

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORTS

/Volume 08/

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE FIRST SESSION (1981) OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FOURTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA.

2nd Sitting 4:30 pm Monday, 9th February, 1981

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (82)

Speaker (1)

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

Members of the Government – People's National Congress (69)

Prime Minister (1)

Cde. Dr. P.A. Reid, O.E., M.P.,
Prime Minister

Other Vice-Presidents (4)

Cde. S.S. Naraine, A.A., M.P.,
Vice-President, Works and Transport
Cde. H.D. Hoyte, S.C., M.P.,
Vice-President, Economic Planning and Finance
Cde. H. Green, M.P.,
Vice-President, Public Welfare
Cde. B. Ramsarrop, M.P.,
Vice-President, Parliamentary Affairs and Party/State Relations

Senior Ministers (10)

Cde. R. Chandisingh, M.P.,
Minister of Higher Education
Cde. O.E. Clarke, M.P.,
Minister of Regional Development
Cde. R.H.O. Corbin, M.P.,
Minister of National Development
*Cde. F.E. Hope, M.P.,
Minister of Trade and Consumer Protection
*Cde. H.O. Jack, M.P.,
Minister of Energy and Mines
*Cde. Dr. M. Shahabuddeen, O.R., S.C., M.P., (Absent)
Attorney General and Minister of Justice
*Cde. R.E. Jackson, M.P.,
Minister of Foreign Affairs
*Cde. J.A. Tyndall, A.A., M.P., (Absent on-leave)
Minister of Agriculture
*Cde. S.A. Moore, M.P., (Absent on-leave)
Minister of Home Affairs
*Cde. J.R. Thomas, M.P.,
Minister of Education

* Non-elected members

Ministers (13)

- Cde. J.P. Chowritmootoo, J.P., M.P.,
Minister, Environment and Water Supply, in the
Ministry of Public Welfare
- Cde. U. E. Johnson, M.P.,
Minister of Co-operatives
- Cde. J.N. Maitland-Singh, M.P.,
Minister, Consumer Protection, in the
Ministry of Trade and Consumer Protection
- Cde. S. Prashad, M.P.,
Minister, Crops and Livestock, in the
Ministry of Agriculture
- Cde. Sallahuddin, M.P.,
Minister, Finance, in the Ministry of
Economic Planning and Finance
- Cde. R.E. Williams, M.P.,
Minister, Fisheries, in the Ministry of Agriculture
- *Cde. C.A. Nascimento, M.P.,
Minister, Mechanical Equipment, in the
Ministry of Works and Transport
- *Cde. F.U.A. Carmichael, M.P.,
Minister of Information
- *Cde. F.U.A. Carmichael, M.P.,
Minister, Forestry, in the Minister of Agriculture.
- *Cde. Y. V. Harewood-Benn, M.P.,
Minister of Public Service
- *Cde. H. Rashid, M.P.,
Minister, in the Office of the President
- *Cde. Van Sluytman, M.P.,
Minister, Drainage and Irrigation in the
Ministry of Agriculture
- *Cde. R.A. Van West-Charles, M.P.,
Minister, Health, in the Ministry
of Public Welfare

Ministers of State (3)

- Cde. M. Corrica, M.P.,
Minister of State for Culture, in the Ministry of
Education, Social Development and Culture
- Cde. R.C. Fredericks, A.A., M.P.,
Minister of State for Youth Sports,
in the Ministry of National Development
- *Cde. C.E. Wright, M.P.,
Minister of State for Construction, in the
Ministry of Works and Transport

Parliamentary Secretaries (3)

- Cde. A.W. Bend-Kirton-Holder, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary, Women's Affairs
and Housing
- Cde. P.A. Rayman, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister
- *Cde. E.M. Bynoe, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister

*Non-elected Member

Other Members (23)

Cde. D.A.N. Ainsworth, M.P.
Cde. M. Ally, M.P.
Cde. M. Armogan, M.P.
Cde. B. Beniprashad, M.P.
Cde. B. Bhaggan, M.P.
Cde. J.B. Caldeira, M.P.
Cde. A.A. Chin, M.P.
Cde. E. B. Davidson, M.P.
Cde. H. Doobay, M.P.
Cde. A.B. Felix, M.P.
Cde. E.H.A. Fowler, M.P.
Cde. P. Frederick, M.P.
Cde. E.F. Gilbert, M.P.
Cde. J. Gill, M.P.
Cde. A. McRae, M.P.
Cde. J.M. Munroe, J.P., M.P.
Cde. R.N. Primo, M.P.
Cde. C.G. Sharma, J.P., M.P.
Cde. H.L.B. Singh, M.P.
Cde. S.H. Sukhu, M.S., M.P.
Cde. B. Tiwari, M.P.
Cde. C. Vandenburg, M.P.
Cde. H.B. Walcott, J.P., M.P., Government Chief Whip

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

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

Members from the Regional Democratic Councils (10)

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

Members of the Minority (12)

(i) People's Progressive Party (10)

Minority Leader (1)

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

Deputy Speaker (1)

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

Other Members (8)

Cde. J. Jagan M.P. (Absent)

Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, J.P., M.P.
Minority Chief Whip (Absent)

Cde. N. Persaud, M.P. (Absent)

Cde. C.C. Collymore, M.P. (Absent)

Cde. S.F. Mohamed, M.P. (Absent)

Cde. I. Basir, M.P. (Absent)

Cde. C.C. Belgrave, M.P. (Absent)

Cde. Dalchand, J.P., M.P. (Absent)

(ii) United Force (2)

Mr. M.F. Singh, 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

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Leave to Members

The Speaker: Leave has been granted to Comrade Jackson, Tyndall and Jairam for today's Sitting.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Speaker: The sitting of the National Assembly will be suspended until the arrival of the President.

Sitting suspended at 4:35 p.m.

5:17 p.m.

On resumption -- --

ARRIVAL OF THE PRESIDENT AND CDE. VIOLA BURNHAM

Their Excellencies, the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, Cde. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, O.E., S.C., and Cde. Viola Burnham were announced. Their Excellencies enter the chamber and were received by the Assembly.

The Speaker: Cde. President, may I invite you to address the National Assembly.

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT

His Excellency the President: Cde. Speaker, as this historic first sitting of the first Parliament under the People's New Constitution takes place, may I do what others have already done – congratulate you upon your being elected the first Speaker of this new Assembly. / Applause/

Obviously, the high competence, skill and tolerance with which you carried out your duties in the former National Assembly have been responsible for your present choice and I wish you every success and long and distinguished public service.

May I offer my congratulations, also to the Deputy Speaker, whose various qualities and qualifications for the post are well known. I wish him, too, hopefully many years of service in this Parliament, and to the people of Guyana.

Comrade Speaker, even to the casual observer one of the clear differences between this Assembly and its predecessor is that of size of membership. This is due mainly to the additional twelve members drawn from the Regional Democratic Councils and the National Council of Local Democratic Organs (NCLDO).

In the past, Local government was a subordinate and inferior system to that of Central Government. Now, under the provisions of the People's New Constitution the two systems are part of a whole, the object of which is to bring democracy to the remotest corners of Guyana and to establish real power to the people. The structures and institutions which are at the moment enabling, are intended to ensure, from the People's Co-operatives of the National Assembly, the fullest participation of all of our citizen in decision-making and planning in the social, political and economic fields. The whole framework is aimed at unifying Guyanese by ensuring their maximum involvement at all levels, directly and indirectly, in community, regional and national development. The elections for the various Councils, from those of the People's Co-operatives to those of the Sub-regions, will take place shortly.

When the People's New Constitution was being promulgated it was emphasised that certain new rights were to be entrenched. These include the right of the tiller to the land that he tills, that of women to full equality, and an end to all forms of discrimination. The first implies the need for drastic land reform, and an end to land hoarding and the use of land as an instrument of exploitation. The second compels a revision of some of the extant concepts of property owning as between spouses, and the right to confer citizenship by marriage. And the third forces a change in the law of inheritance especially as it applies or does not apply to children born out of wedlock.

Two committees, headed by Comrades Gavin Kennard and Justice Desiree Bernard, respectively, have been established. Their tasks will be to advise my Government urgently and in detail, on these, and similar and related matters. The names of the other members of the Committees will be announced by the 28th of February, 1981.

In addition, in this the International Year of the Disabled, steps must be taken to recognise concretely the full citizenship of the physical handicapped and their right to personal fulfillment and to contribute to national development.

My Government takes seriously its duty, during this year and the ensuing four years of its term of office, to make a reality of the various new rights to be found in the Constitution. At the same time, however, particular attention is attracted to Article 38. I quote:

“38. It is the duty of the State, co-operatives, trade unions, other socio-economic organizations and the people through sustained and disciplined endeavours to achieve the highest possible levels of production and productivity and to develop the economy in order to ensure the realisation of the rights set out in this Chapter.”

The duty is that of all Guyanese individually and collectively, and we shall all have to work imaginatively and consistently.

In this national task, the Local Democratic Organs are pivotal and their members and leaders carry a heavy burden. Their power and positions spring from the people whose immediate representatives they are. They are equal partners with the people's representatives at the centre. We all stand or fall together, we all fail or succeed together.

In this context, my Government places great emphasis on planning throughout the economy, and at all levels; planning not for the sake of instituting a hideout inelastic bureaucratic system with an independent momentum or inertia of its own, but planning as a means of making the best and most

economic and economical use of all of our resources, while it allows the necessary flexibility for revising programmes in the light of experience, and the ability to deal with urgent matters or events which arise ex-improviso.

A State Planning Commission and Board were established in 1978. They are responsible ultimately to the President. Their importance must be recognised not as a new economic and political Czar, but as the machinery meshed and co-operating, with other agencies, to ensure the realistic conceptualisation, and efficient execution, of National plans in the economic, social and political sectors.

In 1980 our economic growth amounted to a mere two percent in real terms. This may be attributable largely to the increased and continually increasing price of oil, compulsorily imported inflation, and adverse terms of trade. But these are factors which have to be and must always be taken into account when planning. We cannot, for instance, in the 1980's, plan on the basis of 1972 cheap oil prices or 1975 higher sugar prices.

Further, every Ministry, every Public Corporation, every Government Department, every Public or Parastatal Agency must plan within the context of the National Plan, within the terms of Perspective Plan, as well as within the Budget of a single year at a time.

Ministries, Corporations, Departments and Agencies, as from 1981, if it was not the case before, will have to get a clear concept of their tasks, duties, targets and economic and social objectives. These will have to be articulated in writing and agreed after discussion with the State Planning Commission at the relevant times. Of course, they may be subsequently varied but only after further discussion and agreement and not whimsically. Carelessness and casualness will be vices and privileges of the past.

Ministries in particular, will have to recognise their roles, especially that of monitoring, in relation to Corporations which fall within their respective Ministers' portfolios. Their tasks will be not merely regulatory but also, economic, promotional, productive, and social. The services to the people for which they are finally responsible, must be satisfactory and efficient from every point of view. Their involvement must be more than mechanical and book-keeping. It is my Government's conviction that an awareness and articulation of objectives will be conducive to excellent performance, the more effective deployment of human and material resources in our system and nation, and the achievement of the ultimate in service to the people.

It is palpable that the Public Service and Public Sector will have to be restructured in several respects. At the same time, there will be intensive in-service training and an improvement of remuneration and other benefits, based on performance and agreed incentive schemes. There will be no place for dead weight and the idler, there, however, will be rewards for action and the imaginative.

1981 has been designated the Year of Energy. This is referable not only to the physical and mental energy which the nation must display as a prerequisite to survival, let alone progress, but also and perhaps more especially to the need for the adumbration and the effectuation of a relevant and sensible energy policy.

The first and immediate objective of such a policy must be to conserve energy, and to rehabilitate

and improve our present capital stock in this area. The latter exercise will be a costly one, which the general taxpayer cannot be expected to continue subsidizing indefinitely. At the moment, even the netting generating costs are subsidised. We shall have to pay for the power we use. Though, the tariffs will be structured in such a manner that the small man with four house light, a radio and an electric iron in use on an average of five hours, eight hours, and one hour per day, respectively, will not be called upon to pay a higher bill than at present

Second, the efficiency of our national generating agency at managerial and non-managerial levels will have to be raised to the maximum and optimum. The consumer must not be asked to pay for inefficiency, especially, in the Year of Energy.

Third, in the short term, we as a nation must develop alternative sources of energy to those based on petroleum. A distinguished scientist has remarked that no country is without adequate energy resources, for petroleum is not the only source of power or energy. In many sectors, and through various agencies, we have been carrying out successful experiments in energy production based on wood and animal and vegetable waste. This must be accelerated and must pass from the stage of experiment to that of practical economic application.

Fourth, we must pursue actively the identification and assessment of our oil reserves. So far, the results here have been most encouraging and heartening.

So too have been those with respect to the exploitation of uranium – another source of power and energy in the modern world.

Fifth, we must seek to develop one resource which, we and all the world know, we possess in abundance – water power. This is relevant and crucial even after we will have found oil. The site, the Upper Mazaruni, has been identified. The studies have been made; and these have established the technical, commercial, and economic feasibility of a hydropower complex cum Aluminium Smelter. Negotiations are at the moment proceeding with respect to financing, and establishing a consortium between Government and a smelter partner.

All of these experiments, activities and plans in the view of my Government ought to be centrally co-ordinated and programmed. To that end, it is proposed to convert the informal Energy Unit into the Energy Authority. The necessary legislation will be placed before this House for consideration within three weeks.

At the beginning of this first year the People's New Constitution there have been some straightforward objectives set. An important one is the improving and expansion of the nation's housing stock. It is not enough to speak of our past achievements – the thousands of new housing units both under the aegis of the Government, and on the initiative of private individuals and Insurance Companies.

The people of Guyana, rural and urban, are still not properly housed. There are still too many homeless and ill-housed comrades. Housing is a service we owe to our people. That is the political conviction of many of us, and that is dictated by our Constitution under Article 26. Housing is not a mere social service. It is as economic an undertaking as the building of factories. First, a self-housed

citizen is likely to be more productive than an ill-housed or un-housed one. Second, the production, procurement and deployment of building materials and inputs provide employment and give a fillip to our economic development in the circumstances of Guyana. Housing has a strong ripple effect on the economy.

The Ministry of Housing within the Ministry of Public Welfare has been charged with co-ordinating at a national level, all the housing activities and ensuring that all the relevant funds, facilities, and resources are utilised to the best advantage in town and country, and that slums in a socialist Guyana become a thing of the past. The public and private sectors will be fully involved.

It no doubt has come to the notice of this Assembly that a new Ministry of Environment and Water Supply has been created. The task of this Ministry is to ensure that long before the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade is ended every Guyanese should have access to pure water for all relevant purposes and that our physical environment be such as will make us all proud. It is not a matter of mere aesthetics. It is as much a matter of health, human happiness and one of the important prerequisites of productivity and development.

The environment of Georgetown and the rest of Guyana has to be, and will be improved, and all those stagnant canals and trenches in the capital and elsewhere must become clear, clean running streams by the year 1982.

During this year my Government will be working towards providing adequate land, water and air transport facilities eventually for all of our citizens. These are the just deserts of our people. At the same time they are necessary for the effective functioning of the society and the economy.

Also among the priorities for 1981 will be the rehabilitation, improvement, and expansion of the physical facilities for education, particularly those for primary education. Many of the buildings and classrooms are inadequate for the growing school population and the new curricula, programmes and emphases, and in several cases their age, and neglect before they were government owned, are reflected in the general state of dilapidation. More, in the field of Nursery Education, there is need to build so that our children at that tender age may be removed from ill-suited temporary buildings.

There will be continued emphasis on the content and quality and direction of training offered, but atmosphere, surroundings and environment are also most crucial.

Meanwhile, Higher Education has been redefined to include not only University training but also most aspects of non-traditional, primary, secondary, and technical education. The responsibility for this has been put within a new Ministry, and my Government has determined that all education institutions run or financed by the state, shall be national institutions responding to the needs of the society and contributing to the task of nation building. We cannot afford to pay for the esoteric, the ivory towered, the insulated and the isolated. Public financing commands obligations to the people.

A new Ministry, that of Manufacturing Industry, under the responsibility of the Minister of Trade has been established. Its role is to co-ordinate, advise and help create favourable conditions for the activities in this sector; that apart from clarifying and articulating policy particularly under the Investment

Code. This is most important if there is to be a coherent and planned development of manufacturing whether the investment be public or private, local or foreign.

The emphasis on developing rapidly a significant manufacturing sector does not imply a downgrading of agriculture, which is, and for a long time will continue to be a core sector. We must feed ourselves and others in the “hungry eighties”. We must accumulate the capital for further development in other areas. We must produce the inputs for secondary industries.

The national investment in agriculture over recent years has been huge, and has already begun to pay dividends. But it has to be carefully managed, and the necessary ancillary services and infrastructure, like farm to market roads, provided. It must be the subject of macro and micro planning, if the hoped for results and benefits are to flow. It is not without reason, therefore, that there are three Ministers charged with responsibilities directly related to agriculture. It is not without reason that the Ministry of Agriculture hosts the largest planning division outside of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Finance.

At the same time, you may wish to note the creation of the Ministries of Fisheries and Forestry. We must harvest economically for the benefit of our people the vast natural resources in these fields. The products are in demand in the Caribbean and throughout the world.

It should come as no surprise that at this time there has been instituted the Ministry of Co-operatives linked informally but meaningfully to the Ministry of Economic Planning and Finance. My government’s thesis that the Co-operative can, will and must be the mechanism for ensuring maximum people involvement in economic decision-making, and moving the society towards socialism, is too well known to need any polemics.

The new Ministry will function very closely with the Local Democratic Organs, and will be charged with co-ordinating the relevant activities of all other agencies involved in the development of co-operativism. It will in sum, be responsible for assisting, expanding and strengthening the Co-operative sector in every Community and Region, through the Co-operative Republic of Guyana – the sector that is destined to be the dominant one in our economy.

During its term of office my Government will be ever mindful of Article II of the People’s New Constitution which declares the entitlement of Co-operatives, Trade Unions, and all socio-economic organisations of a national character, to participate in the various management and decision-making process of the State, and particularly in the political, economic, social and cultural sectors of national life.

It is in this context that the Trade Union Congress holds membership on the Guystac Board and the State Planning Commission. It is hoped however, that participation will be more widespread at other levels and that the Trade Unions in this new era, will be very active partners in national progress and development.

My Government’s commitment to the socialist ideal is a matter of common knowledge – in other quarters it would be described as notorious – also is its conviction that co-operativism must be seen as the major instrument of economic and social transformation. The main object of development for my Government is people and, I quote from Article 14 of the Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of

Guyana, “the fullest possible satisfaction of their growing material, cultural and intellectual requirements.”

It is against this background that development must be understood. Growth is merely an indicium of what there is within the economy to provide for human development, it is not an end in itself divorced from the main objective. But it must be achieved if the latter is in turn to be achieved. Our country’s material wealth has to be continuously increased, and our economy expanded to provide the amenities and benefits which we declared as rights in the People’s New Constitution. This, Comrade Speaker, is a task for all Guyana, all Guyanese and Guyanese primarily.

Comrade Speaker, the Co-operative Republic of Guyana is not an island geographically or metaphorically. As you know for instance our country was one of the founding members of Caricom. To that regional institution we are irrevocably committed. There have been difficulties, there have been disappointments, but Caricom has served us well. The envisioned rationalisation and complementarity of the economy of the Region will lead to rapid development for the people of the Caribbean.

Guyana does not seek to induce or proselytize for ideological monolithism. We accept without reserve the right of every nation and people to choose its own political and economic models, we are against, and abhor, outside intervention in the affairs of sovereign nations. But co-operation at the economic and other levels is not only possible, but also desirable, and must ensure to the benefit of the people.

It is therefore my Government’s intention to do everything within its competence to make a Caricom Summit possible within the near future. If we were to identify and deepen our areas of co-operation, we shall be better able to face the rest of the world and contribute more meaningful to the North/South debate on the New International Economic Order.

A concomitant of our active membership in Caricom is our commitment to and membership of the Non-Aligned Movement. My Government unequivocally and unapologetically stands by and supports the principles of that Movement. We are for the end of colonialism in all forms, and in all parts of the world. We are for true independence, and we in Guyana refuse to be pawns of either East or West, we are protagonists of the New International Economic Order. We did not win independence to have our copy books marked by masters new or old. That’s where we stand.

We have chosen our course and will not be lectured to by big or medium-sized “brother”. We are resolved to choose our friends and to deal with and speak to them on the basis of equality. Friendship does not commit us to the obsequious acceptance of other people’s perceptions. Our first and last loyalty is to Guyana and its interests.

But, Comrade Speaker, our ability to steer an independent course rests entirely on our ability to build and strengthen the economy and State of Guyana, on our ability to make self-reliance a fact and not a phrase.

Comrade Speaker, in our hands lies the destiny of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. Let these be safe hands.

His Excellency presented a copy of his Address to the Speaker.

Thanks to the President

The Speaker: Cde. President, thank you very much for your kind congratulations and remarks on my re-election.

Cde. President, on behalf of the Members of Parliament and on my own behalf, I wish to thank you most sincerely for the honour of coming here to open the First Session of our Fourth Parliament and for delivering the Presidential Address to us. You are no stranger to this Chamber and whilst your great oratorical skill and your brilliant performance at debates will be surely missed by all of us who had the privilege and pleasure to be Members of Parliament when you yourself, Cde. President, was a Member, we today joyously welcome you as the first President with executive powers of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. We are also heartened that you will on other occasions have cause to address us and eagerly look forward to those occasions.

Your address sets out the Government's policy and Comrades and hon. Members will as usual be afforded the opportunity of debating it.

We are also grateful to Cde. Viola Burnham for her gracious presence with us this afternoon. [Applause.] Please be assured, Cde. President and Cde. Viola Burnham, of our highest esteem and regards.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved. "That this Assembly do now adjourn until Thursday, 12th February, 1980, at 2 p.m."
/The Vice-President, Parliamentary Affairs and Party/State Relations./

Adjourned accordingly at 6 p.m.