

THE
PARLIAMENTARY - DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORTS

/VOLUME 107

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE THIRD SESSION (1983) OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FOURTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

50th Sitting at 11:00 hrs on Friday 1985-08-16

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (74).

Speaker (1)

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

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

Prime Minister (1)

Cde. H. Green, M.P.,
Prime Minister

Other Vice-Presidents and Deputy Prime Ministers (2)

*Cde. Dr. M. Shahabuddeen, O.R., S.C., M.P.,
Vice President, Deputy Prime Minister and
Attorney General

Cde. R. Chandisingh, M.P.,
Vice President, National Development
and Deputy Prime Minister

Other Deputy Prime Minister (1)

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

Senior Ministers (9)

*Cde. R.E. Jackson, M.P.,
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Cde. J.R. Thomas, M.P.,
Minister of Home Affairs

Cde. R.H.O. Corbin, M.P.,
Minister of National Mobilisation

Cde. H. Rashid, M.P.,
Minister of Energy and Mines

*Cde. C.B. Greenidge, M.P.,
Minister of Finance

*Non-elected Member

Cde. Sallahuddin, M.P.
Ministry of Forestry
Cde. Dr. R.A. Van West-Charles, M.P.,
Minister of Health and Public Welfare
*Cde. M.L. Parris, M.P.,
Minister of Education
Cde. S. Prasad, M.P.,
Minister of Transport

Ministers (5)

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

Ministers of State (3)

Cde. M. Corrica, M.P.,
Minister of State within the Ministry of
Internal Trade and Consumer Protection
Cde. H.L.B. Singh, M.S., M.P.,
Minister of State within the Ministry of
Regional Development
Cde. D.A.N. Ainsworth, M.P.,
Minister of State in the Ministry of
Education

Parliamentary Secretaries (2)

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

Government Chief Whip (1)

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

Other Members (24)

Cde. O.E. Clarke, M.P.
Cde. R.E. Williams, M.P.
Cde. J.P. Chowritmootoo, J.P., M.P.
Cde. Philomena A. Rayman, M.P.
Cde. J.B. Caldeira, M.P.
Cde. E.H.A. Fowler, M.P.
Cde. Joyce Gill-Mingo, M.P.
Cde. M. Ally, M.P.
Cde. M. Armogan, M.S., J.P., M.P.

-
*Non-elected Member

Cde. Bissoondai Beniprashad, M.P.
Cde. A.A. Chin, M.P.
Cde. Elaine B. Davidson, M.P.
Cde. H. Doobay, M.P.
Cde. A.B. Felix, M.P.
Cde. Patricia Fredericks, M.P.
Cde. E.F. Gilbert, M.P.
Cde. A. McRae, M.P. (Absent)
Cde. Joyce M. Munroe, J.P., M.P.
Cde. R.N. Primo, M.P.
Cde. C.G. Sharma, J.P., M.P.
Cde. C. Vandenburg, M.P. (Absent)
Cde. Edwina Melville, M.P.
Cde. Y. Khan, M.P.
(One seat vacant)

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

Cde. R. Bishop, M.S., M.P.
Cde. Bhagmatee Latchminarayan, M.P.

Members from the Regional Democratic Councils (10)

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

Members of the Minority (12)

(i) People's Progressive Party (10)

Minority Leader (1)

Cde. Dr. C. Jagan, M.P.,
Minority Leader (Absent - on leave)

Deputy Speaker (1)

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

Other Members (8)

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

(ii) United Force (2)

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

OFFICERS

Clerk of the National Assembly - Cde. F.A. Narain, A.A.

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly - Cde. M.B. Henry

PRAYERS

14:00 hrs

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

The Speaker: Comrades and Honourable Members, this sitting has been specially fixed for today for the purpose of enabling the Assembly to record the profound grief at death of Cde. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, O.E., S.C., late President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. As there are no matters to be dealt with on the agenda, I will now therefore proceed with the motion. Cde. Prime Minister.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

TRIBUTE TO COMRADE LINDEN FORBES SAMPSON BURNHAM, O.E., S.C., LATE
PRESIDENT OF GUYANA

“Be it resolved, that we, the Members of this National Assembly at this Special assembled, record our profound grief at the loss sustained by Guyana in the death of Comrade Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, O.E., S.C., President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, and pay tribute to the distinguished service which he rendered to Guyana and direct that an expression of our heartfelt sympathy be conveyed to his sorrowing widow, children and relatives. [The Prime Minister]

The Speaker: Cde, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: “Too soon, too soon,

our banner draped for you,

I would prefer

the banner in the wind not bound so tightly

in a purple fold –

not sodden sodden

with your people’s tears

but flashing on the pole

we bear aloft

down and beyond this dark dark lane

(Martin Carter)

Cde. Speaker, it is written somewhere that “In life we shall find many men that are great, and some that are good but very few, very few are both Great and Good”, this is why when a great and good soul, a champion and, in this case, the architect of our revolution and clearly the greatest son born to this country, and indeed the Region, died sometime around 10:45 a.m. on Tuesday, 6th August, 1985, we are forced to question the ways of the Creator – without being sacrilegious I ask him the Grand Architect of the Universe “Why did Forbes Burnham had to die, why did he leave us, why can we no longer hear his voice?”

However, I was reassured, indeed consoled, on Sunday night when our friend and our patriot, our wise one, reminded us that nature is such that we have destroy to build. In the theme

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of his message, Dr. Ptolemy Alexander Reid, O.E., reminded us that “without destruction there could be no construction”.

Indeed, I recall that our late Illustrious Founder Leader after the destruction of our Party Headquarters told us that we must rebuild from the ashes – like the Phoenix after being consumed in flames, rose miraculously from the pyre – stronger and more beautiful.

But let us now face this – strange, unbelievable, the paradox that as the result of the Leader’s demise, this Parliament, the New President, the Deputy Leader, the General Secretary, the Executive Committee and all of our members have pledged to make the Party and Government even stronger.

And so like De Vere we mutter, “Grief should be like joy, majestic, sodate, confirming, cleansing, equable, a making free, strong to consume small troubles, to command great thoughts, grand thoughts, thoughts lasting to the end”.

The Prime Minister continues

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

14:10 - 14:20 hrs

14:10 hrs

Over the last 21 years our Beloved Founder Leader led this nation in a humane way showing thousands how to release their creative energies. He successfully surmounted the many vicissitudes that plagued our country over these years all the time bringing our nation to higher levels of material and spiritual advancement.

More than most leaders in the world, he did everything to stimulate the economic development of Guyana and his programme of self-reliance has already started to bear fruit. No matter what our detractors say, the Guyanese nation today is intrinsically stronger than it was 21 years ago. He wrought social unity and a lasting peace that posterity must revere. He insisted on religious equality and overthrew the discriminatory religious system which the colonialists had left us. It was he who made the African listen to the sitar and the Indian enjoy the beat of the drum and steel pan. He indeed changed a land of six peoples to One People, One Nation with One Destiny.

Over the next few days and for many years to come, we and others will recount, as we do today, the life and life work of this great man, this greatest son of Guyana. As for me, I liken him to the North Star - constant, the brightest in the sky and outstanding. As a little boy, to me he was just Cousin Forbes. Later he was the brilliant student and a respectful helpful youngster to the adult members of our respective families, particularly loved by his parents and the idol of my own mother.

Of course, human as he was, he had his peculiar moments like the occasion when he was caught with a can of condensed milk or sucking the eggs before bringing them to Aunt Rachael. Talking about condensed milk, let me say, Cde. Speaker, that those of us in the Party understand the relationship of this particular commodity to the Leader. He particularly liked it as a boy and said to us once that the first time he earned money - as indeed he did - he would buy a case of condensed milk and, with abandon, enjoy it. I believe he must have had a premonition. We all know that recently he was off sweet and, therefore, even if it was available, he could not use things like condensed milk, but the night before his death, in the presence of a number of us, he made what I considered a rather strange request. He called his Confidential Secretary, Cde. Celina Harewood, and asked her if she could find a can of condensed milk for him because he felt like having some. It was an extremely strange request. Cde. Vi was there, Cde. Hoyte was there, Cde. Shahabuddeen was there, Cde. Parris, Cde. Chandisingh, Cde. Jackson and Cde. Van West-Charles. We said nothing, but we all thought it rather strange.

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In 1942 he won the Guiana Scholarship which was awarded to the top student in the colony at that time. As we all know, the war delayed his travel to England for his studies. I remember that he visited with us a few days before leaving for abroad and I believe, as I said at the opening of SAPIL, as Forbes Burnham said good-bye and turned away, my mother said to us with great prophecy and precision that when he returned he would be a great man and do many good things for our country.

In London, he soon made a name for himself, winning the Best Speaker Cup at the University of London Law Faculty and even before his return to Guyana the people around him quickly recognised this genius and his leadership potential. So it was that these qualities were quickly made available to this nation after he returned to British Guiana in 1949.

There are somethings I wish to talk about. Other colleagues will, no doubt, deal with his life in proper chronological order and his rise to the presidency. For me, the things that I found most interesting I prefer to talk about. Those things were, first, his natural charm and charisma. This was obvious to all friends and even wherethere were foes. During his early political career, he practised at the bar and I recall that his advocacy and supreme command of every situation caused the Court Room to be jam-packed^{with spectators}, including lawyers, whenever they knew that Burnham would be in that particular court. He quickly earned recognition as the leading barrister and advocate in the country but despite the prospects of a successful and lucrative career as a lawyer, he chose to undertake the heart-breaking and difficult task of transforming an undeveloped colony into a developed country.

His task, his main mission, his assignment, I believe, in Guyana was to see the creation of the new Guyana man and woman. And so, it was fitting, that it was he who headed the Government when, after some difficulty, Independence was gained and granted to this country on the 26th May, 1966. He demonstrated the qualities of a true statesman when, from this very Chamber, on the 26th May, 1966, he received from His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent the Constitutional Instruments of our new State. On that day he said a number of things, but I would like with your leave, Cde. Speaker, to take one passage from that Address. I quote:

"After 150 odd years of British rule, and in some cases misrule, we are now independent. But we harbour no bitterness. Bitterness, we feel, is for children and the intellectually underdeveloped. It is difficult, nay impossible, to change the facts of past history, and in the circumstances, though we welcome with enthusiasm our new status, we are prepared not to spend the time ahead of us abusing those who

once dictated to us, but rather to seek means of co-operating with them to our mutual advantage - shall I say self-interest."

The second interesting thing about this man, for whom we mourn today, was his ability, in a crisis and during difficulties, to give those around him the strength and confidence to carry on. I remember the days when the Party was in the wilderness. It was he and he alone who persuaded us that there was a silver lining behind the dark clouds that descended upon us during those tough and difficult colonial days. When attempts were being made to humiliate the entire party leadership, when people flaunted their power and authority at us, it was he, and he alone, who inspired us and convinced us that we were not to be undone. He told us that we had the will and the capacity to extract victory out of a seemingly impossible situation. One example I give. In late August 1961 - I see a few Members here who can share those memories - the Party had just lost the elections held on the 21st August. I recall that I lost the Houston seat by a very narrow margin. The Party got 1.6^{per cent} less votes than the winners but only half the number of seats. The enemies within and without were like hawks. We in the Party were in retreat. There were tears; our comrades sobbed. Like vanquished soldiers, we were beaten, battered and bewildered. At a mammoth meeting - perhaps the biggest meeting we ever had in Georgetown at the Bourda Green, the Leader, during his speech, his talk, whatever you call it, held us up with this rallying call: "Will you ^{not} watch with me for one hour?"

(The Prime Minister continues)

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National Assembly

14:20 – 14:40 hrs

14:20 hrs

I was there, I felt it, thousands felt it, tens of thousands felt relief and renewed resolve. We then were all part of the resolve that said we are down but not out, Burnham is our Leader, we shall not be moved, just like a tree that is planted by the water, we shall not be moved. Only this man could with such apparent ease give hope where there was despair – all this at a time when the Party organization was without professional staff, we only had poorly paid but dedicated staff. Without a lot of money, without vehicles and easy means of communication. I remember when we were travelling to places like Mc Kenzie by train and boat getting there in twenty-four hours. There were no helicopters, no speed-boats, facing the vicious sand flies and huge, hungry singing mosquitoes up the Canje. I have been with him and one day at a place called Bara Cara in the Canje and all he could do in the mornings was have his bath with two calabashes of water. At all times he remained the centre of interest for very many people.

Next we have seen his organizing skills – making the Party, as he often said not an election machine, but a powerful and organized entity. Cde. Speaker, look around the Government benches, look around the Party, it was he who first recognized the strength and potential of the workmen in this country and with people like Roy Field- Ridley and Jane Phillips- Gaye encouraged the establishment of a woman's arm – Women's Auxiliary as it was then called – now WRSM, which has blossomed forth under the leadership of Cde. Viola into a magnificent group and, clearly the most powerful and best run women's organization in the Caribbean. It was he who inspired many women to come together and present that famous State Paper on Equality for Women.

Cde. Speaker, from those early days the Party depended greatly on the organizing ability, persuasiveness and the human and material contribution of our women. They did this at great personal sacrifice. Cde. Speaker, looking through the window just now I noticed one of your employees, Elsie Skeete. I remember her at the making great sacrifices for the Party. I remember others making all sort of sacrifices for this Party, where the men feared, the women did not fear. It was the women who organized the passive resistance campaign in the 1960's, and indeed gave flower to our signature campaign. It was they who organized food for Party workers through that infamous of famous long strike of 83 days. Many of them willing as they did to ignore the needs of their children and husbands, all because they had faith in this one man, their hero, their love, their guide.

At each point of crisis in Guyana, when many of us were confused, it was he who changed confusion to order, uncertainty to resolve. At the 3rd Biennial Congress 6 years ago, he said:

“We must be committed and resolute. No wall must be too high to scale. No citadel too strong to take. The People must win under the leadership of the Vanguard People's National Congress.”

When we felt too small, when many felt inadequate, and felt that the might of the foe made fighting futile – it was he who made us into an army of fighting men. I heard his voice rising with majesty and firmness on October 6, 1976 at the Rally after many young Guyanese had died in the Cu 445 Cabaña Air Disaster:-

“The size of a people is not the dominant criterion, it is their mind, their conviction and their commitment”.

I travel back to 14th April, 1968 at the 11th Congress of the Party, he reminded us:

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“We have travelled over a long and rock strewn road. We have suffered. We have travailed, we have bled and some have died. Shall we allow anyone to rob us of our reward? Shall we like Moses merely gaze on and not enter the Promised Land?

Thousands who were tending to relax left that congress understanding that the struggle continues.

He never turned back, by 1970 he took us into Republic status and led us as a nation along a revolutionary course to consolidate our political freedom and our attempt to achieve economic independence based on co-operativism and self-reliance. Cde. Speaker, his other great strength was his humility and ability to work hard. From a lawyer, teacher he soon became the chief work-horse of this nation expecting and often getting from his associates prodigious efforts. I remember he did not only talk about self-help. He joined in the exercise like the Mahdia self-help road. I remember something very clearly, after a congress we were asked to clean up Georgetown and I remember Cde. Leader and his champion spouse, Vie walking into the dirty trenches in Vlissengen Road which had quite a lot of things including carcasses. Those who might have said they were not going into a trench with carcasses had no choice but to enter and smile.

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National Assembly

11:30 - 11:40 hrs

(The Prime Minister continues)

11:30 hrs

He worked long hours, as you know. In fact, whenever my phone rang between 2.30 and 3.00 in the morning I said, " Yes, Cde. Leader ", because only he would be at work and would call at that hour.

During all this the Leader always had a great concern for the unity first of the Guyanese masses and second, his great vision for a united viable Caribbean with all the people striving to maintain their Independence and national integrity. He was responsible for the idea and the hosting of the first ever Caribbean Festival of Arts in 1972 - Carifesta.

As early as December, 1964, shortly after he took over from chaos and racial strife he said, "This Government holds that all the peoples of this country are equally important whether they belong to a large or a small group. To us the Amerindians are important. To us the Chinese are important. To us the Portuguese are important. To us the Europeans are important. To us the mixed races are important. To us the Africans are important. In short all Guyanese are important and valued members of our community and we cherish them and consider that as a Government it is our duty and privilege to guard, protect and further the real interests of all." That statement, with the other things he did saw an end to the confusion that existed in 1964.

At our Congress in April 1971 he made this point: "Success attracts its own enemies and saboteurs, here and abroad. Only unity based on the people will frustrate and defeat these".

We remember him, Cde. Speaker, being the one Leader in this Region who conducted a forceful campaign against apartheid. He was a leading participant in that London demonstration after the Sharpville Massacre in March, 1960. Five hundred black people were killed by the White Minority in South Africa. In fact, he was arrested and charged.

Further afield,
/His faith in Non-Alignment is well known and has earned us the respect of both East and West. He, too, will always be remembered for the part he played in the demand for a New International Economic Order and by way of example it was through his efforts that the International Bauxite Association, the I.B.A., was institutionalised.

But what must be his greatest virtue was his ability to work with and to get people to perform, to make little people real. The abiding faith he had

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in so many of us ordinary people. Again, I invite you, Cde. Speaker, to look around this Chamber, look at the benches, the Public Servants, the Managers around here and see the number of people who never thought they had the ability to perform in certain jobs, and at certain levels. But he identified and weaned them to maturity and confidence.

I see myself, if you forgive me, as one of those persons. Thanks to his guidance I was able to function for 12 years as General Secretary of the Party and today can hold this office with humility even though the circumstances are so very unhappy and painful. This had to do almost purely with his ability to spot and develop the latent talent of so many Guyanese. Dr. Reid himself who is here said this. The incumbent President himself hastold us that when he was called upon to enter the political arena he hesitated, he was uncertain, but that was changed by the guidance, the persuasion, the encouragement of Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, our best talent scout.

Cde. Speaker, the doctors told us that our Beloved Founder Leader's heart stopped beating on Tuesday, 6th. But doctors do not understand. His heart continues to beat with strength and a beautiful rythm in the bodies of the thousands he met, the thousands he touched and gave a reason to continue working in our country. I believe that he lives and will always live in the hearts of all of us in this Chamber and beyond and when the many statements that we will make today and henceforth have been recorded, what I believe he would wish most and what I believe we must do by way of paying him tribute, is to so conduct ourselves that he could say from his still resting place, "I left a legacy in Guyana of men and women who are prepared to work hard and together to help unite this Nation, to retain our dignity as a people, to achieve total self-reliance, and as we move into the 21st century make Guyana a strong, integrating force in the Region."

From this very Chamber where our Beloved Founder Leader liked to share
with your leave,
his ideas, I use this occasion, /sad though it is, to ask that we recommit
ourselves to achieving those high ideals for which he stood. We must inform
our children so that they can join in the task of building a monument in our
hearts to this great man. Work, as you know, has started to preserve his
earthly remains so that we can from time to time visit and fondly commune
with him so that our children can see in human form Guyana's greatest hero.

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We in this Assembly must support the suggestions already made to identify places that will be allocated to building suitable structures to his memory. All these things must and will be done. But I contend, these must be merely complementary to our determination and effort from this day forward to work together sincerely, to work hard so that Guyana will do our hero's memory justice.

In these days of turmoil and evil, the title of Truly Good, Great and ^{re} Illustrious can be served for very few. The title can be reserved for him that cannot be justly accused with many vices, for a man that spent his whole life in first seeking, then secondly, maintaining the independence and integrity of his country, one who was a tremendous success inspite of adversities and an unhelpful international climate, and whose successes were never achieved at the expense of justice, honour, integrity, or by the sacrifice of a single principle. This title of a Truly Great Man cannot be denied L.F.S. Burnham.

14:40 hrs

(The Prime Minister continues)

To Cde. Vi and the girls and other members of the family, we share your anguish and your grief, we can do no more than wish you fortitude and that you take comfort in the fact that even though there is a very personal relationship as husband, father and relative, this Parliament, the entire Nation, well-wishers, the Third World and all peace loving Nations share this loss with you. I repeat the words from this card I received –just a few minutes before I came here: “Where there is faith, there is the promise of an end to every sorrow, where there is hope there is the promise of a brighter day tomorrow. Thinking of you”.

He was a good, great man, he was to me, to very many of us, father, friend, brother, protector, savior, mentor, comrade in arms, for some he had reached the state of deity.

Forbes Burnham was both a visionary and man of action – a man for all seasons. We loved him; all Guyana loved. His loss has left an emptiness of soul, an anguish and agony which we could hardly bear. Yet the example of his life and work has taught us courage, struggle and hope. We can only bid you farewell for there are no goodbyes among friends for you will forever live in our hearts. I reflect on the words written by Shakespeare:

“His life was gentle, and the elements, so mix’d in him that
Nature might stand up, And say to all the world, “This was a
man”.

With deep sorrow, but it is my duty to move the Motion standing in my name.

Rest in Peace my Beloved Leader and Father of the Nation – Farewell – So long for now, we must meet again.

Motion proposed.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud: Cde. Speaker, death is an inevitable reality. It visits sometimes when least expected. With birth death steers in the face every day. Inescapable as we all know death to be, it is still not readily accepted. The renowned Poet Rabindrnaught Tagore wrote these beautiful lines, I wish to quote them.

“I know that the day will come when my sight of this earth shall
be lost and life take its leave in silence, drawing the last curtain
over my eyes, yet stars will watch at night and morning rise
before and hours heave like sea waves casting up pleasures and
pains. When I think of the end of my moment, the barrier of the
moment breaks and I see by the light of death thy world with its
careless treasures. Rare is its loneliest seat, rare is its meanest of
life. Things that I longed for in vain and things that I got, let
them pass, let me but truly possess the things I ever earned and
overlooked

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14:40-1450 hrs

The late President has been deeply involved in the political life of this country for more than three decades. After a distinguished academic career he returned from London in 1949 and became a member of the P.P.P in 1950. He was elected its first chairman. He became a Member of Parliament in 1953 after the P.P.P. won a landslide victory at the first general elections held under Universal Adult Suffrage. He joined the Government as Minister of Education. With us today is Cde. Janet Jagan who also entered the Assembly at that time. After the suspension of the Constitution Cde. Burnham accompanied Dr. Jagan, leader of the P.P.P. to several countries including England, Egypt and India to protest the action of the British Government. During this period of our history Guyana enjoyed absolute unity of all working people. Regrettably, this unity was not to last. The National Movement was split in 1955.

The President's death occurred at a time when this country is in serious political, economic and social crisis. Our great difficulties have to be overcome. This is a time for decisive action. It is a time to come to grips with the multitude of socio-economic realities, with the earnest desire of providing our people with a better standard of living.

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud continues

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

14:50 - 15:00 hrs

14:50 hrs

In order to overcome them, there must be an objective appraisal of the situation with a view of forging the required unity to reach a political solution to arrest the crisis. The emergence of real unity of the people is pivotal to the preservation of our sovereignty and for social progress. The welfare and well-being of our people must be paramount in whatever future course this country takes. Statesmanship must be demonstrated for the creation of a broad-based, coalition of all patriotic, democratic, progressive and revolutionary forces to deal with the many pressing problems which face our nation and people. In addition, the P.P.P. is of the firm conviction that the death of the President must not be used to surrender to the dictates of imperialism. The Guyanese nation is very alert and will be observing the unfolding of events with scrupulous keenness.

I recall way back in the mid-fifties visiting the Chambers of Cde. Burnham who was at the time a practising barrister. As a lawyer's clerk, I was asked to seek his advice on the procedure for an appeal from the decision of a jury in a case where two men were charged for "motor manslaughter", as it was called then. May I say that he was very polite and receptive. In the late fifties, while he was President of the Bar Association, I led a delegation as acting President of the Law Clerks Association to his Committee and successfully persuaded them to take action on certain matters which affected the clerks.

I was in this Parliament since the P.N.C. took the Government in 1964. In these Chambers, like other members of my Party, we have been locked in many heated debates. P.P.P. members have had strong and fundamental disagreements with the late President and his Government. However, we cannot overlook the fact that Cde. Burnham has been at the centre of our political life for more than thirty years and that his decisions have had a significant impact on the lives of the Guyanese people. In the long stretch of his political life, both inside and outside of these Chambers, there are events which will be remembered. Cde. Burnham has passed on. He will be discussed for a long time. The pages of history will chronicle his life and administration.

Death, inescapable as it is, is not easily, or probably never, accepted. In fact, those who have been near and dear to the President probably can find no explanation for his death. There could be no doubt that they will reminisce their experiences with him for a long time, but I think we have to concede that with birth death is born

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and it has to be watched almost every conceivable second of our life. In the early years of this Parliament - and I am speaking of my own early years, the early sixties - just after the P.N.C. Government came to power, particularly during/consideration of the Estimates, we have had a number of occasions to be in the lobby to chat, to talk, to exchange ideas and, may I say this afternoon that on those occasions the late Cde. President was not without those relaxing moments when very easily he shared his humour with those who were around him.

On behalf of the People's Progressive Party, on behalf of all Members of this Parliament and on my own behalf I want to convey sincere condolences to the bereaved widow, children, grand-children, relatives and Government on the passing of Cde. Burnham.

Dr. Jagan on the 13th August wrote a letter to the current President. I wish to refer to it, Cde. Speaker, with your permission. I quote:

"On behalf of the P.P.P. I wish to congratulate you on your appointment as Executive President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and Leader of the P.N.C. and to wish you every success in your new assignments.

In this critical period of our country's history it is my profound hope that ways and means will be found to forge national unity which is the greatest imperative for peace and social progress in Guyana. At a time when imperialism is pressing at our door, all patriotic Guyanese must be mobilised in the exciting task of nation-building. It is our hope that you will use your high office and considerable talents to take bold initiatives to bring an end to the long-standing political crisis. A political solution is urgently required if the grave economic and social situation of our country is to be put right."

I am also advised, and I wish to inform you, Cde. Speaker, and the nation, that a similar letter was addressed to the Cde. Prime Minister.

Traditionally, Guyanese are known for certain unique tendencies, whether in the neighbourhood, the community or the nation and that is to share in moments of loss, grief and sorrow. I think it is also necessary and vital for us at a time like this to look optimistically to the future with a view of creating such conditions, such a climate, that Guyana can move forward happily for the benefit of all the people of this country. It is my duty, on behalf of the P.P.P., to support the Motion so ably moved by the Cde. Prime Minister.

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Cde. J. Chowrimootoo: Cde. Speaker, today as of recent days, torrents of tears continue to tell the story of an irreparable loss, of a love of a mortal who has now transcended the realms of mortality into immortality. For the works, the achievements of the late Lindon Forbes Sampson Burnham, our beloved Cde. Leader is with us, will remain in perpetuity for all times, for all Guyanese, for all mankind. I knew him as my leader, I knew him as a fellow legislator, I knew him as my President. He was my philosopher-guide. I knew him as a good man. He was filially respected by all. Indeed he was the father of our nation. On that fateful Tuesday, the 6th day of August, 1985, the brightest star that had ever lit the Guyanese firmament was no more. That kind heart which gave solace, peace and brought tranquility to many a tortured mind ceased. Our Leader, Lindon Forbes Sampson Burnham was no ordinary mortal. He was born to achieve greatness. The first President of the English speaking Caribbean and creator of the world's first Co-operative Republic was born of humble parentage. Sixty and two years, five months and seventeen days he sojourned upon this earth, and it was as much time ago, he was born to Racheal Sampson Burnham and James E. Burnham in a humble abode in Alexander Street, in the then village of Kitty.

Europe was licking its wounds from the devastating war of 1914 - 1919. The great Lenin was to pass on to the great beyond two years later, as the first socialist revolution was affirming itself in the USSR while Lord Balfour was cheeming to deprive the Palestinians of their homeland and had sown the seeds of discord which now threatens mankind's existence. It was in such a milieu of political upheaval that our Cde. Leader was born. He must have been born with a mission - a mission of peace, a mission of universal dignity for all humankind. It is true that his mother Rachel Sampson was of East Indian and Amerindian Black extraction. His father, James Burnham, the \$25.00 a month headmaster, a devout and patriotic Guyanese was of Barbadian parentage. While it is true that our Leader showed a near congenital Caribbeanness, this characteristic he acquired out of a deep concern for the common suffering the West Indians.

His early readings at school was to have a profound effect upon his principled position on Caribbean integration. No wonder men of the stature of Michael Manley and the late Robert Bradshaw revered him and looked up to him as their Cde. Leader. He was truly, up to the time of his death, the undisputed

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leader of the Caribbean Integration Movement. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham was brought up in a home of piety, he himself was steeped in the holy Scriptures and as a boy Sunday School teacher, he often delighted the Kitty Methodist Congregation whenever the Priest was not available. His magnificent oratory was indeed inspired by divine guidance. Forbes Burnham's academic genius flowered early as he breezed through Central High, after Kitty Methodist Primary, and entered Queen's College at the age of 12, and in quick succession distinguished himself in the world of academia. To have won the centenary exhibition as well as the Government's Junior Scholarship to be followed by the Percival Exhibition award, and to become the only awardee of a British Guyana Scholarship for that year, and attaining the highest grades at the senior Cambridge examinations in 1942, placed our Cde. Leader in the Hall of fame, of the poor. Notwithstanding he was never lost to the ivory tower, He was a realist. Even at an early age, and never lost sight of the real world around him. As the world in the thirties and early forties, fomented with unrest, as the downtrodden and exploited rebelled, as the colonial peoples clamoured for a greater say in their governance, Forbes Burnham's mind and heart became imprinted with the call of destiny to join the struggle to free his homeland of an alien rule.

As the 1939-1945 imperialist war waged, and as the turmoil grew more intense and the sufferings of his fellowmen, his countrymen grew from the shortages, the thoughts of a Guyana self-reliant and feeding itself must have conceived, to flower in 1972 as the feed, clothe, and house the Nation programme a programme which Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham has bequeathed to the world, the Third World in particular. Our Cde. Leader's vision of a better world for the poor and exploited crystallised into the world renowned and accepted platform of the new international economic order. The concept and practicality grew into the current South, South dialogue, and the Third World's response in the form of counter-trade and mutual financial assistance. The world has gained through the inspiration, initiative and the fearlessness of Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham.

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(Cde. Chowritmootoo continues)

Because of the war, our Founder Leader could not have taken up his scholarship immediately. He worked for a few months as a Customs Officer and later became a Master at Queens College. While there he obtained his Bachelor of Arts Degree (External) from the London University in 1944, a truly monumental achievement for that time. In 1945 he left for London University where before graduating with an L.L.B. Honours he won the Best Speaker's Cup of the University. His supreme eloquence was never coloured with pompousness.

In 1949 he returned to Guyana, having been called to the Bar of the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn, London, but not before further registering himself as a progressive, revolutionary internationalist, a Caribbean man, a true West Indian. Politics was in his blood as he fought for the upholding of the dignity of black students in the United Kingdom, as President of the West Indian Student Union and Vice President of the London Branch of the Caribbean Labour Congress. His in-born leadership qualities were manifested as he led delegations on two occasions to the International Union of Students Council in Prague and Paris, and on the occasion of the World Youth Festival in 1947 in Czechoslovakia.

Events, destiny and divine guidance schooled our beloved Leader in his early days, enabling him to take his place on the portals of world affairs where he is justly acclaimed as one of the greatest statesmen of the twentieth century. When the overseas schooling of Forbes Burnham was finished he was politically matured for the task ahead. His country was beckoning him home. Guyana needed its helmsman to steer the ship of state to safety and independence. As was expected, in 1949 he co-founded the mass political organization, the People's Progressive Party of which he became Chairman. He eschewed the attractive offers from the petty bourgeoisie and the mercantilist class, and plunged himself in the cause of the exploited and whose cause he espoused until his untimely death.

He became a member of the Guyana Labour Union and was President General at the time of his death. It was Forbes Burnham who exposed the myth of nonpolitical trade unionism. The struggle for the psychological emancipation of the Guyanese working class began with our beloved Cde. Leader. When the masses voted the P.P.P into Government in 1953, Linden Forbes Burnham was sworn in as its first Minister of Education on 7th September, 1953. He had already distinguished himself as a brilliant advocate but this he had sacrificed in the cause of the exploited working class. His first public act as Minister of Education was to place learning to the seats of power - text books to be re-written to give them a socialist outlook - he contended in 1953. Two concerns at this stage pre-occupied his mind; Independence for Guyana and the maintenance of national unity. In Independence, he envisioned a socialist society subsuming the processes of Guyanasation and national dignity. With national unity he dreamt of a model society for the rest of mankind. Such was the greatness of this

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visionary whose feet were firmly planted on the ground and whose eyes never left the realities of the little man. The Sampson Burnham who had blossomed in the Forties was bearing fruits in the Fifties. He made politics a profession of respect and pride in the hearts of Guyanese. He recognised left adventurism and advised against it. He pleaded, cajoled, but to no avail. He warned that there can be no such monstrosity as a "Socialist Colony." That is a contradiction in terms. They did not listen. Their foolhardiness had set the Guyanese clock of Independence backwards for over a decade. This setback to the working-class movement was incalculable. Forbes Burnham was jailed as he protested the injustice of the suspension of the Constitution in 1953.

The British were not in any hurry to give Independence to Guyana, especially since the young radicals with popular power base were not to be trusted with British Colonial interests. Forbes Burnham was no colonial lackey. The cause of independence could not be sacrificed on the altar of adventurism. To Forbes Burnham, Independence was a sacred mission and must be pursued at all costs. To others, international recognition was more important, political power at any price was their goal. While our Leader fought to preserve the unity of the working class, others were sowing the seeds of discord, hatred and racial animosity.

On February 26, 1955, Forbes Burnham wrote, and I quote:

"Our policy will be to further the cause of the Guyanese liberation at all levels. The cause of the workers wherever they are and whatever race they belong to shall be ours."

Our Cde. Leader was dwelling on the minds of the Guyanese, to invoke the spirit of oneness of purpose, the feeling of being a Guyanese, to take pride in one's self as a Guyanese. In this August Chamber he began his life-long quest to weld his people into a society of proud Guyanese, a nation free and strong. His over thirty years of service to Parliament stands out in West Indian history, nay in the world history of Parliamentary democracy. His genius as a politician, as a statesman, as an orator, embellished this Chamber, and the spoken word became the sharpest sword, as the polished and accomplished wordsman gave of his wit and wisdom to enhance many a proceedings.

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(Cde. J. Chowritmootoo continues)

Our beloved Cde. Found Leader ensured that Parliament became the tool of democratic practice. Parliamentarians were enjoined to take and discuss the business of Government to and with the masses.

Consultative Democracy - ensuring all are involved; meet the people tours - ensuring all are seen. Face the community meetings - ensuring all are heard, are facets of the institutionalisation of people's democracy - thanks to our Beloved Cde. Founder Leader.

Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham loved his people with a zest. He struggled to avert the strife which nearly engulfed his nation, the nation he loved so passionately, and at the last hour, when everything seemed lost, the master brought his genius to bear, and all was saved - out of chaos a new dawn.

Guyanese and Guyana under Forbes Burnham began the road to national reconstruction. Independence and Republican status came in quick succession as the grand master out maneuvered our erstwhile masters. The process of decolonialisation which he had begun many years before gained momentum with independence. His task was to transform the Guyanese being as well as the Guyanese society. Nationalisation gave fillip to the thrust of transforming our society. Names like Davis and Esu Persaud, made sweet music to his ears as he saw Guyanese replacing and surpassing the colonial and transnational managers. On this score Forbes Burnham would never compromise. He was proud of his fellow Guyanese and was liberal in his praise for their accomplishments. He gave everyone the opportunity to prove him or herself. Yet he would be harsh on others who would seek to compromise the process of guyanisation, those who would have us go under, to submit to the machinations and manipulations of the exploiters who would want to subject us to their will. National cohesion and the maintenance of our national sovereignty became matters of grave concern and urgency. He did not baulk. He stood his grounds. His was a committal of conscience. His entire life's work was embred with a commitment to the well being of the Guyanese nation, a country of 216,000 sq. kilometers, nothing less.

Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham inspired Guyanese with a nationalism, with a love of country that has affected all Guyanese, in every corner of our dear land. His abiding faith in the truth for the struggle for the betterment of all Guyanese for making the small man a real man, saw him personally involved in schemes and projects to bring to reality, conditions which meant improvement of the lot of the little man. This characteristic took a heavy toll on his personal health. Yet he spared no pain. Fresh are the memories of his recent visits to the West Coast of Berbice, to the backlands, his communing with the little men, his dearly beloved flock.

Forbes Burnham dreamt in consciousness. He spoke of the unfolding of the MMA to becoming an agro-industrial complex, of the growth and development of a new

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township, of its attendant facilities and benefits for the workers; that the early stages on the road to economic independence was fraught with grave difficulties, was the living experience of all Guyanese. External forces hostile to our revolutionary process sought to subvert our course, but Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham was a match superior to their guile and treachery. He held the helm on course and never diverted. Our captain was made of tougher metal. His flexibility was his humanness, yet he never compromise on the lofty principles of socialist development.

Our Leader has fallen, our national hero who we loved and cherished is no more. His gaiety and his grace are all gone. But, we must continue the journey he had begun.

"And so the stately ships go on
To their heaven under the hill
But O for the touch of a vanished hand
And the sound of a voice that is still.

Death the greatest of tragic poets, captures the essence of life, and distills its emotion.

Robs of life,
Of a father
Of a Dear one
Of our beloved Cde. Leader.

Mr. M. F. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion. The details of the President's life has already been told, but my contribution would be largely personal. For me personally, the untimely death of Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham has meant the loss of a Dear Friend. It is true that we did not share the same ideology but we agreed to differ and remain friends to the very end. When my colleague Desmond Hoyte called me at my legal office on Tuesday 6th and asked me to come to see him at 1:30 p.m., little did I realize what was in store for me and so when he told me that the President was dead I grabbed hold of him and told him that could not possibly be true. He assured me it was and gave me the details. I at that time could not visualize that the vibrant person with whom I had travelled to attend the funeral of the late Tom Adams in Barbados was dead.

I left the Public Building in a daze and returned home - I could not do any work after that. I first met Odo and I fondly knew him way back in the 1950s, indeed that was what Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud was talking about. I met him in the 1950s when he was a lawyer's clerk.

Mr. M. F. Singh continues

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I was a Clerk in the Deeds and Supreme Court Registry and Odo was a young lawyer. I often had to attend to him and even then I was deeply impressed by his charm, his charisma and the strength of his personality. Therefore, when I returned as a young lawyer in 1963 and joined the United Force, after being injured in racial clashes, Odo was no stranger to me. After the 1964 elections, when no single party won a majority and we formed a coalition with the P.N.C., it was Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham who gave the okay for me to join the team going to the United Kingdom to negotiate Independence in 1965.

He also attended my wedding in January 1966. I became his Minister of Works and Hydraulics in the Coalition Government in 1967. As a member of his Cabinet, my relationship with him was close and excellent. In fact, sitting behind me is my eldest child who was born in 1967 and Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham knew of her birth even before I did. I will tell you how it happened. In his usual concerned manner, he always found time to enquire about the welfare of other people and so when I turned up for Cabinet meeting on the 28th December, 1966, he asked me if my wife had had the baby as yet. He knew that my wife had gone to Mercy Hospital three days before. I told him, No. He then turned to Rudy Kendall, who was Minister of Health, and said to him, "Rudy, get Dr. Han and tell him to go to the Mercy Hospital and check on Feilden's wife. Give him my personal Cabinet telephone number and let him telephone me at this number." Dr. Han was a specialist gynecologist on loan to the Public Hospital from Albany University. About midday the telephone on the Cabinet table rang and Odo answered it. He then turned to me, while handing me the telephone, and say, "Boy Feilden, you haven't done any better than me. It is a girl." It was Dr. Han on the telephone telling me that mother and daughter were doing well. Shortly afterwards, Odo adjourned Cabinet and we had a small celebration. Such was the depth of warmth and feeling of the man, Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham.

I remember on another occasion he asked me how was the child. He never failed to enquire about my family. I told him that she had just started to speak and had developed the habit of saying "Shut up." Shortly afterwards, she was invited to his little daughter's birthday party. She went and with his immense and fantastic memory my wife told me that he went up to my little girl and said, "Young Feilden, I understand that you can say 'Shut up.'" My wife told me that she looked him in the face and said to him, "Shut up." Perhaps that was the only occasion when somebody ever told the Prime Minister to shut up.

Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham was the kind of person who always found time to listen to other people's problems. I could telephone him at anytime of the day or night and as long as he was available he would speak to me and, if necessary, arrange to see me. He was everyone's friend and his memory was phenomenal. He never forget a face

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or a name. His untimely death is not only a tragic loss to Guyana, but a deep loss to the Caribbean and, indeed, to the entire world. He was one of the founding fathers of CARIFTA, the forerunner of CARICOM. Despite obstacles, he always strove desperately for Caribbean integration. He was ardently committed to the non-aligned movement and, indeed, from what I gather, one of the founder members. His fight against that despicable system, apartheid, is well known. He was, indeed, one of the great orators and leaders of the century. His forensic cut and trust in debate, his sharp wit, his ready repartee, will be sorely missed. Later this year will be my nineteenth continuous year in Parliament. During most of those years I have had the pleasure of listening to him. Even when we violently disagreed, it was still a pleasure to listen to his oratory.

Guyanese and the world mourn his passing. To his sorrowing widow, Cde. Viola, and to his daughters and his entire family, may I on behalf of my party and myself extend heartfelt sympathy. Desmond Hoyte and Hammy Green, may I congratulate them on their appointments and wish them all success in their onerous duties because to follow in the path of Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham is no mean task. He is dead and gone but his memory lingers on. May his soul rest in peace.

The Speaker: Cde. Beniprashad.

Cde. Beniprashad: Cde. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to be given this opportunity to express my feelings at the loss of a loving man, a great leader, a statesman of exceptional ability, a father, a grandfather, a godfather. To many of us he had a personality and charm that cannot be matched anywhere in the world. His political career, was full of struggle for what we have today in Guyana. He caught the eyes of many world leaders. From the highest to the lowest he gave respect and recognition for himself and our nation. It was so much for Guyana and has passed away while still having so much more to do. His sudden death at this stage has been felt by every citizen in our country. He was for the people at all levels, from field, office and factory, an approachable man, easy to reach by the citizens of Guyana, from the oldest to the youngest, from the richest to the poorest, from the highest to the lowest.

(Cde. Beniprasad continues)

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He loved the whole of Guyana, the city, every town, every village, every mountain, every river, every field and his presence was an inspiration to every man, woman and child of our country. The intelligence, the personality, the knowledge, the ability, the love and affection, the humanity were all there in Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham. Cde. Speaker, just look around in this Assembly and you will see all the races of Guyana represented here from all levels. There are farmers, doctors, lawyers, just to mention a few.

Cde. Speaker, at this point there are not enough words to describe this great man. On behalf of myself and family I extend deepest sympathy to his dear widow, Cde. Vie, and all other members of his family. Cde. Speaker, our late President will always be remembered. May his soul rest in peace.

The Chairman: Comrades and Hon. Members I have just received a message from Cde. Basir a Member of Parliament. He has requested that his deepest sympathy be expressed to the Family, the Parliament and the Nation on the death of the President and regrets that he was unable to be here.

Comrades the motion is that we, the Members of this National Assembly at this Special Sitting assembled, record our profound grief at the loss sustained by Guyana on the death of Cde. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham; O. E., S. C., President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, and pay tribute to the distinguished service which he rendered to Guyana and direct that an expression of our heartfelt sympathy be conveyed to his sorrowing widow, children and relatives. Will Members kindly in silence for two minutes in support of the motion.

Members stood in silence for two minutes in support of the motion.

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion Carried.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Adjourned accordingly at 16:48 hrs.