as long as the People's United Party and the then Prime Minister continued in office. (Applause) Just like the World Bank that had actually cut off lending to Belize because of the corruption on the part of the last Government. (Applause) What we have done by way of assistance that came on top of the, what, fifty odd million that BSCFA got in fair-trade money and we helped to ensure that when fair-trade was negotiated, that BSI which wanted to share in the fair-trade monies got none, so that all went to the cane farmers. In addition to all that money which now Mr. Madrid is saying Mr. Ortega must help to account for. Out of our own resources we have help the farmers. Didn't we just write off something like \$3 million for them, that they owed to the Government of Belize? So, nearly in terms of placing an exclamation point behind the beneficent role of the government in all this, let me repeat that the \$1million each for Corozal and Orange Walk, that is gone across today from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of Works, for the repair of sugar roads can be added to, depending on what the assessment which will be

done starting perhaps this afternoon at the latest tomorrow by the Ministry in conjunction with the Deputy Prime Minister for Orange Walk and with Minister Hugo Patt for Corozal, depending on what that assessment shows more money can and would be given by this government to assist the farmers. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. R. RAMIREZ (Corozal South West): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My contribution to this Sugar Bill Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015, is that I am totally against that. Why, because they never gave the opportunity to the association. They suppose to have an input and I could recall they have been fighting for many years, for a marketing committee. I don't see anything here in this Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, and that is very important for the industry and the *cañeros*. The Prime Minister has been saying that the farmers or the associations spend more than \$50 million of resource. The associations every year give the annual report and all farmers have a book like this. If the Minister of Agriculture don't give information to the Prime Minister, something is wrong there. Just on education the spent 40% of that money in Corozal and Orange Walk on social welfare, 29% of that money on community development; additional 8% on religion additional 6% on emergencies, an additional 13% of all that money and that is approved on a general meeting not by the association. The farmers, and I can recalled in the 1980s when the UDP won the first time, who do you think closed the factory there in the north? In 1990s again, who do you think closed the factory? It was the UDP. In 2000 when the *cañeros* was having problems with the core sampler, where was the UDP and the Minister of Agriculture who was the then Member for Cayo Central? I could remember the Member for Queen's Square, the one who ran from Belize that went to the US, that was when Atanasio Gutierrez was killed. Where was the government when the co-generation started and the farmers had problems because of delivering their sugar cane? We lost millions of dollars because of that problem. No government stood up and helped the farmers. 2010, the same problem we had a long crop again the farmers lost money, where was the government to help the farmers? That's why today I think the *cañeros* did a wonderful stand up not signing that agreement and if they went and signed yesterday or today, it's because the crisis is too big thanks to this Government.

All the business in Corozal and Orange Walk are suffering thanks to this Government. Watch the Free Zone, again, coming way to Punta Gorda same problem. I heard my colleague here mentioning about the sugar and the rise problem, again, thanks to the UDP. The sugar and the rice with this crisis, it's not ashamed, I saw the colleague of Orange Walk North making a lot of mistake and he is the Deputy, a senior Member of this House of Representative. But anyhow, I don't worry about that, I worry about my people of Corozal South West that we have more than 235,000 tons to deliver. That they will deliver because they are good farmers. What I could say today: one, let us work together *cañeros*, we have to do a lot of things in the future. But with government I think we don't have anywhere to go. He could be so eloquent on his language, yes, but the people don't eat off of that. We need more jobs. We need more things for the Belizean people. United we stand, divided we fall. (Applause) You are talking about changing the leader, no way! Francis Fonseca will be the next Prime Minister of this country. (Applause) The UDP is too used to be Opposition for many years, they were Opposition. So, it's time to govern. Please govern this country then maybe you will be in the future, again, as government. Thank you very much. I do not support this Bill. Thank you. (Applause)

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Really when I got up this morning I did not intend to speak on this Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, Mr. Speaker. For the obvious reason that I have never seen any Bill before coming to this House, any amendment. I kept hearing things in the media that the Prime Minister would be amending the law so that the crop can start. And obviously, Mr. Speaker, that was the whole objective of today's exercise. This whole rigmarole, all this crap that we've been hearing in this House today, Mr. Speaker, from that side (Applause) has to do with wanting to grand stand and to pretend that today, the 19th of January, we are now ensuring that the crop can start by passing this law in one day. Well, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been at pains to try and point out that we need this law to make constitutional what is not presently constitutional. Well, he has failed to tell us how come that that same section 16 of the Sugar Industry Control Act, I believe it is section 16, right Prime Minister? You must have looked at it many times, it must have given you many sleepless nights. Because what that section is saying is that it's the Sugar Industry Control Board that decides that fixes the date when the grinding should start. That's what I read in the Act. This Sugar Industry Control Board fixes the date, in other words, fixes when the crop should start because it goes on to say and I am reading what the law says, "that once the Sugar Industry Control Board fixes the date, the manufacturers shall receive the sugar cane and the cane farmers may produce, and deliver. They shall too!

And what is happening here, Mr. Speaker, is that the composition of that Sugar Industry Control Board, when you analyze it. The existing composition before we pass this law today, before they pass this law and I will be no part of that, is that with the Government and the cane farmers association representatives, they control the Sugar Industry Control Board. So, Mr. Prime Minister if you had wanted to, you could have had this crop open a long time ago. (Applause) You see nothing I have heard today from the government side, from the Member who presented the Bill, the Member for Orange Walk North, the Deputy Prime Minister, who, I don't think understand what he is actually presenting today. I listened to him very keenly but in any event, the truth of the matter is, in no way what people like the junior lawyer, the one who is, according to the Prime Minister, an empty vessel. What she has been saying from day 1 is the gospel truth: that this Prime Minister has fraudulently abused the intelligence of this nation by suggesting that they don't understand that you need to amend the law and you can't do by going to court. You can't go to court to get a mandamus for all nonsense. Well, the truth of the matter is, Mr. Prime Minister, that there is nothing in this amendment which you say will now make constitutional everything that is in the sugar industry, nothing amends that same section 16 that gave the power and gives the power to the Sugar Industry Control Board to set the grinding season. And for the Prime Minister to tell this nation, well yes maybe they could have set it and maybe the court could have ordered it but how can the court order anything to be done when the court doesn't have an army, or have a police 24/7. Mr. Prime Minister, last time I read or heard that said, it was by Hitler in Nazi, Germany, you know. (Applause) The courts have no power, only the government; we have the political power that is the clearest sign of this country sliding into a dictatorship, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

This is what is happening today. It is a historic day today because the government is now really revealing all its fangs. The government you see has sat by and allowed this transnational company, ASR, American Sugar Refinery, a massive transnational company, perhaps the biggest in the world, the largest sugar producer in the world, he has sat by and allowed this company to humiliate, insult, and oppress the cane farmers of this country. (Applause) And I accuse the

government today of being collaborationist with this oppression that is taking place with the cane farmers of Belize. (Applause) Why do I say this? Because not only did they squeeze the cane farmers into accepting \$.51 per ton for the value of their bagasse contribution when they were asking for \$10. Lord, man, why couldn't they agree to a \$2.00, \$3.00, or something reasonable, \$.51 and tell you take it or leave that is what the ASR was saying and the government just sat by, yes. And then, when they did have an agreement and the cane farmers in their majority voted for it. ASR wasn't satisfied with that. They went behind the backs of the farmers and inserted this clause that was tantamount to them controlling whether or not they would take the farmers cane. They would decide the quality and that of course virtually torpedoed an agreement that could have been made and was agreed to long ago. The ASR in effect was, obviously, wanting to kick the cane farmers when they were down and in fact trick the cane farmers into agreeing to all these things and the government just sat by and allowed all this to happen. So, yes, Mr. Speaker, I, too, join the Leader of the Opposition in saying that the government has not only collaborated but has allowed ASR to take full advantage of the cane farmers of this country. And in truth and in fact, all this delay could have been avoided, all this depression in the north could have been avoided if the government had stood up on the side of the people from day one instead of siding with ASR to the detriment of the cane farmers of this country. (Applause)

The net result is that they have succeeded, you know, the Prime Minister and his Government have succeeded in destroying, certainly dismembering and disfiguring the cane farmers association of Belize, a fifty-five year old institution, they have succeeded in dismembering it, why, because they believe that the majority of the people of the cane farmers in the association, certainly, in the management of the association, were members or supporters of the Opposition, People's United Party. In other words, Mr. Speaker, what I am also accusing this government of today because the real issue is not whether the crop will start tomorrow or the day after, you know, because that is already settled. They voted for it yesterday, the majority, everybody voted on wanting the crop to start. The issue today is how history will remember this very sad episode in our country.

And I listened keenly to the Honourable Prime Minister even when he called me senile. I listened to him. Well, Mr. Prime Minister, I may be getting too old for this business. I may be, but I am old enough to know that when I see a liar I would have to point him out. (Applause) I am old enough to know when I see a manipulator; I have to point him out. (Applause) And I am old enough to know that all the ingenuity and disingenuity that you may come with, Mr. Prime Minister, will not allow the Belizean people to be fooled by this disingenuity of yours, that is what I am old enough to know. (Applause)

So, I conclude, Mr. Speaker, by saying that all this rigmarole, all this crap that we have been hearing from that side of the House, from the government was one big cloak in order to hide and disguise an infamous betrayal of the cane farmers of this country. Thank God that they will still live to see another day and survive and no doubt the Belize Cane Farmers Association will survive this day, will survive beyond because they are bigger, they are in a sense bigger than this National Assembly. They are bigger, Mr. Speaker. They are bigger, Mr. Prime Minister. Let me tell you why they are bigger because they stand for their people and in the final analysis when the general elections are called they will teach you a lesson for what you have done to them. Thank you very much. (Applause)

HON. H. PATT (Corozal North): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in contributing to the Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015, allow me first to recognize some of farmers that we have present here today, being Mr. Wilfredo Magaña and behind the media we have Mr. Aldo Loza (Applause) and Mr. Elder Villamill. Mr. Speaker, these are farmers who apart from knowing very good how to plant sugar cane, how to read sugar cane, how to carry on the business of sugar cane have decided to join us to better get informed of the rules governing, the sugar industry. These are farmers who see themselves not as the co-farmers as the media would tend to disseminate but they consider themselves sugar cane businessmen and sugar cane businesswomen, who at the end of the day will take decisions based on informed sessions and more knowledge for the benefit of themselves, their family, the sugar industry, and of course, the nation as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make clear on tough fundamental issues that need to be emphasized in the amendments to the Sugar Act 2015. The first one being, to ensure primarily that the Sugar Industry Act is in compliance with the Constitution of Belize. And secondly, that it was the expressed interest of a substantial number of cane farmers to have the freedom to associate with the association of their choice where they will be able to openly and freely make their opinions as a constitutional right of all Belizeans. Ultimately, the freedom of choice will consequentially oblige each association to be more efficient and more effective in the things that they do. At the end of the day, the associations that are able to produce the kind of benefit and negotiations that will promote growth and development for their members will be the ones that will go and strive. Farmers will be the ones that will decide which entity deserves their membership, which association they believe best serves their purposes, and which association can best represent them. As some farmers have clearly stated our constitutional rights to freedom of association will create the kind of environment of competition which will translate into tangible benefits for them. We all know that competition creates an environment of improved performance and delivery and this is precisely what farmers deserves and are looking up to. We can retract and take a look back at the changes done and implement it in the sugar cane quality program back in 2009, many were hesitant, many were doubtful, that the changes purposed would even work or would even create benefit to them.

Today, five years after implementation of such program, the industry in Belize is setting the standards of quality for the region. As a matter of fact, many countries are now looking at what Belize is doing so that they can adopt to improve systems in their countries. This is the kind of benefit, direct benefit that many envision in the amendments of the Sugar Act 2015. Parallel with the amendment, the accompanying infrastructure within the bodies in the industry will ultimately ensure improve economic benefits to our *cañeros* in the north. And I am certain, Mr. Speaker, that the benefits brought along in the changes will ultimately be felt by all of our cane farmers.

And, Mr. Speaker, allow me to make another small intervention and it's a pity that Member for Corozal South West is not here. He seemed to have confused himself in the year 2000 with relation to the many issues happening in the industry. Mr. Speaker, allow me to tell you that, I am a cane farmer registered in the Corozal division. You would know that annually we make a contribution of \$. 60 for every ton that we deliver. There was a loan done by the Belize Sugar Cane Farmer Association, Corozal division back in 1999 and 2000, the year he seemed to confuse. Then he was the Chairman of the Belize Sugar Cane Farmers Association, Corozal division. Out of that loan, 14 years later, and this was until last year that the cane farmers of Corozal finally made payments of that loan. What the Member for Corozal South West should have indicated to the farmers,

what happened, where is the accountability of the funds for that \$1 million that was loaned and he was Chair and today, farmers are asking what happen to that money? That was my only contribution and, of course, thank you and blessed be all and more importantly our cane farmers who took the decision to have the crop starting next week. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

HON. G. VEGA (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I stand to move the second reading of that Bill.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that Bill for an Act to amend the Sugar Industry Act, Chapter 325 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000-2003; to bring the Act into conformity with the Belize Constitution; to secure to all cane farmers the freedom to belong to an association of their own choice; to facilitate the commencement of grinding seasons in a fair and equitable manner, taking due account of the legitimate interests of all stakeholders; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

Bill read a second time

III COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE ON BILL

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the House will now resolve into a Committee of the whole House to consider the Bill that was read a second time.

I would like to ask the public in the Galleries to kindly leave during this portion of the Sitting.

[In the Committee]

The Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

1. Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

Clauses 1 to 19 agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

IV BILL FOR THIRD READING

1. Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

HON. G. VEGA (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole House has consider the Sugar Industry (Amendment) Bill, 2015, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of this Bill.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Sugar Industry Act, Chapter 325 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000-2003; to bring the Act into conformity with the Belize Constitution; to secure to all cane farmers the freedom to belong to an association of their own choice; to facilitate the commencement of grinding seasons in a fair and equitable manner, taking due account of the legitimate interests of all stakeholders; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a third time.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

Bill read a third time.

ADJOURNMENT

HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Economic Development): Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

The House now stands adjourned.

The House adjourned at 2:20 P.M. to a date to be fixed by the Speaker.

Speaker.

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