

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

[VOLUME 1]

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE
FIRST PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE
CONSTITUTION OF GUYANA.

27th Sitting

Friday, 16th December, 1966

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Assembly met at 5 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Present:

His Honour the Speaker, Mr. A. P. Alleyne

Members of the Government

Ministers

The Honourable L. F. S. Burnham, Q.C.	- <i>Prime Minister</i>
Dr. the Honourable P. A. Reid	- <i>Minister of Home Affairs</i>
The Honourable P. S. d'Aguiar	- <i>Minister of Finance</i>
The Honourable N. J. Bissenber	- <i>Minister of Housing and Reconstruction (Leader of the House)</i>
The Honourable R. E. Cheeks	- <i>Minister of Local Government</i>
The Honourable E. F. Correia	- <i>Minister of Communications</i>
The Honourable Mrs. W. Gaskin	- <i>Minister of Education and Race Relations</i>
The Honourable L. John	- <i>Minister of Agriculture</i>
The Honourable R. J. Jordan	- <i>Minister of Forests, Lands and Mines</i>
The Honourable W. O. R. Kendall, C.B.E.	- <i>Minister of Trade, Shipping and Civil Aviation</i>
The Honourable D. Mahraj	- <i>Minister of Health</i>
The Honourable C. A. Merriman	- <i>Minister of Labour</i>
The Honourable J. H. Thomas	- <i>Minister of Economic Development</i>
4 The Honourable S. S. Ramphal, C.M.G., Q.C.	- <i>Attorney-General and Minister of State</i>

Parliamentary Secretaries

Mr. B. B. deGroot	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary, Prime Minister's Office</i>
Mr. G. Bowman	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Labour</i>
Mr. O. E. Clarke	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education and Race Relations</i>
Mr. J. G. Joaquin, O.B.E., J.P.	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Works and Hydraulics</i>
Mr. C. V. Too-Chung	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Finance</i>

Other Members

Mr. W. A. Blair	Mr. T. A. Sancho
Mr. J. Budhoo	Mr. M. F. Singh
Mr. W. G. Carrington	Mr. R. Tello, Deputy Speaker
Mr. R. G. B. Field-Ridley	Rev. A. B. Trotman
Mr. H. Prashad	Mr. H. M. S. Wharton, J.P.

Members of the Opposition

Dr. C. B. Jagan, Leader of the Opposition	Mr. D. C. Jagan
Mr. A. Chase	Mr. H. Lall
Mr. B. H. Benn	Mr. L. Linde
Mr. Ram Karran	Mr. R. D. Persaud
Mr. R. Chandisingh	Mr. M. N. Poonai
Dr. F. H. W. Ramsahoye	Dr. S. A. Ramjohn
Mr. E. M. G. Wilson	Mr. E. M. Stoby
Mr. M. Hamid, J.P.	Mr. S. M. Saffee
Mr. J. R. S. Luck	

Clerk of the National Assembly - Mr. F. A. Naran.
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly - Mr. M. B. Henry.

Absent:

The Honourable M. Kasim, Minister of Works and Hydraulics - on leave
Mr. P. Duncan, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Local Government
Mr. H. J. M. Hubbard - on leave
Dr. Charles Jacob, Jr.
Mr. C. V. Nunes
Mr. M. Khan - on leave
Mr. Y. Ally - on leave
Mr. M. Bhagwan - on leave.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Mr. Speaker: We will now take a short suspension. Hon. Members may, if they care, leave their places in order to witness the arrival and inspection of the guard by a Guyanese Governor-General.

Sitting suspended at 5.02 p.m.

RESUMPTION OF SITTING

Sitting resumed at 5.23 p.m.

ARRIVAL OF THEIR EXCELLENCIES THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND LADY ROSE

Their Excellencies the Governor-General and Lady Rose entered the Chamber after being announced by the A.D.C.

5.25 p.m.

ADDRESS BY HIS HONOUR THE SPEAKER

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Prime Minister, hon. Leader of the Opposition, hon. Members of this National Assembly, Your Excellencies: Sir Walter Scott, writing in the eighteenth century in his great poem, "The Lay of the Last Minstrel", used these words:

"Breathes there the man, with
soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath
said,
This is my own, my native
land!"

Whose heart hath ne'er within
him burn'd
As home his footsteps he hath
turn'd
From wandering on a foreign
strand?"

Today, Sir, your heart - and the heart of every loyal Guyanese - burns with feelings of enthusiasm and joy and achievement, happy in the knowledge that, to use a local parlance, "a local boy has been appointed Governor-General of this independent Guyana." [Cheers.] We, in this honourable Chamber, feel thankful and happy for the dreams and ideas which were held years ago by the great nationalist politicians in this country of which number there are still a few sitting in this House: the hon. Prime Minister, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member, Mr. Brindley Benn, the hon. Member, Mr. Field-Ridley, the hon. Member, Mr. Ram Karran - these men saw a vision of an Independent Guyana at a time when Guyana would be owned by Guyanese and run by Guyanese for the benefit of Guyanese. [Cheers.] Today, Sir, those dreams have come true and, again, I say how happy we are to welcome you to this Chamber.

Under the Articles of the Constitution of this country it is enacted that there shall be a Parliament of Guyana consisting of Her Majesty the Queen and the National Assembly. Since you are now the Queen's representative in this country, and since you are such an integral part of this Parliament, I deem it proper to give you a brief insight into the composition of this honourable Chamber and its doings.

[MR. SPEAKER]

This, Sir, is a unicameral Parliament consisting of 53 elected Members. In addition to that number, the hon. Prime Minister is empowered to add not more than four, one of which number he has already added in the person of the learned and hon. Attorney-General and Minister of State.

Fifty-three Members vote in this House, the other Members are non-voting, but they have powers of deliberation. The Speaker is also a Member of the House; he, too, is non-voting. On my right sit the members of the Coalition Government led by the hon. Prime Minister, a great Guyanese. Opposite sit the official Opposition led by an equally great Guyanese, the hon. Member, Dr. Cheddi Jagan. On the Government side the hon. Minister of Housing and Reconstruction (Mr. Neville Bissember) is the Leader; the Chief Whip, the hon. David deGroot. On the Opposition side the hon. Member, Mr. Hamid, Chief Whip, the hon. Members Mr. Wilson and Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud, Assistant Whips. You have to know them, Sir, because you are, as I said, a part of this Parliament, and it is good that you know the people with whom you have to work during your term of office.

At times, Sir, the atmosphere in this House can be very robust, and, sitting in this Chair and presiding over debates, I find that there is a great deal of talent in this House and at times the debates, particularly on the National Security Bill, can reach a very high level. But at

times when Members seem to be off colour, and things get a little sleepy in this House, Members seem to blow off a little steam. Across the Table there is the usual parliamentary parry and thrust, and it is very, very illuminating to sit and listen to the Guyanese wit and the amount of repartee which passes in this home. I call it a home because the atmosphere is so homely and Members seem to be quite at ease in the House, and that is what it should be. This, then, is a brief outline of this Chamber and of the people who compose it - the people with whom you will have to deal during your term of office.

You come, Sir, from a great Guyanese family. I have heard the late Frederick Gardiner Rose sing in that baritone voice of his "The Road to Mandalay", and "Songs of Araby". I know that Your Excellency possesses a beautiful baritone voice, and we hope some day or other to have the privilege of hearing Your Excellency.

On behalf of this hon. Chamber, Sir, I bid you welcome, and I ask hon. Members to rise and behold Sir David Rose, Governor-General of Guyana.

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister (Mr. Burnham): Mr. Speaker, I am most grateful to have been permitted the opportunity, on behalf of the Government and the people of Guyana, to issue congratulations and words of welcome to their

Excellencies Sir David Rose and Lady Rose. Everyone knows that Sir David Rose is a son of a distinguished family, and we were reminded earlier today of the fact that he is the third generation Rose to have served in the Public Service of Guyana. Of his grandfather, I had been told by my father who used to be a schoolmaster; his father I had heard a great deal of; of him I know a fair amount.

I recall that my first meeting with Sir David, at close quarters, was in 1953, that memorable and historic year. Unless I am mistaken, though the Constitution did not so provide, I had and still have good reasons to believe that he was the person, as technical officer, who recommended my restriction. I was struck then by his high sense of duty and his integrity. So far as I saw then, so far as I note now, he was carrying out his duty as he saw it and, indeed, as it was at that time.

5.35 p.m.

I remember a minor incident which caused me to hold an even greater opinion of the man. A certain member of the party to which I then belonged, now the Leader of the Opposition, had been arrested and Mr. Rose, speaking to his counsel, your humble servant, on the afternoon of his arrest, had assured me that, so far as the police were concerned, they would not object to bail when the defendant came before the Magistrate though the police themselves were not pre-

pared to grant bail. A member of my profession, described as an honourable and learned profession, at the hearing of the case, attempted to suggest that the police at all times were prepared to oppose bail and had always been opposing it. I remember Mr. Rose standing up in court and admitting that the day before he had intimated to me that the police did not propose to oppose bail when the defendant came before the court.

Now, those were difficult times, so difficult that a member of my profession forsook veracity for a moment, but Mr. Rose, as a gentleman, did show absolutely no fear in sticking to and observing his undertaking and word.

A few weeks ago, when it was finally known on what date Sir David Rose would come to Guyana to be our first Guyanese Governor-General, I met a constable in the Police Force who had known Sir David when the latter had been an officer in the British Guiana Police Force, as it then was, and the comments made by this constable were all glowing and flattering. It is not often that one who is set in high authority in a disciplined force gets such warm tributes paid to him by the lowliest of the lowly. I think that bears evidence of the fact that, amongst the members of the Force, Sir David was considered a gentleman and one who could be relied upon to do his duty fearlessly and with justice.

[THE PRIME MINISTER]

It was not merely because Sir David was a gentleman that the Government saw fit to advise Her Majesty to appoint him. It was also because it was recognized that Sir David was a man of ability and the type of individual to whom we would like to do honour and who would do honour to the office of Governor-General.

This, as you know, Mr. Speaker, is an ultra democratic country, in the sense that the most specious, ill-informed criticism finds its place in the Press. There was criticism, of course. I am sometimes led to believe that the easiest way to sell one's self, or to sell one's newspaper, is to be irresponsibly and ill-informedly critical of something which cannot in logic be attacked. It was said that Sir David had been away from the country. From my point of view and the point of view of the majority of Guyanese, the fact that he had been away from the country on promotion and in service, the fact that he had earned the high opinion and commendation of those politicians with whom he had to work in places like Antigua, all those facts gave one answer, namely, that he was the proper and perfect choice in the circumstances.

We have been Independent for over six months now. In point of fact the Parliament is supreme; in point of fact the political Government makes the final executive decisions. But apart from the legalism attached to the fact

of Independence, there is necessary for any new nation a certain amount of symbolism. I think Sir David's appointment to the Governor-Generalship of Guyana is part of the necessary symbolism, which the new nation of Guyana requires and must have if it is to build up its own legends, if it is to feel that it is in every sense an Independent country. It is a happy fact that the symbol, in this instance, is a distinguished gentleman from a distinguished family.

The time was, of course, when it was but a dream that the Head of State in Guyana should be a Guyanese. The then Government and Opposition in 1963 put away their implements of war to join in a Motion calling upon Her Majesty's Government to appoint a Guyanese Governor, and it is not without significance today that all the Benches are full on both sides of this House. The presence of the Opposition here today, I am led to believe, is an indication that the Opposition shares in the happiness which the majority of Guyanese feel at the fact of the appointment of a Guyanese Governor-General, a son of the soil and a native of our country.

On an occasion like this, I enjoy the happy fortune of having the face of my quondam colleague, now my legislative colleague, to look upon. I cannot and will not speak for him, for in this House there is no one who is incapable of expression. The old order has changed and today it has yielded place to the new.

I am not the legal adviser to the Government. That is the role played by my learned and hon. Friend, Mr. Ramphal, the Attorney-General; but taking a careful look at the Constitution, I can discover really only two things in which the Governor-General has an absolute discretion. One, in his choice of Prime Minister. The discretion there is more apparent than real, because if he commits the error of choosing one with whose choice the majority of the legislators do not agree - we need say no more.

5.45 p.m.

The second matter in which the Governor-General has an absolute discretion, if I remember correctly, is with respect to the choice of his personal and domestic staff. That is as it should be, for even Prime Ministers have an absolute discretion in that field. But that is, so to speak, the *littera legis*. There is much more to the Governor-General's duties than being able to decide merely who should be Prime Minister and who should be the members of the Governor-General's personal, private and domestic staff.

As I understand it, the role of the Head of State under the Constitution with which we have been endowed is to give counsel and support to the political Government, even though the Constitution states that, in practically every case, the Governor-General must act on the advice of the political Government. There is so much which a Governor-General of Sir David's ability, understanding and background can

do. There is so much advice and counsel which can be his to give to those who, under the Constitution, formally instruct him what to do. During the period of time that Sir David is here, I can say that, as Prime Minister, I hope to take full advantage of those unwritten powers enjoyed by a Head of State, those unlegislated duties which a Head of State owes to a political Government. I have good reason to believe that I would be wiser and the country would benefit if full advantage is taken of Sir David's ability, counsel and assistance.

It must not be believed that because, so far, my references have been to Sir David, I have been forgetful of the fact that, to his left, there is a charming lady, Lady Rose. She, too, though not native born, has, in many circles, been considered a Guyanese and has laboured here in Guyana. Speaking recently to one of her professional colleagues, I discovered that she, too, was held in very high esteem when, as a doctor, she practised here in Guyana. We are happy that Sir David should have found so charming and fine a spouse, and we shall be only too pleased to emphasize to her that not only is she legally a Guyanese, having taken unto herself a Guyanese husband, but because of the very fine work which she has done here, and the great reputation which she left behind her when she departed from this country, it would be a pleasure to offer her citizenship of this fair, green land of Guyana.

[THE PRIME MINISTER]

We know that the good die young, but we hope that Sir David and Lady Rose are not so good that the Lord will not spare their lives to spend many a year here in Guyana - years of happiness, years of service. This is indeed a fine moment. Maybe one may say it is Sir David's and Lady Rose's shining hour. I am sure that this is Guyana's shining hour for today we see one further and significant step in the complete Guyanisation of our country.

We greet, we welcome the new Governor-General. We welcome him not in the same way as we have welcomed other Heads of State, telling them about labba and creek water, we welcome Their Excellencies in the same way as a father welcomes his beloved prodigal son who has been away too long. [Applause.]

The Leader of the Opposition (Dr. Jagan): Mr. Speaker, Your Excellencies: the landmarks of Guyanese history have brought our people to the point where they are now able to have a Governor-General who is a son of our soil. The occasion is one of achievement for this country and, in my position as Leader of the Opposition, it is against this background that I welcome you.

Your Excellency's office must bring you into active participation in the life of the community at various levels, including participation which takes the form of exercising administrative and other powers in Your Excellency's

own deliberative judgment or on the advice of Ministers. In these circumstances, I take this opportunity to express my feeling that your arrival coincides with a period of political and economic struggle in Guyana, in which sides are being taken and lines of agreement and disagreement are being very clearly drawn. The fight for national survival has reached proportions which were not previously anticipated, and many have been the occasions when genuine claims for social justice have either been submerged in a morass of economic and social desperation or have been lost on account of the perversities of minority Government.

You come representing the sovereign at a time when inflation and problems of finance have manifested themselves in clearly perceptible forms, and when the need to maintain these meagre constitutional guarantees which were conceded on the accession of Guyana to Independence has become pressing. It would appear that those who are on the side of genuine economic stability and who feel the necessity for political Government to function under a broad consensus of public opinion have so far achieved too little.

Political division has brought economic distress which is apparent everywhere. The constitutional guarantees appear to be violated at every turn by men who, among their other claims, have a predilection for exercising the power of arbitrary arrest and detention and restriction of

freedom of movement. It would also appear that industrial unrest and political protest have reached a point at which the right to freedom of movement is threatened.

We wish to assure Your Excellency, nevertheless, that although Independence does not create in the minds of our present rulers those attitudes of mind which are required to infuse the breath of freedom in the institution which constitutional guarantees attempt to defend, public opinion remains firm in support of the creation of those conditions of life in our society which will bring freedom, justice, and the realization of the dignity of every individual who belongs to or may be in Guyana.

5.55 p.m.

We look forward to the faithful exercise in an unbiased and unprejudiced manner of those duties and functions which fall within your province. By an impartial discharge of your duties to all the peoples of Guyana, you can make your term of office one that will long be remembered. But if, perchance, you fall into the maelstrom of unsavoury pressures, you will, like your predecessor, fail to secure the full confidence and respect of all sections of the Guyanese community. We do not wish the latter event to occur, and wish at the outset to say that, notwithstanding the circumstances of your appointment, we pledge our co-operation to you in the fair discharge of your duties and

would wish you a happy sojourn in your new and distinguished office.

For this season, my colleagues on this side of the House wish to join with me in conveying to both Your Excellencies, and to your family, our best wishes for a happy Christmas, and for success in the coming year.

His Excellency the Governor-General (Sir David Rose): Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members: I am deeply grateful to you, sir, and to hon. Members for the generous welcome you have extended to my wife and myself this afternoon, and for the privilege of addressing the National Assembly in reply to the addresses of welcome made on the occasion of my appointment to the office of Governor-General. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the hon. Prime Minister, and the hon. Leader of the Opposition for the very generous welcome they have addressed to my wife, my family and myself.

I am conscious, Mr. Speaker, of the honour and trust which has been bestowed upon me by Her Majesty the Queen of Guyana, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister, in my appointment to this high office under our Constitution. No man could receive the great honour to represent the Head of State in his own country, without a genuine feeling of humility and inadequacy.

Mr. Speaker, there could be no happier way for me, with my wife and children, to return to

[H.E. THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL]

my native land, which is also the land of birth of four of my six children, and we will do our best to make ourselves worthy of the trust reposed in us. To this end, we are determined to do all we can to serve the people of Guyana. I am also very grateful to have the privilege of following my grandfather and my father in the Public Service of this country. My father's life work, his selfless dedication to the treatment and cure of Leprosy and Filariasis, will be a fitting example in service which I will strive to emulate.

Mr. Speaker, as we observe the world scene today in the first year of Guyana's Independence, we perhaps cannot avoid a feeling of great hope mixed with foreboding and concern for the progress of mankind. Great hope because we are in the modern age of science and technology brought to the knowledge of an ever-increasing number of people both by modern educational facilities and by modern communications media - television, air travel, radio; foreboding and concern because these great potentialities for our material well-being offered by the modern age seem in danger of being snatched from our grasp by man's apparent inability to understand and serve his brother man and to share with him the reward of knowledge and resource.

The hopeful dialogue between the great Powers of the East and the West moves forward only slowly. The mounting toll in human

life and suffering in the Vietnam war daily reminds us of this. In other parts of the world, men have never seemed so deeply and irreconcilably divided in recent history for reasons which find their origin entirely in racial intolerance and discrimination. The spread of this unhappy conflict with its unfathomable misery for millions of our brother men has not spared the Commonwealth as the tragic events in Southern Rhodesia constantly bring to our notice. From this confusing world scene around us, only the age-old truth stands clearly forward, that mankind cannot reap the full benefits of his God-given intelligence (benefits which, in this age of science, could place us within reach of a material well-being undreamed of in earlier generations) unless there can be an honourable peace between nation and nation and unless there can be peace and stability within nations.

The role which our young nation will play in this troubled world is one which my Government, with the assistance and authority of this honourable Assembly, will formulate and define. In your deliberations on the affairs of the nation you may well ask: Have we not a challenging opportunity as a member nation of the United Nations and the Commonwealth to show the way by example towards racial tolerance in our multi racial country? Can we not draw increasing and lasting strength from the not too distant experience and sufferings of our people in that dark period of

violence when our just renown for inter racial amity and co-operation was so sorely tested, but which we have survived and placed so firmly behind us? Can we not share the lessons of our experience with others?

And to come to the Caribbean scene, Mr. Speaker. Like other Guyanese who have had the privilege to serve both in the individual West Indian islands and in the brave experiment of the West Indies Federation, I was profoundly impressed by the respect with which our countrymen are held by our West Indian brothers in those islands. One constantly hears of the distinguished contribution made by one Guyanese or another in any particular island in the public service, the judiciary, the legal and medical professions, business, and so on. The reputation which our people enjoy in the islands for hospitality, friendliness and good citizenship is almost a by word. One need only think of our potential resources and the steps which the Government has already taken towards closer economic co-operation in the region to behold a vista of challenging and hopeful possibilities for the young Guyanese nation and her sister nations in the Caribbean islands.

6.05 p.m.

Against this background, Mr. Speaker, this National Assembly of Guyana, which I have the honour to address today as the first Guyanese Governor-General, has a unique responsibility to discharge, for it has been entrusted by our people to set our course on the uncharted sea of

national independence. The course which this Government sets under the sovereign authority of this Parliament may well govern the lives and prosperity of generations of Guyanese to come. This is your great task: to shape Guyana's destiny in the world of nations; this is the heavy burden with which the people of Guyana have entrusted the first Parliament of the nation. As true sons and daughters of our soil, there is no doubt that you can live up to this solemn charge. I am proud and eager to walk hand in hand with you through this opening chapter of our story as a nation.

Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, I am thankful to Almighty God to have been given the opportunity to serve our people at this time. It is to this ideal of service to the people of Guyana, no matter how small and insignificant any individual contribution such as mine may be, that I sincerely dedicate myself with my wife on this day. [Cheers.] And I pray God to guide your deliberations in this the first national Parliament of independent Guyana, as I pray Him to give me the strength and wisdom to honour the trust reposed in me in the office of Governor-General under the Constitution. [Cheers.]

PRESENTATION OF MEMBERS AND THEIR WIVES TO SIR DAVID AND LADY ROSE

Mr. Speaker: Your Excellencies, permit me to present to you

[MR. SPEAKER]

the wives and Members of the National Assembly.

[The following Members (and those wives who were present) were presented to their Excellencies:

Mr. R.C. Tello
Mr. D.B. deGroot
Mr. G. Bowman
Mr. O.E. Clarke
Mr. J.G. Joaquin
Mr. C.V. Too-Chung
Mr. W.A. Blair
Mr. J. Budhoo
Mr. W.G. Carrington
Mr. R. G. B. Field-Ridley
Mr. H. Prashad
Mr. T.A. Sancho
Mr. M.F. Singh
Rev. A.B. Trotman
Mr. H.M.S. Wharton
Mr. A. Chase
Mr. B.H. Benn

Mr. Ram Karran
Mr. R. Chandisingh
Dr. F.H.W. Ramsahoye
Mr. E.M.G. Wilson
Mr. M. Hamid
Mr. J.R.S. Luck
Mr. D.C. Jagan
Mr. H. Lall
Mr. L. Linde
Mr. R.D. Persaud
Mr. M.N. Poonai
Dr. S.A. Ramjohn
Mr. E.M. Stoby
Mr. S.M. Saffee.]

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved: "That this Assembly do now adjourn until Tuesday, 20th December, 1966, at 2 p.m."

[Mr. Bissember.]

Adjourned accordingly at 6.12 p.m.