

SUGAR ESTATE EMPLOYEES - BUS FARES – REFUND (13/09/05)

(No. I B/269) Mr G. Gunness (Third Member for Montagne Blanche and GRSE) asked the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Public Infrastructure, Land Transport and Shipping whether, in regard to the refund of bus fares to sugar estate employees as per their conditions of employment, he will, for the benefit of the House, ascertain if such employees will continue benefiting from that refund and, if not, why not.

The Minister of Agro Industry & Fisheries (Dr. A. Boolell): Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, with your permission, I am replying to that question. Bus fare of employees are being paid in accordance with the provisions laid down in the Sugar Industry Remuneration Order

Mr Gunness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, now that the children of the employees are travelling free of charge in buses, are the employees entitled to a refund of the bus fare?

Dr. Boolell: There are several modes of transport. There are the sugar estate buses which are put at the disposal of the children of the employees and they also use contract buses. Now with the free transport, it means that the money is not going to be refunded. Free transport has been extended to children going to primary, secondary and university, provided they are below 20. So, we will have to impress upon the sugar estate that, in respect of the money being saved, they use it for the welfare and educational benefits of the children of the workers.

Mr Gunness: I suppose there must have been a calculation made. Can I know from the Minister what is the amount of savings that this represents to the sugar estate in general?

Dr. Boolell: Reimbursement to students amount to Rs14 m., buses contracted out is Rs4 m., which means that there is probably a savings of Rs18 m. As I told the hon. Member earlier, we may impress upon the sugar estate to use this money judiciously to invest and to promote FOR the welfare and educational benefits of the children of the sugar estate employees.

Mr Gunness: Is there any follow-up mechanism to ensure that this money is being used for the welfare?

Dr. Boolell: The hon. Member can rest assured that contrary to past practices, we are going to put those students first and we will see to it that

benefits are going to accrue to those who toil and sweat in the sugar industry.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, that is interesting to hear. Can the Minister give a concrete example of what will be done with that Rs18 m. so that we can follow up?

Dr. Boolell: Well, certainly, they are not going to be caught with their pants down. We will see to it that the proceeds be used judiciously to empower those children, and, by empowerment, we mean investment in education which is the best and the soundest investment.

Mr Guinness: Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, one last question. Again, it is a lot of *bla-bla-bla*. Can the hon. Minister give a concrete example as to the plan of action, of what will be done with that money?

Dr. Boolell: Well, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we can increase the number of scholarships. We can provide them with facilities such as grants and other educational assistance, especially to those attending universities. Of course, Mr Deputy Speaker, Sir, we will impress upon the sugar estate to improve the community welfare of the workers' children.