

# Official Report

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2011) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN*

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146<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Monday, 31<sup>ST</sup> January, 2011

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*The Assembly convened at 2.15 p.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Hon. Member Mr. Clement Rohee on his elevation to acting Prime Minister, temporary though it may be. Though it is not Mr. Rohee's ambition as publicly announced, let us hope that at some future time there is some permanence to these appointments.

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

### **(i) GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members this afternoon we can start with Mr. Raphael Trotman.

**Mr. Raphael Trotman:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. Permit me to continue in the vein of which we began by firstly expressing on my own behalf and that of the Alliance For Change, particularly its Parliamentary delegation, congratulations to our newest Member of Parliament, Ms. Baveghems, who is not here but none the less a fixture, as someone pointed out on the corridors, and known for her forceful activism over the years. I congratulated her privately and wish to do so now publicly. Even though the time may be short with elections anticipated later this year, nonetheless, I believe that she has earned the right to sit here

despite what some may say regarding her qualifications or otherwise. I believe her service to the people of Guyana earned her the right to sit in the peoples place. I wish as well to offer my congratulation, even though the other may be for a short period, to Hon. Member Rohee. It is with much anticipation that I would expect the style and standard of his debate will rise commensurate to his appointment. We expect something different from him this afternoon. I could not help but notice that you were perhaps making the offer for him to be a running mate, as you did throw out a challenge for all members of your escort to be offered cabinet positions.

This year's budget provides an excellent opportunity for us to take a holistic view, not just of the past fiscal year, but of the entire stewardship of this Government within this Ninth Parliament. This being the last budget to be presented in the Ninth Parliament for my colleague and brother the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. I believe that it is fair to say that there have been some individual successes which cannot and should not be denied. Even if we tried to or pretended to deny that these have occurred, I believe the evidence speaks for itself.

Our infrastructural development has continued at pace, no doubt. We have seen a new stadium, a bridge across the Berbice River, the Takatu Bridge which was in fact a gift from the people and Government of Brazil; nonetheless it is for our benefit. We have undoubtedly seen schools, hospitals, roads and a new Family Court, which in fact is now a sub judice matter, just to name a few. I will not stand here and pretend that there were no developments. In fact it would be indecent for me to come here and deny that there had not been some marked changes and improvement in several areas. I would, as I said state that right at the beginning. It would be equally indecent for me not to recognize that running parallel to these matters which I just described in every respect, a certain number of matters which tells us that we are not fairing as well as we believe we are. In my view, it could be argued that we are no better than we were when this Parliament first met and convened in September of 2006. The net result would mean then that our gains have been quite negligible.

I refer to our overall security situation, not just security in traditional sense of the Police Force with armour, vehicles, radio sets and things of that nature. I speak today more about the levels of security in the nation. I speak about our economic security, social security, agricultural and food security, educational security, health also political security and stability. The list is of course non-exhaustive. I posit that when we examine the matter from this angle

we see immediately that we are better described, as Hon. Member Cheryl Sampson said a few evening ago, we have become quite fittingly like *Thomas Hobbes* described in the 17<sup>th</sup> century *Leviathan*, I quote, “*solitary, pure, nasty, brutish and short*”. Without intending to blame Government or any individual Minister, two newspaper headlines of yesterday or today alone reminded me of what Hobbes wrote in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is most applicable today. Yesterday’s front page of one of the dailies had a man with one of his feet dangling where he had been shot and his foot almost severed. I believe there is a line that says he was a man of unsound mind. Today’s newspaper has a woman lying, who had been mauled by dogs which were released by the owner of a property. What these pictures tell is that we are in a society, no matter whether we pretend it is so or otherwise, we have become in fact quite brutish in the way we relate to each other. The degree to which persons are going on to the streets begging, stealing and just being vagrants or otherwise tells us that, as I said, things are not well.

We are for the most part in my view tumbling forward, and whilst I recognize a certain level of astute stewardship by my colleague the Hon. Minister of Finance, I also recognize a high degree of happenstance involved in our economic successes.

The economic intelligence report of October 2010, which I believe is the last report, forecast a somewhat different situation than that given by the Hon. Member when he spoke. I am bold enough to say that as pointed out in that report, our tradition export are doing so well that only a donkey would mess up a wind fall of the gold price being at \$1,333 per Troy ounce. I know for sure that my friend is no donkey. The point I am making is that because the prices are so good, it would take quite a foolish person to destroy the gains that we are getting.

As you would have noticed, I have taken a different approach at the Minister this year. It has been my custom, of the past five years that I have led the AFC as a parliamentary body, to name different Ministers who I felt deserved the honour of being recognised. I think I began with Minister Rodrigues-Birkett, and then I recognised Minister Ramsammy and Minister Ramsaran, I singled out Minister Manickchand on one occasion, and last year much to the eye of many people, Hon. Member Rohee, I recognised as a person who was trying his best to make things better. This year it has been quite difficult, because some of those whom I have recognised in the past have disappointed me now in the present. I am somewhat guarded about extending the platitudes as I did before. I however wish to say that in my estimation there have been some exemplary contributions made. The debate this year has not been as

bad as previous debates. There was some uncomplimentary language used which was expected.

I would like this year to recognise the efforts of the Minister of Finance. The reason being that he has, I believe, made those of our generation proud that he could pilot five successive budgets through this House. I did not say successful, but successive. We may disagree, but at least we recognise his contribution and his effort. Not all of his estimates and all of his reasoning sit well with us, but I believe we do appreciate the fact that, like I said, persons of our generation know his contributions and his intent.

There has been an unending, perhaps even a cacophony of noise about us working together, and the disappointments expressed on both sides for our inability to forge ahead and arise at a consensus on many matters. Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira on Friday last spoke about the loyal Opposition. I wish to state that we need to understand that the concept of the loyal Government and the loyal Opposition was designed for a monarchy, where the Regent was Head of State and Government, and so had his/her best people go against each other in debate, and at the end of the day made a decision on what was heard, said and presented. For us now in the year 2011, we need to cast, in my view, aside the last visages of colonialism, because in 1970 we declared ourselves a Republic. A debate designed in that adversarial style must have by definition a proposition and an opposition. For those who come here and say that the Opposition offers you nothing, that is because we have been designed by the very nature of which our structures had been presented to us in 1966 to oppose, because that is how we were told we are to behave.

We, on this side, believe that we are not seeing that we are our own worst enemies. The Opposition parties are not programmed to present alternatives. I believe it was Hon. Member Lumumba who demanded an alternative budget, or to support. We are programmed and designed to dismantle and to oppose, and when we do so we are ridiculed and challenged for doing so. Likewise, the Government expects that its budget will be attacked and it has to defend. We have been in my opinion caught in this unholy and unhealthy vortex for upwards of forty-five consecutive years, while other countries with far less human and natural resources, far less capacities, and even with far more problems than we have, have gone on to record not only unending economic growth and progress, but more importantly political stability.

I repeat what I have been saying for the past five years, that an adversarial Parliamentary system is quite against and contrary to the cohesion and development in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-dimensional society such as Guyana's. It was designed for a homogenous society, and it cannot work in Guyana. This is why report after report, and encounter after encounter, will see us going at each other. I urge that we stop coming here every year to beat up on ourselves and to stop insulting each other, and on the last day like today we make hollow statements about working together, then for the next eleven months we go at each other's throats again, then lament the fact that we fail to bring trust, respect and understanding for each other. Much talk about cooperation or the lack thereof has come from as I said the Government benches, but as I listen to Hon. Member Teixeira on Friday last, I did ask of the Clerk to provide me with some statistics. Before I go into this I wish to extend a little note, I do not know whether you are deserving of this or someone else, but I must say that the staff of the Parliament Office is operating at a phenomenal rate of excellence, and I wish to commend them. Whatever I have asked for in terms of research recently has been provided far quicker than I even expected. I noticed today that my questions which I asked about NICIL are already circulated, which is commendable.

**Mr. Speaker:** The staff is exclusively responsible for that, Hon. Member.

**Mr. Trotman:** One would have thought that elections year you would have claimed some for yourself and do as Hon. Member Basil Williams did as he published his C.V. in the Stabroek News – he would have it as a tick “Improvements in Parliament”. You are not of that ilk.

The Parliament Office has provided me with all of the Opposition motions for the Ninth Parliament, those are the motions presented by us on this side. They number thirty-seven. Of these thirty-seven, the Government has supported only four, which in itself tells the story of the lack of cooperation. When we are accused of not supporting anything that they bring, we brought – I will mention without going through the entire list – a motion for the National Development Strategy to be adopted anew, a motion on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, Motion on Casino Gambling, a Motion on the construction of the bridge across the Berbice River, a motion on the deduction....

**Ms. Gail Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, the issue my colleague is raised, says that the Government voted against his resolutions. They were in fact amended, and after the thirty-seven, several were approved by this House, some were sent Select Committees, such as the HIV/AIDS one.

It is not correct to say that none were supported. The point raised by the Member is that none were supported except four.

**Mr. Trotman:** Mr. Speaker, may I invite the Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira to get her own statistics. Mr. Hoyte used to say: “there are lies, there are damn lies and then there are statistics”, and I have the statistics.

**Ms. Gail Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member referred to the motion on the Rights of the Child which was tabled by Shontel Smith. It was amended and passed by this House. It was not opposed by the Government. I am very familiar with the thirty-seven motions that had been tabled. There is one pending that has still not been debated, that is because the AFC’s postponed it on several occasions.

**Mr. Trotman:** Being legally trained, Mr. Speaker, the motion which we presented; we would have wanted it to be passed and approved but it was not. Let me go on Mr. Speaker. What does the Hon. Member say about the motion on African Slave Trade and Slavery? Do you wish to raise and object? What does the Hon. Member say about the motion to review the operations of Guyana Power and Light Company? Do you wish to put in a....

**Ms. Gail Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I think I do know what the Member is doing, but I wish to say very clearly that I am willing with the Member, to sit down. If the Member is saying that all motions coming to this House must be accepted with no amendments, that is a rather strange proposition to this House. Motions were tabled both by Government and Opposition, and at various times the motions were amended, which were tabled by the Government, with the support of the Opposition and vice versa. Therefore, I do not accept this as a personal challenge. This is the way the Parliament operates.

**Mr. Trotman:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. Just to mention two more: the motion on the Allegation of Torture against the Joint Services of Guyana....

**Mr. Speaker:** Proceed Hon. Member.

**Mr. Trotman:** The motion to give access to Local and External Channels other than NCN, but also to the people of Region 10, in particular Linden. I believe the point has been made that it cuts both ways. The accusation could be made against us that we do not offer any support whatsoever. I am saying, and I have demonstrated that we also are quite capable of not only making the accusation, but also proving it, if and when the time comes.

I am saying that this framework under which we operate cannot work in Guyana. Despite all the talk about us trying to co-operate, the system is designed to keep us at each other's throats.

May I, with your leave and protection, go through some of the areas, because like I said, I am juxtaposing. Undoubtedly, there has been progress made, but I am showing that there are also instances where we are still lagging behind. Public procurement and corruption, something that is almost like a head of garlic for some Members over there. They run when they see it and smell it. Under this head, we have definitely not scored well. One only has to read the newspaper reports of failed stellings, over-budgeting for basic construction works; i.e. for the Amelia Falls road project, to know that we are not doing well in this sector. I would say – I have it here somewhere – one of our esteem colleagues who is also running for Office of the President, the Hon. Member Ramotar, remarked not so long ago in the newspapers “Ramotar Upset With Non-Establishment of Public Procurement Commission – Corruption Needs to be Weeded Out”. Much to my surprise, the word corruption never passed his lips when he spoke just a few nights ago. To those who say that there is no corruption existing, we all know – we all live in this society – we all know that it exists. There are some Members who sat here and heard him say that there is no corruption and that we should prove corruption exist. I say no more.

On the issue of mining, the LCDS and our Hinterland development, we all have to admit that strides have been made in this regard. In the era of our environmental protection and preservation, have we considered whether we are thinking straight in selling our birthright to mine thousands of tons of gold and precious minerals for a mess of pottage offered from those who have exhausted their resources and enjoy developmental-nation status elsewhere? I believe that we can do better.

I recently attended a lecture on food security. I know that this is a big pet subject for Hon. Member Persaud. I searched for a definition for “food security” which I believed was most applicable to Guyana. I quote, “it is a state where there is universal access to food that is healthy, nutritious, safe and culturally acceptable. In addition, in a food-secure community, the growing processing and distribution of food is supposed to be regionally based, socially just and environmentally sustainable.” Without a doubt, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture is one of our busiest and perhaps most productive Ministers, there is not a day that goes by or evening news cast that does not have his face on it. I will say that he is hard-working. I will

not deny that, but at the end of the day, are we doing better as a nation in terms of our overall food security?

I choose the reference of “culturally acceptable” for a reason. For example, there is not a time where I have travelled into the Interior when there had been floods, that there is not a shortage of cassava, which is a staple diet for our indigenous brothers and sisters. To say that we are sending fifty bags of rice for you is simply not good enough for them. These are the matters which tells me that despite all that we hear, we are still not doing well. With this in mind, I say that despite the innovations and many meetings attended by the Minister of Agriculture, and the launching of dairy development boards in August, we are still sailing as a people to firstly provide sufficient amounts of the right food to Guyanese, and to have enough left over for export. Too much food is being imported into Guyana, including fruits that we grow here: rice and sugar. In fact I saw someone eating tamarind from Thailand recently. It is just not good enough. I know that there are issues under the World Trade Organisation rules, but still, there are ways of getting around some of those issues.

Given the escalating food prices, we are yet to hear about the Government’s plan beyond the Grow More Food Campaign. So I ask, what efforts are being made to promote the value-chain agriculture, food preservation and canning? Nothing bothers me more than to hear a report as I did just now, that water is being imported into Guyana, that we have to import milk, guava juice, orange juice, cherry juice, and passion fruit juice. I ask the question as my Hon. Member and colleague Rohee would ask, *“Is goat bite we or what, that we cannot be producing?”*

Under the head of Human Rights and Human Dignity, I referred earlier to the rising number of homeless, street people and beggars, in which there is now an established business at certain corners where people in addition to avoiding traffic lights people are also finding ways to avoid that trade at certain places. We have a very busy, energetic and very defensive Minister as we have seen only a few nights ago, one of my favourites I might add. Yet, generally, again I ask, are we doing well? There are too many situations of children being abused. I think just flipping through the newspapers today, I saw some men doing some terrible things. We need to get into the mode where we are not just reacting to the act, but we need to find ways to prevent and to protect our children from being abused in this manner.

Then I come to that place which some people are trying to link to Mr. Mandela, that dumpsite. Even though it is a matter that is being tossed between the Ministry of Local



Government and the Municipality, I do believe, it is a place which we have entered thousands of our departed relatives, that the Hon. Member Minister Manickchand ought to have some involvement in that area. Perhaps, Mr. Rohee, we should do a M.O.U. (Memorandum of Understanding) between your Ministry and the people of the dumpsite.

The garden city, as I have been told by one Member who has just penned a poem, has now become the garbage city, and even the dead cannot rest in peace. While we may be speaking of frontend loaders moving stuff and opening and cutting new roads, at the end of the day, when we place ourselves as a people on an index of development we are not faring well.

I come to the vexed issue of Governance, which I know I am going to get many objections on. I start with His Excellency the President's speech which he gave here, I think on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2006, in which he adumbrated his philosophy on the terms of the enhanced framework for political co-operation. If there is anything that can define a failure in terms of Governance, it has been the failure to implement that initiative. This morning, quite by chance, I found my handwritten notes from a meeting attended on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2006 at the Office of the President. Present were, His Excellency himself, Dr. Loncheon, Hon. Member Franklin, Hon. Member Corbin, Hon. Member Ramjattan, yours truly Clayton Hall, and the lady of the Parliament – Hon. Member Teixeira; we collectively identified fifteen matters for discussion:

**2.45 p.m CB**

- (1) That we would introduce formal meetings between Cabinet and Opposition.

Where are we on that?

- (2) That we would increase the paid emoluments of parliamentarians, regional democratic councillors and the staff of these agencies;
- (3) That we would ensure the early appointment of commissions and committees;
- (4) That we would ensure that there be joint representation on overseas delegations;
- (5) That we would together meet community needs and concerns;
- (6) That we would have joint initiatives to tackle HIV/Aids and other health issues;
- (7) That there will be joint action to restore the role and status of parliamentarians and politicians in general.

And I can tell you that was the President's recommendation and proposal;

- (8) That we would address this issue of REOs being political appointees and not independent of the politics;
- (9) That we would address the whole issue of resource allocation to the various regions;
- (10) That the operations of the integrity commission or its operations would be reviewed;
- (11) That the procurement commission will be established; and
- (12) That there would be local government reform.

The AFC added,

- (13) The release of Mark Benschop.

*[Mr. Persaud: What happen to Mr. Ramjattan?] There has been a death in Mr. Ramjattan's family. I would expect you to express some kind of recognition of that. [Mr. Persaud: I was not aware.]*

Hon Member Frankly proposed,

- (14) The issue of the Brazil/Guyana road.

As I said, nothing has come of this meeting. So again, I say, we are nowhere.

Mr. Speaker, turning quickly to justice, I was very, very happy to hear the Hon. Attorney General speak about the update of the laws, and the importance of the Law Reports, which he says are going to be published very soon. I am very disappointed that he still does not see the necessity for law reform and law review in Guyana. I believe, and I hope, that when the next government takes its place we will see that implemented speedily.

Before I leave justice let me just say something: "I think it was on Friday when the Hon. Member Ramson spoke, he said thanks to him," and I quote him now:

"...the illegitimate and illicit operations of the mediation department were brought to an end..."

As a mediator who is trained - and I know there are several of us in here - I believe that statement was an affront and an insult to all of us who are hardworking men and women, and offered our services free. If he understood, and maybe he did not, so I will give him the benefit of the doubt, it was a voluntary programme where the justice system was not delivering and getting people's cases heard and determined. Persons or parties could agree to a process of mediation, and if there was an agreement it was referred to the court for an Order

to be made. So there was nothing illicit or illegal about it, though we welcome the legislation to regulate it; and it had the blessings, I am told, of the Government of Guyana.

I am saying despite the Law Reports and the new Law Volumes being published, we are still not getting it right. When one takes a look at the Deeds Registry it is in chaos; and I believe even you, Hon Speaker, had reason to write. I came across an article from the Hon. Dr. Luncheon, dated August, who said that within a matter of two months, I believe, there would be reform. Nothing has happened.

We are concerned with the slow pace of the justice improvement project. We are concerned that despite the large number of Bills being passed, the implementation record is poor. We are now overloaded with laws and lack the capacity to implement them. It is all well and good to say we passed three hundred Bills in this session. But how many of them are we implementing?

I turn now to the portfolio of the Acting Prime Minister – security. And I put under the heading security, treason, grenade explosion, wanton killings, narcotics trafficking and its attendant ills.

This term of the Ninth Parliament began in January, 2008 with the Lusignan massacre, and followed by the February incident of the Bartica massacre. It has not been an easy period for the Minister, for us as Members, or for this Nation. Nonetheless, we believe that though there is what appears to be calmness, ever so often, as we heard not so far away from here a few weeks ago there was an explosion, and the police issued a statement, ‘that the man ‘*Yankee*’ is a known trafficker in guns and grenades’. I was horrified to know that the Police Force has or had this information and did nothing about it. How could people be known traffickers of grenades in a country like ours and the police force is not snatching them and shutting them down?

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up Hon. Member.

**Mrs. Holder:** I raise Mr. Speaker, to move that my colleague be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Trotman:** Mr. Speaker, treason. We are the only country in the English speaking Caribbean that has had five persons charged for treason, and others for sedition, in the last

decade. This alone is an indictment on the Government and people, and all of us, including this Parliament of Guyana. It has nothing to do with evidence and whether it exists or not, though I have my doubts. It is more about the fact that the legitimacy of the State is under threat in Guyana, and the Government by pressing these charges is agreeing and admitting as such. This alone should compel us into dialogue. And in fact, let me say that matters now unfolding as we speak in Tunisia, Egypt, and Sudan, should not be viewed remotely or in isolation. People are people everywhere, whether they are Chinese, Middle Eastern, African, East Indian or West Indian. When they have had enough they take matters into their own hands. All of us will be caught up and there will be no P.P.P/C, P.N.C.R, A.F.C or anything left if they had their way.

I am disappointed, at the latest turn of events. Whilst I was happy that Mr. Mark Benschop was released, having made the list of those November discussions in 2006, I am quite unhappy that his freedom appears to have been purchased with the liberty of three others.

We recently had the killing, not by the Government of course, of Mr. Roopnarine Ramodit who returned after 18 years, and within 24 hours of coming to Guyana he was shot. The response has been quite innovative and unique, unprecedented. The Ministry of Home Affairs signed a MoU with the tourism sector to give better protection to tourists. I have never, in my life, seen anything like it. It is an innovation which I am sure other jurisdictions will study, and I doubt they will copy it. It begs the question that if you are prepared to issue a MoU for tourism you might as well issue a MoU for every Tom, Dick and Harry, in Guyana, because we all are suffering from one crime or the other. I guess we will hear more about it.

Within this Ninth Parliament we have had the horrific case of Ms. Neesa Gopaul. I think enough has been said about that. She has become the poster girl for the treatment of children, or the lack thereof. We continue to see a rash of armed robberies every day; murders, brothers killing brothers. I think the Kaieteur news had a unique one today where a man was *killed to death* by his step-son. He was killed to death. That is how bad we have become. A person is not bludgeoned to death now but killed to death. The point remains that at the end of the day I am saying we are not doing better. Again, I am not blaming the Minister, but, it seems that there are more weapons in the hands of people. It seems that people are not respecting the sanctity of life; people are killing, destroying and maiming at an alarming rate. They are killing and burying in shallow graves and not worrying that they are going to be found out. All of what I am saying, points to a crisis. I believe it was the Hon. Member Backer who said

there has to be a bipartisan approach to some of these matters. If not, with the greatest of respect, whether it is Mr. Rohee's "*goat nah bite meh*" or not, we are going to fail, and we are going to spiral into confusion.

I turn to labour. Unemployment continues to be high and opportunities few. Despite the claims of 'come to the Ministry and you will get a job', I can take you to any village and you will find groups of young men, gambling and smoking weed, who say there are no opportunities or they feel crowded out, because they lack qualifications. They will be discriminated against either because they are academically challenged or because of the geography, where they live, or otherwise. I have no doubt, that the Minister has made strides. I would like to say as a debater, and as a Member of this House, that Hon. Member Nadir's speech to open the debate, when we began on Monday, was not a bad speech. It lacked some good statistics and facts, but I believe the presentation was good and should be commended. At the end of the day in this Ninth Parliament, Mr. Nadir's term is going to be defined by one matter, and that is how he handled RUSAL and the workers. His Ministry's failure to curb the lawlessness and the way the workers were treated - to help them - and in the way his own Ministry was treated, well, I believe, will be the defining factor as to whether or not at the end of the day labour has fared well.

There have been, as I said, some bright spots. I refer to the parliamentary staff, and I am quite impressed and pleased. I have had reason to commend persons at the Immigration Department and at the Airport. I believe that the standard has risen; it is quite high. There are some police officers, and I do not know whether credit should go to Mr. Rohee; perhaps it should - there are some also members of the military. I have had the occasion to call several ministries seeking certain services from time to time - the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health in particular - and again, I must say, the standard and reception I received were very, very good, and I need to commend them.

The irony is that this problem we face of movement and retraction will be solved for us, in my view, very soon, if we do not get ourselves together. I predict, not using see faring techniques or abilities, we are going to have population explosion in this country in the not too distant future. It is going to be an explosion of a different nature. It is going to be an explosion of foreigners who see us as being soft, divided, like a ripened fruit that we, the people, are unwilling and unable to enjoy because we are too busy fighting each other and trying to have the fruit for ourselves. Then when this happens we will have no one to blame

but ourselves. I suggest we need to begin looking at the demographics of Guyana, migratory patterns and such like, and do, for example, as others have done, examine whether we need to start introducing aliens landholding licences and other innovations to protect Guyanese and things that rightfully belong to us.

A few years ago I suggested that we examine what I believe is quite a good initiative in Finland, and that is a Committee of the Future. That Committee is a bipartisan Committee that relies heavily on technocratic support from academia and civil society, and deliberates parliamentary documents referred to it when requested to do so. And this Committee conducts research associated with future studies including their methodology. Some of its noteworthy publications in the not too distant past include a study on *Russia in 2017, Russia in 2030* – because Russia is its largest neighbour – *Democracy in the Turmoil of the Future; The Future of Healthcare and Keeping Up With Change*. So, they have started to project, in a bipartisan way, what is happening in their society and not waiting for individual Governments to confront them when something happens. Many of these things, as we know, happened long before we actually see them exposed. This issue of governance has always troubled me - as no doubt it troubles many others - causing me to state, as we celebrated our 40<sup>th</sup> year of Republican status last year, that it provided a critical opportunity for us take stock and assess the health and state of our Republic. I went on to say that the time has come for us to forge a system of governance that promotes concerted effort and broad-based participation on National decision making. We cannot maintain the Republic if we continue to practice our combative, competitive and confrontational style of governance.

Article 13 of the Constitution, tells us that it is our duty to establish an inclusionary democracy by providing increased opportunities. I believe that unless we have the courage to embrace our own unique form of power sharing and inclusive governance, uniquely designed for our unique situation, we will continue to be lesser than our true potential. I therefore reintroduce an old topic, the concept of the team. Selecting some of the best from over there, some of the best from over here, and even from out there, and together, not separate and apart, we can accomplish it. There is nothing that prevents us from bringing an end to the constant bickering and quarrelling. The decision is ours. But as I stated last year I have chosen for myself, and can only educate, edify and persuade others, but cannot and will not use the old political tools and devices of manipulation, subterfuge and coercion to have people support something that is not of their will. Likewise I cannot be myself, made to do

something by coercion, by being compelled or being cajoled, that I am not prepared to do. I therefore propose that we give serious consideration to:

- The committee of the future,
- The manner in which we approach dialogue with each other and governance,
- A bipartisan approach to our security situation,
- That we consider building better relationships between ourselves and the wider society.

In closing, I would not be much longer. As this is the year of elections, and I dare say the year of an unprecedented number of presidential hopefuls, we have not yet, even in this Chamber, added the Sharma's, the Ramsaroop's, the Bacchus's, the Nadirs – I do not know whether he is running - and the others who are out there waiting for the gong to sound. I wish to take this opportunity for the last budget of the Ninth Parliament of Guyana to seek your indulgence to say a few words, because so many of you are present. Whoever emerges - even though I will be supporting my candidate, Mr. Ramjattan - while my obvious support is for one candidate - God may very well appoint another! So for me, my admonition is that we need candidates who will publicly:

- Commit to removing the executive presidency within one year of taking office;
- Commit to restructuring the power structure to ensure devolution and fair and equitable distribution and thereby give real meaning and effect to Article 13 of the Constitution;
- Commit to engage people to dialogue and relationships between and within the political parties, with civil society and the people of Guyana;
- Commit to the restoration of the rule of law in every respect; and
- Commit to rebuilding value and sanctity of life, liberties and human dignity.

We desperately need a president and a government that demonstrates the capacity, the ability, and willingness, to bridge the ethnic and political divide, to confront and address legacy issues that spurn hate and revenge, and to forge a culture of accountability and acknowledgement that creates the atmosphere for forgiveness and reconciliation. By that I mean to put Guyana and its entire people first, and not want ego, blind ambition, ethnicity, gender, religious belief, age and even sexual orientation – if I am to be politically correct.

In closing, I would like to express my gratitude to the staff, as I said, of the Ministry of Finance, for preparing this Budget and allowing us the opportunity of debating it. I would like to thank the Hon. Member Dr. Singh for bringing it and completing his cycle. As I said

before, while we may not agree with all that he says here, we cannot deny that he has made a contribution, in the same way as Mr. Carl Greenidge, and others like him, has made to this House. It occurred to me that it would be hypocritical of me to call Dr. Singh my brother on the outside of this Assembly and yet seek to denigrate him in here. We may disagree but we do not need to be disagreeable and disrespectful.

The Hon. Member Ramson, I have come to realise, is really a nice poodle running around like if he is a Rottweiler.

The Prime Minister who I believe has a very gentlemanly demeanour belies a tough, crafty, and astute, political animal below it.

Madam Teixeira is really, in my view, and still is, a wonderful lady underneath her sometimes brash exterior. I really believe that she should have made and would have made an excellent diplomat in one of our frontier posts.

You, Mr Speaker, who perhaps is too much of a gentleman, maybe you need to be in the 'rum shops' like Mr. Navin, mixing it up.

It has been my pleasure to have served the people of Guyana, and to be alongside all of my colleagues here from the P.N.C.R, the P.P.P/C, G.A.P/ROAR and even within the A.F.C. As this is most likely my last budget presentation, because I have resolved for myself, as I said since last year, I will not be involved in the business of playing politics or being in the Chamber for the sake of being here knowing that my ability to offer genuine representation is stymied or non-existent. I have therefore resolved to only be involved in the future where there is something that is constructive and not destructive, something that is embracing and not insular, something that is forgiving and reconciling. As I said it has been a pleasure to serve and more so under your watchful eye, Mr. Speaker. I thank God and the people of Guyana for the opportunity to have been of service. When I do return it must be under changed circumstances. I thank you Mr. Speaker. (*Applause*)

**Prime Minister (Ag.) Minister of Home Affairs , [Mr. Rohee]:** Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to join with my colleagues on this side of the House in congratulating the Hon. Member Mr. A.K. Singh – emphasis on the letters A.K. – for his erudite presentation of the 2011 Budget.



I would like to also congratulate his staff for providing him with the necessary support that enabled the Ministry of Finance to present to the National Assembly the 2011 Budget.

This may sound like a sweeping statement but since we seem to be in the mood of house sweeping and house cleaning, as the Hon. Member Mr. Trotman indicated about what is taking place in the A.F.C, and what seems to be taking place within the Opposition P.N.C.R in the course of their outreach meetings. I have to say that they have once again failed to raise above pettiness, verbiage and the irrelevant. They have failed to grasp the gravamen of the theme of the 2011 Budget.

What we have heard this year is no different from what we have heard before. Here is the general line: criticise everything, condemn everything, do not recognise anything positive, create the impression that they are on the wrong path, and create the impression that they know what is right for Guyana.

It is all political, and we understand that, because that is the business we are in, on this side of the House. You would know that in every kind of business you can fail or you can succeed, depending on the policies you pursue. Since the PNCR has been failing, year after year, to convince the electorate that they have the correct policies for Guyana, it follows that we, on this side of the House, have been pursuing the correct policies since the electorate has been reposing confidence in us since 1992.

This brings me to the word *connectivity*. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, the Ninth Edition, the word connectivity means: “computing capacity for interconnection of systems, applications, etcetera, and the property of degree of being interconnected”. Let us take the latter meaning for the purpose of relevance, simplicity and ease of understanding on that side of the House. When we hear hollow statements to the effect that the Budget has, I quote,

“„no connection to the reality”

“...it is nothing to shout about...”

This approach, of course, pre-supposes that there is a disconnection or a lack of connectivity, not between the Government and the masses, but, between the Opposition and the people of Guyana, perhaps including their own supporters. In fact, as an aside, we see this playing out

in the course of the current outreach meetings organised for them by the so-called dynamic five. [**Mr. Corbin:** Which one, Gail?]

The fact that all Guyanese people, including the P.N.C.R supporters, continue to benefit year after year from all expenditures passed in this Hon. House. It is therefore rather clumsy politics for the P.N.C.R to argue that the 2011 Budget has nothing in it for the Guyanese people, including their own supporters. I do not think their supporters buy that argument. In fact, they do not even pay attention to the political pantomimes of the P.N.C.R. On the contrary they pay close attention to what the Government offers to them, and look to find ways and means of accessing the benefits from those programmes or projects which have something in it for them.

Who says the Budget is not for the working people? We have heard some on the Opposition benches claim this. If it is not for the working people, the question is: "Who is it for?" The \$15.9 billion for the Security Sector who will be the beneficiaries? The \$1.5 billion for the Justice Sector who will be the beneficiaries. The \$320 million for Sports development and expansion who will be the beneficiaries? The \$173 billion allocated for the modernisation of the Parika and Supenaam stelling, and the construction of the Kumaka wharf, who will benefit? The \$24.3 billion to be spent this year on the Education sector who will benefit? The \$1.4 billion allocated for the Health sector, who will benefit? The \$3.6 billion for the Housing sector who will benefit. And the \$1.5 billion for the Water sector, I ask again who will be the beneficiaries? [**Mrs. Backer:** If you do not know, how will we know?]

*3.15 p.m.*

**Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Rohee]:** ...the construction of the Kumaka wharf, who will benefit? The \$24.3 billion to be spent this year on the education sector, who will benefit? The \$1.4 billion allocated for the health sector, who will benefit? The \$3.6 billion for the housing sector, who will benefit? The \$1.5 billion for the water sector, I ask again, who will be the beneficiaries?

The Opposition claims that we cannot spend the money allocated in the budget. I can say this for the security sector, last year \$14.2 billion was allocated and all was spent. This year \$15.9 billion will be received and every cent of it is intended to be spent. Some claim that the billions which was spent on the security sector will not be bringing in the returns that it should be bringing in, the Hon. Member Mr. Trotman just referred to this, and that we are not

getting value for money. Mr. Speaker, I ask the question, had we not invested heavily in the security sector over the years would we be better off or would we be worst off today? The answer to that is quite obvious and that is why we are better off today.

Obviously, Government's investments in the security have paid off. I say, to those who say that there were not sufficient allocations, do not allocate the money, do not spend it and let us see what will happen. We do not deny the fact that there is room for improvement, and there will always be room for improvement, but we must say that at the same time let us recognised where progress has been made and we will be working to make even more progress with the \$15.9 billion that is allocated to the security sector this year.

Let us take, for example, health and security. Any investment in the health sector, any investment in the education sector and infrastructure development, brings benefit for public security. In the area of health, Government has allocated \$13.4 billion in 2010 and that sum has been increased this year. We are convinced that the health sector had been bringing added benefits to the people of Guyana. A healthy population means that the police will have a healthy pool of resources to select their intakes from, and health incidentally is instrumental to public security because good health enables the full range of human functioning, and the health of law enforcement personnel can determine who wins the fight against crime. So we support the allocation that has been given to the Ministry of Health because we see that it is bringing benefits to us in the security sector.

Take education, Mr. Speaker. There are numerous linkages between education and security. Investment in tertiary, secondary and primary education, in fact, at all levels, means that the literacy level will increase, and, thus, higher human development, or human capital development. This means that the quality of the recruits coming into the Guyana Police Force and other law enforcement agencies will increase with immediate impact of improving the effectiveness of police service delivery. Additionally, education expands opportunities for youths, thus building their resilience against criminality and allures to criminal gangs.

What about the allocation for physical infrastructure, transportation and security? These developments will substantially improve our transportation infrastructure and will assist the security forces in greater mobility by reducing travel time and improving police response to crime. In respect to information and communication technology and its linkage with security, we agree that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) development and progression in Guyana will improve the security situation in our country. Security requires

timely access to relevant intelligence and information that can be acted upon. Prior to the development of useful technologies, required data often resided in books. We are now moving to take the information in those books and insert them as data to be access by computers. A number of police stations are being computerised so that more targeted strategies and responses could take place in a timely manner and to also ensure greater networking among the security forces in the country.

We have heard from Minister Dr. Ashni Singh that more resources will be allocated to the energy sector, thus installing lights in the number of communities which hitherto did not have lights in the past. Anytime criminals commit acts against citizens of this country they have a tendency to do so under the cover of dark, so that lights install in any parts of the country, in any community, assist the police and the law enforcing agencies in their activities to catch those criminals. Our approach to crime fighting is multifaceted. It embraces the conventional and the unconventional approaches. There is no single approach to addressing this complex problem. We have consulted far and wide in an effort to tackle the fight against crime, drug trafficking and other manifestations of deviant behaviour in our country. Many studies have been done; many recommendations have been made; the Government has taken many of the recommendations on board, and many have been implemented. Take for example, at the legislative level, forty-nine pieces of anti-criminal legislations had been passed in the House since the PPP has assumed office. At the institutional level, police reform under the Government of Guyana Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Citizens' Security Programme is on the way and is already bearing fruit. We, however, recognised that there is a far way to go. Institutional reform at the Ministry of Home Affairs which exercises oversight over the law enforcement agencies is also to be carried out. At the community level, much has been achieved through the Community Action Component of the Citizens' Security Programme. Building of social cohesion and the creation of safe neighbourhoods are the ultimate strategic objective of this softer side of this citizens' security programme. Under this programme, skills training has commenced in ten communities with a total of three hundred youths being trained. The programme is also providing skills for employment and entrepreneurship, training in violence prevention, mentoring, and the suppression of antisocial behaviour. These measures are also aimed at improving the general security of our country. It is recognised that when youths are involved in those activities, they tend to shy away from the activities offered to them by criminals and other forms of delinquent behaviour.

Community Policing Group constitutes an integral part of Government's crime fighting strategy. Currently, there are two hundred and seventy-two groups across the country with a membership of four thousand six hundred and ninety-five. In this regard, we have sought to widen policing community by involving youth and women in their activities. It is clear that investment in crime fighting and investment in the justice sector are complementary. One of the biggest challenges facing the criminal justice system today is the substantial backlog of cases. Improvements in the justice sector will see a significant reduction in the backlog of those cases.

It is plausible to argue that everyone, rich or poor, located in developed or developing countries, security is an important constituent of his or her well-being, and that it is necessary for all to enjoy the fruits of their labour. It creates the environment for improved quality of life for citizens and sustainable economic growth as well as development, and that is why the Government has continue to invest so much in the security sector. As I said before, we have already begun to see the benefits derive from those investments.

I want to submit that all the offers for help by the PNCR-1 G, in this House, is mere talks - nothing else but talks. It is not really interested in offering any tangible or concrete support; what it is really offering is the paying of lip service. If it is really serious about extending a helpful hand it could have done so years ago. But, do you know what? It has missed the bus. Too late is the cry. Now, we are in an election year, I doubt the PNCR-1G can extend a helping hand, because to do so now would be, in my view, to commit political harry carry.

Let me give just one example of the opportunities that the PNCR-1G has at its disposal to provide its ideas to make a concrete contribution to the maintenance of law and order. Some years ago, Government established an advisory body called the National Commission on law and order, a most unique body, the only one of its kind in Guyana. Just imagine, out of one hundred and seventy thousand people, there are some twenty persons who, like others, are vested with the responsibilities to draw up plans for the promotion of law and order in our country. The Hon. Member, Mrs. Backer, was appointed by her party leader to serve on that Commission. However, out of the eleven meetings held in 2010, Mrs. Backer only attended one. Yet the Hon. Member has the temerity to stand in this hallowed chamber and call upon the Government to work together with the Members of the Opposition on law and order in Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, it reminds me of the art of guile so well mastered by the founder leader of the PNC when he said, and I quote: "If the Bolsheviks were to unite with the Mensheviks, the history of the Soviet Union would have been different". How ironic it. We are back to where we were so many years ago. It is not my intention to respond comprehensively to the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer, but I am constrained to refer to just three issues. First, the Hon. Member claimed that the PPP/C administration is responsible for the breakdown in law and order. Second, that the political directorate must quit micromanaging the security forces. Third, that the Government must stop being petulant and non receptive to the constructive recommendations that emanate outside of Freedom House or the Office of the President.

Let me deal with the first assertion. There is no breakdown in law and order in Guyana. If one wants to talk about a breakdown in law and order then he or she has to look at Afghanistan, Somalia and Haiti to some extent or the Mexican city of Tijuana. To say that there is a breakdown in law and order in Guyana is an over exaggeration and an attempt to play the orchestra to catch the attention of the media. Mr. Speaker, I ask, where is the so-called collapse of public safety mentioned by the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer, and the evidence to show "That we are going through the worst criminal era in our country's history," as claimed by Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence, or "the investors find the crime situation appalling", as claimed by the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, or that "we are not doing better" and that "we are near to a point of crisis", as claimed by the Hon. Member Mr. Trotman.

How can we make the absurd claims in a situation when the economic activities in the country show no sign of slowing down and nine hundred and forty-six new companies registered in 2010, when the construction industry is booming and the overall economic growth rate of four per cent is for the past four years? These are the indicators to show that we are not in such a situation. Two, tourist arrivals has shown no signs of slowing down – one hundred and fifty-one thousand one hundred and forty-one tourists arrived in the country last year, sixty-three per cent over the previous record high of 2009. Three, the local private sector has not shied away from investing in the country with five hundred new enterprises being registered in 2010. Four, people go about their businesses and their daily lives in a routine manner. Five, the shops and stores open their doors to customers everyday. Six, schools are functioning normally with an attendance rate of seventy per cent on a daily basis and teacher's attendance at eighty-five per cent. Seven, essential services are functioning normally without any interruption, say for a few technical hitches here and there. Eight, there

is no capital flight from the country nor any one of the banks. Nine, last but not least, Mr. Speaker, nightlife is robust and quite extensive.

These are all signs that the security of the State is not threatened and that law and order is being kept at an optimal level by the law enforcement of this country, thus, enabling Guyanese and visitors to live and enjoy life under normal conditions in our beloved country. That is so much for the talk about the crime situation and it being out of controlled. If there were in this country what the Hon. Member claimed that are there, none of these nine indicators would have been possible in Guyana. When one talks about countries in crisis because of criminality and when one talks about a collapse of law and order in the country, none of these nine indicators exist. So let us come with scientific indicators to show, and it is not just talk that there is a breakdown in law and order in this country. There is no, and I insist, breakdown of law and order in Guyana. I am not saying this because I am the Minister of Home Affairs. I am saying that because, as like you and as everyone over here, we live in this country, we could walk about this country, we can work, we could have fun, we can have leisure, we can do all that we want to do in this country without looking over our shoulder as we used to do prior to 1992.

We do not speak of our togetherness... In the Minister's budget speech, there is mention of the word "togetherness" which appears in that theme. When we speak of "togetherness", this togetherness is not an abstract motion nor is a togetherness of a metaphysical nature. On the contrary, we speak of "togetherness", that is a concrete expression of concrete efforts by the Guyanese people nurtured neither by political conviction nor ideological motivation, but rather by a strong belief in their own self-esteem, their self-confidence and their capacity to assort themselves to put their shoulders to the wheel to improve their economic and social well-being collectively or individually.

This is the journey which the PPP started out in the 1950s which reached a climax in 1953 and 1957 before that journey was rudely interrupted in the 1962 to 1964 period due to the machinations of the colonial and other powers together with the local satraps. We on this side of the House are happy to be together with thousands of Guyanese and all Guyanese are encouraged to join in this wonderful and exciting journey.

What about the other claim of the Hon. Member, that the political directorate must quit micromanaging the security sector? This assertion is without any foundation, whatsoever, and it is obvious based upon hearsay, anecdotal and, perhaps, statements made by some who are

either disloyal to the organisation to which they belong or loyal to those who have a vested interest in the ethnic appeal of kith and kin which incidentally is fast disappearing and being replaced with the rapidly developing culture of togetherness of the Guyanese people irrespective of a political and ideological persuasion.

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up Hon. Member.

**Minister of Education [Mr. Baksh]:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes more to continue his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Rohee:** Those of us who live through the 1960s and saw what took place in those days feel a sense of pride and satisfaction when we reflect on where we are today in relation to the encouraging signs of social cohesiveness developing in our country. Never before, since the 1950s, have we experienced such sustained political stability in our country. To claim that the political directorate is micromanaging the security forces is to insult intelligence of the security forces and to make them believe that they themselves cannot think for themselves. It is a shame to know that there are people in our midst who seek to heap scorn and sow disaffection within the joint services of our country when they should be singing the praises to the heroic sons and daughters of Guyana who, while many are sleeping or at work, or at play, work hard to ensure that the country is in safe hands. We must stop denigrating the security forces of this country and support them. Neither critical support nor grudging support will do to, but rather we call on the party representatives in this House to give their unswerving and unstinted support to our joint services.

To say that we on this side of the House are being petulant and non-receptive to constructive recommendations outside of Freedom House and the Office of the President is to demonstrate a lack of understanding of the way this Government and the party work. Too often stories are heard about children being left behind because of broken homes; the struggle by a single parent to make ends meet; a farmer not being able to pay for his tractor due to a poor harvest; a family not being able to pay a further installment for a minibus purchased on agreed terms, or the breadwinner being killed due to road fatality. The question is, Mr. Speaker, are there systems in place to cater for the children or the parents in such situation? Is the State adequately prepared to take care of the less fortunate, the disadvantage, the marginalised? The answer is yes. The systems are functioning and are publicly funded. But there is another



dimension to this situation, and that is, solving these problems together. The togetherness of the nation is what really matters. We call it participatory democracy and this is part of what the Hon. Member Mr. Ramotar referred to as the national democratic process.

It is participatory democracy from top to bottom and from bottom to top. It is a democracy that is a work in progress and it is manifesting itself everyday in our country. Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to illustrate a few examples: meetings between the President and stakeholders from every walk of the social, economic and political life take place on a daily basis; meetings between Ministers and the people take place on a daily basis. Every single day there are three or four, or sometimes five, Ministers of Government in the field meeting people to discuss and solve problems of concern to them - workers from Barama, the sugar workers, the rice farmers, the bauxite workers, market vendors, the taxi services owners, scrap metal dealers, the fisherfolk, contractors, captains of industry, teachers, students, nurses, Toshaos, pensioners, single parents, the joint services – sometimes together, sometimes separately – coupled with cabinet outreach meetings held from time to time in various Regions of the country is an integral part of this exercise.

We do not wait on elections to have these engagements in the people. Similarly, we do not wait on an election year to present a budget to bring benefits to the people. We do it all the time. The budget is about people, not necessarily about elections. That has been and continues to be our focus, election year or no election year. What is taking place in our country is a very convincing and impressive matrix of building togetherness that far surpasses any previous attempt of doing so. There is no President in our country's recent history, say for the 1950 to 1955 period, with whom one can compare. It is a painstaking, calculated and persistent process. It is like watching a bird builds a nest in which its eggs are laid to hatch and bring forth a new bird. Thus the analogy is clear for all to see.

*3.45 p.m.*

It is those efforts, by the Government, be it in the field or the office, the Guyana International Conference Centre or the National Park, the bottom house or the community centre; be it the Rural Entrepreneur and Agricultural Development Programme or the National Foster Care Programme, the National Uniform Assistance Programme, the National School Feeding Programme, or the National Training Programme for Youth Empowerment; be it the Youth Entrepreneur Skills Training Programme or the Community Action Component of the Citizens' Security Programme; be it the Tipperary Hall Project at Buxton,

or the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF) 's eleven thousand solar panels for houses and other critical installations in the Interior, the Women of Worth (WOW) Programme, the One Stop Shop Housing Programme, the Secured Livelihood Programme, the One Laptop Per Family Programme, all these initiatives and innovations, cumulatively, contribute to a national effort of togetherness and the building of tomorrow's Guyana. When these initiatives are coupled, add togetherness, with the \$24.3 billion for education, \$14 billion for health, \$3.6 billion for housing, \$1.5 billion for water, \$5.9 billion for public safety and security - from which all Guyanese will benefit - the reconstruction, and reconciliation, architecture stands out like a beacon for all to see.

As though this is not enough, let us cast our attention, for just one moment in time, and do a tour of the horizon of the changes which that have taken place in the financial architecture of the country, the profound changes have been affected in the legal and the law enforcement architecture, and then we look around and gaze with ah and wonder at the radical transformations which have taken place, and continue to take place, in the social and physical infrastructure of the country. One cannot help but to conclude that our dear country is on the move in a progressive direction.

As though this is not enough, let us play the role of the imaginary film star seated in Qatar Airlines or as a passenger on Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Atlantic dream plane and take a journey into the future and marvel at the projects which are yet to come that will blow the minds of the eternal pessimist, rend asunder the soul of the unrepentant cynic and tame the anger of the unforgiving critic. I refer to:

- The five hundred and sixty-kilometre high speed fibre-optic cables network from Lethem to Providence, and from Moleson Creek to Anna Regina.
- The redesigning and remodelling of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) to become a modern airport.
- The Amalia Falls Hydropower Project.
- The development of an indigenous oil and gas industry.
- The rehabilitation and improvement of Sheriff Street to Mandela Avenue, and the opening of a new access road to CJIA.
- A paved road from Linden to Lethem; and
- The Hinterland Electrification Programme.

I ask a simple but humble question: How can we ever beat that?

Last Friday, when I heard the calls for justice for persons still in prison on remand, and the claim that a person was in prison for stealing three *bigan*, or what is called bolangers, and, further, that bail was being refused for minor offences, I was somewhat bewildered. I am constrained to ask whether those impassioned pleas by the Hon. Member Mrs. Riehl were a reflection of her jurisprudential philosophical conviction, or whether they were based on political expediency. Having regard to the Hon. Member's role as a State prosecutor in the Director of Public Prosecution Chambers in the 1990s, surely her advocacy on such matters then does not mirror her advocacy on the same matters today. The Hon. Member is perfectly entitled to her views, or to change her views on the matter, but it is certainly a smack of double standards when the Hon. Member cast in the role of a Minister of Justice - because a State prosecutor exercises that role - did not recognise the fundamental rights of citizens to protest peacefully and denied the exercise of that right, resulting in the unlawful incarceration of persons. Now that the Hon. Member has transformed into a champion of a person who stole five bolangers, this transformation, I submit, should not go unnoticed. The Hon. Member ought to have commended members of the magistracy who make considerable efforts in the preservation of the rule of law, and for the maintenance and respect for law and order in our country.

In every institution there are weaknesses. I am sure that whatever the weaknesses which exist in the magistracy are they will be addressed as the process of reform of that institution develops.

I want to conclude. What are the main elements of our anti-crime strategy and what is the maintenance of the public order plan? Let me list them for the benefit of the House.

- To provide more resources to the intelligence community.
- To beef up the number of investigators within the Criminal Investigation Department.
- To work aggressively to reduce the amount of illegal firearms in our society.
- To make operational to the maximum the integrated Crime Information System.
- To strengthen border control by increasing security presence at all legal and illegal border crossings.
- To introduce Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV), to ensure maximum security coverage of the city and its environs.

- To intensify land and water patrols in the Interior and more particularly in E & F Divisions.
- To make great use of technology, such as the soon to be established Information Technology (IT), backbone to fight crime.
- To establish a marine outpost at the mouth of the Pomeroon River.
- To work for great improvements in relation with the Amerindians communities and the law enforcement agencies - to hold regular meetings with the Toshaos in particular.
- Place greater emphasis on cohort operations across criminal traffic and general law enforcement landscape.
- Significantly enhance monitoring of airstrips throughout Guyana.
- Maintain roadblocks on a regular and spontaneous basis.
- Intensify monitoring of the mining areas.
- Intensify searches at checkpoints in the Interior of the country.
- Raise to higher level and intensify the collaboration between the joint services.
- Lend greater support to the Guyana Prison Service in the fulfilment of its custodial and correctional responsibilities.
- Intensify all-round training of police investigators, ranks of the Traffic Department, police prosecutors, the middle management and senior ranks of the Guyana Police Force.
- Work to ensure greater collaboration and support for the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP)'s Chambers within the context of the criminal justice system.
- Use more regularly and effectively the Plea Bargaining Act, the Intercept of Communication Eavesdropping Act and to put in place, soon, laws relating to paper committals and video links.
- Intensify international cooperation with law enforcement authorities in neighbouring countries and other countries, as well as those with other international organisations.
- Provide more resources to take care of welfare, occupational health and safety issues affecting ranks in the Guyana Police Force and other law enforcement agencies.
- Continue to build and strengthen relations with young people by establishing youth groups across the country.
- Strengthen and continue to provide sustainable support to the community policing system, the neighbourhood police and station management committees.

- Encourage the involvement of civilians who supports law enforcement and law and order.
- Improve public confidence in the law enforcement agencies.
- Enhance the capability of the Guyana Fire Service to respond to fire emergencies.

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up Hon. Member.

**Mr. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Rohee:** The key elements of the fight against drug trafficking are as follows:

- Provide more human and technological resources to Custom Anti-Narcotic Unit (CANU) and the narcotics branch of the Guyana Police Force.
- Continue to enhance the presence of CANU and the narcotics branch of the Guyana Police Force at all legal and illegal entry and exit points.
- Dismantle suspected networks at air and sea ports.
- Identify trans-shipment routes and use appropriate equipment to interdict suspects.
- Enhance maritime intelligence by establishing relevant databases and profiling of vessels.
- Use advance technology to conduct effective raids and searches.
- Continue to work towards more effective networking with foreign counterparts.
- Increase information gathering and intelligence driven operations.
- Continue to upgrade security arrangements at CJIA and Ogle airports to stem the flow of drugs.
- To continue to ensure accountability and transparency in the activities of law enforcement ranks, through regular polygraphs.

We will soon, after two more interventions, wind up, or wind down, this Budget 2011 debate, after which we will enter into the stage of considering the Estimates of Expenditure. This budget must be considered as historic and unique in its own way, given the historical context in which it is situated. The electoral jury will be called upon later this year to present its verdict as it does every five years and there is no doubt that the popular jury, having examined and considered all the facts, will return a verdict of not guilty to the PPP/Civic,

notwithstanding the Opposition which so desperately sought to convince the jury to do so over the past five days.

This budget, together with previous budgets, will no doubt put us in good stead; it will put the nation and the people in good stead. It will and must be seen as guide for the future development of our country, and for the people's own development of their well-being.

I therefore commend this budget for positive consideration. Thank you. [*Applause*]

**Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Corbin]:** It really gives me no pleasure to speak in this Budget 2011 debate. As most Guyanese by now have realised, apart from exposing its weaknesses for the understanding of the average citizens - and this can really be done outside of this House - it has no impact on this administration which boasts about wanting involvement of the Opposition and wishing to have constructive suggestions.

Unfortunately, listening to the Hon. Minister, a few moments ago, it is like *pouring water on duck's back*. The responses suggest that they think this is a wedding ceremony and, like brides- to- be, they want to wait over there to catch the bouquets from this side of the House.

*Mr. Speaker left the Chair.*

*Mdm. Deputy Speaker in the Chair.*

For that honourable gentleman of the cloth, who earlier in this debate felt that he was now qualified to admonish the Opposition - joined now by the Hon. Member - as to how to debate a budget, let me assure him and Mr. Rohee that this is not a church congregation. Once we are with this system of governance and we do not want to move towards shared governance, and we are dealing with the Westminster system that we want to hold on to, perhaps I should enlighten this House on what the late Winston Churchill once described the role of the Opposition to be, very simply, "To expose, oppose and depose." While the deposing would be left for later this year for that jury to determine, our duty today is really to deal with exposing and opposing - that is our function today.

Listening to the Hon. Member a few moments ago and the honourable gentleman of the cloth a few days ago, I was reminded of Matthew chapter 7, verse 5, and I prefer the old King James Version. I am sure that these gentlemen are familiar with it. Last year Mr. Rohee, the Hon. Member, quoted heavily from scriptures. The verse states:

“...first cast the beam out of thine own eye; and then thou shalt see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

The Hon. Minister Manickchand stood in this House and castigated the Hon. Member Mrs. Holder about her survey of the old-age pensioners. She was so upset that she brought a mountain of documentations, allegedly to prove the existence of these pensioners. Well you would note, Madam, that I examined ... *[Power outage]* ...

It is a kind of paradox ... using biblical scriptures, but we will get on with this. I was saying, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, is that the Hon. Minister Manickchand castigated the Hon. Member Mrs. Holder about her survey on old age pension, and then she brought a mountain of documentation here, allegedly to prove the existence of those pensioners. Well, I examined a sample of those documents, as everyone saw in this House, and I really do not know what the Hon. Member had hoped to achieve with them, certainly not to establish the existence of the pensioners. I would have excused her if she was not a lawyer, because if producing a document with a signature was adequate evidence of the existence of a person many lawyers, as like Cde. Moses, would be out of work, as there would be no fraud cases in this country. So instead of risking a nervous breakdown, she may have been better advised to seek the counsel of the Guyana National Statistical Bureau, which eventually, I believe, came to her rescue sometime this weekend, in the letter columns, and provided some rational explanation. Emotions do not deal with these important issues.

*Mr. Speaker in the Chair.*

What about the survey that we were regaled about in this House? She did not see anything wrong with that. The honorable gentleman of the cloth told us in this National Assembly that he used to judge the reduction of persons who he could find to give charity to at Christmas as evidence of the improvement of the situation in Guyana and the reduction of the poor.

I believe that there are several organisations which do charity at Christmas. We do charity; my family does charity. My family has a senior citizens luncheon every year at Christiansburg in honour of my father. There is a record of all the persons; we note it every year. This year it was reduced to about forty persons, so we had to check. Twenty-five of them had died. Were we to assume that the absence of persons at this luncheon meant that they had improved their status and that there was no need for the situation? The truth is that

many died, obviously in some cases because of poor health, and in some cases of their inability to have proper nutrition. I do not wish to deal with his other example of a person who was fortunate to have a home as an analysis of the income of the alleged person - the person who was blessed to have a home as an indicator of changes in this country. If we examine the very statistics which we were presented with in that example, it would be clear that the income of that person could not be sufficient for him or her to own a home, unless there was additional support and income from some other source, because we were given the amount the person earns. I do not want to engage in speculations about the other sources. I am happy for the homeowner. God has richly blessed her, and I am happy that she has a home. But certainly that could not be any survey to tell us about the improvement of situations in this House. Therefore there is no indication that the ordinary man in this country is not having a hell of a time surviving with the high cost of living and struggling to survive under this PPP/C Government.

Since my good friend Mr. Nagamootoo was asking for a quotation, I will give him one from Psalms 1:

“<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

<sup>2</sup>But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law that he meditate day and night.”

And let me make it clear that I am not casting any stones, because I am conscious of the admonition that one should judge not, that he be not judged.

Whether the Government likes it or not, the fact is that this is an election year. As the debate confirmed, even a few moments ago, with the Hon. Member appealing to the voters already and the jury, that the budget presentation and subsequent debates have been used as an opportunity to cleverly propagandise with the use of figures, statistics and lengthy commentaries the alleged achievements of this administration from the standpoint of its manifesto in 2006. If Mr. Nandlall was here I am sure he would have muttered, “And what is wrong with that?” I would have answered and said to him that, “Nothing is wrong with that at all”.

I predicted that it was going to be an election budget even before Monday, 24<sup>th</sup> January. I am at a loss to know why so many speakers went out of their way trying to convince us that it



was not an election budget. Every Government is expected to account for its stewardship, and in doing so must expect that that stewardship be analysed and evaluated. The constant quoting from their manifesto during the debate confirmed our prediction, as the Hon. Member Mrs. Baveghems correctly surmised, “A rose by any name smells the same.”

An election budget is not about the quantum of expenditure, Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, but the manner in which the expenditure is allocated, and the thrust of the presentation which is aimed at hoodwinking the intended voter that all is well. Placing allocations in areas previously neglected, so as to create an illusion to the electorate that there is renewed concern for the problem which confronted them over the years, in the hope that they would forget the years of neglect, and making additional promises which every schoolchild would know, and soon discern, are not achievable in the timeframe which was announced. That is what an election budget is all about.

Tried as the Minister of Finance did, however, he has failed in this objective, since the election sweets, such as the increase in old age pension and social assistance, the raising of the income tax threshold from \$35 000 to \$40 000, the reduction in corporate taxes, the millions to be spent on the repair and construction of roads and other infrastructures in villages neglected for the past eighteen years and the promise of laptops for every family will not erase the memory of the discriminatory treatment by this administration over the years, or reduce the growing army of poor and impoverish persons in this country.

On the contrary, the budget really offers no relief to the worker who earns less than \$40 000 per month. The Hon. Member Mr. Rohee can shout to the stars about education being a benefit, and electricity being a benefit, and schools being a benefit, no one denies that, but the first benefit the average worker wants to have is a proper and decent meal everyday - that is the first benefit he wants to see. How is he going to feed himself and his family? That is the first consideration. He who is earning far less than \$40 000 per month and still is confronted with the escalating cost of living as a result of rising food prices, which the Minister admitted is taking place, and the unconscionable sixteen per cent Value Added Tax (VAT), he will not have an opportunity to see that benefit.

The slice of bread a day to the pensioner will have no real impact on the pensioner's quality of life. The failure of the administration to offer salary increases of at least sixteen per cent has assured workers that their quality of life will not improve, despite the grandiose

announcement that this is the biggest budget ever. That is not going to put food on the table for the ordinary man in the country.

The headline of the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper, last Sunday, tells it all about this election budget, under the caption, “President promises water, help with legal matters”. That is the caption of the headline of the *Sunday Chronicle* newspaper, written by Johann Earle, on 30<sup>th</sup>, January, with a big photograph. But it was interesting reading what the report states. I want to quote a section from this very Sunday newspaper, the *Guyana Chronicle*, to illustrate the point. Before the President spoke... I do not see the Minister here, the *Minister of Water*. I put in the word water.

“The Minister had announced that Guyana Water Inc. would be commencing the installation of standpipes along the main roads and there were still a number of persons who are yet to uplift their land titles. He said the titles give the residents empowerment and personal worth.”

However, when the President spoke, he announced decisions which superseded what the Minister stated earlier.

“I will ensure that we find the \$60 million so that the entire community could get water. Rather than start with standpipes, we will begin to lay the network.”

4.15 p.m.

Here is the interesting part.[**Mr. Nandlall:** What is wrong with that?] I was looking for the refrain earlier, but this is the interesting part of the article. I continue.

“But he also stated that because of limited resources and the fact that the roads usually come after, the water network would have to be completed. Some of the roads would have to be put on hold.”

That was after the big announcement.

The President also gave a commitment to the construction of a nursery school in the community and asked for volunteers to run a computer training facility for which the Government would provide computers. That is why we cannot receive from the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water the list of projects which he promised to circulate in this

House showing how the \$6 billion in supplementary expenditure passed last year would be spent. It had to be left for magnanimous announcement like this to satisfy election imperatives rather than in any studied and constructive manner. That is what I am talking about an election budget. The electioneering started since last year.

Again, I am sorry that the *Hon. Minister of Water* is not here because I recall, in this very House, Your Honour, that this very Minister...Last year when I had visited those communities, from Bare Root, and filmed the horrible state of water supply - people were going into canals because of low pressure to get water, digging holes and fetching water from the road with donkey carts – the Minister stood in this House and said that within fourteen days water will be there. When I challenged it, he said that I was misleading this House and that there was no problem with water in those communities. Well, all I can say is that you can fool all the people some of the time but not all of the people all the time. The election silly season is here again.

Before I go further, Mr. Speaker, let me take this opportunity to congratulate our new Member of Parliament (MP), Mrs. Joan Baveghems, a true working class woman who understands the reality of Guyana. Her presence here reflects the commitment of the PNCR-1G not only to the equality of women but also its belief that the working people are most qualified to represent their interests. I would also like to congratulate our Shadow Minister of Finance, Mrs. Volda Lawrence, for her excellent and erudite presentation in this debate which exposed some of the fallacies presented to this House, particularly the debt burden that we have been hearing about over the years.

Mr. Speaker, the Budget 2011 unfortunately commenced on a very deceptive theme. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Rohee, a few moments ago, tried to give us an interpretation. It was the first interpretation that was attempted in the whole debate, but it started out on a deceptive theme - *Together Building Tomorrow's Guyana's Today*. The Minister, a few moments ago, quoted from a dictionary. Well, I believe that the Minister of Finance must have in his possession a special PPP/C's dictionary because I checked with the shorter Oxford Dictionary to see whether I was suffering from hallucination. According to that dictionary, the meanings ascribed to that word "together" are as follows: inter-companionship, union, proximity, in each other's company, in one assembly, with union or combination of parts, or elements into or in a condition of unity, in concert or cooperation, unitedly, conjointly, in a way for or into or in mutual action, mutually, reciprocally." All these are interpretations that

the shorter Oxford Dictionary gave me of the meaning of the word “together.” Having regard, however, to the behaviour of the PPP/C administration over the last eighteen years and, more particularly, since 2006, I do not believe that it is I who am hallucinating. I believe that it has to be someone on the other side of the House.

As I continue my brief presentation today, I will demonstrate how this theme is best described as a sick joke, including pronouncement made by Members of this Government during this very debate, including the Hon. Minister Rohee, a few moments ago. The introduction of this budget, page 1, states:

“...the current PPP/Civic Government entered this Ninth Parliament of Guyana with clarity of purpose that was defined in our Manifesto promise to deliver a Brighter Future For All Guyanese.”

In the next paragraph he went on to state:

“...we are confident in our declaration that much has been achieved, promises have been delivered, and the future is brighter for the country...”

Indeed if that were really so, I would have been a very happy man. I would have made a five-minute presentation like my daughter suggested that I do, last year - she said that we were wasting time - and sat down. I would have commended the Government because if Guyana progresses, and the country is doing well, and there is no problem, all Guyanese will benefit. Our members will benefit and Guyana will be moving forward. But the Minister forgot, I believe, significantly, that at the opening of this Ninth Parliament, His Excellency the President, himself, in his 2006 speech to this National Assembly emphatically announced that the hallmark of this period would have been consultation. I would not waste time to read the section of his speech. I think it is part of the records of this House. What became of this promise or undertaking? The fundamental promise that was to guide the future suddenly resurrected in 2011. Like other such statements in this budget speech, that turned out to be what it really was - mere rhetoric.

Let me state, and I repeat, that the PNCR - 1G and I would always be pleased if the laudable objectives outlined in this budget are achieved. If Guyana prospers and the wealth is equitably distributed, then all of its people, including our members and supporters, would be happy with a better quality of life offered. It is, therefore, out of concern for Guyana that we indentify the weaknesses in the budget in the hope that this administration would take heed if

it really wants to succeed. We can do no more. But, as I said earlier, it is like *pouring water on duck's back*. In the first place, if the Hon. Minister was serious about this term “together”, his methodology in preparation would have seen widespread consultation. This has been a persistent call by all stakeholders in the past. In 2008, the Minister was unprepared to even acknowledge the request by the Red Thread organisation for a meeting with him before the budget. Regrettably, the leopard has not changed his spots. Again, there has been no consultation, particularly with the parliamentary parties that the Hon. Member Mr. Rohee said that they would like to work with. Instead, we have seen the usual unilateral approach adopted over the years. Is that what you mean by “together”?

The National Development Strategy (NDS) provided the best platform for togetherness that this budget proclaims. It was a document that was prepared by a wide range of experts and knowledgeable Guyanese across the political spectrum and divide, and had unanimous endorsement, Hon. Member. The second document that came after that was a communiqué signed between President Jagdeo and the Leader of the Opposition on the 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2003. It is instructive that the followed up agreement to that communiqué signed on the 19<sup>th</sup> June, 2003 contained the following, under item three, the National Development Strategy:

“The President and Leader of the Opposition agreed that the National Development Strategy paper should be relaid in the National Assembly and be subjected to debate therein.”

What was the result? They are speaking today of togetherness. In 2007, we came to this National Assembly urging, with a motion, a joint review of that National Development Strategy, the fundamental document that underpins the whole development programme for this country. The very Minister of Finance, who speaks of togetherness, boldly rejected that motion, flaunting arrogance in the House and stating boldly that he can do it all alone - right in this House. I was here. How serious can we take this Government when they talk about togetherness in this budget? Mr. Rohee, a few moments ago, wanted to have us believe that they are really serious. It was instructed that the very document, the National Development Strategy, made a significant point that I have repeatedly brought to the attention of this National Assembly. But, again, nobody listens to me. But I will quote it again. The section is captioned “Constraints to Guyana’s Development.” I want to read that section.

“The major obstacle to Guyana’s development is to be found in the divisive nature of its politics...”

It continues with:

“...partly because of the prevalence of faith, racial and political rivalries between two groups and partly because Guyana’s Constitution is largely based on the Westminster model which does not embrace inclusivity in governance as one of its main characteristics, there has been little or no meetings of minds. It is evident, however, that if Guyana is to attain even a modicum of development in the next ten years or so, it is essential that a number of decisions that are based on intelligent, objective discussions and consultations between the two parties be made.”

This is the document that we approached this House with and said, “Let us sit down together. It is the proper basis for taking this country forward.” And we were arrogantly told that we can do it alone.

We brought another motion to this House seeking to have tax reform, that there should be a committee on tax reform because taxation should be dealt with in a holistic way - there should be certain policy frameworks. After a while, there was continuous rejection of the proposals - continuous rejection! I think, the Hon. Member, the late Winston Murray, raised it, at every debate, in this National Assembly, but it was totally rejected. Today, there is a budget that has in it a piecemeal approach to taxation without any policy underpinnings being made. Sure we can boast of reduction of corporate taxes as was done by five per cent and sure the private sector will be happy about it and will congratulate the Government. I do not envy it. It has been fighting for that for a long time and, therefore, it has a right to be pleased that at least somebody listened for a change only, of course, because it is election year. We threw some scraps and then we turned around and we decided that one company, the telecommunication company, should not enjoy this five per cent. There may be a very good reason for this.

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up Hon. Member.

**Mrs. Backer:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hon Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Corbin:** There may be very good reason for such decisions as it relates to how one modifies taxation, but certainly if, indeed, the suggestions were taken on board a long time ago, there would have been a policy underpinning the manner in which taxation was imposed and there would have been no cause for suspicions, as exist at the moment, in how it is being approached.

We speak of togetherness. I do not know that the five per cent is what is really needed for the private sector. I read an article...because during this debate, Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member - I am not sure which one of them - quoted during the presentation, reading from the press release of the Private Sector Commission, how happy it was about the decrease in corporate taxes. As I said, I believe it was right. They are businessmen; they have to survive, and they have a right to do what they did in their opinion. But I read subsequent comments from members of the Manufacturing Association - the Hon. Member Mr. Manniram Prashad is not here - who were, at the same time, suggesting that other aspects of the tax system need to be looked at so that manufacturers, and all of them could have more incentives in order to build this manufacturing sector that we are told in the budget that the Government wants to make a reality. No consultation or no willingness to discuss a broad policy for tax reform, and the Members come to this National Assembly shouting “togetherness.”

We sought, in times of crisis, Hon. Member, to get this National Assembly to meet after the Lusignan massacre. That, too, was rejected! Similar rejection was made to our call to have an international inquiry into the criminal violence of Guyana, including the execution of four hundred Guyanese youth by a phantom squad, including in those deaths, Mr. Speaker, was a Government Minister, the late Hon. Mr. Satyadeo Sawh and permanent social activist and journalist, Ronald Waddle. Yesterday marked five years since his brutal assassination. Yet, despite a similar call by the human rights body, the United Nations Convention on Human Rights (UNCHR), the Government had adamantly refused to hold such an inquiry that could have satisfied and bring closure to thousands of people in this country, and its speaks of “togetherness.”

The year 2011 was declared by the United Nations as the International Year for the People of African Descent. This Government which speaks of togetherness felt it appropriate to submit a national programme without the slightest input from any opposition parliamentary party in this National Assembly. More disgraceful, however, was the refusal to even respond to the request by the major Guyanese organisation of African descent to have a meeting so that its

input could be added to the programme. Then to add insult to injury, we had to hear the learned Hon. Attorney General gave us a lecture in anthropology and proclaiming the right of the Government to proceed, unilaterally, with a launching programme, rather than offering an unreserved apology for that behaviour. Even in your utterances here in this National Assembly, you are demonstrating how hypocritical such a call is. Even in the face of such discontent for something that can be corrected you are too big and too arrogant as a Government to say, "Let us see if we can correct our mistakes so that we can really build togetherness in this country."

The Hon. Attorney General is my good friend. I knew his father very well. When he was quoting several things from the past I wanted to remind him of a few things, but I did not worry. The Hon. Attorney General is a learned man, and whatever he may be accused of, and whatever may be his weaknesses, I am confident and I am sure that a lack of knowledge could never be one of them. I can only assume then that he has deliberately ignored the content and spirit of the United Nations resolution on the International Year for People of African Descent.

The International Year for of People of African Descent commenced because of a United Nations (UN) resolution and I want to quote for the Hon. Attorney General's benefit - I know he already knows this; he is a knowledgeable man - to remind him of what he already knows.

"The year aims at strengthening national actions and regional and international cooperation for the benefit of people of African descent in relation to their full enjoyment of economic, cultural, social, civil and political rights, their participation and integration in all political, economic, social and cultural aspects of society and the promotion of greater knowledge of and respect for their diverse heritage and culture."

It goes further:

"The year aims at strengthening national actions and regional and international cooperation..."

This is a repetition. I will actually go to the... [**Mr. Benn:** I know you lost your way.] I never lose my way. My name is Robert Corbin. Let me go to the actual resolution. I go to the resolution, Sir. It is Resolution 864. I was just quoting a section, but it has about four preambles clause: Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Recalling the



International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, with some more words, Recalling the relevant provisions of the outcomes of all major United Nations Conferences and Summits, in particular the Vienna Declaration and the Programme of Action and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, Recalling Resolution 62/122 of the 17<sup>th</sup> December.

Then the proclamation was made. It goes on to say - after the part that I have read there –

“Encourages the specialized agencies of the United Nations system, within their respective mandates and existing resources, and civil society to make preparations for and identify possible initiatives that can contribute to the success of the Year.”

I want to repeat that: “...and civil society...”

One wonders what the interpretation of the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs is when he seeks to dilute what the United Nations intended by telling us about the Government’s right to proceed alone.

I was quite intrigued by the Hon. Member tracing his ancestry, and I have no problem with his assertions therein. But clearly the Hon. Member missed the boat or he came on another. If the resolution and the working document of the working group are being read, notwithstanding how he claimed this ancestry was arrived at, this is referring to those who came over here on slave ships and died in the slave trade. It deals with those in the continent and other places in the diaspora who are still suffering under the yoke of oppression, exploitation and devoid of human rights. I have no qualm with the Hon. Member being associated or tracing his genealogy to this, but that should have placed a greater moral obligation on him to ensure that the right people were involved in planning this year as directed by the United Nations. Even if the UN made no such specification, must we accept that hijacking a celebration is in keeping with the theme of this budget? Shame and disgrace upon you!

I can go on citing many other examples about this fallacy of togetherness, but it will be to no avail. In this context, I was amused also by my learned and very good friend, Senior Counsel (SC), Bernard DeSantos, who sought to chide the Opposition for not bringing draft legislation to this House. However, I recognise that this outstanding SC, as he is, was holding a good brief and doing an excellent job as usual. If this Government has such intolerance for a motion or simple suggestions to have tax reform or to work together to revise the National

Development Strategy, what will be its reaction if to go further to bring a Bill? The AFC has a Freedom of Information Bill a long time ago, why has it not come up?

Let us not indulge in deception in this House. Since this is the last budget debate of the Ninth Parliament...[**Mr. Benn:** Talk about the budget.] I want the Hon. Member to know that this is the budget. If it is placed on a weak foundation like your bridge at Supenaam, it will sink! It will sink just like the bridge in Supenaam. It will break down. It will float away just like the wharf at Charity. I am saying that the budget starts off on a weak foundation. It starts off...that is part of the theme of the budget – together. I am on this budget and I am saying to you that it starts off with deception. Once it starts off with that shaky foundation, it is going to collapse because we are deceiving ourselves in this House and trying to fool the populace that you are so concerned about working together to carry this country forward. That is what I am saying. However, since this is the last budget debate...

*4.45 p.m.*

**Mr. Corbin:** Since this is the last Budget Debate of the Ninth Parliament, I want the Hon. Member to know that this is the Budget. If it is placed on a weak foundation like your bridge at Supenaam it would sink. It would break down. It will float away like the wharf at Charity. I am saying that the Budget starts off on a weak foundation. That is the theme of the Budget. I am on this Budget and I am saying to you that it starts off with deception. Once it starts off with that shaky foundation, it is going to collapse because we are deceiving ourselves in this House and trying to fool the population that you are so concerned about working together to carry this country forward. That is what I am saying.

However, since this is the last Budget Debate in this Ninth Parliament, let me state here how very clearly, and repeat to my good friends on the other side of this House that Guyana's economic foundations will continue to be on shaky ground unless the issue of governance is adequately addressed. You can reject shared governance at your peril but all indicators – the National Development Strategy – and all of the documents have said to you that this country has deep-seated problems which, if not addressed, will continue to undermine the economic progress of Guyana. So you can ignore it at your peril.

**Economic Performance...**

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up, Hon. Member.

**Mrs. Backer:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

*Question put and carried*

**Mr. Corbin:** Mr. Speaker, looking at the Budget Debate and the documents presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, he reports of a robust economic performance in 2010 – clearly seen in paragraph 1.4 at page 5 and section 5 at page 56. We in the PNC/R do not dispute these numbers. No one here has disputed them in any real terms. The Hon. Member, Mrs. Volda Lawrence, acknowledged that there was growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). She queried whether the figures represented were really as they are, whether we should believe the International Monetary Fund (IMF) statistics or the figures of the Minister – I have a copy of her presentation. The fact said that there was real growth in GDP of 3.6% compared to 2.3% in 2009, overall balance of payment surplus current revenue improved to \$107.8 billion as compared with last year, minimum public sector wage increase by 5%, growth of 0.4 in rice, manufacturing 0.3%, fishing 7.4%, fishery 1.4%, gold and mining 2.9%, other crops 2.5% and that exports increased. That is very good.

The Finance Minister went onto point out some other things in the Budget that were not shouted about too loudly in the presentations and the debate; the decline in the 91 day Treasury Bill rate, contractions in sugar by 5.5%, bauxite by 9.8% and livestock by 1.1%. The Minister saw the inflation rate remaining at 4.5%, which is about 0.5% above what was projected for this year. The Minister was silent about the depreciation of the Guyana Dollar to the US dollar by 0.12%. The Minister also reminded us that in order to do all of that and all that we have achieved, there is a current account deficit of \$239 million US. The targets for 2011 with this \$161.4 billion Budget, a 13.1% increase, the Minister states that a number of things will happen in 2011.

I believe that the Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence did an excellent job in dealing with the overall macroeconomic performance as the proposed revenue and expenditure for 2011. I believe that she demonstrated that it is not the amount of money spent, but whether we receive value for money that is important. That is what we are concerned about. We are happy to know that we have money to spend. It is not the Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh's pocket money nor is it the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP's) money. These are funds which have accrued that belong to the people of Guyana and managed by the Administration. We are happy that we have money to spend. What we want to ensure is that the tax payers of this

country are guaranteed that there is adequate stewardship and proper management of those finances. Of course she also mentioned corruption, but that seems to create a lot of uneasiness among Members on the other side, so I will leave this subject alone, at least for the moment.

Other Members of the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) Opposition, dealt with the many sectors and Ministries outlined in the Budget and after five long days of debate, I would not attempt to repeat what they have already said. I believe that it would be true to say that the conclusion of all their presentations, despite what Mr. Rohee said, is indeed that it is nothing to shout about. I think that conclusion is true. The truth is that we have had a lot of lengthy rhetoric masking the reality of some very delicate areas of our economy and there has not been a sufficient explanation and proper presentation of programmes to give us the assurance that those projections in delicate areas of the economy can be accomplished. Let me cite just one example of sugar: see page 20, paragraph 4.7 of this Budget. In that paragraph, this is what the Minister said:-

“To say 2010 was a disappointing year for the sugar sector would be an understatement of considerable proportions...”

... and he goes onto speak “...there were challenges constraining its operation.”

I do not want to read the whole thing because we have all read the Budget. In that particular paragraph, he does not refer to any statistics. They are put in another part of the Budget very nicely, but at page 56, paragraph 5.2, he speaks of the difficulties confronting the sugar industry in a manner which does not provide the kind of assurance that it could really be achieved even though we are happy if it could be and this is what he said. I want to read this section, 5.2:-

“Mr. Speaker, the difficulties confronting the sugar industry are well known and have been much ventilated.”

That is a way of getting away from telling the people what is really happening so he dispatches that in one sentence.

“Government has made clear to the industry our expectations with respect to the implementation of the plans and achievement of the goals set out in the turnaround plan, including as they relate to the acreage under cultivation, raising the conversion rate of cane to sugar, generating efficiency gained from increased mechanisation and

improving industrial relations between the sugar company and its workers. In return, the industry has given certain assurances that provide some room for confidence that the turnaround will be accomplished.”

All the projection on sugar is based on expectations and assurances. I will explain why by going into a little more detail so that Mr. Rohee, the Hon. Member, does not believe that we are indulging in “talk for talk sake”. In his 2007 Budget Speech entitled “Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana”, at page 24, paragraph 4.7, the Minister said:-

“The flagship Skeldon Modernisation Project is scheduled for completion in 2008, operations to commence in February 2008.”

Well, that did not materialise. We know all of the problems with the startup.

Then he went onto say in that Budget of 2007:-

“The new factory will produce about 110,000 tons annually.”

Well those results are still questionable because of all that has happened since then.

“National production rising to 450,000 tons annual...”

... this is the benchmark. That is where we must judge, not by 2006 and 2007 but by this 5-year... all the other things we were told from 1992: “we achieved this”, “in the last 5 years we have achieved that”, but when we get to sugar obscured is the benchmark which the Minister himself set and told this National Assembly that national production would rise to 450,000 tonnes. Check the budget of 2007.

Unfortunately, in 2008 there was a decline of 15.1% resulting in sugar’s total national production being at 226,267 tonnes. In 2009, 290,000 tonnes were projected; not the 450,000 tonnes, we have forgotten about that for a long time. That dropped through the bottom. No reference to the 450,000 benchmark that was set before, but the target set was 290,000 tonnes, a 28.2% increase on what was actually produced in 2008. However, he said that that was contingent and that is why I am raising this point. When he made that Budget and he said that it was contingent upon several uncertainties outlined by the Minister including dependence on a complete turnaround plan. I am looking again here and I am seeing the same words: “set out the turnaround plan”. So here we have the same words being used that were used in 2009, but instead what in fact happened was that we produced 233,736 tonnes which,

again, was below the target. In 2010, we produced 220,862 tonnes – 5.5% lower than in 2009 – but the Minister in his Budget projects that notwithstanding this continuous decline and the many problems which we have with Skeldon, not to mention other issues such as acreage and the quantity of land to actually produce the quantity of cane that Skeldon desires. He forgets the 400,000 tonnes but expects that we will have a tremendous increase of 35% in 2011, over and above. He targets 2011 as 298,879 tonnes or 35% above the 220,000 tonne level.

As I said before, the only foundation upon which the Minister rests his case is the same words he used in 2006 dependent upon this turnaround plan. So the question is... **[Interjection]** 2009... I am not too big to say when I am wrong, unlike you. When you threw the bridge down, you do not want to admit it. You blamed the Ministry or cooperatives and all of these things.

“In return, the industry has given assurances...”

Assurances!

“...that provides some room for confidence that the turnaround plan will be accomplished.”

Surely this target could not be dependent upon Skeldon alone because Skeldon, according to the Minister then, was going to produce 110,000 tonnes. That means that you have to have increase in production also outside of the Skeldon factory and we are told about mechanisation and a number of other problems, but how are we to have the assurance in this House that that is achievable given the dismal record of performance, given the strikes, given the whole question of management which the Government itself admits that it has serious problems with. So we consider this a laudable objective which we would be happy to be achieved, but I am afraid that even with Mr. Ramotar's membership on the board, it looks more like a political pipedream.

In 2007, we were told that private farmers had already expanded cultivation by 13,400 hectares and planting had already started in 2007. Where was the production from these expanded acreages in 2010? It did not have anything to do with Skeldon, or was there some deception in 2007? I do not know which one it is, but certainly with these kinds of statistics how are we in isolation without togetherness to understand and really believe that this will

occur in 2011? He will get up, I am sure, and regale us with all kinds of plans and we must accept what he says like children in a congregation.

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up, Hon. Member.

**Mrs. Backer:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition be given 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

*Question put and carried*

**Mr. Corbin:** Again, Mr. Speaker, the Minister speaks of togetherness. We are just as interested in the success of the sugar industry as the Government is, but how has the Government behaved in this sector? I want to cite this example for the Hon. Member Mr. Rohee who thought that he could use the example of National Commission on Law and Order which he claims we had an opportunity to serve and some Member, who was named by me, only attended one meeting. What was the record of the attendance for the previous year? I want you to look at that; when both nominees, Abiola Wong and the Hon. Member, attended and their reports to me were that it was an exercise in futility.

Let me go to sugar and make sugar a reference to you. You are speaking of togetherness in sugar. This Parliament rejected every single proposal made by the Hon. Member Tony Vieira who was interested on giving advice on what to do at Skeldon Sugar Factory, but you are not interested in togetherness. He pointed out from the beginning that if you were going to have such large throughput in production, the first thing that you have to do was to move with an aggressive programme to cultivate thousands of hectares more of cane or else, when the factory is finished, you would not have the throughput to make optimum use of the facility. I stood here and heard him say so, but this very Government that speaks of togetherness ignored every suggestion made by some on this side who wanted to contribute to sugar. He was not versed in politics. He was versed in sugar. He grew up on sugar and what was even more insulting was that the agreement was arrived at that we should name persons on opposite sides of the House from the major parties to sit on this board and Mr. Rohee could cite the example Mrs. Backer used. I, by letter, appointed Mr. Tony Vieira to be the representative on the GuySuCo Board years ago. Today, the Government bluntly refused to put him on the board, although the principal, he was my nominee. I refuse to name anybody else on the principle that if you ask me to give my best person to assist you with an assignment, I name a person who as experience in the sugar industry, who grew up managing

sugar, then you refuse to appoint him, your call for assistance is a joke and that is what it turned out to be- a big joke. Do not sit here hypocritically telling us that you are interested in participation in this very sugar industry, so I refuse to name somebody so you have put Mr. Ramotar on the board. Well maybe he will make the turnaround possible. Do not come to tell us that you are interested in togetherness when, by your mere behaviour, you have demonstrated that it is all an empty call.

We are told that bauxite production was disappointing. I do not want to go into details because time is running out, but the Hon. Prime Minister having made some very bold projections for the bauxite sector. When he spoke here on Friday last, he gave us hope that with the upturn of the market that there is going to be increased bauxite production, that there was going to be mullite now being exported, but then he gave us the bombshell that no alumina at all will be coming. That was the big announcement years ago, this commitment by RUSAL and later by BOSAI that they were going to do alumina. I grew up in the bauxite town of Linden so I knew from the beginning that unless you solve the power problems in this country any talk about alumina and aluminum smelters could not be serious unless one solves from the interested investor, some more detailed proposals about what they intend to do. However, they used that as a carrot so that they can control huge areas of our natural resources and I do not know what we are getting from it. Maybe the Minister can tell us. I will be happy if we are getting justice and getting our due share.

When I looked at the mine the other day, the lucky spot mine where BOSAI is mining, though I am not expert and I am sorry that the Prime Minister is not here, having seen bauxite mining for years – Mr. Benn should know or ought to know – I see no real mining techniques being employed that gives assurance that they are planning for any long-term and expansive production but the kind of “scatter-brained” mining... when you have gold miners coming to this country... I will take you and show you that in order to get what is at the top quickly they are destroying all prospects to get to the ore which is deeper so they are not interested... [**Mr. Neendkumar:** They have to get a new system.] That is why we destroyed the railway line. What I am saying and suggesting to you as a Government is, just as you have regulations for gold mining when large-scale gold miners come to this country and hope to explore and exploit our mineral resources, you should move to look at those agreements that you have to ensure that certain mining plans are sent to the appropriate Ministry to monitor what they are doing. As a humble suggestion, do not leave it to them alone.



We have been regaled throughout this Budget about the billions that will be spent in various sectors. We are told that the indigenous people will get millions of dollars. We are happy about that, but is the expenditure going to create conditions for them to have genuine economic development, create self-reliance and be independent producers in their communities? That is the issue before us. We heard a list of projects when the Minister spoke. \$197 million spent on projects for community development plans, \$31.7 million she said benefitting 150 farmers and so on and so forth. For 2011, we are told that another \$78 million will be spent for these community programmes: \$56 million for one poultry pen, a plant nursery and student dormitory at Liliendaal. I have to look at the estimates to see how this money is being allocated because the way it is put in the Budget, one cannot really know what is really being spent for hinterland development in terms of economic thrust, therefore, to mix it up in the Budget Speech, to say that \$56 million is being spent on a poultry pen, plant nursery and student dormitory at Liliendaal is to do what is said in the Budget: to give the impression to the indigenous people that a lot of money is coming so you group all together; \$78 million coming into this area. The question is how do you measure whether those resources have contributed indeed to genuine development in these indigenous communities? I do not have to provide all the answers for you. You do not have to believe what the PNC/R says. One, Mr. Martin Chung, in a letter of 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2011, in the *Stabroek Newspaper* – I do not know the gentleman – says it all:-

“Amerindians are tired of empty promises.”

That explains it all.

The Hon. Member Mr. Fernandes came to this House last year. He explained in a very simple down to earth manner, in his usual style of not offending anyone, providing a little bit of humor and still making his points about what are the things to be done. With no aggression and no hostility, he stated that he had been through areas that needed assistance. We come back this year and many of those issues have not yet been addressed and you speak about togetherness. I can speak with authority on this matter because I traveled through those areas with him and I know that what he is saying is accurate.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings, in her maiden presentation said:-

“This is my first and maiden presentation. I would like to know that I can tell my people that you have done something for the area.”

A hand stretched out, Hon. Member, but she has to come back to this House one year later to point out that some of those very problems have not been addressed.

*5.15 p.m.*

**Mr. Corbin:** The only thing that I have managed to get the Minister of Amerindian Affairs to admit this year is that Amerindian titles were made available to the Indigenous people titles under the PNC and all that is happening now is the specification and demarcation of boundaries. I do not know if it slipped out of her mouth Thank you, for the first time, for not being in the company of an “Ananias and Sapphira”. She spoke the truth.

If one has heard the pronouncements by the Government over the years, one gets the impression, indeed as we have said, that only in 1992, suddenly, the interest of the Indigenous people came to the forefront. I heard one person, so young, in this Parliament speak about Toshaos Conference. The first big conference was held since 1966 right here in this National Assembly under the PNC Government. And the Government speaks of certain places as though it thinks no one else has done anything in these communities. I applaud what you are doing. That is your job to do it now. Do not keep looking back because as the Hon. Member, Mrs. Baveghens said, “you will get stiff neck”. Look forward and do what you are doing because we would like to see proper development.

When the Hon. Member, Mr. Fernandes, tell you to move the koker so that the people can get their produce in, for heaven’s sake move the koker so that the people can get their produce to the market. I am not speaking by guessing. I believe the Hon. Member might have been in diapers when I was working in the North West. The Hon. Member speaks as though we do not know what is happening. I am sparing her the pains of having to say that she knew and misled the Hon. House. I am saying that she does not know. That is why I am saying that she was too young to know. I worked personally all over the North West. There was an Amerindian Settlement at the very Hobo Airstrip. I, as the Community Development Officer, resettled those people so that the then government could have built the Airstrip. I want to enlighten her so that she will not allow the propagandists of modern times to mislead her. That is what I am trying to do. All those areas such as Barabina Hill, Ottokwai and Hobo Hill had interventions. What we are saying is that what we need to determine is not the quantum of money spent, but whether the allocation of resources provides a proper foundation for these communities to have an economic takeover.

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up Hon. Member.

**Mrs. Backer:** Mr. Speaker I move that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition be given another 15 minutes to continue his presentation.

*Question put and carried*

**Mr. Corbin:** Let me try to speed up because I did say I would be brief. While I am on the subject of the Indigenous Peoples, one of the problems which faced the people of the Rupununi a few years ago was that they were all encouraged to go into peanut production. AK 62 and Ground runner were the varieties of the nuts and that they grew at the time. There was only aircraft, at that time, to bring out the produce. When the peanuts were produced, a lot of it could not have adequate marketing. I am admitting to that one. What Government did then was try to encourage cottage industries to make peanut butter and bottle the cashew nuts. Now Government is talking about a road from Lethem to Georgetown. What I would like the Hon. Minister to tell me is what will be happening to make use of this road so that these communities could increase their agricultural production in order to bring economic viability to those Indigenous communities. Then I will know you are on the right track. Those are the things we are concerned about Hon. Minister. We are not concerned about expenditure only but also to see that you have proper plans for development.

I do not want to waste time on water because I was told that my Hon. Friend, who is also so audacious, was humbled a few days ago after a certain presentation. I was not here so I am dealing with hearsay. All I would like to say is that it is not how much is spent on water, but it is whether there is water supplied in the communities and people do not get “mauby” but, indeed, get proper potable water. A Member of this Assembly took out a photograph right here in the bathroom last Thursday. *[He holds up picture]* This is the condition of the water that is running through the pipe. I would like to ask the Hon. Member to give this photograph to the Hon. Minister Mr. Irfaan Ali. I have the photograph on my computer. This is a photograph taken of the quality of the water in this Parliament Office. If you Hon. Member can do that to this August Assembly, what is he going to do to the citizens of Georgetown? And he tells us of millions of dollars that has been spent. I am not making this up. It is happening right here in this Parliament Office.

I have noticed that Members have gotten accustomed to asking for documents to be circulated. That seems to be a new Standing Order. I am not going to ask that this one be

circulated, but I think you should note that that photograph was taken right here and I would not come to this House and stand to deceive you.

**Mr. Speaker:** I am aware of the colour of the water in the washroom.

**Mr. Corbin:** Thank you very much, Sir. It is not a figment of my imagination. What we are saying is that it is ok to spend this money, but unless you deal with these teething problems, the people of Guyana will not have quality service for the money that you spend.

While I am on the subject of water, I noted that the Minister was at the Dazell Housing Scheme. He was not here when I said he promised that within two weeks water will be fixed in those areas. Yet, I hear that the President is promising pipelines and all manner of things. The Minister told this House that the problems would have been fixed in fourteen days. I do not want to talk about the East Coast because you have made promises in the newspaper. I would like to talk about the Hopetown Cooperative Society and the Catherine's Lust housing area. We are talking about equality of opportunity and equity. The Government wants togetherness.

The Hopetown Co-op Society did not go to the Minister at the Ministry of Housing and ask him to do infrastructure. As a co-op society, the members contributed. They provided all of the money to do the infrastructure, dig the drains and fix the roads. The Minister cannot say there was any fault there because they did not go and ask for money. [**Mr. Irfaan Ali:** That is not true. They had fraud.] Is the Hon. Member saying there was fraud? [**Mr. Ali:** I can give you a copy of the agreement] Do not worry with the agreement. I am saying there was no fraud. In other words, this is a society whose affairs were regular, they were businesslike and they were not dependent on the State. They pooled their resources and they did not ask the Ministry to put in any infrastructure. They bought the pipelines and all they asked the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) to do was hook up the connection so that they can get water in Catherine's Lust. They were told they had to pay \$5 million just to get that connection. I bring these issues here because the Government wants to know what affects togetherness. That is why I say that it is almost a waste of time to speak here. When I went up there and the residents raised this matter with me, I told them it must be a mistake. They said no. They said they wrote a letter to GWI, sent a copy to the Minister and vice versa. I told them I would not intervene because the Ministry might think it is political interference. I told them they should go and represent their interest. They went and the Minister said he would reduce it to \$2 million or something like that. The Members of the Society rejected it because he tried to

cajole the representatives who attended that interview to sign to sign an agreement which my learned colleagues, Mr. Ramson and Mr. De Santos, would consider duress and undue influence.

He is holding the people to ransom by telling them they would not get water unless they sign an agreement. The representatives who went to his office had to sign but they did not have the money. They went back to the Co-op Society and at the General Members meeting, the members rejected that. They said there was a new plant opened in West Coast Berbice. All those people in Cotton Tree did not have to dig a pipeline nor dig a drain. The Government provided the pipes, put a new pump station and it is pumping water to each home. Residents only have to pay the connection fee to GWI. They said:-

“We believe that we should get the same treatment. We are going to pay our connection fee but why should we pay this \$1.7 or \$2 million just to connect water when other people are getting it free.”

They reached a stalemate and at that stage, I wrote His Excellency the President and raised it in the presence of another Hon. Member of this House who took copious notes during one of those alleged secret meetings that Mr. Trotman thinks I have. [**Mr. Raphael Trotman:** Now you are talking about it.] No. It was in our press statement the next week. I went there to make representation for the people and I raised the matter with the Head of State and he said that the matter will be looked into. Mr. Speaker, as I speak to you here today, the people of Catherine’s Lust section of the Hoptown Co-op Society still do not know what their fate is. Members of the Government come to this House boldly talking about working with the people and having outreaches. Are you really serious Hon. Member Rohee? [**Mr. Clement Rohee:** I am very serious]. We will fix the situation with the people at Catherine’s Lust. Connect their water tomorrow and I will say you did a great job.

I do not want to deal at length with corruption. We hear a lot about water and education. A few moments ago the Minister told us about this great expenditure in education. I do not want to tell the Hon House what I think. I asked my research assistant to look at education as reported in the newspapers and see what is happening with the schools. Let me tell you what the newspapers said.

1. “9<sup>th</sup> November, 2010 – Poor conditions at Bagotville and Golden Grove Primary.”

This is despite all of the billions being spent. I do not mean this as an attack on the Minister. He was bold enough to admit that there are problems and he is working on them and that is why I admire the Minister of Education. He is a pragmatic man. He understands he needs help. He did not come with any bravado and tell us that everything is bright and beautiful, but he must speak to his colleagues. The education sector needs help and we must find ways to give support to it but do not try to tell us that all is bright and rosy.

[**Mr. Ramotar:** Which newspapers?] It is the Stabroek News of the same date. The story went like this. I am just going to read a little paragraph:-

“Classes were disrupted at the Bagotville Primary School on West Bank Demerara and the Golden Grove Primary School on the East Coast Demerara as students joined in the protest.”

It seems that unless these students protest, they do not get any action. That is the new form.

“One of the teachers said, “This is a terrible situation. We are in this for years now, Pansy Shepherd said as other parents related that two teachers and the Headmistress teach 107 students at the Bagotville Primary School, but many times the teachers are away owing to other commitments and the students are left unsupervised. Efforts to contact the Ministry of Education officials for a comment yesterday were futile.”

Later on it says:-

“The Parent/Teachers Association at Golden Grove Primary School supported a protest there.”

This is a different part of the country. The Opposition was not involved. This is the people getting fed up. Mr. Rohee is looking forward to this jury. That is the jury that will judge him. Not me. These parents and students is the jury that will judge you.

“We are waiting five weeks for a new pump”

...and the story goes on:-

“12<sup>th</sup> September, 2009 – Children of Three Mile Secondary School fall ill.”

That is Bartica in Region 7.

“16<sup>th</sup> May 2009 – Overcrowding remains problem at Covent Garden Secondary School” – Stabroek News.

This is not in the North West. The article says:-

“The Parent/Teachers Association (PTA) of Covent Garden Secondary School is calling on the authorities to address the issue of overcrowding which it says has been a reality at the school over the last few years. Stabroek News visited the East Bank School yesterday and spoke to members of the school’s PTA who related that the problem has been affecting the children of the school, particularly those in the first and second forms.”

I want to show a continuous trend over this five year period that the Ministry said everything was bright and beautiful.

“26<sup>th</sup> November, 2008 – Parents want Government to address issues impacting drop-out rate at Mahaicony Creek School.”

I am pointing this out for those who are not helping the Minister. Instead of prattling about what is happening in the education sector, they should understand the problems. Do not shout that all is bright and beautiful. Listen to what we are saying and say that you will address those problems so that we can improve the education sector. I am forced to quote these articles because when we say these things in the House, we are told that they are figments of our imagination. It is propaganda. According to the Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, we make it up.

“13<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 – Region 4 RDC moves to fix toilets at Enmore Primary.”

This is from the newspapers.

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up Hon. Member.

**Mrs. Backer:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition be given 15 minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Question put and carried*

**Mr. Corbin:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. The exhibits that I have just made available are attempts to let my friends on the other side of the House understand that we are not here to

share out bouquets. We are here to bring to your attention these issues. Sure the economy moved but what is being done with it?

I want to say very quickly that we hope the Budget will achieve its objectives. We have reason to doubt, despite the Minister's boast about the absorptive capacity of the country, because in the very Budget we are told that quarrying production declined. With this massive expansion in construction and billions of dollars, will we have the necessary saw materials? The Government is building big roads and all of these things. Would we have the output to deal with it? I do not know. I would be very glad if the Minister addresses this. These are things that affect the whole issue of delivering on time. Are these just statements to give people the impression that all of these things will be done this year or do we seriously expect them to be done?

There are other reasons which will prevent this programme from succeeding. Some, of course, has already been manifested. This is the unwillingness to accept constructive criticism, suggestions and proposals, pettiness, contempt and arrogance, the mistaken belief that the Government and its political officials are the only source of knowledge, the absence of justice and the squandering of all opportunities to achieve consensus to build national cohesion and take Guyana forward.

I must conclude by referring to the issue of corruption. I know it makes my friends on the other side very uneasy. I would be remiss in my duty if I did not touch the subject because the Hon. learned Attorney General took time in his presentation to even quote from books to tell us what the learned writer wrote without telling us that the writer was, despite his hallowed status as a Senior Counsel and a political activist. He was the Deputy Leader of the People's Progressive Party (PPP); a key member of the PPP. [**Mr. Ramson:** He was never the Deputy Leader] Was he a Central Committee Member? He quoted from the learned member, Mr. Ashton Chase, without calling the name to give the impression that this scholarly presentation on corruption years ago was written by some independent person. All I would say to you, Hon. Member, is that his writings in that context are no better than your presentation in the National Assembly. They have both come from politicians in the context. [**Mr. Ramson:** There is nothing wrong with that.] I am not saying that there is anything wrong with it. Learned Counsel, there is something called weight of evidence. It is the weight of the evidence and not the availability of the evidence. The Hon. Member went back till then to quote from the Hon. Member, Mr. Ashton Chase, but did not go back far enough to tell us



that corruption did not start then. Some people think it started in 1992. The Hon. Member did not remind them about the Del Conto Road which was never finished and millions was spent on it by the PPP Administration even before independence had started. The younger Members of Parliament probably do not know what I am talking about, but do not pull those things with me. There was the burning down of the Rice Board. All of that started years ago – 1957 – 1964 – to hide all of the financial irregularities there. If the Hon. Member wants to go back, we can waste a lot of time going back into history, but do not behave like a knight in shining armour. Do not behave like that because I will remind you of the sabotage of the sugar canes and the blowing up of bridges to halt production. Do not let us go back to that. You can try that with the younger Members who do not understand the history of corruption in this country. [**Mr. Neendkumar:** What about the barge? Tell us about the barge.] I can tell you about that. As was the nature of the PNC, there was an inquiry...

**Mr. Rohee:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to seek your guidance on a matter. The Parliament of Guyana: Handbook for Members of the National Assembly has a list of unparliamentary expressions. It says:-

“The following is a list found in the 19<sup>th</sup> Edition of Erskine May’s Parliamentary Practice.”

It lists “corrupt” and “corruption” as unparliamentary expressions. Mr. Speaker, I am seeking your guidance as to whether this is applicable in the situation in which the Hon. Member is speaking.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members the words “corrupt” and “corruption” are unparliamentary, but I hasten to add that unparliamentary language is so rife within the House right now by both sides that it is totally impossible for me to bring any control to this matter. I try my best from time to time but Members who know better continue to violate this rule with great impunity. I just wish to make that statement.

**Mr. Corbin:** Your Honour, let me say that I am grateful for your guidance and I trust that in the future we will apply that rule equitably. I understand what you are saying. I never knew that the word “corruption” was un-parliamentary. It is in our Reports and I am about to read from the Parliamentary Journal and it has the word “corruption” inside. How do we deal with a matter when one is quoting? I plan to quote from this Parliamentary Journal which deals with good governance.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramson, spent a great deal of time in his presentation quoting about corruption. He mentioned the Knowledge Sharing Institute (KSI). He spoke about who was fired. He talked about a Hon. Member of this House whose husband was involved in corrupt practices and all of that. He said that in this House and that is why I have to reply to him. I would like to make matters easy and read from an article titled “The Ten Economic Freedoms” taken from the Index of Economic Freedom, page 2007. In the same manner that you permitted certain documents to be circulated then, I would be happy if I am allowed to circulate, too, for all Members of the House to see this Report on Guyana which states on page 2007: “Freedom from Corruption – no change.”

It goes on to say:-

“Corruption is perceived as widespread. Guyana ranks 126 out of 180 countries in Transparency International Corruption Perception Index for 2009. There is extensive corruption at every level of law enforcement and government. The ruling party’s reputation has been tarnished by allegations of collaboration with criminal elements. Widespread corruption undermines poverty reduction efforts by international aid donors and discourages foreign investors.”

This is not a figment of the PNC/R – 1G’s imagination. I would be happy if it can be circulated. If there are problems about circulating that, I am sure you would not allow me to read what is in this other document published by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA)’s Research Associates Messrs Robert Covooris and Elcin Chang. It is an analysis titled, “Guyanese President leaves a tattered legacy.” The first sentence...

**5.45 p.m OW**

**Mr. Robert Corbin:**

"...Guyana ranks 126 out of 180 countries in Transparency International Corruption Perception Index for 2009. There is extensive corruption at every level of law enforcement and government. The ruling party’s reputation has been tarnished by allegations of collaboration with criminal elements. Widespread corruption undermines poverty reduction efforts by international aid donors and discourages foreign investors.”

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Research Associates Messrs Robert Covooris and Elcin Chang. It is an analysis titled, "Guyanese President leaves a tattered legacy." The first sentence says:

"Stagnation, violence, corruption, arch-sectarianism, and unfettered crime: this is the heritage that President Jagdeo will bequeath this country."

I do not want to read the rest of it. I do not want to waste time. We did not invent cocaine in the barrel; we did not invent cocaine in coconut; we did not invent these things; these are things that are happening in this country. And I would be the first to admit that in every country in the world there is corruption. Every country and every Administration will be faced with it. The issue is not whether they exist but whether you are prepared to stamp it out effectively when it occurs. I am happy that the Hon. Member Mr. Ramson read from the document, at least, he was able to say, and I take it as a matter of pride and commendation, to confirm that the PNC did condone it, he went before the court. He quoted Lennox Canterbury in this House; he went to court because the PNC had intolerance for it and dealt condignly with it when they were in power. It is the attitude to it. That is what we are saying. Drug-running, narcotics trading etc. have been engrained in this Administration to the extent that it does and will interfere...

I want to conclude, by saying that unless the issue of good governance is addressed, it runs across all these issues and I want to recommend for the reading of Members of this Hon. House, the Parliamentarians, this is not from any strange source it is from our own Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's (C.P.A) the 2010 Issue 2, an article written by the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women's Parliamentarians, one Kashmala Taric. This is what she had to say in her article "Democracy remains undemocratic". I do not want to read the entire article because, and I must thank the Clerk, Mr. Sherlock Isaacs, for ensuring that we do get these CPA publications. It is in the possession, I believe, of every Member of this House. I urge you to go to page 112 of the current issue we have. This is what the Chairperson was saying- and she was speaking of a country not Guyana-

"Pakistan's recent 18th amendment to the Constitution has many provisions which are against the spirit of democracy. It offers not room for people's participation in the process for their emancipation and empowerment. Democracy remains incarcerated with a ruling elite whose sole concern is focused on recycling power within its domain so that each stock holder may have a stab at wielding it periodically. It shows the feudalistic mindset of our political leadership. My conscience does not allow me to accept democratic dictatorship."

All I would say is that Guyana did not lead in the amendment of the law. We seem to have reached that stage even without an amendment to our Constitution. I trust that in this ninth Parliament as we, perhaps, windup this debate, that there will be serious reflection on the views emanated from this side of the House and that it is not treated with the disdain and arrogance that it appears to be treated with every year. Take seriously the constructive criticisms that we have made. They may hurt you but that is the only way that we are going to get progress in this country because all of us, I believe, are interested in the progress of all the people of Guyana to make a reality of our motto "One People One Nation One Destiny."

Thank you.

*Applause.*

#### ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

**Mr. Speaker:** I would like to announce that we would have the meeting of the Sub-Committee of Supply immediately after the suspension. I would like to remind you that the Members of this Committee are: Hon. Members, Mrs Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, Dr. Ashni Singh, Dr. Jennifer Westford, Mr. Harripersaud Nokta, Mr. Parmanand Persaud, Mr. Lance Carberry- Ms. Backer is sitting in for him- Ms. Amna Ali, Mr. Desmond Fernandes and Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan. I am asking Members to please not delay this meeting by loitering outside while the rest of us are waiting for you.

We will suspend now for the usual period.

*Assembly suspended at 5.50 p.m*

*Assembly resumed at 6.30 p.m*

#### **Mr. Speaker in the Chair**

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Members we do not have a quorum; we only have 17 Members unless we can get up to 22 Members within 30 seconds I would have to suspend the Assembly until we can get a quorum.

**The Minister of Finance [Dr. Ashni Singh]:** I rise to make the concluding contribution to this the first of the two distinct segments of this Hon. House's consideration of Budget 2011. I had the honour of presenting this Budget to this Hon. House exactly one week ago, today. In doing so, my first task would be to thank all of my colleagues on this side of the House who spoke in favour of Budget 2011. Their facilitations, to your truly and to the Ministry over which I preside, were generous and certainly did not go unnoticed. To all of them I say that we appreciate your kind comments and that those comments inspire us much more than you might imagine.

I hasten to add that, while the task of compiling and casting the National Budget within a viable and sustainable macro-economic framework and presenting the finished product to the National Assembly fall on the portfolio I hold. The finished product of the Budget really is a distillation of policies plans, programmes, and projects that are generated through ongoing strategic processes that take place within all of our sectors and our Ministries on an ongoing basis and that benefit from engagement with sectors and stakeholders throughout the year by all of my colleagues in the Cabinet. And so, to the extent that these plans find favour, and I believe that they do find favour not only in this Hon. House but the nation at large, the congratulations are really due to all of Government as a whole.

Indeed, I believe that during the course of the debate all of my colleagues, on this side of the House, availed themselves amply of the opportunity to elaborate on their plans for their respective sectors, in the case of Cabinet Members, and of developments in and perspectives

from their regions and their other constituencies in the case of none Cabinet Members, on this side of the House. In the end the presentations from the Government side of the House having been taken in totally... I believe that the compelling vision of the People Progressive Party Civic Administration, concrete plans that we have for realising that vision and the progress we have already made in that regard were adequately adumbrated and elaborated over the course of the past six days.

This brings me to the contributions to this debate emanating from the other side of the House. On that note I should register my view that the debate on Budget 2011 was poorer for the absence of the Hon. Member, Mr Winston Shripal Murray. I believe it is fair that Mr. Murray, as my shadow, and I had a particular engagement which saw us collaborating closely and also debating fiercely. Differing diametrically but doing so in a manner that, I believe, was characterised by the strictest rigour. His contributions to these debates over the years in my own estimation were always erudite and I missed those contributions this year. If I might say so, with no disrespect intended to my colleagues on the other side of the House, I believe the opposition evidently missed his contribution also.

As I reflect on the contributions to this Budget 2011 debate from the other side of the House, I might also pause to refer to the presentation by friend, brother and colleague, the Hon. Member Mr. Raphael Trotman, earlier this evening. I note, in particular, the Hon. Member's suggestion, if I read him correctly; there is a chance that this will be his last Budget debate in this Hon. House. I suspect it is inevitable that one would wonder whether this is a reflection of his best forecast of how his Party will fair under its new Presidential candidate. I would not necessarily wish to speculate on whether this might be the reason for the Hon. Member, Mr. Raphael Trotman's, prediction, again, if I read him correctly this might be his last debate. I will say that I thank him for his kind remarks and I thank him also for standing out as, perhaps, the solitary exception on the other side of the House in ensuring that throughout his presentation he, actually, acknowledged where positives existed. I will say that his example was solitary and stood out because where he saw that things were being done well he identified them and where he thought that they were not being done quite so well he identified those too. I am tempted, and I will succumb to that temptation, to make an observation that I made to the Hon. Member last year. That is to say that I noted in his presentation some distance between the tone that he adopted and the tone adopted by the rest of the Members of his Party. The striking magnanimity that he displayed was remarkably absent in the presentations made by his Party colleagues who spoke before him. In fact, if I were to return to the presentation made by his Party's presidential candidate who, curiously, spoke first on his Party's behalf rather than last as one might have expected under some circumstances. In his presentation he tried, amongst other things, to give just one example; he tried the cheap illusionist trick of juxtaposing a reference to Guyana with a quotation from Paul Collier's book hoping to create the impression of a non-existent nexus between Guyana and the quotation that he was reading from. I would say, one could sparsely stoop lower in trying to mislead this Hon. House and country in employing such a cheap illusionist's trick.

The same was mirrored by yet another colleague of Mr. Trotman, Mrs. Sheila Holder, who expounded on the matter of old age pensioners. I will be frank with you and I have said this

to Mrs. Holder. Had she simply said the matter of old age pensioners is a matter that I am curious about and I am interested in knowing why it could have occurred. I do not believe that anyone on this side of the House could have reasonably taken an issue with her. I can safely say, I would not have neither Minister Manickchand. I have no doubt that Minister Manickchand would have stood up, and I would have too, and explained what would have contributed to this increase. The Hon. Member went further and cited quotations to what in the first instance was purported to be an authoritative study. Only when pressed and cornered she divulged that this was, in fact, her work. Again, with no disrespect intended to the Hon. Member that matter of demographic projections; the matter of estimating changes in population and population composition requires specialist expertise. Indeed, specialist expertise I do not possess myself, and I would not, just as I would urge anyone in this House not to, stand before the House, tender what at best and most kindly, can only be described as amateurish- some might say bogus I would want to attribute amateurish rather than insinuate any more sinister motive- and puerile primary school arithmetic to what really ought to have been accorded far more serious technical attention. Creating misleading impressions, casting aspersions, and diverting attention from the serious issues that confront us in the Budget; serious issues that merit real debate. Instead, throwing in a red herring, staring us down a path and really occupying a lot of time and attention on a matter that would not even withstand the scrutiny of a high school mathematics teacher and when rigorous work was cited which was publicly available, often we are told that we do not make information publicly available, on the Bureau of Statistics website on population projections two years ago. Lo and behold, instead of correcting the misleading impressions that were created, subsequent pronouncements were made by the Hon. Member, outside of this House, that continue to refuse to acknowledge the existence of rigorous projections on population; that completely debunked the amateurish work that she had done. I cite these, Mr. Speaker, merely as two examples and I urge the Hon. Member...**[Interjection: Mr. Anil Nandlall: Reign in his flock]**...that his flock really ought to be reigned in. It is my humble view that had the approach the he adopted, today, been adopted by his colleagues, Members of his Party, during the course of the debate, I believe, that their contributions to the debate would have been considerably enhanced.

To my other colleagues, on that side of the House, I say that, notwithstanding that much of what you said was disagreed with; notwithstanding that much of it has been rebutted, debunked by my colleagues on this side of the House; notwithstanding I could conceivably spend the next three hours rebutting point by point. I will say that I thank you for your contributions. I thank you for your contributions, particularly, because of the manner in which I regard the opportunity provided by the annual Budget debate in the processes of our Parliamentary democracy.

The Budget debate provides and incomparable opportunity; an occasion like few others throughout the year, probably like no other in the entire Parliamentary calendar, for members of the Hon. House, on both sides, to outline for the nation their assessment of global conditions and of the global economic situation, view of regional economic developments and how these regional economic developments influence the environment in which we

operate, how these developments shape the opportunities and threats before us, and how we as members assess the micro-economic stance adopted by Government. Indeed, it presents us with an opportunity to proffer any alternative policy stance, as a Parliamentary opposition, perhaps, presenting itself to the nation as an alternative Government their vision for the country, the policies and programmes they would adopt to realise this vision.

The Budget debate, year after year, provides us with an opportunity for this to be done like no other. Did we hear anything of the sort during this Budget debate? Did we hear a rational level-headed assessment of global economic opportunities or of regional economic threats? Did we hear an assessment of Government's macro-economic policy stance? Did we hear an alternative policy stance that would be adopted? We heard a few trinkets about photographs taken of some washbasin; we heard a few trinkets about the drying floor needing a roof above it or something else. I will not dismiss these suggestions as they are local level things that need to be fixed by sector Ministers and I would exhort all of my colleagues in the Cabinet to listen to these issues and address them. With the greatest of respect these do not constitute macro-economic policy; they do not constitute suggestions for an alternative policy stance. Did we hear any of this, Mr. Speaker? We did not. I believe I paid keen enough attention to all of the sessions. I was battling with severe bouts of the flu but I do not believe I drifted off long enough to miss anything. I will say, resoundingly, that we did not hear any of the kinds of things that one would hear in a serious policy debate. There was nothing on external context; nothing on domestic policies; no alternative policy suggestions. I hasten to add that to those Members who did make suggestions; who did identify issues that need to be fixed at the local level, project level and project design level, there were some such suggestions. As I have just indicated I will say to those Members: we thank you for those suggestions. I will say to my side of the House; I will exhort you to listen because it is our job to fix those problems, they exist. Instead, and, perhaps it was best characterised by the crescendo of the Opposition Leader's presentation this afternoon. I am sorry that he has chosen not to be here to listen to my response to what he said.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Opposition Leader asked for an excuse. He injured himself in a fall this morning.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, very much Mr. Speaker I was not aware of that. Instead what we heard and witnessed...I presume then that Mr. Williams, the Hon. Member, is in good health and is holding the forth, literally and single-handedly. I commend him for doing so. What we heard, as I said and I repeat it for emphasis, has embodied and is best encapsulated in... The crescendo that was offered by the Leader of the Opposition was motley assembled, belligerent, inconsistent, opportunistic misrepresentation. Instead of offering credible arguments about what they thought should be done differently...

### **6.54 p.m RD**

...and what indeed they would do differently as an alternative Government, we were regaled with arguments designed very conveniently and almost like they were randomly selecting arguments as suited the latest opportunistic purposes.

I could not possibly say it better than was said late Thursday night by two of our more experience Parliamentarians; I refer here in the first instance to the distinguished former Attorney General, the Hon. Member Mr. Bernard De Santos; and in the second instance Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj who both spoke. Late in the night, Mr. De Santos made a simple observation, but it struck me. I heard that it was repeated. Mr. Nandlall in fact repeated it on Friday night. Mr. De Santos made a simple but extremely cogent compelling submission, he said “you simply cannot argue simultaneously that the budget has nothing for the people of Guyana, but that the budget is an election budget and therefore offers goodies to the people of Guyana”. Mr. De Santos pointed out the very obvious and intractable contradictions in those two arguments. Yet we heard Members on the other side of the House at will, randomly, sometimes the same speaker, sometimes in the same paragraph, sometimes in the same breath using these arguments interchangeable that the budget had nothing, and then in an instance that the budget was an elections budget. In fact, one Member went so far as to say that the budget is an elections winner, and proceeded to say “*but the budget has nothing for anybody*”, and saw nothing wrong. He evidently missed what Mr. De Santos had said, because he spoke after Mr. De Santos, and saw absolutely nothing wrong about the inherent contradiction and absurdity about juxtaposing those two arguments in the manner that he did.

Mr. Seeraj speaking, I believe, almost immediately after Mr. De Santos gave us another excellent, and I believe very representative example of the kind of inherent contradiction, and opportunistic nature of the kinds of arguments that were tendered. Mr. Seeraj pointed out that the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan said “*a five percentage point reduction...*” Incidentally, it is not a five percent point because five out of thirty-five and forty-five is not five percent; it is a five percentage point reduction. Mr. Seeraj pointed out that the Hon. Member Ramjattan had said in his presentation that the five percentage point, of which Mr. Ramjattan said five percent – the five percent reduction in the Corporation Tax does nothing for the companies, nobody will benefit from this, this is of no benefit to anybody, and then before he finished the sentence he said “*but you have discriminated against the telecommunications companies*”. Here again, yet another example of the same kind of intractable inconsistency and contradiction. You cannot possibly say it does nothing for anybody, but then those who did not get it have somehow been denied a benefit. Yet another example of the contradiction that Mr. De Santos highlighted. I thank Mr. De Santos for saying it so eloquently, far more eloquently than I possibly could. And, I thank Mr. Seeraj for giving that other very illustrative example.

This was the kind of argument that we heard throughout the course of the past six days. On some occasions it was “Elections Budget vs. Budget has nothing for anybody”, on some occasions it was “Corporation Tax means nothing to the people”, on other occasions “you should have given it to everybody, on other occasions “you should not have reduced it by five percentage points, you should have reduced it by even more”; they could not make up their minds. This kind of incoherence extended to absolutely every point made. When it came to the Income Tax threshold it was said in one breath “*it does not matter, it does not help people*” and in another breath “*it should have been more, it should not have been forty thousand*”. You cannot argue the two. You cannot in one breath say that it does not help poor



people and then argue that in fact it should have been more. There is an inherent inconsistency in that. In fact, were the Hansard Reports or the tapes to be studied, one would have unveiled before one a veritable litany of inconsistencies. They could not make up their minds. Today it was that the threshold should be here, and tomorrow another speaker says that the threshold should be there, the next day another speaker says that the threshold should not be moved at all. I am riddled with such examples. Today one of them said that they do not mind the budget being bigger, tomorrow another one says that they commend the Government and that we should spend even more, the next day the other one says that the problem is the level of Government spending. They could not make up their minds.

One might be tempted to rush into the conclusion that these are just different speakers offering different perspectives. One might be tempted even to rush into the conclusion that this was a *hodgepodge*, again I thank the Hon. Member Mr. De Santos for giving me the most appropriate word. One might be forgiven for rushing into the conclusion that this kind of approach is reflective of a *hodgepodge* response, but it speaks to something in my estimation far more fundamental. It speaks to an Opposition in disarray; no coherent policy position, no common internal debate on issues, no commonly agreed position which they were going to defend. In fact, having listened to the Budget debate, you are even more confused at the end of the debate as to what the Opposition's position on issues are, than you were at the start. You are even more confused than when you started.

I believe, this is why I thanked them for their responses and contributions to the Budget debate – because I believe it is important that the Nation view these responses. I believe it is important for the people to see and draw their own conclusions, whether those conclusions be; that they are *hodgepodge*, whether it be that they are in disarray, whether it be that they do not know what they are talking about. It is important that these responses be put on public display for the people of this country to draw their own conclusions. For that reason, as I indicated, I thank the Members of the Opposition for disclosing the state of affairs on their side of the House.

It was my intention to break with tradition this year and to be somewhat briefer than I am known to be in my concluding statement at the end of these debates. Alas, the Leader of the Opposition caused a change in my plans. There was so much that was said, I heard some words being offered of which I will desist from saying, but I will not desist from responding to what was said by the Leader of the Opposition. For the sole reason that the contribution made by the Leader of the Opposition, I believe rather regrettably, because the Leader had the opportunity to speak on behalf of the whole Opposition and to respond to the hand extended to this Government in the theme of this Budget, and regrettably he missed that opportunity. Instead engaged in the very belligerence of misrepresentations to which I alluded earlier. I will highlight some examples which have to be corrected for the record although I do not believe that any right thinking Guyanese really believes anything that he says. I still believe that for the record some of the misrepresentations that he gave, must be corrected. I am not sure where to begin without incurring the wrath of my Parliamentary colleagues, because if I were to take them point by point we will be here all night. I would not wish, Mr. Speaker, to incur your wrath in that regard. Where do I begin?

The Leader of the Opposition spoke of the 2011 Budget. First of all he committed the very inconsistency that Mr. De Santos had castigated earlier, because in one breath he wants to say that the budget does nothing for anybody, but then he spoke of the goodies. He sought to insinuate that because this year is an “*election year*”, his exact words in addressing certain matters, he spoke for example about the income tax threshold and the increase in old age pensions. He said the income tax threshold, corporation tax rate and the old age pension amounts have only been addressed because this year is an election year, and these things have been neglected for the past 18 years. This is what the Leader of the Opposition attempted to say with a straight face in this Hon. House. I would say that one would have to be a rather bold politician, knowing full well that there are hundreds of thousands of people who know otherwise, perhaps one seeing the sunset within view to make such a boldly inaccurate statement.

The facts are quite contrary of his assertion. In fact it is absolutely untrue, quite the opposite. Any one of these issues, let us take for example the income tax threshold, it was last adjusted as recently as 2008. The Hon. Minister Ms. Priya Manickchand mentioned this in her budget speech just a few days ago. In 2008 we were far away from an election. In 2008 in fact we were just a year and a bit past the last general elections, but we made a substantial increase in the income tax threshold in 2008. That was not the first adjustment, as the Leader of the Opposition would like to have this Nation believe, over the past eighteen years. In 1992 the income tax threshold was \$6000 per month. This year we have moved it from \$35,000 to \$40,000. It has moved progressively from the paltry \$6,000 a month which the Leader of the Opposition left it as when we demitted Office in 1992, progressively from \$6,000 to \$35,000 last year, and now to \$40,000. For the record, that constitutes an increase of over five hundred percent.

Once again we have increased old age pensions as recently as 2008 by more than 60% Minister Manickchand said this in her speech. Old age pension in fact in 1992 was less than \$300 per month. Old age pensions are now \$7,500 and in fact old age pensions now attract no means test which they once did. The paltry sum of \$292 or whatever it was in 1992 attracted a means test. You had to demonstrate eligibility to get that \$292 a month. Today all you have to do is demonstrate that you have met the age requirement, and register, and you are entitled to your \$7,500 per month.

I would go further than to merely highlight the attempt by the Leader of the Opposition to misrepresent the fact. I am saying definitively that any suggestion that we did not alter the old age pension or the income tax threshold over the last eighteen years is factually incorrect and is a misrepresentation of the facts.

I would go further and say that it is important that we not be dismissive, as the Opposition Leader was, of this \$7,500 a month. We never said that said that old age pension was going to sustain a person and that it was going to meet all of their needs. We never said that. It is an unrequited transfer, non contributory in its nature, you do not have to contribute to anything, and you do not have to participate like some pension schemes. It is a unilateral transfer from the public purse to the elderly Guyanese intended to supplement and to assist these elderly

Guyanese in meeting their needs. I will go further and say that it is not the only method we have implemented, we have gone further. We have said if you are on the old-age pension register, we will pay water rates for you. Now in fact you not only benefit from \$7,500 a month, but you also benefit for water rates paid on your behalf. I would say, while it might be easy to be dismissive and say it is only \$7,500, I will say this, that when aggregated across the more than 40,000 old age pensioners and more than 9,000 public assistance beneficiaries, the old age pension payments and public assistance payments amount to direct income support of more than GYD \$4 billion. No machination or manipulation, or attempt of distortion by the Leader of the Opposition or anybody else can take away the fact that this is an injection into the hands of the most vulnerable people in our society, \$4 billion of spending power. Typically, these persons propensity to consume is on the high end. They will take this entire \$7,500 in the case of the old age pensioner and go to the market, buy food, they will pay transportation and consume other goods and services, which immediately feeds into the economy and create multipliers far beyond the \$4 billion of the initial payment being made by Government. That is not only \$4 billion of direct income support given to elderly and the vulnerable; it is \$4 billion of business opportunity for our private sector, the vendors in the market, the minibus drivers, and the seamstresses. It is \$4 billion, multiplied several times over, of business opportunity for our private sector.

That is just one example. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition spoke of consultation, and made much of the issue of togetherness. It is not an accident, the presence of the word “*together*” as the first word of this budget theme. This is not an accident. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition sought to ride what I believe has become a little bit of a favourite hobby horse for him, and spoke of consultation, and said the budget was prepared without consultation. What can I say, that this reflects a woeful and tragic ignorance, if that is permitted.

**Mr. Speaker:** As I told the Hon. Acting Prime Minister, Members of the Government with impunity completely ignore the rules. I am not saying you did this one deliberately, but there we go.

**Hon. Singh:** I will be guided by you Sir. With lack of familiarity, cut the muster and a woeful lack of familiarity with the nature of the Budget and the process by which the Budget is prepared. I understand why this lack of familiarity persists in the mind of the Leader of the Opposition. There was a time when the budget represented something plucked out of thin air. When the budget was lightning bolt intending to strike the people of the Nation by surprise. People awaited the budget with great trepidation; they wondered which price would go up, and what the exchange rate would be tomorrow. Should I place my import order today or wait until tomorrow after the Budget? What will the devaluation be? This is the era from which the Leader of the Opposition originates. This is the world in which he exists. Regrettably and evidently continues to exist. When the budget was something that was awaited with great trepidation, great fear and businesses closed their doors. Last year I read some extracts from our archives that documented the manner in which our business community awaited the budget in fear, from the time in which our Leader of the Opposition is more familiar. I have them with me, but I will not repeat them this year. I believe we can all refer to the Hansard from last year. Without a doubt this is why the Leader of the

Opposition evidently regards the budget as something that stands out there on its own, isolated and divorced from everything else that Government does, a bolt of lightning, something unexpected, something that shoots from the skies and hit the people of the country. This was the kind of Budget that the Government of which he was a part unleashed upon the people of the country. “*Killer Budget*” I think that was what some of the stakeholders described the budget as. “*Scud Missile*” I believe Dr. Jagan in fact described the budget as being that. Those were Dr. Jagan’s words.

**Mr. Speaker:** One leading MP at the time described one budget as an “*austere budget*”. You know we pronounce you A’s broadly.

**Hon. Singh:** Thank you very much Sir. You sighted that example with great familiarity and I expect that and similar anecdotes occupy a treasured place in your memoirs and in your reflections.

This was the kind of language used to describe the Budget. I said in a comment, before the National Budget was presented to the National Assembly that today we live in the era of policy continuity and predictability. There are no such fears today. Nobody in the business community is worried of what the exchange rate will be tomorrow. Nobody in the business community is worried about what the interest rate will be tomorrow. Nobody is worried about what will happen to prices in the market tomorrow, because there is policy continuity and predictability. This has been a hallmark of this PPP Civic Administration from the time we came into office. The budget is not a stand-alone item plucked out of thin air. When we speak of our social strategies, we are speaking merely – and this goes back to my introduction when I accepted thanks, but I said I was merely the messenger and that I was merely conveying the message of the work done by my colleagues in the Cabinet. When we are speaking of the national education plan, a plan that has been developed over years one which has been consulted throughout the country, one that has buy-in ownership by every stakeholder in the sector, a plan that already has strong national ownership. When we speak of our social policy we are speaking of our national health sector strategy, a plan that similarly has gone through rigorous national consultations that has already passed the test of endorsement by every stakeholder group. The budgets represents, merely, the latest vertical slice of what we have accomplished as a government, and what we will be doing in the coming fiscal period. This notion of the Budget as a stand-alone instrument isolated from everything else that is happening, that requires special consultation or else people will be struck by lightning, that notion thankfully is confined to the dustbins of history. For the benefit of those who did not hear, it is thankfully confined to the dustbins of history. Our National Budget today is the amalgamation of the National Competitiveness Strategy, the National Health Plan, the National Education Plan, the National Housing Strategy, our National Tourism Strategy, our National Infrastructure Plans, Roads and Transport network plans; all plans that have been adequately ventilated and consulted that have strong ownership. This is the National Budget today, no surprises.

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up Hon. Member.

**Hon. Rohee:** Mr. Speaker I rise to ask that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to*

**Hon. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, on the same matter of stakeholder views. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition havin made so much of consultation, and as I have indicated, misplaced emphasis on consultation given the nature of the budget process today. Then, conveniently chose to dismiss, disparage, ignore – I am not sure of ignore will be the right word, but conveniently choose to treat as irrelevant, disparage and be flippant about the views expressed by important stakeholders in this country about the Budget. Let us take for example what the private sector had to say about Budget 2011. For example the matter of the corporate taxes; here I am quoting from Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> January, Stabroek News, page two, headlined “Private Sector Welcomes Corporate Tax Cut as Show of Faith”. This is not the Government speaking, this is the Private Sector Commission in the Stabroek News, not a self appointed spokesperson with no constituency, a duly and democratically elected spokesperson speaking on behalf of the Private Sector Commission saying the following, and I quote, from the Stabroek News as I indicated:

**5.09 p.m CB**

“The Private Sector Commission yesterday praised Government’s move to reduce corporate taxes and to raise the personal income tax threshold saying it has vindicated the body’s efforts to work with the Government on implementing the National Competitiveness Strategy.”

You cannot choose to pretend to be enamoured by the idea of consultation but then conveniently ignore a National stakeholder as important as the elected representatives of the private sector. Could you imagine, conveniently ignoring the views expressed by the duly elected representatives of the private sector, essentially representing the whole of the private sector? The Private Sector Commission is the umbrella body of umbrella bodies; the umbrella of umbrellas. They are ignoring what is said by that body not only in welcoming policy positions taken by Government in the budget, but also in emphasising that they welcome those positions in the context of an ongoing engagement under the umbrella of the National Competitiveness Strategy. It does not serve their political purpose, the Leader of the Opposition conveniently chooses to ignore this, cast this aside; it is not relevant. The private sector is watching. They can see how flippantly you dismiss them. They are not relevant; their opinions do not matter. In fact the Private Sector Commission is not the only stakeholder body. The Georgetown Chamber of Commerce said that it views Government’s 2011 Budget as bold.

“The reduction in the corporate tax rate and increasing of the personal income tax threshold are perhaps the boldest parts of the package. The change is significant as it signals both to individuals and companies the Government’s desire to encourage investment and social prosperity.”

These comments do not matter to the Opposition; these comments are ignored; they are treated as irrelevant because it is politically expedient for them to do so. I say to them ‘*shame on you*’. If you thought it was the private sector alone, labour got the same treatment.

FITUG said they are pleased and satisfied with the recent announcements made in the National Assembly in Budget 2011.

“The increase of the income tax threshold is greatly appreciated. Coupled with the reduction with the corporation tax, which will not only create job opportunities and greater benefits to the worker, it will contribute towards the stimulation of growth in the private sector.”

This is coming from labour, again, conveniently cast aside by the Opposition, conveniently ignored, and treated as irrelevant because it is politically expedient for them to do so. Again I say ‘*shame on you*’.

These were not the only examples where, regrettably, the Leader of the Opposition was convenient and selective in his references. For example, there is the issue of the arrangements made by Government to recognise the historic occasion of the United Nations Year of People of African Descent. This Government having deliberated on this matter, perhaps six to nine months or a year ago, saw the Hon. Member Minister Frank Anthony coming to this House, if my memory serves me correctly, and delivering a ministerial statement on this matter. Our Government’s deliberation on this historic recognition did not extend only to Minister Anthony submitting a Cabinet paper or identifying interventions that he thought might be appropriate, did not extend only to his coming to this National Assembly and reading a ministerial statement. It also saw the Hon. Minister convening a committee whose work started, I believe, as long as last year June. It is a broad-based committee with representatives of social organisations for which the list is so long I could not possibly read the entire list. I will say that the Executive Committee was chaired by the distinguished academic, Professor and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Guyana, Professor James Rose. The deputy chairman was no less a personality than His Worship the Mayor of Georgetown, His Worship Hamilton Green. ((*Interruption*) *I have the list before me. I am reminded that he has restored his membership – is it in the Executive - in the Party lead by the Leader of the Opposition. (Ms. Shadick: We know him well.)* The Secretary, Ms. Jenny Daly and Assistant Secretary, Mr. Tom Dalgetty. Is this Ras Tom Dalgetty? - (*Ms. Shadick: Yes.*) Treasurer, Mr. Lennox King; sub-committees chaired by... Is this Mr. Aubrey Norton’s namesake? (*Ms. Shadick: He himself.*) *I didn’t know Mr. Norton has a namesake. Is it his namesake? (Ms. Westford: It’s him.) It is he himself*). Chairperson of a sub-committee Mr. Aubrey Norton; and the list goes on with persons drawn from New Amsterdam, East Canje, Corriverton, Fyris, Gibraltar; representatives from ACDA, Linden Commemoration Committee, Museum of African Heritage, Concerned Citizens, National Emancipation Trust, Stanleytown, First of August Movement and the Pan-African Movement. There are geographical representations, persons from afro-centric organisations and villages that have organised committees. Was there any Government Minister? I do not see any Government Minister. Minister Frank Anthony was not on the committee himself. ((*Mr. Rohee: Can we have that circulated please.*) *Mr. Speaker*

*with your permission I would be happy to respond favourably to the request made by the Acting Prime Minister, and ask the Clerk to cause this list to be circulated.*

It is distressing when someone of the stature of the Leader of the Opposition could come to this House and purport to speak authoritatively on matters when, in fact, what is being uttered constitutes no more than vulgar misrepresentations.

**Mr. Trotman:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that word vulgar ought to be expunged. And I believe if anything is un-parliamentary it would be that word - misrepresentation, yes, but vulgar, no.

**Dr. Singh:** I would be happy to withdraw even before you rule.

**Mr. Trotman:** Mr. Williams could you get up the next time for your Leader.

**Dr. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, I will rescue the Hon. Member Mr. Williams from the spot in which he finds himself. I unreservedly withdraw the word that appears to be causing offence. I believe that the message is clear. There is indeed no need to resort to superlative adjectives to make the intended point.

*(Mr. Williams: We could hear that one more time.)*

*Mr. Speaker, Mr. Trotman and I are brothers from another place and I am glad that together we have managed to awaken the Hon. Member Mr. Williams from his deep slumber. (Mr. Williams: I am happy you know I am not listening to you.) The Hon. Member seems suddenly to have awakened from his slumber. He found his tongue.))*

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition in seeking to justify his comments sought, I believe in a repost, to suggest that the Budget is placed on a weak foundation, and, if it is so placed on a weak foundation, it will sink. These are in fact his words. I think I wrote them down faithfully. He said,

“The economic projections will continue to be on shaky grounds.”

I have news for the Leader of the Opposition. The economic foundation of Guyana has never been stronger than it is today. The Budget 2011 is as solid as a rock.

On another matter which I think is an important one is because it is illustrative of this attempt to sow seeds of division. Minister Ali spoke of this in his presentation. I think he described it as separatist and divisionism.

In another example I feel compelled to respond to because it represents an attempt... When we are speaking of togetherness the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, sowing the seeds of divisiveness, makes reference to the presentation by the Minister of Amerindian Affairs and speaks to the matter of Amerindian lands. An attempt to suggest that the task of allocating and demarcating Amerindian lands somehow predated 1992. Anyone who knows the Amerindian Act, anyone who knows the history of Amerindian lands in this country, would know that nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the Amerindian Act that predated the 2006 Amerindian Act, while it described Amerindian areas, said very clearly that these

lands could be taken away, and therefore did not provide for complete ownership. What is more, in 1991 on the eve of the return of democracy, absolute grants were made to seventy-two of these communities, but no demarcations were done. As a result, the boundaries of these grants were never defined. We have since 1992 spent more than a quarter of a billion dollars demarcating Amerindian lands. We have not only addressed the issue of demarcation, which is so critical to the granting of titles, but we have also granted additional titles, moving us from a position where in 1992 only six percent of our territory was designated Amerindian lands, today where fourteen percent of Guyana's landmass has been demarcated, once and for all, Amerindian lands under the 2006 Amerindian Act.

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up Hon. Member.

**Mr. Rohee:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Dr. Singh:** We have made Amerindian lands absolute and forever. And for the benefit of the Hon. Member who is flippantly inquiring what that means. I would first of all refer him to the Amerindian Act, and urge that if he wants to pretend to represent people in this House he should acquaint himself with that Act, rather than coming and asking flippant questions about what that means. What is more, anyone vaguely familiar with the Amerindian Act would know of the rights conferred on the communities concerned. In fact, as recent as in our Low Carbon Development Strategy, the rights that are associated with those lands were illustrated by the Right, for example, to opt in to the Low Carbon Development Strategy. Anyone who paid even a passing interest in the low Carbon Development Strategy would know that. So, 'shame on you Mr. Williams'. I see the Hon. Member is getting animated and excited.

Reference was made to the sugar sector. The difficulties faced by this sector are well known, and have been adequately ventilated, as I said in my Budget speech. They are well known and were addressed by my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, and others - Hon. Member Mr. Komal Chand, Members on the Opposite side of the House and Mr. Seeraj. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition sought somehow to suggest that our plans for the sugar sector were the exclusive preserve of the Government. That there was no - I think he cited this as an example when he was making much of the issue of togetherness - involvement of stakeholders, the Opposition etc, when strategies were being contemplated for the sugar industry. Let me say this: I have elsewhere cited the sugar sector as one of the finest examples of how... I will tell the House; what the other example is. The other example is electricity, because I believe more than any other sector sugar and electricity have benefitted from exhaustive consideration by the parliamentary mechanisms that we have established including the Economic Services Committee. I recall no less a person than the Prime Minister appearing before the Economic Services Committee at lengthy sessions. I recall no less a person than the Hon. Minister of Agriculture appearing before the Economic Services Committee. In the Prime Minister's case the submitting of documents on electricity, and in the Minister of Agriculture's case the submitting of detailed documents on sugar - the sector's strategy,



projections and its financial statements – copious volumes of documentation placed into the public domain. These documents were placed on public record by being lodged with this National Assembly and filed in the parliamentary library, annotated in the proceedings of the Committee’s work, and subject to the scrutiny of those bipartisan committees which, I hasten to add, have a rotating chairmanship - the Opposition chairing one year and the Government chairing one year. If I am not mistaken the Minister of Agriculture may very well have appeared at the time when the Opposition held the chair. In fact I seem to recall when sugar was the subject of consideration of the Economic Services Committee, it was chaired by no less a person than the former – I should not say the former Hon. Member, it would suggest that there is something historical about his honourable status – Member Mr. Tony Vieira, who in fact was a front bench Opposition Member at the time. He had, as chairman of the Economic Services Committee, abundant unfettered opportunities to interrogate, scrutinise, turn upside down, sideways and asks whatever he wanted to ask, seek explanations of the Minister and of his officials - I think there was a Chairman, the CEO and the Finance Director. No less a person than the late Hon. Member Mr. Winston Murray was a Member of that Committee. The Hon, Minister went further. Having submitted the sector to the rigorous and, we believe, appropriate and necessary scrutiny of the Committee, he said, “let us go to visit the factory because we have nothing to hide; let us go and see the factory for yourselves, speak to the engineer, speak to the workers.” “We will bring the cameras because we have nothing to hide. Everything I see in the factory you will see too.” Do you know what? Not only did the Government Members Mr. Ramotar and Ms. Teixeira go – I believe Ms. Teixeira was a member of the Economic Services Committee, and I am reminded is a past Chairperson of that Committee – the Opposition Members did too, including their sugar expert Mr. Tony Vieira, and their lead spokesperson and shadow Finance Minister, Mr. Winston Murray. They went in broad daylight, with the benefit of cameras, so they can interrogate, scrutinise, ask *in situ*, ascertain just as the Minister could, or just as the CEO could. Such is the openness with which we manage our affairs in this Government. To come and suggest now that there was no inclusiveness, no involvement, no openness, is simply not the case. The Leader of the Opposition then sought to make reference to issues of equality of opportunity, equity. With no fear of contradiction I will say that every aspect of our Budget has the principles of equity and equality of opportunity firmly embedded in them. If we were to take the roads been constructed, the offer has already been made by the Hon. Minister of Public Works, and I will repeat that offer: “I would be glad to take the Leader of the Opposition on a walk to villages starting on the East Cost, from Plaisance all the way to Ithaca on the West Bank of Berbice – every village.” And in every village the roads we are doing, the water networks we are putting in place, the wells we are sinking, and the schools we are building, speak for themselves, and can withstand scrutiny. Minister Benn I suggest you insist that your invitation be accepted. Permit me to reiterate, reaffirm, your invitation. We could go from village to village and show the work we are doing in every village to ensure that all the people of our country benefit from the work we are doing, and from the policies and projects contained in our budget.

When we speak of a national school feeding programme, we speak for all of the children of Guyana. When we speak of distributing school uniforms, we are speaking of every single boy

and girl, irrespective of village, region, or school. When we speak of spending three or four hundred million dollars in ensuring that text books are available in our schools, we are speaking of all of the schools of Guyana. When we speak of old age pensioners, we are speaking of all 42,000 plus, all of them, irrespective of which village they live in. We stand proud on our record as it relates to equality of opportunity and to equity.

I could go on and on and literally debunk and respond to every issue raised. I will, however, conclude by addressing the last issue raised by the Leader of the Opposition, the issue of corruption. Let me say at the onset that our Government has zero tolerance for corruption. Where instances of corruption are identified and proven they are dealt with, and going forward they are going to be dealt with in the most condign manner possible. We demand no less as a Government. And this is our responsibility. The Opposition has developed a new found habit. This habit is really a very simple one. It is almost lazy, if I might be permitted to use that word. They pick up the Auditor General's Report, select a paragraph from it and say, '*here you have it, evidence of corruption*'. Without a doubt the Auditor General's Report identifies issues that must be dealt with administratively. Without a doubt there are instances where procedures are not followed and must be followed. Those who don't follow them must be made to follow them, and must be sanctioned.

7.54 p.m.

**Minister of Finance [Dr. Singh] (replying):**...this is our responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition has developed a new found habit and this habit is really a very simple one; it is almost lazy, if I am permitted to use that word. It picked up the Auditor General's Report, selected a paragraph from it and said here it is, the evidence of corruption. Without a doubt, the Auditor General's Report identifies issues that must be dealt with administratively. Without a doubt, there are instances where procedures are not followed and they must be followed, and those who do not follow them must be made to follow them and must be sanctioned. But I will say this: The very existence of an Auditor General's Report is an instrument adopted by democratic nations around the world to ensure that compliance with the laws, compliance with procedures, is ascertained that accuracy of Financial Reports is evaluated, and where there are non compliance, where there are breaches, that those be placed in the public domain, that they are reported in the National Assembly, and that they are available for the world at large to see and draw its own conclusion.

This is a fundamental instrument adopted by democratic nations around the world. We are not alone in this regard. I will say that prior to 1992 there was the dubious distinction of having spent ten years without a single set of audited accounts produced and tabled in this National Assembly. The Hon. Member Dr. John Austin had an interesting explanation for it. I

hope that the explanation is given maximum publicity. He said – not to paraphrase, and forgive me, Sir, if I misquote him – in essence, they knew of the wickedness that was going on. As a matter of fact, all the people know of the wickedness that was going on, so there is no need to tell them. In essence, this is what the Hon. Member Dr. John Austin told us. [*Laughter (Opposition Members).*] Now, there are some who might laugh and think that he was disclosing something of some novelty. I suspect. We all knew that, as the people of this country must have known that for a very long time, but it was good hearing it from him. I thought it was perhaps...

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up Hon. Member.

**Mr. Rohee:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Dr. Singh:** It was a refreshing moment, that confession from the Hon. Member.

I will say that we have worked painstakingly to ensure that this Auditor General's Report is produced, and to ensure that it is tabled. The news is not always good. Sometimes it includes finding that, frankly speaking, as administrators, would cause us concerns. But we ensure that faithfully it is produced and tabled in the National Assembly. One, because it is such an important part of our democratic process, and two, it informs administrative actions that we take. Let me say this that this practice of selectively quoting from the Auditor General's Report is curious. I will say that if one were to look at even the most mature of democracies, even the most sophisticated of bureaucracies, one would see clear examples of audits being done; audit findings resulting in the suggestion that sometimes procedures are violated; sometimes there is even fraud. This is common in democracies in which the audit will identify where there are breaches they are reported publicly and the administration takes corrective actions.

There is an abundance of examples. I can cite, for example, from report published by the National Audit Office of the United Kingdom. I can cite, for example, a report entitled, *An Audit of the Department of Work and Pensions* and it starts by stating:

“Benefit fraud is a crime and undermines public confidence in the benefit system. Estimates by the Department for Works and Pension suggest

overpayments due to fraud have fallen from £2 billion to £800 million in 2006 to 2007.”

This is from the United Kingdom. I can cite from the United States of America, the General Accountability Office or the GAO, as it is called, which is the US Audit Office, *Audit of Defense Contracts*. In the previous case I was reading from the United Kingdom Report. In the current instance, I am reading from a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Report, dated the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, 2007 and headed “An Invitation to Huge Defence Fraud.” What does the report state? The report states, in relation to military spending and defence contract:

“The Oversight Committee identified contracts worth a total of US\$762 billion in which there were problems of mismanagement, poor value and fraud.”

This is the United States of America. The report states very clearly that the Committee was shocked at the scale of the problems revealed through investigations into the Federal Procurement of which defence accounts for almost three quarters. I have a plethora of examples - examples from audit reports published by the Audit Offices of the United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, the European Union, Australia and New Zealand. I have a plethora of examples which I would be happy to share.

Lest my argument be misconstrued on this matter, I emphasise that I do not suggest that this is acceptable. In fact, it is not. Any responsible administration would seek to minimise and to eliminate the extent to which public moneys are inappropriately spent. I seek only to make the point that we are not unique in the fact that we have an Auditor General’s Report that occasionally reports things that are less than favourable but we, unlike our predecessors in office, do not hide it. It is made public. It is tabled in the National Assembly and action is taken against it. I do not hear anyone reading this report and painting the entire United States of America administration or the entire United Kingdom administration as corrupt. These are reports that emanate from Government’s departments in those administrations.

I will say, though, it is most regrettable that the Leader of the Opposition elected to speak on this matter because, as he knows well, he presided over an administration where the ultimate corrupt act was committed, and that is, the people of this country were denied the right to elect the Government of their choice under his administration. So I would suggest that the Leader of the Opposition does not have the moral authority to lecture this Government on matters of accountability and transparency. I could go on and on.

Budget 2011 represents, as was said by more than one speaker before me, the latest installment in this Government's policy continuum. A continuum that aims at the transformation of Guyana into the modern and prosperous country we know that it can be. Throughout the budget examples of initiatives were seen aimed and intended to benefit the lives of real people. The income tax threshold, no matter how the Opposition Members may wish to disparage it, they know that every single taxpayer in Guyana would benefit from the income tax threshold. More than that, they know that out there are more than thirty-eight thousand Guyanese persons who are now removed from the income tax net. The old age pension and public assistance, they know that between the two of them more than fifty thousand persons will receive, as I indicated earlier, direct income support totalling more than \$4 billion, that is more than fifty thousand elderly and other wise vulnerable Guyanese people. They know that as a result of Budget 2011 every single Guyanese child will get a school uniform; they know that every single Guyanese child will get a meal, a snack in school. They know that in every village in Guyana, on the coast and in so many villages in the Hinterland, new roads, new schools, new health centres, new wells, new water networks, new solar panels, new power plants will impact on peoples' lives. They know that under the National Training Programme for Youth Empowerment over twenty thousand young people will be trained and in case they are wondering, not only will those people now be given a skill with which they will be now equipped to enter the job market, but they will be given skills relevant to the job market and the programme, in fact, matches the training programmes offered with employers, arranges apprenticeships and places those trainees in the world of work. The Opposition knows that hundreds of nurses, clinical and technical staff will be trained; four hundred single parents will be equipped for the job market; another one thousand seven hundred and twenty single mothers will benefit from small business loans under the WOW programme and will start their businesses. Entrepreneurship is alive and well in our country.

These are just a few examples of the initiatives being implemented. If I were to speak of the adjustment made to corporate taxes - the impact that it would have on reinvestment by companies, the impact that it would have on job creation by those companies, the impact that it would have on shareholder and shareholder value creation by those companies. If I were to refer to the investment made in the ICT and ICT training, where ninety thousand families will now have their own laptops over the space of two years, bringing computer literate to

families to whom this would be a distant dream. Those people are now equipped for the place of work.

Mr. Speaker, if I may be permitted on a minor digression. I have had the pleasure of visiting call centres operating in Guyana and I have been deeply gratified to see young Guyanese men and women in their hundreds working in a high-tech environment. Those were young people. I do not see anybody in this room as young as those people - young people between the age of eighteen and forty years. Young Guyanese men and women, typically, indeed, it is more often women than men based on what I observed on the visits that I made, working in a highly computerised environment, providing services in real time to clients, to companies, to individual clients in North America, in Europe, in Asia, in Australia, in New Zealand. There are call centres in Guyana providing services right now to clients in Australia - young Guyanese boys and girls working at a computer, providing services to clients in Australia, in the hundreds. Five years ago there was none of them. Today almost three thousand young Guyanese people work – Minister Nadir told me that five years there was a few; there was certainly not five hundred, five years ago – in call centres. This can be multiplied many fold. Minister Nadir said twenty-five twenty, I believe. Minister Nadir, did you not say twenty-five thousand?

The critical impediment being one, the investment environment, and that has been fixed, and two, the skills based, and we are fixing that. We are providing ICT education under the auspices of Minister Shaik Baksh's Ministry. ICT laboratories have been built in seventy-two schools. Those laboratories are equipped. The teachers are being equipped so that all the students will come out of the school system as computer literate, and laptops are being put in the homes so that mothers, grandmothers, sugar workers, housewives, bauxite workers... The persons who are temporarily displaced at Barama were given computer training. This is the transformation. So this tomorrow's Guyana of which we speak is taking shape - a Guyana in which one hundred per cent of our energy are derived not from fossil fuel, but from clean and renewable sources. The Amaila Falls project is on the way; the road is under construction, as we speak. This is the tomorrow's Guyana of which we speak.

The ICT, the construction of the fiber-optic cable that my colleague Minister Rohee spoke so eloquently of earlier today that will catapult us to the next century, this is the tomorrow's Guyana of which we speak. There are certain truths of which there can be little doubt. Firstly, that real progress has been made by our country and this real progress has been made over the

past four years, and even more so, over the past fourteen years. Without a doubt, this is the result of the institutions which were built; the legislations which were brought to this National Assembly; the capacities that were developed. Without a doubt, this is as a result of the investments that we have made...

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is up Hon. Member.

**Mr. Rohee:** Mr. Speaker, I to move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes more to continue his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Dr. Singh:** This is the result of the investment that we have made - investment in physical infrastructure, investment in social infrastructure. But importantly, it is not only the result of governmental effort, the Guyana of today and the Guyana of tomorrow that we are building today, it is also the results of the efforts made by Guyanese men and women of all walks of life. The single mother who goes to the bank, takes a loan, starts her small business, she is building tomorrow's Guyana today. The entrepreneur who takes a loan to expand his wood processing plant, he is building tomorrow's Guyana today. The student who pays attention to his ICT lessons so that he can get a job in a computerised environment, he is building tomorrow's Guyana today. The entrepreneur who reinvests, and saves, and expands his business so that his business will be bigger tomorrow than it was yesterday, he is building tomorrow's Guyana today. I see the Opposition is getting agitated. Only the Hon. Member Mrs. Deborah Backer, uncharacteristically, is least agitated among them today.

This is the foundation that we are building today. If I were to speak of truths, a second truth would be that a firmer foundation for our country, such as exists today, has never been seen before today. I will make bold to say that from the foundation we build today will rise a Guyana worthy of our efforts and fulfilling of our dreams; a Guyana that would take its place among the prosperous nations of the world. We, the PPP/Civic Government, will not be distracted from this task. We will remain unswerving and undistracted; we will remain firmly committed to this task. We have extended the hand of friendship to the Opposition.

**Mr. Speaker:** Could you clap a bit lower, Comrade? You are disturbing me.

**Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Ali]:** Okay, Mr. Speaker.

**Dr. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, the hands of friendship have been extended. We are willing to work with all equally committed and progressive groups to realise this vision for Guyana. It remains, of course, to be seen how the Opposition response to this. I am not particularly encouraged by the fact that many of them elected did not even extend the courtesy of remaining in this House to listen to this response. It will not cause my optimism to be dimmed. Instead, I will say to them that there is still time to come on board – all a board, as it is the saying, all hands on deck – and join us as we continue the task of building tomorrow’s Guyana today.

I thank you very much and I comment Budget 2011 to this Hon. House. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I think that brings us to the end of our debate for today. There is some housekeeping matters, if you will permit me. Before we adjourn, we will consider and dispose of the report of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply on the allocation of time for consideration of the 2011 Estimates of Expenditure by the Committee of Supply. The House will have to resolve itself into Committee of Supply for this purpose. The Assembly will now therefore resolve itself into Committee of Supply.

*Assembly in Committee of Supply*

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply met today, 31<sup>st</sup> of January, 2011, and consider the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2011 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The Sub-Committee passed a resolution on the matter. Copies of the Sub-Committee’s minutes, resolution and schedule have been circulated. I invite the Hon. Minister of Finance to move the necessary motion.

**Dr. Singh:** Mr. Chairman, I now move

“That the Committee of Supply doth agree with the Business Sub-Committee in its resolution.”

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, the Committee of Supply has been allocated three days for consideration of the estimates. Consideration will begin tomorrow, Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> of February, and will be in accordance with the resolution of the Sub-Committee.



*Assembly resumed*

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Mr. Rohee:** Mr. Speaker, before I move that the Hon. House be adjourned until tomorrow, I would like, with your leave, to announce that tomorrow commences the United Nations Global Interfaith Week of Humanity. I would like, through you, to extend an invitation to all Members of Parliament, I think they were all invited, to attend a function at State House tomorrow at 9.30 a.m. hosted by the Government of Guyana and the Interfaith religious community in Guyana. Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that the House stand adjourned until tomorrow at 2.00 pm.

**Mr. Speaker:** The House is adjourned until tomorrow at 2.00 p.m.

*Adjourned accordingly at 8.19 p.m.*