

National Assembly Debates

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SECOND SESSION (2002-2003) OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE CONVENTION CENTER OCEAN VIEW INTERNATIONAL HOTEL LILIENDAAL

11TH SITTING

2.00 PM

FRIDAY 16 MAY 2003

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (68)

Speaker (1)

The Hon. Hari N. Ramkarran, S. C., M. P. - *Speaker of the National Assembly*

Members of the Government - People's Progressive Party/Civic (34)

The Hon. Samuel A. A. Hinds, M.P.

-Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications (Absent on Leave) (Performing the functions of the President)

The Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., J.P., M.P.

-Minister of Parliamentary Affairs

The Hon. Clement J. Rohee, M.P.

-Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation

The Hon. Harripersaud Nokta, M.P.

- Minister of Local Government and Regional Development

The Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.

- Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport

The Hon. Dr. Henry B. Jeffrey, M.P.

- Minister of Education

The Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar, M.P.

- Minister of Finance (Absent)

The Hon. Shaik K. Z. Baksh, M.P.

- Minister of Housing and Water

The Hon. Navindranauth O. Chandarpal, M.P.

- Minister of Agriculture; Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica

The Hon. J. Ronald Gajraj, M.P.

- Minister of Home Affairs; Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/ West Demerara

The Hon. Rev. Dr. Ramteeth D.A. Bisnauth, M.P.

- Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security (Absent)

The Hon. Clinton C. Collymore, M.P.

- Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (Absent)

The Hon. Satyadeow Sawh, M.P.	- Minister of Fisheries, Other Crops and Livestock (Region No. 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)
*The Hon. S. Rudolph Inarandy, O.R., C.C.H., M.P.	- Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Foreign Affairs
*The Hon. Doodnauth Singh, S.C., M.P.	- Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Absent)
The Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.	- Minister of the Public Service
The Hon. C. Anthony Xavier, M.P.	- Minister of Transport and Hydraulics
The Hon. Bibi S. Shadick, M.P.	- Minister in the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security (Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/ West Demerara)
**The Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.	- Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce (AOL)
The Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues, M.P.	- Minister of Amerindian Affairs (Absent)
The Hon. Dr. Leslie S. Ramsammy, M.P.	- Minister of Health
Mr S. Feroze Mohamed, M.P.	- Chief Whip
Mr Cyril C. Belgrave, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.	- (Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr. Donald R. Ramotar, M.P.	
Mr Husman Alli, M.P.	- (Region No. 7 - Cayana/Mazurani)
Mr. Komal Chand, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.	
Mrs Indranie Chandarpal, M.P.	
Mr Bernard C. DeSantos, S.C., M.P.	- (Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)
Mrs Shirley V. Edwards, J.P. M.P.	
Mr Odinga N. Lumumba, M.P.	
Mr Heeralal Mohan, M.P.	- (Region No. 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)
Mr Ramesh C. Rajkumar, M.P.	- (Region No. 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne)
Mr Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.	- (Region No. 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne) (Absent)
Dr Bhoji S. Ramsaran, M.D., M.P.	- (AOL)
Mrs Philomena Sahoye Shary, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.	- Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Water - (Absent)
Mrs Pauline R. Sukhai, M.P.	- (Region No. 1 - Barima/Waini)
Mr Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.	

* Non-Elected Minister

** Elected Member from The United Force

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Members of the Opposition (30)

(i) People's National Congress/Reform (27)

Mr Robert H. O. Corbin, M.P. - (AOL)
Mr Winston S. Murray, C.C.H., M.P.
Mrs Clarissa S. Riehl, M.P. - Deputy Speaker of the N.A.
Mr E. Lance Carberry, M.P. - Chief Whip
Mr Ivor Allen, M.P. - (Region No. 2-Pomeroon/Supenaam)-(Absent)
Mrs Deborah J. Backer, M.P.
Mr Deryck M.A. Bernard, M.P.
Mr C. Stanley Ming, M.P. - (Absent)
Mr Raphael G.C. Trotman, M.P.
Mr Vincent L. Alexander, M.P. - (Region No. 4-Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr Andy Goveia, M.P.
Mrs Volda A. Lawrence, M.P.
Dr Dalglish Joseph, M.D., M.P. - (AOL)
Miss Anna Ally, M.P. - (Region No. 5-Mahaica/Berbice)
Miss Sandra M. Adams, M.P. - (Region No. 10-Upper Demerara Berbice)

Mr Jerome Khan, M.P.
Dr George A. Norton, M.P.
Miss Myrna E. N. Peterkin, M.P. - (Region No. 4-Demerara/Mahaica)-(Absent)
Mr James K. McAllister, M.P. - (Region No. 3-Essequibo Islands
West Demerara)

Miss Lulene A. Nestor, M.P. - (Region No. 4-Demerara/Mahaica) - (AOL)
Mr Abdul Kadir, J.P., M.P. - (Region No. 10-Upper Demerara/Berbice)
Mr Ricky Khan, M.P. - (Region No. 1-Barima/Waini) - (Absent)
Mrs R. Bancroft, M.P. - (Region No. 8 - Potaro/Siparuni)
Mr Nasir Ally, J.P., M.P. - (Region No. 6-East Berbice/Corentyne)
Miss Judith David, M.P. - (Region No. 7-Cuyuni/Mazaruni)
Miss Genevieve Allen, M.P. - (Region No. 4-Demerara/Mahaica)
(One Vacancy)

(ii) Guyana Action Party/Working People's Alliance Party (2)

Mrs Sheila V.A. Holder, M.P.
Mrs Shirley J. Melville, M.P. - (Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo)

(iii) Rise, Organise and Rebuild Party (1)

Mr Ravindra Dev, M.P.

OFFICERS

Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, *Clerk of the National Assembly*

Mrs Lilawtie Coonjah, *Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly.*

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PRAYERS

The Clerk read the Prayer

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave:

Leave has been granted to the Hon Member Mr Robert Corbin for today's sitting and to the Hon Member Ms Lurlene Nestor up to 19 May 2003.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTIONS

ITEM 1 – FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST GENERAL ELECTIONS HELD IN BRITISH GUIANA

WHEREAS the 27 April 2003 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the first general elections held in British Guiana under universal adult suffrage, and

WHEREAS the 18 May 2003 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the first sitting of the House of Assembly after the aforesaid general elections,

BE IT RESOLVED that the National Assembly

1. Commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the first general elections held under universal adult suffrage on the 27 April 1953, the winning of those elections by the People's Progressive Party and the election of the Executive Council on the 18 May 1953 as historic events of national importance, and

2. Pays tribute to all those who played a role in the achievement of the foregoing and particularly to the people of British Guiana united across ethnic and class lines who

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were mainly responsible for making the momentous achievements possible which eventually led to the independence of Guyana.

The Speaker: Hon Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation.

Hon Clement J Rohee: Mr Speaker I rise to speak on the Motion standing in my name entitled Fiftieth Anniversary of the First General Elections held in British Guiana.

Mr Speaker, Monday 18 May 1953 was a day of great political significance and achievement for the working class and farmers of our beloved country. It was on this day, following the sweeping and unprecedented victory for the PPP at the first general elections held under universal adult suffrage on 27 April 1953, and the democratically elected representatives, numbering eighteen out of 24, each and every one of them representing the PPP, took their seats in the First Session of the First House of Assembly.

On that same day, Mr Speaker, the true representatives of the people elected their six representatives to the Executive Council heralding the first expression of the popular will of the Guianese working people in the highest decision-making forum of the Colony.

Mr Speaker, I believe it would be appropriate, if only for the purpose of observing the fiftieth anniversary of this historic event, that I mention the names of these persons as they appear in the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Inaugural Meeting of the House of Assembly of the Colony of British Guiana held in the Chamber of the Legislature of the Public Building, Georgetown, Demerara, at 2:00 pm on Monday 18 May 1953.

- Mrs Janet Jagan
- Mr F Bowman
- Mr Jainarine Singh

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- Dr JP Latchmansingh
- Mr A Chase
- Ms JIS Burnham
- Mr FO Vansertima
- Mr LFS Burnham
- Mr Ramkarran
- Mrs J Phillips-Gay
- Mr CS Persaud
- Mr SMLatchmansingh
- Mr Ajodha Singh
- Dr RS Hanomansingh
- Dr CB Jagan and
- Mr M Khan

Reflecting on the antecedents that commingled at that juncture of the country's political history, Cheddi Jagan in his famous *West on Trial* had this to say:

The 1953 election campaign roused unprecedented enthusiasm throughout the country. For the first time in our history the people were really involved. It was the first election under universal adult suffrage. So great was interest that the percentage, 74.8%, who turned out to vote was higher than in Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad where the figures ranged between 53% and 65%.

Writing in his booklet *One Hundred and thirty-three Days Towards Freedom in Guyana* Ashton Chase had this to say:

... April 27 1953 will remain ever green in the memory of us. On this day several thousand Guyanese quietly but resolutely struck a fierce blow at the forces of imperialism. In a clear and decisive manner the people expressed confidence in the People's Progressive Party. They elected us because of the militant stand which our party had taken

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on matters affecting the working class. Our party was strong and its unity unshakeable. We had brought together for the first time politically the two major racial groups in the country – the people of Indian and African origin. Above all we presented a dynamic programme.

Mr Speaker, based on the recommendations of the Waddington Commission which were accepted and incorporated into law, and enshrined in a new Constitution of 8 March 1952 and April 1953 respectively, not only were elections held for the first time under universal adult suffrage and a House of Assembly consisting of elected representatives established but in addition, the first House of Assembly was called upon to elect six persons from among the elected persons to be ministers. These six ministers were to be members of the Executive Council.

Mr Speaker, allow me to describe the proceedings that culminated in the election of the PPP ministers by referring to the minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the House of Assembly which reads as follows:

The Honourable Member for the Corentyne River, Mr Khan, then moved the following Motion:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: in accordance with the provisions of Section 9(1) of the British Guiana Constitution Order in Council 1953, this House hereby approves of the election of the following members:

- *Cheddi Jagan*
- *LFS Burnham*
- *Ashton Chase*
- *S King*
- *JP Latchmarsingh and*

- Jainarine Singh

to be members of the Executive Council in and for the Colony as provided for under the Provisions of Section 5 of the British Guiana Constitution Order in Council 1953.

The Motion was seconded by the Hon Member for Berbice River, Mr Ajodha Singh, and carried.

Mr Ashton Chase describes this new historic development in the evolution of constitutional and governance arrangements in British Guiana as follows:

The ministerial system is new to British Guiana. It is the first time it was introduced. In British Guiana like all colonial territories, ministers are vested with some sort of responsibility. We do not have full responsibility for our departments or subjects like the ministers in the United Kingdom, for example. Ours is a subordinate position; we have quasi-responsibility. We have the shadow not the substance of power. We are creatures of British constitutional experimentation.

Mr Speaker, we can clearly discern from this statement the high level of political and ideological awareness and sophistication that was to be found among the political leaders of that era. Small wonder why Sir Gordon Griggisberg, the biographer of the then British Governor Sir Alfred Savage, could confirm this when he wrote:

The new Constitution was a typical colonial one with an African pedigree and the Colonial Office seemed to have been insensitive to the effect of this on a relatively sophisticated people.

Mr Speaker it is clear the backward and miserable socioeconomic conditions obtaining at the time in the colony helped create objective conditions for the acceptance of the PPP by the urban working class and

the farmers in the countryside.

Under the astute and dynamic leadership of the best representatives of the Guyanese working people a nationalistic, democratic, progressive platform had been formulated and articulated. Its main pillars were the demand for universal adult suffrage, constitutional and socioeconomic reform and self-government leading to national independence. Under this broad banner – everyone, including nationalists, patriots, democrats, revolutionaries, and communists – all had a role to play in the struggle against colonialism and its local manifestations.

A perusal of the records, Mr Speaker, of that time show that the overarching consideration of the PPP and the new government was to bring about improvement in the living and working conditions of the workers and farmers. Karl Marx in his seminal work *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* wrote,

Mankind always sets itself only such problems as it can solve since looking at the matter more closely it would always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exists or at least is in the process of formation.

Mr Speaker, a perusal of the literature reflecting the views of the leaders of the PPP at the time testifies to the fact that that era can be characterized as a period of intense political debate, sharp polemics and political activism of a new kind never witnessed before in the history of the colony.

Further, it was an era in which there was constant and relentless struggle between radical and progressive political thought and action as exemplified in the stand adopted by the PPP on the one hand, and the conservative, backward and reactionary position adopted by the privileged colonial elite, the plantocracy, and big business interests on the other.

Mr Speaker, reports reflecting developments at the time suggest

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that the political landscape was inundated with a plethora of so-called independents, fellow travellers, opportunists, bandwagoners, fly-by-night politicians, all pursuing their narrow national interests and political agendas, and at the same time vying for the crumbs thrown to them from the master's table. Many were also afflicted with red-carpet fever.

Mr Speaker, the era under which the momentous events of 18 May 1953 took place was one that was marked by the beginning of the national independence movement, a movement that roused the masses of working people, raised their hopes and aspirations and provided them with a greater awareness of their rights as individuals and as a people.

Mr Brindley Ben, the then Secretary of the British Guiana Pioneer Youth League, the forerunner of the Progressive Youth Organization, writing an article entitled *Why the People Voted for the People's Progressive Party* had this to say:

The people heavily backed the PPP; they attended meetings of the House and listened to the debates. Those who could not gain access to the Chambers stood outside and cheered the members as they left or arrived. They called the ministers 'people's Ministers' and went to the ministerial buildings in their scores to lay their grievances or to be given the Minister's advice.

Mr Speaker, the fixture of the PPP at the poles in 1953, its entry in the House of Assembly and the election of six of its members to the Executive Council signalled the beginning of the end of the colonial era and the dawn of an age of enlightenment for the Guyanese working man and woman as well as the poor farmers in the countryside, a political awakening, nay, renaissance, had begun.

The PPP though strongly supportive of and committed to the trade union struggle for bread and butter issues, and for the advancement of the rights and demands of the working class, was determined to elevate the struggle on the industrial front to the political level since this was the

only way the workers and farmers could realize their political aspirations.

Mr Speaker it was in this context that national and working class unity was achieved for the first time in our country's history. It was an achievement, if not an experiment, of such great significance, that historians, politicians, trade unionists, men of letters, and students of political science in years to follow would seek to draw lessons and inspiration from, and take as a point of reference for critical analyses in the constant but elusive search to bring about once again national and working class unity that obtained in our country in the early 1950s.

Mr Speaker, as we reflect on such political processes it is apposite to recall the words of Marx, who in his celebrated *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* had this to say:

Hegel remarked somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur as if they were twice.

He forgot to add the first time as tragedy the second as farce.

Mr Speaker, for the purpose of the record allow me to quickly refer to some of the more important initiatives taken by PPP ministers during the 133 days in office.

First, the **Labour Relations Bill**. The Labour Relations Bill was to secure by law and practise the right of freedom of association and the right for workers to organize and bargain collectively with their employers. It was aimed at minimizing interunion rivalry and preventing periodical disputes from halting production in industry.

It included two important provisions, (1) seeking to prohibit victimization of workers, and (2) the right of trade union officials to visit the place at which their members were engaged. Words of Ashton Chase, Minister of Labour, Commerce and Industry

Second, the **Education Bill**. One of the first acts in this sphere was to award 24 additional scholarships. The Education Minister announced

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these as people's scholarships in commemoration of the overwhelming victory that we won on 27 April 1953. The announcement by the minister of the abolition of dual control of schools brought down the Tower of Babel on us. The hullabaloo which was created then should have been created before the day of elections as our intentions were bold in print in our manifesto, so also were our intentions as regards remodelling our education system itself – LFS Burnham, Minister of Education.

Finally, among others, was the repeal of the undesirable Publication Ordinance. This atrocious undesirable Public Relations Ordinance was the first to be repealed on a bill moved by our minister of education. Thus our first legislative act was a direct mandate from the electorate.

In addition there were initiatives, Mr Speaker, treating with the lifting of the ban on West Indian leaders; an amendment of the Rice Farmers Security of Tenure Ordinance of 1945; passage of a resolution requesting the President of the United States of America to exercise amnesty in the case of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg; local government reform; social security and workers compensation, and the appointment of working people's representatives to the boards and committees.

Mr Speaker, it was against tremendous odds that PPP ministers worked hard to push through important reforms that would benefit the Guyanese working people. Capturing the mood that prevailed at the time and the atmosphere in which ministers were performing their duties, this is what Mr Chase had to say:

It is even more noteworthy when one takes into account how busy ministers were. We never lost the common touch. Many a night we spent at group meetings, or addressing gatherings locked in by the byelection battle of Georgetown north. We never shirked hard work as we thought especially in the absence of a daily or weekly paper it was our duty to go all over the country explaining our point of view and the reasons for our various acts as well as getting the feelings and opinions of others to guide us in our work.

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Few would deny that the people's ministers worked hard in their brief spell of office. It was a common feature to find ministers at work on Saturday afternoons and on Sundays. It was even more common to find lights burning in the minister's office until 11:00 pm and 12:00 midnight with ministers delving into files and reports.

Of noteworthy importance was what Chase described as unity unmatched. In this regard he states:

Another irksome matter to the officials, but one on which the success of our party depended was the unbreakable unity that existed among ministers. We always presented a united front at meetings of our Majesty's Executive Council. At all times we met privately in our Council of People's Ministers - a system and term which they despised and entreated us to change - and hammered out our differences sinking personal opinions in the interest of a common and united front.

Mr Speaker, it will be remiss of me, nay historically inaccurate, if I did not refer albeit briefly to the international context in which the political events of 1953 occurred.

Once again Mr Speaker, an examination of literature available reveals beyond the shadow of a doubt that many leaders of the PPP were strongly influenced by international developments in Asia, Africa and Europe. Of great influence was the revolution in Russia, the establishment of the USSR, and eventually the socialist community of states; the revolution in China; the winning of independence in India; the struggle for freedom and independence in Kenya led by Jomo Kenyatta and on the Gold Coast led by Kwame Nkrumah; as well as the struggles raged by the people of Egypt under Nasser; in Iraq under Musadek; in Algeria under Ben Bella and in Guatemala under Arbenz.

Mr Speaker the movement for national and social liberation in

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Guyana led by a united and progressive PPP leadership was not to be found wanting. The course they set for the country, the colonial limitations notwithstanding, was clearly aimed at ensuring Guyana's rightful place in the worldwide struggle for the right to self determination, national independence, peace and social progress. In an article entitled *We Planned Reform and Troops Came In*, LFS Burnham who had served as minister of education said:

The PPP consisted of several shades of political opinions with two common bases – a desire to improve conditions of the workers and the achievement of self government with full democratic rights. Our manifesto showed a realization of our limitations at this stage of development and consequently was not even as revolutionary as the Labour Party's policy.

Mr Speaker, on 8 October 1953, after 133 days in office the Royal Welsh Fusiliers landed at Georgetown. A state of emergency was declared by the Governor, Sir Alfred Savage, the elected ministers were dismissed, the House of Assembly prorogued and the Constitution suspended.

The communist plot to cause disorder and overthrow the Government was a *raison être* offered by the British colonialists to intervene militarily in the colony and remove the PPP from office.

Mr Speaker, the Guyanese working-class was struck a devastating blow.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Member Mr Vincent Alexander.

Mr Vincent L Alexander: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, on behalf of the People's National Congress/Reform I rise this afternoon to associate our party with the event which we seek to commemorate today.

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The People's National Congress/Reform recognizes the People's Progressive Party of 1953 as the predecessor party to the People's National Congress/Reform today and the People's Progressive Party/Civic today. We recognize that 1953 marked a historic moment in the life of the country, but we also recognise that we did not reap all of the successes which were hoped for.

So, Mr Speaker, as we look back to 1953 in the People's National Congress/Reform what is most important is for us to reflect and to learn from the lessons of 1953 and that period.

We are of the view that there is much that could be said of that period, but at the same time we feel that Guyana would be better off if we learn from the lessons of that period. And we say that, Mr Speaker, in the context of a Guyana today, where there are people who would say that all of our years, from as far back as adult suffrage onto today, have been wasted years because the country has not moved forward.

I am not putting this forward as my position but I am saying that there are Guyanese, and I am quite sure we all read the national press, who take that position and so for us it is critical that more than celebrate we should reflect and learn from that past. Because if we do not learn from the past we are likely to repeat the mistakes of the past and in so doing the country is none the better off.

So Mr Speaker, one of the first observations in that regard which I would like to make is the fact that the 74% turnout referred to by my Honourable colleague on the other side has recently been the figure in dispute. There are researchers who have argued that in fact the turnout was not 74%, it was more in the vicinity of 50%, and, therefore, the 80% which were garnered by the PPP at that time did not represent as massive a mass movement as we had been led to believe.

And I make that point Mr Speaker, because in the spirit of reflecting we need to understand if in some regard we did not become too caught up in the euphoria of the moment and did not take stock of some of the

realities that we should have been dealing with.

Mr Speaker we also observed that that government in 1953 was suspended. We agree that the British were wrong to do so, but we ask ourselves what are the lessons to be learnt from the fact that the British could have done so and could have found some point of articulation for doing so.

We are of the view, Mr Speaker, that while it is true that the PPP of 1953 brought together the masses of Guyanese in terms of the ethnic mosaic of Guiana, that that was not sufficient for the survival of the party. In fact for any party to survive there has to be ideational oneness that can take that party forward. It became evident subsequently that one of the lessons to be learnt from the era of 1953 is that one cannot pedal unity on things with the exception of ideational oneness.

It is the absence of that said oneness which resulted in the demise of the PPP and led to the emergence of the PPP as it is presently constituted and the People's National Congress as presently constituted - two separate branches from what was essentially one root in the first instance.

So it is in that context Mr Speaker, for example, that the People's National Congress/Reform today still seeks to address the question of unity and in so doing has arrived at a conclusion that a good basis upon which we may explore the building and the realization of unity is shared governance. But, more than that, we have proposed that for that to succeed there must be a consensual plan agreed to by the partners in that shared governance. And from that we are exhibiting that what we have learnt from the experience of 1953 where, to a large extent, what eventually happened was possible because of the absence of oneness in terms of approach to how issues of the nation should have been dealt with.

Mr Speaker, we are also of the view that another lesson to be learnt from the incidents of 1953 is that whatever you believe in has to

be articulated and pursued within the environment with which you are trying to realise that belief and we are of the view that one of the reasons for the failure in 1953 and thereafter had to do with a lack of appreciation of the geopolitical realities, hence those realities crushed that movement and retarded the process – cannot move it with itself – trying to initiate. And so for us that is another lesson that we have got to learn. Even in the world today one has to come to grips with the global environment within which one seeks to pursue national pursuits and to understand that if one does not clearly appreciate the environment, and come up with the necessary strategy and tactics to survive in that environment then one would be crushed.

So, Mr Speaker, as I stand today to associate my party with the Motion, I stand in recognition of the fact that what happened in 1953 did represent, at that point in time, some progress. It did represent a light on the horizon, but in the final analysis we did not reap the seeds that were intended, we did not have the harvest which we hoped for, and, therefore, for the People's National Congress/Reform the most important of today's activity has got to be a reflection, a determination of why did we not reap the harvest intended and how we can ensure we do not commit the same mistakes again so that we would have learnt from our experience.

It is in that context that we lend our support to this Motion and it is in that context that we say that rather than euphoria, rather than celebration, it is really a time for reflection and that some 50 years after 1953 that the Communiqué of 2003 represents the possibility of a new beginning, represents the possibility of us moving forward in unity.

And, therefore, I ask the Honourable House to see this moment as one of reflection and one of great possibilities, possibilities which we can only realize if we learn from the mistakes – some of which I have identified – and if we seek to move forward in unison, if we seek to move forward as one so that we can realize the dream which was dreamt way back in 1953.

I cannot say Mr Speaker that we have that perfect unity, that ideal

unity that is desirable.

I cannot say, Mr Speaker, that on behalf of my party I am host to all that is happening today. In many regards I am guest and we are guests.

And we would hope Mr Speaker, that as we seek to move this country forward we would not have to be guests in our own home, that we all can be hosts and we all can be authors of the country's future.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member,

Hon Minister of Fisheries, Other Crops and Livestock.

Hon Satyadeow Sawh: Mr Speaker I rise to lend support to the Motion under discussion here this afternoon, laid in Parliament by the Hon Minister Clement Rohee.

Mr Speaker, there comes a time in every nation's history when one can pause and reflect upon important occasions and events that have played an important role in the development of society and the development of its people. And I rather suspect Sir, that there is no one here today who would deny that the fiftieth anniversary celebrations, which this Motion addresses, is one such occasion.

Mr Speaker I wish to speak on four issues of the period that constitutes the Motion under discussion.

First of all on the formation of the Political Affairs Committee - the forerunner of the PPP - the PAC had at its formation in 1946 enunciated its aim as that of establishing a strong, disciplined, and enlightened party equipped with the theory of scientific socialism. For the very first time in the crown colony of British Guiana an organized group would concern itself with this subject of scientific socialism.

And, Mr Speaker, if we are truly to do justice to this debate here in

this Honourable House today, it is important, as the Honourable Member who spoke prior to me observed, for us to reflect deeply on the historical antecedents, the events that have led us to the point where we are today, and objectively and truthfully analyze it in terms of where we came from and where we are today.

At a symposium held at Freedom House auditorium in 1986, some very important personalities spoke at what was then the fortieth anniversary celebration of the formation of the PAC. I wish to recognize at least two of those very distinguished persons in our midst here among others, whom we are very happy and pleased to have with us - 50 years since this historic event.

Former President Janet Jagan dealt with the topic *The Formation of the Political Affairs Committee*. She traced the early beginnings of Cheddi Jagan's involvement in the struggles of sugar workers, the search for persons interested in progressive ideas, the meeting with HJM Hubbard, then general secretary of the BGTUC who introduced them to Ashton Chase, assistant general secretary of the BG Labour Union which was founded by HN Critchlow, and the decision to form the PAC. She mentioned the influence of the defeat of fascism, the anticolonial struggles particularly of India and referred to the formation of the first women's organization in the country - the Women's Political and Economic Organization.

Strong action was taken by the PAC in support of striking sugar and bauxite workers and also international solidarity became a practice. Mr Ashton Chase, author and trade unionist gave a well informed dissertation on the labour movement's growth over the years. His topic was *The Trade Union Movement in the 1940s*. He reviewed the early beginnings of trade unionism, the hostility of the ruling class and the weak numerical and financial status of most of them.

Dr Cheddi Jagan spoke on the topic *The Contribution of the PAC to the Political Struggles in the 1940s*. He mentioned the defeat of fascism, the inspiring role of the Soviet army and the ouster of Churchill

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in England by the Labour Party which had put socialism on its plank. He said his winning the seat of a legislature gave a fillip to plans for the laying of the foundation for the PPP in 1950.

These were some of the events Mr Speaker, that brought us to the stage of the formation of the People's Progressive Party.

Mr Speaker, permit me to quote from the writing of Hon Brindley Ben in *Thunder* where he said in an article entitled *Cheddi Jagan, Champion of the National Liberation Struggle, Architect of Independence*:

In the hallowed chambers where the representatives of the British, the planters and the acceptable local elite debated over the methods by which the exploitation of the natives was to be carried out, a lone voice emerged to challenge the empire and undermine its foundation. In his victory speech he said, 'we the people have won, now the struggle will begin.'

By his well-researched and elegantly articulated arguments on behalf of the suffering masses Cheddi Jagan made good his pledge to bring the people to the parliament, but the astute politician was fully conscious of the fact that logical arguments, though important, could not be the sole basis of change that was necessary. Grass roots mobilization was essential so he took the parliament to the people.

Mr Speaker, thus the formation of the People's Progressive Party in 1950.

The second aspect of my presentation, as I said, deals with the 1953 elections campaign itself and I think it was extremely instructive when we read *The West on Trial* written by the late President Jagan to see what transpired during that historic election campaign. Permit me if you will, Mr Speaker, to quote from *The West on Trial*, page 112,

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Our campaigning in 1953 brought us into contact with working people all over the country with the exception of the interior. We did not have enough funds to make expensive trips to the remote areas that was why we contested only 22 of the 24 seats.

My wife was in charge of Essequibo and West Demerara; I was responsible for the East Coast of Demerara and Berbice while Mr Burnham conducted the campaign in Georgetown.

Dr Jagan further wrote:

This division was forced upon us for we had soon discovered that Mr Burnham was not one of those who were prepared to undertake arduous work. He had never ventured very far away from Georgetown and had made few contributions to the party's newspaper.

Dr Jagan also wrote:

The opposition had no real programme and made no real effort to criticize our programme, instead it delved into personalities and devoted time and energies to a large number of irrelevant red herrings. In this campaign the opposition had the support of big business with the press as its powerful weapon. The churches too played a big role in opposition to us.

In our colonial society the hierarchy of the Anglican Church was closely identified with the ruling party. The spokesman for organized Hinduism was JB Singh and pitted against him in his former constituency in West Demerara was our candidate Fred Bowman.

And, Mr Speaker, if only for the records, and for our young people who we hope would read that book and this debate some time, what I am about to read to you is of extreme importance – the battle between

Fred Bowman and the respected Dr JB Singh. Dr Jagan wrote:

This contest was remarkable in several respects and the contrast between these candidates was dramatic. Fred Bowman was a humble sugar worker of the shovel gang, the kindly, quiet spoken, good natured Dr Singh on the other hand was a member of the Legislative Council for nearly 21 years, part of which time he had served in the Executive Council and on important boards and committees. Fred Bowman was an African standing against an Indian in an Indian-dominated constituency. Bowman's victory over Dr Singh was, perhaps, the most significant. He polled 42% of the votes against Dr Singh's 26%. Another important victory was in the Georgetown south constituency where Ashton Chase defeated Peter D'Aguiar who polled only 29% of the votes.

And of course Dr Jagan faced off against the respected Dr Rohan Sharpley. Dr Jagan wrote:

Dr Sharpley polled only 1,258 votes compared with my 6,235 votes. This defeat was a severe blow to his prestige and he never really recovered from the shock. But the most important outcome of the elections was the complete rout of the racists, the League of Coloured People and the East Indian Association. It was a symbol of national unity.

So this was the elections in 1953, Mr Speaker, that really galvanized people across racial and working class lines and we were able to move our country forward quickly.

I want to touch quickly, Mr Speaker, on some of the things that the PPP was able to implement during its 133 days in office because, as we said, this was the representative of the people, for the first time delivering the goods in terms of enhancing their social well-being. And we all will agree. Sir, that there can be no history of Guyana without the history of

the People's Progressive Party being written during this period of our lives.

And more than that Mr Speaker, it was the PPP that first placed Guyana on the map of the world. Though our country is small, by our deeds it became known throughout the world, deeds which were honourable because they were rooted in struggle and based on patriotism and working class internationalism. This is part of the address that Dr Jagan himself delivered as General Secretary to our party's congress in 1975:

The PPP was born in struggle and rooted in the working class. The bullets which snuffed out the lives of the Enmore Martyrs acted as a catalyst agent. We fought for freedom, democracy, human rights and socialism.

And very soon we will be observing another independence celebration - and this is what Dr Jagan said:

We strove untiringly for national independence. At the very beginning we declared that our people would never be able to exercise their humanity unless our country was free from colonial rule and foreign domination.

As you know Mr Speaker, there are some today who try to belittle the contributions of our party and our leaders in terms of the struggle for our independence. But he wrote that ours was not just a struggle in abstraction, we combined the long-term with the immediate.

If we were to realize our goals of independence and socialism then we must have democracy, he declared. And that was the rallying cry that galvanized the people - democracy, ultimately the denial of democracy - and then the winning of democracy again by the PPP in 1992. He says for us the first blow for democracy was the fight for universal adult suffrage.

This pointedly addresses the Motion before us today Mr Speaker. Dr

Jagan said:

Today many take for granted that everyone is entitled to vote but still there are quite a few who are unaware that it was the PPP which first called before the Waddington Constitution Commission in 1951 for the right of everyone to vote without qualification and for the voting age to be reduced to age 18.

A determined move was made to block us from propagating revolutionary ideas. We know of the Luchoo Subversive Literature (Amendment) Bill.

Mr Speaker, Dr Jagan wrote that we advocated not only the free dissemination of ideas, but we also opposed restrictions on the free movement of Guyanese. For four years, from 1953 to 1957, many PPP leaders were restricted to the areas where they lived and could not move about. Our concern about human rights was also shown by our firm stand against the hated doctrine of apartheid which was then practised by the South African government.

Another strong plank of the PPP was freedom of association particularly as it affected the rights of workers to belong to a trade union of their choice. By its dynamic and forceful struggle the PPP did its duty to the Guyanese and international working class. It is true to say that in Guyana today, there is no important facet of life which the People's Progressive Party did not pioneer - education, health, agriculture, banking - whatever.

The achievement in 1951 of one of the most advanced colonial constitutions was in itself an indirect help to freedom fighters elsewhere. Standing steadfast to principle the PPP was the only party in the Caribbean which did not join the US cold war bandwagon. It did not tack-and-turn and make deals with imperialism. It did not assume an opportunistic position even in the face of grave difficulties.

Mr Speaker, it established links and lent support to national liberation movements the world over. And it is not without significance

to note that when the Constitution was suspended in October 1953 the British ruling class in a *White Paper* declared that we had been supporting terrorists in Malaysia and Kenya. But time has vindicated our stand, he said, when the PPP did not join the wolf pack in blockading Cuba. Dr. Jagan wrote:

We are proud that we played a role however small in bringing independence to many colonies and socialism to Cuba.

In the eyes of the PPP, genuine proletarian internationalism is an essential aspect of true patriotism. One of the PPP's greatest achievements was the forging of unity between the major ethnic groups, Blacks and Indians. And in many other ways the PPP fulfilled its role as the vanguard party. We were the first in the Caribbean to attack the Puerto Rican economic planning model which was held up in the late 1940s as the panacea of the ills facing the Guyanese and Caribbean people.

When we pointed out the weakness of the Caribbean Federation as a glorified crown colony and refused to join it we were attacked. Many of the shortcomings of CARIFTA and CARICOM which the PPP from the very beginning exposed because of its wary view are now coming to light.

And Mr. Speaker, even on the question of dress reforms we were the first to introduce the shirt-jack. We pioneered the way in emphasizing our own history and culture.

The PPP government cancelled the lease to the golf club known as the National Park, one of the bastions of colonial privilege.

And above all we were the first to propagate the ideology of Marxism/Leninism.

So these were the achievements and even looking at them today, they are impressive by any standards.

But the PPP also took a principled position in terms of its internationalist outlook. In an article written by former President Janet Jagan, she wrote and spoke about some of the things that the PAC did even before the PPP's formation - fraternal support to the struggle in South Africa - and this was way back in the 1940s Mr Speaker - to striking British workers and to sugar workers in Cuba fighting for better conditions.

Perhaps its strongest contribution to the principle of internationalism was during the Canadian seamen's strike in the 1940s when their union called a world-wide strike on all Canadian ships manned by union members. Two ships were at the time in port Georgetown and our members immediately joined the strike. It extended solidarity to the South African people's struggle; international solidarity in the areas of protests to the people of Nicaragua, Grenada and many other countries.

Finally Mr Speaker, one should look at the working class and racial unity and what it was then and where we are today. I wish to develop this point by making a quotation from no less a distinguished personage than your good self, Mr Speaker. Writing an article entitled *Class Ideology and Identification Challenges for a Political Party*, a form of lecture you delivered, you wrote:

The PPP's electoral victory of 1953 confirmed for the first time in the history of Guyana the great potential for ethnic unity in political action. It confirmed the correctness of the PPP's approach to theoretical and organizational matters, particularly coalition building.

That as it was then is indeed what it should be today. It was necessary then and is necessary today. Again, I come back to the point made by my colleague on the other side when he spoke about the need for us to learn from the past. We must learn from the past if we are to understand where we are today and develop a consensus on the way forward.

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The people's victory of 1953 Mr Speaker, showed us in whatever form that there is unity in strength. For too long our people have suffered for many reasons - betrayals, corruption, all sorts of meandering - but we must pause today to recognize that throughout our history the missing element has been the unity of the working people. We have to work to bring back those days of the 1950s.

I feel the greatest tribute that we can deliver to our forefathers, our ancestors, is to ensure that we learn the lessons of the 1950s and strive to work to put them in correct perspective today because we have a nation to build. And as we salute our great ancestors, people of all nations and creeds, let us ensure that we do justice to their dreams, their struggles and their sacrifices for we are the children of those who struggled in the 1950s.

Let us work together to ensure that our children and their children and generations to come would understand and appreciate the sacrifices made by those brave citizens of Guyana in the 1950s, even prior to then, and after the 1950s.

So Mr Speaker, I have great pleasure in associating myself with this Motion as proposed, and hope that our country will unite and move forward.

Long live the unity of the people of Guyana.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Member Mrs Sheila Holder.

Mrs Sheila Holder: Mr Speaker, from the perspective of GAP/WPA the party I represent, the heroic achievement of the 1953 period is closely linked with that of Dr Cheddi Jagan and Mr Forbes Burnham, the founding fathers of Guyana's major political party - the People's Progressive Party.

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From our perspective the achievement was the winning of self-government through unity of the Guyanese people fifty years ago. After universal adult suffrage was fought for and won, winning political power for the masses was a mission that preoccupied the energies of that generation. This burning desire served as the impetus for winning political power for the masses from whence they came. It was an accomplishment that was achieved with courage and flair worthy of commendation on this occasion.

From this vantage point it is admirable that Minister Clement Rohee has sought to steer this session of the Eighth Parliament of the National Assembly of Guyana toward a respite to ponder their achievements at a time when the first courageous steps in this troubled political era are being taken to reform the Parliament of Guyana.

Acknowledging the fact that there are many others in the House today far more competent than me to reflect on the historical details of that period from the vantage point of their personal experiences, I prefer to focus instead on the realities of the colonial period and to remind this Honourable House that it was a period when men and women like former President Janet Jagan, Mr Brindley Ben, Jessie Burnham, Clinton Wong, Jainarine Singh, Ashton Chase and our own Hon elder/leader Eusi Kwayana, formerly Sydney King.

Mr Speaker, these Guyanese courageously stood up and resisted the injustices inherent in British rule that was synonymous with white dominance and the acknowledgement of the rights of kings of queens. It is appropriate that we should be reminded that there was once a Peter Rose who fought for the maintenance of the system of exclusion of the masses from self-determination and self-governance.

It is wholly appropriate that we should be reminded that we are not each other's enemies but each other's keepers and brothers and sisters who once fought our true enemies side by side.

Perhaps Mr Speaker this is indeed an opportunity being provided

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for our people to realize that as we squabble over the governance of a rapidly shrinking national card our external adversaries from the trade liberalization and globalization march are gaining ground on us through the employment of an awesome cultural trade machinery.

Mr Speaker, fifty years ago when the colonial shackles were still upon us the Legislative Council came into existence. Such phrases, I understand, as Exco-Legco they were the language of the day used with reference to what we know today as the Cabinet and the Legislative Assembly. There was also an Upper House, I understand, called the State Council and a Constitution known as the Kingdom Edition, I was told. But, all in all, the objective then was to lift the heavy weight of poverty off the backs of our people. The baton has been passed on to successive generations and those of us who sit today in this Honourable House, Mr Speaker, must realize that the task remains the same – the alleviation of perennial poverty and intrinsic internal and external injustices still being experienced generally by our people. Today, our task should be to ensure that the fundamental principles of democracy for which many Guyanese fought during the ensuing fifty years would indeed become a reality.

The litmus test, I believe, will then be a Guyana where the rights of minorities are assured, where the separation of power principle would be adopted, where national elections would no longer be a traumatic experience they currently are, and where the Guyanese people would come to understand that their rights, their power and responsibilities are entrenched in the power of the people.

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Member Mr Cyril Belgrave.

Mr Cyril CL Belgrave: I am proud to stand and to acknowledge the Motion moved by Cde Rohee in relation to the period in which a spark was lit in this country in 1953.

The reason why I can speak is that as a youngster, I joined that trail

in terms of our struggle. There are few persons who are sitting in this House, who would have experienced the period which as a youngster myself and others passed through, for we walked with those leaders, we talked with them, and we understood the real purpose of their struggle.

Growing up, I heard all the great things about freedom and liberty, but then I was to experience these things just outside of my home, in my life. So I joined the band of those youngsters in the Pioneer Youth League which was then headed by one of our guests here today, Brindley Horatio Ben, to learn or gain this experience.

I walked with them and understood that the 70% and more mentioned as not a reality, but I can tell you I saw it. I was at these meetings held in the city of Georgetown in particular. I can name all of our meeting areas – Parade Ground, Bourda Green, Cummings and Middle Streets, Carmichael and New Market Streets, Kingston, Kitty – which I was about to learn and gain from.

What I learnt in that period is that the important thing is for a people to manage their own affairs. That is very very important.

Some may not understand that the British did not give the concession of adult suffrage because they were so happy and lovable to us. It was gained via the Waddington Constitution Commission, by way of struggle, by way of protests, by way of actions. *[Interruption]*

Yes, protests helped us, there is no doubt about that. I stood many times to hear the leaders speak at the parade Ground, leaders like Cheddi Jagan, Forbes Burnham, Jainarine Singh, Clinton Wong, who all made their impact on the people just a few feet away from where the governor lived at the State House. The only message they gave there was 'we want to be free people; we want to manage our own affairs for the development of this country.'

For this reason when I started I said that a spark was lit. That period was the jumping-off point from which this struggle started. I

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know as a fact, and I experienced when domestics were lowly paid, sometimes they were paid by way of foodstuffs from the kitchen. There was a struggle by an organization formed a little later by the Women's Progressive Organisation which made that challenge, and at the helm of that organisation was Janet Jagan.

I can remember the experience of watching 1953 after the elections when our three women, three Js, Janet, Jessie and Jane, walked into that Parliament Chambers. It was a large turnout and a big crowd of women so happy to see that women had taken the position in political struggle by being part and parcel of it, because women were excluded. We must bear in mind that certain women had the privilege but the working class woman was excluded from these struggles and there it was these women, giants of women - one sits here and two are deceased - walked into that honourable Chamber with their heads held high and the cheers of our people greeting them. It was a honourable period for me as a youngster 17 years old. *[Applause]*

I can remember, dear friends - you may not know what took place because some of you may not have been even in embryonic form then to understand - when the thought went out that blood is running in the streets of Georgetown, St Georges Church is painted in red, a fabrication by some alleged honourable men, bishops, Catholic and English and other politicians who failed to capture the vote from the people in 1953. 'Blood runs in the streets of Georgetown' - not even a little pin bored somebody's hand, not one drop of blood. St George's Church was as pure as white and not in any way diluted by virtue of the remarks.

But those remarks were intended to challenge, as Minister Satyadeow Sawh was telling you, the intended gain that was expected from this PPP regime in 1953 for the working class people. Do you know what it was doing there? It was bringing not only the people of Guyana together but it was going to be a beacon, and it was a beacon for many other countries in the Caribbean which followed us and sought their independence. *[Applause]*

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Comrades, that historic day when the soldiers landed in this country after the suspension of the Constitution – you cannot feel it, I felt it - we were all there at the Transport Wharf and anxious. ‘Soldiers coming,’ everybody went down at Transport Wharf to see the soldiers because there was no riot, no quarrel, no problem in this country, but the soldiers arrived and my dear friends they came here with fixed bayonets, platoon after platoon with their guns pointing on the crowd. Do you know when we started to run? It was when somebody in the crowd said *they come to shoot us*. If you see scatteration.

A large group of people turned out who were not in anyway aggressive to the Crown, not in anyway aggressive to the governor, but curious to see soldiers landing in this country. Do you know that was a day that was decried?

The people in this country were terribly depressed for there it was that a happy-go-lucky people were challenged by outside forces to destroy their true representatives who were willing to fight for their cause.

Cdes, it is a known fact that the British in no way, during that period, gave up colonies and gave independence to colonies. You must try to enlighten yourself about that period. Youngsters must try to learn from that history, even some of the young ones here (and those not so young) who were not there, must try to capture that period in your own mind so as to know what took place then and to understand what we have gone through to arrive where we are today.

I would not want to put labels on people but a lot of people ‘rat out’ of that system, a lot of people who at that time were part and parcel of the struggle and willing to throw their fists in a challenge to the plantocracy, a challenge to the governor, and a challenge to the Crown.

When the pressure came some of the people ‘rat out’. And I can tell you that Dr Jagan and his team stood steadfast with the ship and suffered the consequences. Some were detained, some restricted.

My leader of the PYO was restricted to Berbice and could not

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come to meetings to discuss with us the development of the youths.

Dr Jagan was restricted and later imprisoned.

Mrs Jagan, our former President, was attacked, was imprisoned.

Ramkarran was imprisoned.

Do you believe the imprisonment that they suffered was because the British loved you, the citizens of this land? No way!

They loved their sugar, they loved their rum, they loved the bauxite, they loved all the catches that they could have gotten. They extracted the wealth, the gold and diamond from this country and were very perturbed when a government, a people, rose up to challenge their authority.

This is exactly what occurred in the period of 1953. We were challenging the authority of our masters so bad that they were saying that blood was running in the streets of Georgetown.

I say Cdes and friends that 1953 was a great moment in my life and I am sorry that many of you were not part, or were too young, to be part of that period. It changed my whole momentum in life; it changed my strategy of living because then I might have been living for myself but I was taught in 1953 from the struggle that so be it I must live with and for others.

That is when I joined the trade union movement under the eye of one Mr Ashton Chase who was then a stalwart in the trade union movement and we continued that level of struggle. Things went sour, things went bad, don't let me lay blame now, maybe at some other forum or discussion I can cast my blame and show my reasons to believe while persons who professed to be democratic and fighting the forces of oppression, other persons were antiworking class. I can say all those things but this isn't the right forum.

The forum here is to join with Minister Rohee and join with you

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who have joined with us to say that 1953 was a great period in the history of this country. It changed the whole situation of control of man by man, to control by the people. This is what we are doing today, we are sitting in this august Assembly which you could not have done in the past.

In those days you had to be a man with property, you had to be able to get a vote or to be elected. Today you don't have to get that, you go to the people and you 'talk-talk' and they decide you are the right party, as they have done with us, to lead and so be it you will continue to lead until you are removed from office.

I say 1953 was a momentous occasion for me and I proudly associate myself with Minister Rohee and others who have spoken well on this issue.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Member Mr Dev.

Mr Ravindra Dev: Mr Speaker, I rise to speak on the Motion before the House where we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the elections of 1953 and we pay tribute to those who played a role in the achievement of that victory.

No one can doubt that 1953 was a glorious period in the history of our country. No one can deny that. Because from the very first time in the history of what at that time was a colony, going back over 300 years, the people of this country had selected a group of men and women to speak on their behalf. When we look back at that period, at least when I look back at that period one thing that strikes me is the youthfulness of those individuals.

For that alone we have to pay tribute because it took a certain boldness, a definite, tremendous amount of courage to have looked at

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the ramparts and to have stormed them and say we want to speak for the downtrodden and those who did not have a voice before. As I listened to Mr Belgrave, I was struck by his sincerity as he recounted what had transformed him as an individual.

I was born just before that period and I also grew up with my father and grandfather who in their small way, their own subaltern way, had played their part in that struggle and had been transformed by it. So while most of us might not have been there in person at the time I am sure all Guyanese have in their own lives had to grapple with the reality of what occurred in 1953, because it is not that long ago, for we have individuals who were there, who were the leaders of that struggle right here with us.

But I want to say that today, as we look back, we can't keep casting our eyes backward. We have to look forward and it is in that spirit that I want to devote the rest of my comments.

If that group of leaders, that band of brave men and women so early on in the history of the British empire dared to struggle, and even to bring their voices to the attention of the colonists, then we have to ask the question why is it we have fallen so far from the goals as articulated by Mr Belgrave who participated in that struggle.

The goals he spoke about – freedom, liberty, freedom from want, all - I think we can see today that they are still very far from our grasp. So we must look back, we must pay tribute to that era and to the people who crafted that victory, but we have to look forward and we have to ask how is it we have failed? We have failed. We have to be honest because in not having reached those yardsticks that Mr Belgrave articulated, we have failed. This failure has resulted in the resignation of many of our people. Our people can be found in every country of the world today and in each of those countries we have achieved and achieved greatly. We are leaders in each of those countries. In New York City every day the Mayor of Schenectady comes down and recruits Guyanese to go up to Schenectady to rebuild the city. He actually comes down to

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New York City to recruit Guyanese to go up to Schenectady to go help to rebuild their city. Therefore, Guyanese are seen as builders, as creators, as achievers.

So whatever failure we have fallen into in this country it is not the people. It is a failure, I say, of the leaders. It is a failure of leadership. And I say this not to castigate or to berate or to put down anyone, because leaders are those who put themselves up to lead and they are supposed to be like individuals on the crest of a wave who can look a little further than the people, who can have a greater horizon than the people and so be able to chart a course that does not end in failure. So if there is failure the leaders have to take the blame. If there is success leaders take the credit.

Today I would like to delineate two aspects of this failure. One is ideological and the other personal. I will start with the latter.

Without question there are world leaders who allow ambition to overcome what they themselves articulated as the goals for this country. No question that they were leaders who put their own interests ahead of those of the country. But there will always be leaders like that. Man by definition is not perfect. Perfection lies only in God. So by definition men will falter.

It comes down, therefore, with the ideology, the ideas that we put forward. Such ideas, such ideology has to encompass human frailties and human weaknesses and to be able to overcome or control those weaknesses and create institutions where the interest of the people can be furthered. So in that sense even this aspect of failure was a failure of leadership. The leaders themselves did not build institutions to curb what will always be there, human frailties and human weakness.

I come back therefore to the ideology because we all have to be guided by some ideology. We hear nowadays people talk it's the end of history, there is no ideology. All of us have to be guided by some ideas or else we are merely existing, there will be no goal, no forward thrust to

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take us anywhere. So we come back to the ideology that guided these men and women.

Both offsprings of the early PPP, the present PPP and the PNC accepted that they were guided by the ideology of Marxism/Leninism.

Now, I am not here to go into any great analysis of that ideology but merely to say that Marxism/Leninism is and remains a tool that no one can say does not have relevance to the reality. It is and remains a tool. The problem was that many individuals confused the epistemological tool, a tool for gaining knowledge, with the reality, with the ontological reality that the tool purported to examine.

So for example when we hear of this great unity of 1953, it was touted as an organic unity, the unity of class interest because the theory said so. Today, we can look back and understand and accept that ethnic differences were always there. Mr Eusi Kwayana as far back as 1947 talked about the campaign in Buxton when he was castigated for supporting Dr Jagan based on his ethnicity. It was always there, so for us to talk about who practiced 'apanjat' or who practiced the campaign of race... If you go back to those early campaigns those are recurring motifs. Simply dismiss it.

To say those people were opportunists just to paste a label does not grapple with the reality. To label something is not to explain it, and not to explain it is not to deal with it, and not to deal with it is to ensure that it will remain there to haunt us in the future.

It is this refusal to take that tool of Marxism/Leninism to apply it and to, in my view, modify it as others have today done, to deal with the reality of how to deal with where we were as a people in going forward.

I think that was, I don't say a failure, because it is easy for us to look back and in hindsight use these very affirmative statements, but as a people if we are to go forward we have to look back as to what was the analysis, how did we confuse the realities with the tool and in going forward ensure that we don't repeat that mistake or we may have the

confusion that we hear in the background.

I say that what has passed is a failure of both parties, the PPP and the PNC. It is not that we should at this point even have any measure as to who failed more or who failed less. Guyana is at a historical juncture. There are the very basic initial steps, which I commend, where we are beginning to see that we have to work together again to, in a sense, maybe recreate that unity that we had at that golden moment that flashed across the sky so briefly.

But I say that if we are to make that unity in any way meaningful it must be based on reality. And what is that reality? That we have to abandon any notion of unity meaning unanimity – there will always be disagreements.

We have to accept that as a fact of human consciousness that we will see things differently and that we can't just label people, castigate them, throw them out and exclude them just because they see things differently. We have to say and echo the words of Cromwell that in the bowels of Christ I may be wrong. We have to have that acceptance that my position may be wrong and that I must give a listening to the other side.

The unity therefore we see are at two levels in two moments. One is political unity. Our party does not believe that Guyana can go forward unless there is political unity between the representatives of the two major ethnic blocs in this country and to be blunt that is the PPP and PNC.

There has to be some form of working toward the common good, working toward the benefit of the Guyanese people. There is no other way. Fifty years of experience - bitter experience - even experience today, not only last night, today's experience shows us that there is no other way as to the exact form such a unity will take. We are creative enough to do that, but I say we have to accept the principle that there has to be a political working together of these two major blocs for this country to go forward.

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I would like to say also that that unity at a political level can only be meaningful if it is matched by a unity in us seeing ourselves with some level of togetherness, with some level of identity in how we define ourselves in terms of our own identity.

There has been much discussion as to the existence of multiethnic realities within a state. I think the days are long gone where we have to insist that everyone has to be assimilated into someone's vision, be it the British vision, or a Creole vision. I think we have long past that. But we cannot throw out the baby with the bathwater.

Every country must have some vision of itself in some form of unity. We have to act in some way in step with each other. What can be the nucleus of such a unity? We would like to offer that in the construction of a democratic state in giving reality to those same values that Mr Belgrave speaks about, about freedom, about liberty, about equality, about the rule of law. While these may seem dry when you compare these with the ties of blood, they can give meaning to one's life, especially in a country that has known slavery and indentureship where those values were denied us. But such a vision can only come to be if those values are given reality in the everyday practices of the people.

So when one section of the population feels itself excluded, feels itself not participating in the governance of the country then those persons do not feel themselves Guyanese, those persons do not feel equal, those persons do not see the state their state.

I say again, that as a precursor therefore, we the Guyanese people seeing ourselves in terms of we the people, there must be that political unity at this historical moment. It is possible that after we have created such a vision of oneness we might be able to go back and talk about politics, of government, and opposition. But at this historical moment it is a luxury that not only can we not afford, but it is a luxury that actually is destroying us today.

So in conclusion Mr Speaker, as an individual whose lifespan is

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bounded by that great victory and today's date, and as I look back and see so many lives that have been wasted, I echo the sentiment of Mr Belgrave who speaks from experience, because I firmly believe that those leaders who embarked on that great course of action in 1950, and had victory in 1953, I really do believe that they wanted this nation to be better. Therefore I ask those leaders and all leaders today to reflect on why there is a gap between that aspiration and today's reality and for us to go forward to do what is right.

I thank you, and I support this Motion on behalf of my party.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Member Mr Donald Ramotar.

Mr Donald R Ramotar: Mr Speaker, I rise to support the Motion so ably moved by my colleague and friend Cde Clement Rohee. Before I go into the meat of my presentation allow me to welcome those persons who are here who I think at this historic moment - the fiftieth anniversary - who played an important role, should be here at this Sitting. I welcome them here this afternoon. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, in every people's history there are outstanding dates and no doubt the events that took place in April and May of 1953 are dates that we in Guyana can look back on for inspiration and to learn the lessons and avoid the pitfalls of the past. But I think that some of those events were so momentous that even though 50 years separate us from that time, it is important to bring back to people's minds what were actually achieved in that period of time.

The elections of 1953 more than any event before increased the influence of the ordinary people of this country on the politics and on the government of our society. Maybe one figure will suffice to let us understand the significance of what took place then.

In 1953, the registered voters were 208,939 and that represented

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an increase of almost 150,000 over the elections of 1947. That was because of the winning of universal adult suffrage that allowed people without property, without education, just being ordinary human beings living in our society to have an opportunity to participate in the political life of Guyana.

The winning of course of the franchise was a culmination of an important aspect of our people's struggle for freedom which stretched back to the moment when the slave system began here and when the slave system itself was resisted in this country. It was won by the relentless struggles led firstly by the Political Affairs Committee and then the People's Progressive Party that was founded in 1950. It is apposite to recall that the British Guiana Constitutional Commission was appointed on 8 October 1950, known popularly as the Waddington Commission with the following terms of reference:

To review the franchise, the composition of the legislature and the Executive Council in light of the economic and political development of the colony because at that point in time the impact of the struggles began by the PAC was making itself felt.

This was no doubt referring to the struggles of the late 1940s including the killing of the Enmore Martyrs, the demand for elections under universal adult suffrage, and for independence of our country. These were issues raised by the PAC and by the people's lone representative in the Parliament between 1947 and 1953, Dr Jagan. It was also written on the banners of the PPP at the time of its foundation on 1 January 1950. The events of April and May of 1953 were major advances on the road to independence.

Mr Speaker, there is another aspect of the events of 1953 that has a bearing on the politics of today. That is the issue of unity of our people and the fight against racism. Racism was used by those political forces opposed to the PPP in the 1950s and more precisely in the 1953 elections. At that time they were roundly defeated.

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In his message at the opening of the Legislature on 18 May 1953, Governor Sir Alfred Savage was forced to note:

British Guiana has been described as the land of six peoples and the most heartening feature of the recent elections was the absence of racialism.

The fact that universal adult suffrage was won and the fact that in 1953, at the elections the PPP won eighteen of the 24 seats, was a demonstration of the power of a united people. It was a testimony to what can be achieved by a united people.

Allow me to quote from Mr George Robinson's contribution to the debate of the Governor's address on 29 June 1953 at the level of the State Council, that is the Upper House, and he was a nominated member along with Mr Ulric Fingall by the People's Progressive Party. He said:

I would say the People's Progressive Party has been able to achieve something in this country which no other organization has been able to achieve and that is the welding together of the six peoples of this land into a single entity is not for a policy which anyone can doubt.

Sir, today when some unscrupulous politicians and irresponsible talkshow hosts try to use ethnic differences to promote other agendas, including their political careers, the events of 1953 remind us that they can and will be defeated.

I would like from this rostrum to urge those practicing politicians of today to have morality in their politics. The practice of racism must be revisited at every level.

To quote Dr Jagan who, on being thrown out of office in 1964, immediately after he was thrown out in his first article in the *Thunder* he wrote:

Racism is the greatest curse of our land. Anyone who

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spreads racial propaganda must be severely dealt with. Such a person is an enemy to himself and to his country.

Those who use race to promote their political fortunes are immoral politicians to say the very least.

Mr Speaker I firmly believe that once our overall loyalty is to Guyana, once the best interest of all the peoples of this country remains uppermost in our minds then our diverse origin is not a weakness but a source of enrichment and strength.

Mr Speaker, our Cdes of the short-lived Parliament of 1953 have left us a legacy of internationalism and solidarity that we must continue to emulate. Allow me Sir to point to two instances on the Parliament of 1953 in which that expression of internationalism was demonstrated.

In reply to the governor's message to the Assembly on 18 May 1953 Dr Jagan told the House:

The House observes the initiative recently shown by the British prime minister in attempting to ease the present world tension and hope the initiative will be shown in bringing about an end to racial discrimination and ruthless oppression of and against colonial and native peoples particularly in South Africa, Malaysia and Kenya. In such efforts he can be assured of the full and enthusiastic support of the peoples whom this House represents.

In that period when all of our country was under domination, that message coming from a parliament, from a legislator, was a powerful message of solidarity to the peoples struggling everywhere.

Secondly Sir, on 18 August 1953 a Motion proposed by Mr Ramkarran stated as follows:

Whereas the Government of the Union of South Africa has been pursuing for some time a policy of racial

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discrimination and fascism, and whereas the last Legislative Council has already protested against this policy;

Be it resolved that this House recommends that all trade between British Guiana and South Africa be discontinued.

That must probably have been one of the earliest calls for the boycott of apartheid South Africa coming from the Legislature of the 1953 Parliament. But Mr Speaker, I think it is important because this afternoon I heard some people saying that nothing was achieved at that time. It was remarkable what was achieved with limited powers.

We have to take into consideration that the government did not have all the powers at its disposal, that they were counterbalanced by a nominated Upper House. They had a governor that had veto powers over their actions in many ways and they were very clear about that but they all recognized that what happened in 1953 was a major breach to the domination of oppression of the colonial peoples.

I just want to mention in passing that several Bills were passed to strengthen the positions of ordinary people, working people of this country. Most noted was the Labor Relations Bill designed to strengthen industrial democracy that was tabled on 24 September 1953. And other Bills including Factory Safety Act and Docks Safety Act were all passed and piloted by the then Minister of Labour, Mr Ashton Chase.

Dr Jagan piloted the Tenure and Rice Farmers Bill and he also piloted the Motion to amend the Co-op Credit Bank Ordinance with the purpose of increasing food production and developing the fishing industry in our country.

Mr Burnham piloted the Bill to repeal the Subversive Literature Act from this country, one of the most oppressive Acts we had in the period of that time, an act that prevented the free flow of ideas, something that is very cardinal to any type of democracy.

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In conclusion Mr Speaker, let me say that we are celebrating this event at a very important juncture in our history. As you are aware Sir, since 1992 the PPP/Civic Government has done very much despite the problems that still exists, despite the many issues that we are still confronted with that came about as a result of some of the events of that period - some of the divisions that took place.

Obviously, Cde Belgrave was correct that many people want to live and experience things before they can experience change. You have to appreciate that a vast amount of our people were living in logics without floors, had no water services, no electricity – we still have a lot of problems with that but, at least, it is far better than what it was.

We have to appreciate the fact that we could not determine our own destiny in many ways.

We have to appreciate these things to understand how far we have come from those times.

Mr Speaker, more recently the document signed by His Excellency President Jagdeo and Opposition Leader Corbin promises to lead us toward achieving greater cohesiveness and prosperity in our country. Let me say that while our comrades of 1953 had a lot of obstacles – I mentioned some of them just now, the reserved powers of the Governor and the Upper House and other things like that – they made the first main breach of the colonial system and laid the foundation for a free, independent and democratic Guyana.

Finally, let me say that the events of 1953 have become for us and for future generations a source of inspiration, of hope and at the same time a sounding-board to guard against mistakes and pitfalls in our time.

I thank you for your attention. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you very much Honourable Member.

Hon Member Mr Winston Murray.

Mr Winston S Murray: Mr Speaker, before I make my brief presentation I wish Sir, to acknowledge in our midst the distinguished invitees who have joined us for this occasion and particularly to recognize a former President among us in the person of Mrs Janet Jagan.

Sir, when the People's National Congress/Reform was approached to support this Motion we readily agreed so to do because contained in it are two specific aspects of 1953 with which we want deeply and sincerely to associate ourselves. The first is that that year marked the year when universal adult suffrage came to Guyana and the 1953 elections were held on that basis.

We believe that is an event that is worth recollecting because it gave to the ordinary citizens of this country without the need for any minimum income qualification, without the need for belonging to any particular stratum of society, the right to say who should comprise the government of their country. We want to associate with the recognition of that historically important fact in the evolution of our country.

The other aspect of this Motion Sir, that we want to associate with fervently is that resolve clause which says that:

The National Assembly pays tribute to all those who played a role in the achievement of the foregoing and particularly to the people of British Guiana united across ethnic and class lines who were mainly responsible for making the momentous achievements possible which eventually led to the independence of Guyana.

Sir, it is fit and right that we should look back with deep nostalgia to that period in our history as represented by the 1953 general elections when our people were together, when our people recognized that in unity there is strength.

And Sir sadly 50 years after that momentous display of unity by the people we are, I suggest without fear of contradiction a divided people. The question that arises is what has gone wrong or what went wrong

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over the intervening period of 50 years.

When some people spoke today and referred to the victory of the People's Progressive Party at the elections of 1953, I think we ought to be careful to give acknowledgement to the fact that in that People's Progressive Party of 1953 were the representatives and leaders of the two major ethnic groups in this country in the personages of Dr Jagan and Mr LFS Burnham.

The truth of the matter is for whatever reason and on whatever basis, when these two people came apart our country came apart along ethnic lines.

Fifty years after I think we are trying to revisit the spirit of 1953 and I will come to that in my closing. But what I want to say before I get there Sir is this, that as we examine the period and as we speak about the government of the People's Progressive Party and all its achievements, we ought to be careful that we are not speaking in a triumphalist mode as though some particular section is the section that performed and some particular section is the section that didn't perform. Because if we open up that line of debate in this House, I believe it will never lead to a successful conclusion and a unanimous vote on this Motion before us today.

I therefore, Sir, eschew such an approach and simply wish to say that all of us, all of the persons in that era coming down to this era have to carry out an introspection, for I do not believe any of us over that period has been perfect.

And, now, Sir, I come to the year 2003, fifty years after. I sense, and I hope I am right, that in the communiqué signed by His Excellency President Jagdeo and Leader of the Opposition Robert Corbin, there are the seeds for us to recreate this spirit of 1953.

But the mere seeds, whether those seeds will blossom into flowers and further into fruit is up to each of us in this Parliament and up to the

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executive leaders of our country.

We have proposed, and it is in the public domain an approach, we do not say that our approach is the only approach nor indeed that it has all the elements for an approach that will bring our people back together. I say without fear of contradiction that at this juncture with the development of our country, our people are looking to us for leadership. They take their example from us. If we show division within the leadership of our respective political parties, that division is reflected at the grass roots in our society.

So let us start by looking at ourselves. And I pledge Sir, on behalf of the People's National Congress/Reform, that we will do whatever it takes to bring about the spirit of 1953 so that our people can regain hope once more, and with realistic expectation look forward to a day when they can look at their neighbour and be pleased to say 'good morning,' and look forward to a day when their lot in life will be better because their leaders have created the framework, and have delivered to them true leadership, and have brought them to a period of prosperity.

It is against that background Sir, that we of the People's National Congress/Reform support wholeheartedly the Motion before this Honourable House.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Member Mrs Melville.

Mrs Shirley J Melville: Mr Speaker I rise to support the Motion placed before this Honourable House on the fiftieth anniversary of the first general elections held in British Guiana.

Mr Speaker it is indeed of utmost importance that we pay tribute to the persons who were very much instrumental in making such a part of our history in the 1950s. It is heartening to hear that all present in this

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House here today have come to recognize that unity has indeed been very instrumental in the success of those persons in the 1950s.

Mr Speaker, there are lessons to be learnt from that era. And today as we look at the part of it being united across ethnic and class groups we should reflect on where we are today. As our country is in the situation it is today, we need to be able to bring some of those lessons, and we need to be able to sit together and work together in unity for the benefit of our country. We each have a responsibility to the nation to ensure that we in this Honourable House are all role-models to our people.

Mr Speaker, in my very brief presentation I would like to plead to each and every one of us in this House that we should not disappoint the people of Guyana.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Member Mr Carberry.

Mr E Lance Carberry: Mr Speaker, this occasion which marks the fiftieth anniversary of the holding of the first election under universal adult suffrage marks in fact the removal of what was a formidable barrier to mass participation in the affairs of our country. It was the event that made it possible for us to have one man or woman, one vote, and that was a very important, historical event. It is because of the significance of that that we on this side of the House felt that a Motion of this sort should be supported.

My own experience of 1953 was as a young boy of watching and listening to the adults. There was a sense of euphoria, a feeling that this election heralded a new era of freedom for Guyana.

I felt that as a youngster:

When I went to school on the day the soldiers landed it was a

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period of complete bemusement between myself and colleagues at school. We could not understand the significance of these soldiers with drawn bayonets, fully armed on the streets of Georgetown. So I understand what Mr Belgrave was talking about. But I believe that the 1953 election and the results which flowed from that election should have been a watershed in the development of our country.

We have to remind ourselves that there is a distinction to be made between bigotry and racism. I believe that the 1953 election was an attack and a defeat of bigotry. I believe, unfortunately, we allowed racism to remain alive.

It is a pity Mr Speaker that an occasion of such historical worth and experience seems to be slipping a bit sometimes to an attempt to convert it into an occasion of partisan triumphalism. It is unfortunate.

It is instructive that the PPP of 1953 was, Mr Speaker, a party which recognized the need for a common multiethnic nation – a nation that is enriched by the diversity which all of our ancestors brought to this piece of territory called Guyana.

I have over the years tried to speak to some of the people who have been involved as adults in this event and what strikes me is that there is a certain idealism. But what I was never able to discern was really a common vision.

Unfortunately that has been the line it has taken, Mr Speaker, and influences of all of the intervening experiences have served to bring us to this point where on Tuesday, 6 May 2003 the historic Communiqué was signed by the President of Guyana and the Leader of the Opposition.

Let us hope Mr Speaker that we have acquired enough wisdom from the events of 1953 to ensure that the heralding of the beginning of constructive engagement would entrench a truly democratic culture in Guyana. We need to entrench a democratic culture because it is only by so doing that we are going to have an environment for development

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which all of our people yearn for.

If we as a people, Mr Speaker, sincerely and in good faith commit to the achievement of the events that are heralded by that Communiqué, I think we would have earned the right to pay tribute as this Motion says to all those who played a role in the achievement of the foregoing and particularly to the people of Guyana united across ethnic and class lines.

I believe Mr Speaker that if we have in fact earned that right, perhaps we can commit now to a common vision from which all of this will lead us as a people to realize our national motto of *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation.

Hon Clement J Rohee: Mr Speaker, from the outset I would like to express from this side of the House our deepest appreciation and gratitude to all those who, in conveying their thoughts, sentiments and views on this Motion, found it proper and appropriate to lend their support to this Motion.

By doing so Mr Speaker, all of us have in effect paid homage to those who participated in the struggle and sacrifice beginning from the period which we are currently discussing, so that we could gather here this afternoon, in this august Assembly to discuss and to revere in respect of their contributions.

Mr Speaker, in these trying times when the history of nations and the culture of nations are being ravaged and vulgarized, I believe it is important, if not critical, that we retrace our steps and venture to our past in order to reconnect, make that reconnection, in order to re-embrace our history and those who were there before us.

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Even if it is a matter of embracing euphoria, even if it is a matter of embracing romanticism, of being nostalgic as a people Mr Speaker, we need to engage in these exercises from time to time as a people.

This is our history.

We have no other history to claim but our own and therefore it is for us to make that connection, emotional an otherwise, with that history.

Mr Speaker unity is not, as experience has shown, going to be won by waving our magic wand nor is it going to be accomplished by imposition of any sort. It is something that requires hard, patient and persistent work.

I believe the Guyanese people, through their respective representatives, whether it is political parties in or out of office, governmental or non-governmental organizations, have representatives who can do this on their behalf.

I believe therefore it is important Mr Speaker, for us to find the issues that unite us as a people and to build on those.

If our history could be one of those unifying factors, let us use that history, let us utilize that history to do so. Too many things divide us in the contemporary world and in these contemporary times. We have to work on them. We have to work, as many speakers have said, the way we are currently working to accomplish this unity.

There are many lessons to be learnt from the period we have discussed and I want to submit Mr Speaker that if there is one lesson that we should learn, it is the lesson that we need to recollect the moral values that guided some of our leaders, which made some of them go beyond the call of duty - thinking about the nation, thinking about the country and not only about themselves.

Mr Speaker, the problems, the errors and failures were not to be found in the 133 days of 1953. That is not where the errors and failures

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are to be found – it is what followed, the aftermath. And, perhaps at some distant time we should engage in some kind of nationwide discussion on issues of this kind. The PPP was in office, it wasn't in power.

Literature shows that the PPP or the ministers entered the government when the budget was already settled, and therefore they had to work within those constraints notwithstanding the will and youthful exuberance that many of them showed in those 133 days.

Mr Speaker, one of the key players in this process, in the entire course of events, beyond the shadow of a doubt - and I am not saying this to introduce any element of division or any element of greater share of the lion's share of history so to speak – was Cheddi Jagan. The bold and courageous ideas and actions which he demonstrated at that time continued up to the time of his death.

By this I mean Mr Speaker, that even ideas such as the new global human order, the call for a new human global order, the call for a regional integration fund, some say the time has not come.

But leaders Mr Speaker, have to be visionaries, they have to have vision. They cannot think only about the exigencies of the current situation and firefighting matters. This is what makes leaders. If the leaders of 1953 had a vision of Guyana to take it onto a highway that will bring prosperity and happiness for the Guyanese people, then it behooves us or those who today claim the mantle of leadership to have that vision as well.

Mr Speaker, at the national level Dr Jagan and the PPP have always been striving for national working class unity. This was to be found in the call for a national patriotic front and a national front government. This was an attempt to move and to continue the process of national reconciliation and bringing harmony to the country. The ability to combine strategy with tactics which was manifested in the need for the party to shift away – and I want my colleagues on the other side to hear this –

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from a policy of civil resistance and nonco-operation to critical support. All of this was done as part of the historical legacy of 1953.

Mr Speaker we on this side of the House like, I believe, others who have spoken on the Motion, are proud to be part of this glorious history to which we all make a stake and a claim. We are proud on this side of the House to be associated with a party which has continued with a particular legacy.

And Mr Speaker, we also agree that there are lessons to be learnt from the 1953 experience. The one and singly most important lesson is the need to uphold, more than ever before, the high moral values and a deep commitment to serve the people of this country.

Mr Speaker, this debate cannot conclude without us making reference to the one man who recorded the emotions of those days in his poems. I am referring to the great Martin Carter. In his poem *All are Involved*, he says,

This I have learnt, today a spec tomorrow a hero

Hero or monster you are consumed

Like a jig shakes the loom

Like a web is spun the pattern

All are involved, all are consumed.

Mr Speaker as I rest on the words of Martin Carter I look to my left and I see those who were on the left in those days we pay homage, our great respect to those leaders.

Mr Speaker, I believe we need more debates like this in this Honourable House.

I conclude once again by thanking each and every one for supporting wholeheartedly the Motion and for seeing this as a building block for

building racial and working class unity once again to this nation.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Motion put and carried.

The Speaker: On this subject, if I may just mention, the exhibition in the hall was organized by the National Archives for this sitting. A fuller or more complete exhibition will be mounted from tomorrow in the annex of the National Archives which will be opened to the public and shall continue until the end of May.

I would like to thank our guests, those persons who attended this afternoon, for this debate.

ITEM 2 – TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE DISCIPLINED FORCES COMMISSION SUBSTITUTED

WHEREAS Article 197A(5) of the Constitution states:

“ (5) Disciplined forces commissions may be constituted by the National Assembly from time to time, as may be necessary, with power to examine any matter relating to the public welfare, public safety, public order, defence or security, including the structure and composition of the disciplined forces and make recommendations generally with a view to promoting their greater efficiency, and giving effect to the need in the public interest that the composition of the Disciplined Forces take account of the ethnic constituents of the population. ”

AND WHEREAS the Agreement by the President and the Leader of the Opposition as reflected in the Communiqué dated 6 May 2003, provides for the establishment of a Disciplined Forces Commission,

BE IT RESOLVED that the National Assembly approves the establishment of a Disciplined Forces Commission.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that with respect to the Commission, the National Assembly agrees to the following:

- 1. The Commission shall comprise five (5) persons, drawn from qualified and competent persons with senior level experience and expertise in any of the following areas: the Judiciary, the legal profession, the Police Force, other disciplined forces, human rights organizations, management, or any other relevant discipline or area of expertise, and shall be both investigatory and advisory.*
- 2. The President shall appoint the Chairperson after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition.*
- 3. The President shall also nominate two Commissioners and the Leader of the Opposition shall nominate two, taking account of the need to consult broadly with human rights and other organizations.*
- 4. The Commission shall be appointed within two weeks of the meeting between the President and the Leader of the Opposition, held on 5 May 2003 and will complete its task within six months.*
- 5. The Commission shall, in accordance with Article 197A(6) of the Constitution, have all the powers and authority of a Commission of Inquiry under the Commission of Inquiry Act, Chapter 19:03 and shall as far as practicable adopt the procedure set out therein.*
- 6. The Commission shall present its report and findings, recommendations and implementation timetable to the National Assembly within six months save that the*

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Commission shall give priority to its Inquiry into the Guyana Police Force and shall present an Interim Report thereon to the National Assembly within three months.

7. The Report and Interim Report of the Commission shall be subject to an affirmative resolution of the National Assembly.

8. The findings and recommendations of the Commission that are accepted by the National Assembly shall be implemented within a specified timeframe and monitored by the Sector Committee determined by the National Assembly.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Assembly approves,

1. That the Commission shall inquire into the Disciplined Forces, ie the Guyana Police Force, the Guyana Defence Force, the Guyana Prison and the Guyana Fire Service, and all their branches, departments and units, focusing and making recommendations for their reform, sustained professional development and structure. In so doing, the commission shall pay particular attention to:

- The changing context of the operations of the Disciplined Forces, taking into consideration national and international developments.*
- Their relationship with and responsibility to the civilian authorities.*
- The methods and processes of achieving greater ethnic balance.*
- Operational efficiency and effectiveness including interservice co-operation and collaboration.*

- Financial and public accountability.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Assembly hereby mandates that the Commission shall give priority to its enquiry into the Guyana Police Force and, within three months of the establishment of the Commission shall examine and, where necessary, make recommendations on the following:

- 1. The composition, structure, functions and operations of the Guyana Police Force, bearing in mind:*
 - (a) The changing nature of crime and influence of the traffic in illicit drugs and firearms, backtracking and money laundering*
 - (b) The relevance of the recommendations of the International Commission of Jurists, particularly with regard to racial imbalance in the Force, to today's reality.*
 - (c) Terms and conditions of employment, remuneration, training, accommodation, criteria for promotion, discipline, equipment and logistical needs.*
 - (d) The rules of engagement, including manuals of procedure of operation.*
 - (e) The rules, regulations, criteria for granting and controls regarding issuance of firearm licences.*
 - (f) Powers of arrest and detention.*
 - (g) Concerns about the adequacy and application of the Coroner's Act.*
 - (h) The origin, course and development of allegations of*

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(a) Extra-judicial killings, summary executions and the involvement of sections of the Guyana Police Force in illegal activities.

(b) Political interference in the administration, management and conduct of the GPF with reference to the Constitution, the Police Act Chapter 16:01 and all other relevant laws.

(i) Attacks on the Police Force and the shooting and killing of members of the GPF.

2. Ways in which increased public support and confidence can be achieved. For example, examine ways of improving:

(a) Police/community relations.

(b) The functions and operation of Office of Professional Responsibility and Public Relations.

(c) The establishment and functioning of Community Policing Groups.

3. *The introduction of best practices from elsewhere based on their applicability to Guyana.*

4. *The location and staffing of police stations and outposts, particularly in the hinterland, within the context of changed and changing demographic and other relevant considerations.*

The Speaker: Hon Minister of Education.

Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey: Mr Speaker I rise in support of the Motion standing in my name.

Today, we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the introduction of

adult suffrage in Guyana and maybe it is as good a juncture as any for us to contemplate scrutinizing some of our oldest institutions. Security is one of the first requirements of any people and from the earliest of colonial times some kind of militia has been in existence. By the time the Police Force was created to take over from the ailing Militia in 1839, the latter was re-established in 1859, there was already a lengthy colonial security tradition that purported to protect the general interest. Therefore, the forces that this Motion seeks to consider have a long tradition of service.

The effort today is to initiate a process that we hope will better equip the forces to successfully confront contemporary challenges.

Mr Speaker, given the significance of this day in the history of political participation in Guyana, at the risk of being somewhat repetitive, a few general words about our political development would be appropriate. As we are all aware Mr Speaker in terms of actually improving, the life opportunities of our people over the last 50 years have been disappointing.

There have been isolated periods of development and hope, but taken as a whole and placed within a comparative framework our condition has deteriorated. Many people will, rightly, in my view, blame our politics and thus the activities surrounding these Chambers for that decline.

As Minister Rohee, Minister Sawh, Mrs Holder and the Hon Member Dev have pointed out, it was a period in which there were many happy, good, great and distinguished lives. Many such lives were lived and historians will continue to attempt to decipher the whys and wherefores, and the rights and wrongs. But what is certain is that they will not fail to recognize the disfunctionalities of our political relations.

Today we are at the threshold of institutionalizing new political arrangements. Hon Member Murray called it planting new seeds. We must be bold enough to discard old, some would say dangerous, ideas which have for whatever reason, clearly not worked.

Constitutions are political arrangements and they must fit the context. They must be able to provide a level of social stability and development necessary for people to acquire the good life; be able to provide space for governments to govern effectively; be able to provide a context for opposition to effectively oppose and possibly form a government.

It matters not how traditional, or how comparatively progressive any political arrangement may be, if it fails on the stated counts then it is at best useless.

Mr Speaker, the Motion before us comes at a time when there is widespread concern about the nature and growth of crime particularly violent crimes in our society. As a result the approach suggested here is cognizant of quite diverse views.

It is generally agreed that most governmental processes can, and some would say should, periodically be publicly reviewed. It is also widely recognized that although sensitive enquiries into the general or specific operation of the security forces are now internationally commonplace, for example, we are all aware of the inquiry into the operations of the London Police Force after its institutionalized racist approach botched the investigations into the death of young Stephen Lawrence. As we speak, the four-year inquiry into collusion between the security forces and terrorists in Northern Ireland has concluded that those forces colluded in the assassination plot is highly topical.

Right here in Guyana there was the 1986 Crane Inquiry into the Guyana Police Force which focused on recruitment, promotion, training and related issues.

Therefore, what appears to disturb some people is not the demand for an inquiry in itself, but its appropriateness in the present climate. It is argued that irrespective of how laudable the stated intention of those who proposed the inquiry, it will turn out to be some kind of a witch-hunt and as a result it will more likely than not be most debilitating to the very people whose services must now be at their optimum. These persons

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understand the need for modernization and change, but tend to seek it within a framework that is less open to public scrutiny.

On the other hand, there are those who contend that this inquiry is necessary and long overdue if the Disciplined Forces and particularly the Police Force are to regain the public support without which they cannot be successful. For the most part this latter group also claims to eschew a witch-hunt. They claim to seek greater stakeholder understanding of and involvement in the development of disciplined services rooted in the community.

Fellow Members, our politics should be based on compromise, and dogmatism and opinionatedness are its enemies.

On this I agree with the Hon Member Dev.

Mr Speaker, five good persons who are to make up this Commission of Inquiry are to be chosen after broad consultation. We believe that this process which requires the appointment of senior-level persons from a wide range of disciplines will provide us with people with the vision and expertise to understand the present environment and contemporary requirements.

Yesterday we amended the Constitution to allow this Commission to have effective powers to enable it to do its work. The Commission is expected to complete an interim report that focuses on the Police Force within three months and its entire work within six.

Mr Speaker, the terms of reference of the Commission are both general and specific. They seek to create space for the inclusion of issues, for emphasis, that are important at the same time as they address specific stakeholder concerns.

At the general level, recognizing the changing nature of the problems which now confront the disciplined forces, the ethnic diversity of our society, our level of social economic development, which perhaps requires greater interservice co-operation and collaboration, and the implication

of all this, and all this could have for further relationship between the civilian and security authority, the Commission is required to make recommendations for reforms that would lead to greater operational efficiency and effectiveness.

This is a call for modernization, and demands the development of a vision that, while considering the above and, perhaps other variables, takes into account modern trends in policing.

Mr Speaker there is a feeling that the racial balance in the security forces needs to better reflect that existing in our society. The belief is that such a readjustment would lead to fairer policing.

There has been concerns about the racial imbalance of our security forces long before the 1950s – even before the Report of the International Commission of Jurists and therefore efforts have been made to redress the situation. However, perhaps for cultural and other reasons this balance has not yet been achieved.

There is now much talk about the need to timetable fixed quotas; about the possibilities of regionalism and so on. The demand for a degree of balancing in security forces of ethnically diverse society has become routine and given the requirements of economy, efficiency and the actual reduction of ethnic insecurity, we support such approaches.

Mr Speaker, allegations of extra-judicial killings and political interference in the disciplined forces are not new. Recently the *Stabroek News* carried an article that gave some indications of the forgoing history and scope. Further the historical involvement of the security forces in the political arena is legendary.

Entrenched operational cultures are most difficult to overcome, and thus we recognize the usefulness of an approach such as this inquiry which can provide a decisive break and also allow public participation in the process of transformation. It is particularly troubling to us, and I suspect to all Members in this room, and to all Guyanese, that so many

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of our security people are being wantonly killed.

This inquiry is not only about making the forces effective in protecting the people, but also about making them safe with good working environments for the protectors. As a result the Commission is required to consider the conditions of employment, pay, training, accommodation, promotion, discipline, et cetera.

Fellow Members, the formation of Community Policing Groups is only one aspect of modern policing community relations. There is a feeling that the community will only truly aid the Police if it has confidence in it, if it understands and at points can participate in a policing process that it believes to be fair and open.

In ethnically diverse societies all communities must be equally protected and made to feel that they are equally protected. From this standpoint the rules and regulations that govern policing engagement with different sections of the populace must be transparent and possibly facilitate levels of community oversight. The institutionalized process of complaint and redress must be open, timely, relatively simple and affordable.

Mr Speaker, presentments require that we isolate the issues. But for the most part the issues herein are very much interrelated and the Commission must be encouraged to so consider them. We live in new times that require new approaches, new styles of management and greater levels of public participation and inclusiveness. Though noting the concern raised about the timeliness of this inquiry, we believe that it will eventually lead to more effective security arrangements, the kind of policing and security our people desire and deserve.

I thank you Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Member Mr Vincent Alexander.

Mr Vincent L. Alexander: Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise on behalf of the People's National Congress/Reform to support this Motion, a Motion which seeks to put in motion the terms of reference for the Disciplined Forces Commission and indeed the Commission itself. In doing so Mr Speaker, I wish to refer to the Motion itself and to the intent of the Motion in particular.

This Motion, in its second resolve clause, provides for a commission that will inquire into the Disciplined Forces, that is, the Guyana Police Force, the Guyana Defence Force, the Guyana Prison and Fire Services and all their branches, departments and units, focusing and making recommendations for their reform, sustained professional development and structure. In so doing the Commission shall pay particular attention to:

- The changing context of the operations of the Disciplined Forces, taking into consideration national and international developments.
- Their relationship with and responsibility to the civilian authorities.
- The methods and processes of achieving greater ethnic balance.
- Operational efficiency and effectiveness including interservice co-operation and collaboration.
- Financial and public accountability.

Mr Speaker, with specific reference to these areas, I would like to make the observation that when we speak about the changing context of the operations of the Disciplined Forces, we have to speak of this context both in terms of the national situation and the international situation.

And we know Mr Speaker in recent times, more and more, the Disciplined Forces and in particular armed forces, have been held accountable for acts not only in the local jurisdiction but beyond the local jurisdiction because of the number of conventions that we have that regulate their behaviour which are applied internationally. So it is our

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understanding that this context we are talking about has to do not only with national law but international law and the obligations derived therefrom.

We also recognize Mr Speaker that the whole question of relationship to civilian authorities is a very critical one and would wish to underline that our understanding is that for all intents and purposes armies are not subjected to these authorities. They are subjected to the constitution and their main role continues to be worldwide on threats of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Mr Speaker, we have recognized the need, the concern that has been expressed over decades about ethnic imbalance in our security forces.

We are in support of this Commission addressing this issue.

However, we do not expect that in so doing that they will sacrifice meritocracy for mediocrity. Meritocracy will have to continue to be one of the bases on which we seek to have persons join the profession and to climb the ladder within the profession.

So Mr Speaker, we recognize the broad nature of the work of the Commission in relation to the Disciplined Forces.

But, Mr Speaker, we also recognize that in the third resolve clause it speaks specifically to the inquiry of the Guyana Police Force and that it seeks to specify that this inquiry should, within the period of three months, provide us with recommendations in relation to the composition, structure, function and operations of the Guyana Police Force within a particular context, a context in the nature of crime, the influence of the traffic in illicit drugs and firearms, backtracking, money-laundering; in the context of the Report of the International Commission of Jurists to which I referred earlier; in the context of the problems that the Police have been faced with in terms of the conditions of employment, remuneration, training and other conditions; in the context of their manner of engagement, rules and regulations pertaining to the issuance of firearm;

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and in particular in the context of extra-judicial killings, political interference of the administration and the attacks on the Police themselves and killing of their members.

Mr Speaker these are the areas which the Commission will focus on during the first three months, the areas in which one would expect a report to come to this House that would seek to move the Police beyond being a police force, because it occurs to us that the Police Force seems to be trapped by its name and fleeing its motto which is *Service and Protection*. Very often it seems to be trapped by its name and in particular the last word, force, and not involved in its motto.

So we look forward to a report that will lend to the Police Force being one of service and protection rather than one of mere force.

Mr Speaker, one may ask the question why is it that the People's National Congress/Reform is in support of this Motion. I wish to say to you Mr Speaker, that the People's National Congress/Reform is in support of this Motion because it has struggled for some time for the realization of such a commission.

It was the People's National Congress which in 2001, in this very Assembly, tabled a Motion for the inquiry into the Police Force, because at that time we had recognized the problem and thought even then, long before the jail-break of 2002, that this was a matter which needed urgent attention of the nation and the National Assembly in particular.

Unfortunately Mr Speaker, during our period in the House that Motion was not brought before the House. The People's National Congress/Reform subsequently withdrew from the House and in so doing we made the point at that time that we were dissatisfied with the functioning of the House. One of the areas of dissatisfaction was the fact that Motions, and the Motion which I referred to in particular, were not being brought before the House.

Mr Speaker, the People's National Congress/Reform continued to

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express its concern outside of the House for the need for an inquiry into the Police Force. When we temporarily returned to the House earlier this year this was one of the issues we placed on the agenda at that time – the need for an inquiry into the Guyana Police Force. Therefore Mr Speaker it is easy for one to understand why it is that among other reasons we have returned to this House because what we have called for, what we have struggled for, is being realized.

There is no need for an inquiry into the Police Force Mr Speaker, because we recognize that between the period of 1993 and 2002, for that period alone, there were 150 killings by the Police, which have been regarded by many as extra-judicial killings and, really, there has been no process to tell us otherwise.

We recognize, Mr Speaker, the problems of the Carroll-type that affected the operations of the Police Force. We recognize the problems of the conditions of service in the Police Force. We recognize the lack of professionalism that was evident. The general deterioration of the Force we recognize and the lack of confidence resulting therefrom.

And so Mr Speaker, it is for that reason we had all this time called for an inquiry into the Guyana Police Force.

Today Mr Speaker we rise to support this Motion because this Motion provides an opportunity for that inquiry.

On the last occasion this House met the Constitution was amended to provide for the Disciplined Forces Commission to be established with specific powers to make it possible for an inquiry of this nature to be carried out so that today, Mr Speaker, we are speaking not only to the establishment of that Commission, but to the operationalization of that Commission with the specific intent that I referred to earlier – general inquiry into the Disciplined Services and a specific inquiry into the Police Force.

Mr Speaker, we look forward to this inquiry and the

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recommendations of the inquiry. We look forward to this inquiry speaking to the question of the modernization of the Police Force; we look forward to this inquiry speaking to the question of the professionalism of the Police Force; we look forward to this inquiry speaking to the issues of terms and conditions of service of policemen; we look forward Mr Speaker to the inquiry making recommendations that will speak to the issue of our Police Force being converted, or re-converted, to one of service to the people.

We look forward, Mr Speaker, to a time when we will no longer have publications like this which refers to extra-judicial killings in large quantities by our Police Force.

Mr Speaker we recognize that the problem of the Police Force is not the problem of every policeman and recognize at the same time that though it might be the minority creating problems, they have tarnished the reputation of the entire Force. They have interfered with the confidence of the society in our Police Force and, therefore, they have brought us to a point where there is urgency for us to examine our Police Force, modernize our Police Force, and recreate a Police Force in which our communities can have confidence.

Mr Speaker, it is against that background that the People's National Congress/Reform today lends its support to this Motion. We recognize that this Motion is but a stage in the process. It provides for the establishment of the Commission. We look forward to the Commission to do its work; we look forward to the recommendations of the Commission being brought to this House; and we look forward to this House at the appropriate time lending its support to the recommendations so that we would not just end up with a report on paper. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Aren't you prejudging what those recommendations will be?

Mr Vincent L Alexander: Whatever they may be, Sir.

The Speaker: Suppose the Commission doesn't agree with what you are saying?

Mr Vincent L Alexander: Mr Speaker, whatever the recommendations may be, I cannot imagine that those recommendations will not speak with professionalism. I cannot imagine they will not speak to the community having confidence in the Police Force. I cannot imagine it will not speak to the Police Force being one of service rather than one of mere force. And it is in that context, I beg of this House that when that report comes before the House that we show our honesty and seriousness about the establishment of the Commission by lending our support to the recommendations so that the work will go beyond merely preparing the report but to reforming the Police Force, as we have all recognized there is a need for, so that our Police Force can be one of service.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Member Mr Dev.

Mr Ravindra Dev: Mr Speaker I rise to place my party's position on the Motion before this Honourable House. Yesterday we altered our Constitution. This is not an act that ought to be done lightly because constitutions describe the allocation of power within a state and procedures for altering such allocations of power.

The implication therefore that the representatives of the people of Guyana felt that there either ought to be a reallocation of power or an examination of how power is allocated in our constitution. In this case it was the latter where we widened the power of the Disciplined Forces Commission. Today we seek to define its terms of reference in very specific detail in going forward in this activity.

What ROAR has been very concerned about is that we have to distinguish between symptomatic issues from systemic issues. The whole nature of our disciplined forces beginning with the Militia and our Police

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Force in very systemic fashion from their very inception has been so constituted as to ensure that in their exercise of the powers of the state that it acted against the citizenry of this country. It is therefore long overdue for us to inquire into the nature of our forces in a systemic way.

Way back in the 1960s, if one looks at the history, Dr Jagan made continuous references to the composition of our forces and to the need for the then colonial government to make recommendations to correct such imbalances. As late as October 1964, he wrote to the Secretary of State asking for such matters to be looked into and for the imbalances to be corrected.

Before our independence, the government of the PNC accepted that there ought to be such an inquiry. We know that the International Commission of Jurists was invited to look into these Forces.

I would like to quote from the PNC's letter of invitation from that date. These are the words of Mr Burnham:

My Government has recently been considering the question of racial imbalance in various fields of activity in British Guiana. Our concern has been to determine whether such imbalance as may exist in any particular field can be corrected and if so what is the shortest practical period for such correction.

In these deliberations my Government has been deeply concerned with the need to remove from our society sources of racial disharmony and to promote the right of each individual whatever his ethnic origin to have an equal opportunity to play a meaningful part in the life of the community.

My Government considers it desirable that we should take the initiative in sponsoring an impartial inquiry into the question of racial imbalance in all significant areas of

governmental activity.

And as the Commission itself said the terms of reference clearly include an examination of racial imbalance in the security forces and other areas of governmental responsibility.

So Mr Speaker, the task that we are assigning to this Commission in setting out its terms of reference is not one that has suddenly fallen unto us. It has been here, but, for whatever reason it has been ignored and it has come back to haunt us again and again.

As I said from the very beginning, in a very systemic way our forces have not only been composed in the fashion but it has been structured in a fashion which militated against it serving the people.

When our Guyana Police Force was founded in 1839 it was a centralized force patterned after the police force of Ireland which had been set up a few years before. These were two centralized forces that were very heavily armed and was almost a paramilitary outfit. This was in deep contrasts to the force established in England only a decade before which was a decentralized force.

It meant therefore, Mr Speaker, that those who were governing British Guiana saw the role of the Police Force as not to serve the community, and the community's problem, but to enforce the rule of the colonial government onto the people. So from the very onset of these forces you had this centralizing effect where the rule from the centre could be imposed in a very authoritarian way.

Mr Speaker, if we are to have the Disciplined Forces acting in a fashion which is to serve and protect the people of Guyana, we can't only tinker around with composition, we have to look at the very ethos as to how the Force operates: Is it here to serve and protect the rulers or serve and protect the people?

Our party believes that we have to address this very central question.

In terms of the Force representing the composition of the country, as the mover of the Motion, the Hon Minister of Education said, there is no country in the world today, Mr Speaker, that does not acknowledge that since in the hands of these disciplines forces rests the ultimate sanction of a government, the sanction of the state, in fact, the very act that defines a state is this ability and this power to be able to take the life of a citizen and, in this institution which goes to the central meaning of a state, there is no country in the world that does not ensure today, Mr Speaker, that this institution represents the people of that state. So it is very late in the day that we are looking at this aspect but, as we say, better late than never.

Mr Speaker such an outlook is even more necessary in what is now called a severely divided society. In no severely divided society across the globe has there been stability when the disciplined forces of such a society have a preponderance of one ethnic group in that society – be it Yugoslavia where the Serbs dominated; be it Burundi where the Hutus preponderated, it does not matter, it leads to instability.

So, Mr Speaker, we feel that this is an aspect of the very systemic nature of our Force that needs to be addressed.

We come to the symptomatic aspects in terms of how our forces have been operating and what have been their shortcomings.

Mr Speaker if we look at the timetable given to the Commission we notice that we are putting the symptoms to be treated before the systemic conditions. In a sense we are putting the cart before the horse, because many of the 'abuses' of the Force come out of the systemic problems with the Force itself. And unless we address those then the symptoms will continue.

Be that as it may Mr Speaker, it is still a Commission that we hope will look at the two aspects of its task in a holistic fashion even though it will have to present its report in a linear fashion. We hope it will take into cognisance evidence of the systemic corrections that need to be made

when it makes its recommendations earlier on certain symptomatic problems.

Mr Speaker, I want to go on record on behalf of my party to say that we support this Motion before the House.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Hon Minister of Education.

Hon Henry B Jeffrey: Mr Speaker, let me first of all thank all the Members who have spoken for supporting this Motion.

I did say in my little presentation that we should stay clear of attempting to make this inquiry into any form of a witch-hunt. I am sure that all the Members, including Mr Alexander himself, will support me in saying that the security forces, and the Police Force in particular, has given and is continuing to give sterling service to Guyana. His concerns are what these terms of reference are all about.

We have come to this stage largely because, as Mr Dev has rightly pointed out, there are some systemic problems, and, of course, there are the more specific problems pointed out by Mr Alexander. But we should do all we possibly can to prevent this inquiry from becoming any form of a witch hunt.

Talk about extra-judicial killings, as he puts it, has been there for ever so long. We must try to avoid bringing that, as such, into this inquiry, not only as a complaint but almost as a quarrel, bringing bias into the inquiry itself.

Mr Dev, I take your point Honourable Member, that there is something amiss in attempting to put together a commission with some general formations and some specific ones, and then attempting to ask that the specific ones be the first to be reported on. But, as I said in my

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presentation we hope that this Commission, and we urge it to look at its task in toto, to look at the general formation even as it is dealing with the specific. As you must know, at the end of any process, the Commission will have the opportunity to revise its original programme.

So, I again thank all the Members here for their support and do hope that the task of the Commission will be made less problematic if all of us not only can give our support in this House, but can go to our various communities and let our constituents understand that the idea of this investigation is to modernize, to make a better Police Force, to make a better Disciplined Forces and not to castigate or to witch-hunt individuals.

I thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

Motion put and carried.

ADJOURNMENT

The Speaker: Honourable Members, this brings our business for today to an end.

Hon Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker, I move that the National Assembly stands adjourned to Monday, 19 May 2003 at 14:00H

The Speaker: Before I adjourn, Honourable Members, I would like to invite you to remain for refreshments on two grounds: the fiftieth anniversary not of this National Assembly but of our Legislative Council under universal adult suffrage, and, secondly, the debate on the Motion which was just approved brings to an end the bulk, not all, of our business in relation to the recent matters under discussion.

That is why I did not adjourn at 16:00 H because the emphasis of the refreshments today is of a liquid nature. Thank you very much.

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The Assembly stands adjourned to Monday.

Adjourned accordingly at 17:35 H