

## EPILOGUE

by  
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**The struggle for the restoration of democracy in Guyana finally won out on October 5, 1992, when free and fair elections for the first time in twenty-eight years was held.**

The final stages of this return to democracy were however not easy. The decadent PNC minority regime clung desperately to power resisting for a long time the widespread local and overseas demand for electoral reform. In fact, the PNC on three occasions even after long delays, failed to produce a credible voters list. In the process, elections were postponed for a period of nearly two years.

The battle for democracy advanced on many fronts. The political parties opposed to the PNC joined forces in the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy to press demands for electoral reform. This show of unity at the political level stimulated broad sections of the population in civic, social and professional bodies to actively join the battle.

**"Desmond Hoyte should not be attending; I should be representing Guyana."** That was how I had put it in a letter to President George Bush in December 1989. The reference is to the 100th Anniversary Celebrations of Costa Rica's democracy. Invitees had included only democratically-elected Heads of Government. For countries where there had been no elections, opposition leaders were invited. I pointed out in my letter that Desmond Hoyte had come to power through a rigged election in December 1985; further, I quoted excerpts from two articles by Terry McCoy, Head of the Institute of Latin American Studies at the University of Florida at Gainesville which stated:

"The situation in Guyana is a tragedy, but not a large one in global terms. It becomes alarming upon realising that Guyana's slide into economic stagnation, social disintegration and political uncertainty is a microcosm of what is occurring through the hemisphere. ... In this sense, the message from Guyana is that the 1990's will be more than a lost decade for Latin America and the Caribbean -- and for the United States -- if development is not revived. This is an

important message, and we need to listen to it." (Miami Herald, July 16, 1989. p.6)

"Sadly, the US shares responsibility for the illegality and impropriety which plague Guyanese politics. Now Washington has an opportunity, and an obligation, to abandon realpolitik in Guyana. Past policy has failed to advance US interests, much less those of the Guyanese people. The Bush administration needs to send a clear signal that it supports free and fair elections - in Panama, in Nicaragua, and in Guyana."

(Christian Science Monitor, June 12, 1989, p.19)

That letter, coupled with the winding down of the Cold War, started a new stage in the process towards the restoration of democracy.

The first shot was fired in February 1990. In a Republic Day message, President Bush stated that he hoped that the elections due that year would be held according to the norms of democracy that both the USA and Guyana shared.

The second shot came in late 1990, after I had made two visits to Washington: six Senators and eight Congressmen had written almost identical letters to the State Department urging that US aid should be linked to free and fair elections in Guyana, and setting out the needed electoral reforms, including a reconstituted Elections Commission and the counting of ballots at the place of poll, which President Hoyte had refused in 1985.

This prepared the way for President Jimmy Carter and his Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government as elections observers, for which the Guyanese democratic forces had fought a pitched battle. The Hoyte administration had been opposed to observers; they were deemed "meddlers" and "trouble-makers". However, President Hoyte decided to invite a Commonwealth Team, after I had confronted him with his statement to a BBC correspondent in Kuala Lumpur, at the time of the Commonwealth Summit in 1989, that he had no problem with a proposed Commonwealth facility to observe elections. When he informed me that he had agreed to invite the Commonwealth to send a Team of Observers, I asked: "What about the United Nations and President Jimmy Carter, who had observed the Nicaraguan elections? He blurted out: "Who is Carter; I deal only with governments."

President Carter's entry on the electoral stage was crucial. Before his arrival in October 1990, Desmond Hoyte had categorically stated that ballots would not be counted at the place of poll. Carter made it clear, however, that vote counting at the polling place was an essential ingredient for free and fair elections, and without that his Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government might find it difficult to observe the elections. He won out: Hoyte conceded Round One.

Two days before the arrival of the second mission of the Council, the former President had declared that "Bollers [Chairman of the Elections Commission] will not go; he had done no wrong." This put the Council's delegation in a difficult situation, as the removal of Sir Harold Bollers was a universal strident demand. When, at a meeting of the delegation with the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy, it was stated that the removal of Bollers was impracticable, I referred to the Congressional leaders' letter to the State Department. Feeling that everything could be lost, I blurted out that at one time even President Carter's presence seemed impractical, and quoted the section from the letter to Secretary of State, James A. Baker III, entitled: "Appointment of an Independent and Impartial Elections Commission", which stated:

"An independent and impartial elections body is essential to the administration of a free and fair election. There are concerns that the existing elections Commission is weighted heavily in favour of the ruling PNC party. With this membership, it will be difficult for the Commission to credibly guarantee that it will fairly administer the upcoming elections"

Thereafter, the PCD was told to supply, within 24 hours, 5 to 6 names of persons who were not unacceptable to Hoyte. Round Two was won: Hoyte dropped Harry Bollers and selected Rudy Collins as Chairman.

The third Round in the battle for free and fair elections was won when Hoyte was forced by internal and external pressure to abandon elections fixed for December 1991.

At the end, on election day, the PNC resorted to sabotage and violence. The Office of the elections Commission was stormed. Stones and bottles were thrown at the building. Windows were broken. The American Ambassador, among others, was injured. PPP headquarters, Freedom House, was also attacked with threats to burn it.

President Carter contacted Desmond Hoyte. So did the US State Department. He was told clearly that he would be held personally responsible for any injury to Americans. The Police and Defence Force intervened and dispersed the mobs at the Commission and PPP Headquarters, after which the people rampaged through the streets, looting many stores. But order was soon restored.

This paved the way for the counting of ballots at the places of poll to proceed as planned. There were a number of incidents in which the PNC-led mobs invaded polling stations but this did not prevent the PPP/CIVIC from obtaining a clear majority when the

final result was declared by elections Commission Chairman Rudy Collins.

October 9, 1992, when I was sworn in as President, was a memorable date. It was exactly the same date, thirty-nine years earlier, when I had been forcibly removed from government. However, in 1952 it was the PPP; in 1992, it was the PPP/CIVIC.

The CIVIC component -- prominent, politically non-aligned personalities from business, academia and the professions -- brought racial/ethnic, class and ideological balance to the PPP/CIVIC alliance, which was constituted after the breakup of the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy (PCD).

The PCD had failed to reach agreement on a formula for an electoral front. The proposition put to us was unrealistic: the PPP should not have the Presidential candidate and only 30 percent of the list of candidates for the National Assembly. This would have meant that we would not have been able to protect the interests of the nation and the working people. To the charge that we wanted domination, we made it abundantly clear that we wanted neither to dominate nor to be dominated. This was in keeping with our "winner-will-not-take-all" strategy of 1977, after the failure to reach an agreement with the PNC for a National Patriotic Front Government.

Our victory at the polls was greeted with nation-wide rejoicing. The Guyanese people welcomed the new air of freedom and enthusiastically moved to support the new government's drive to rebuild the country.

As we settled into office we began to find out that the destruction of the country done by the PNC regime was much more than was previously apparent. With a per capita income of US\$330 and an external debt per capita of US\$2,260, Guyana remains one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. Nearly half of the population is below the poverty line. This leads to a vicious circle of poverty and underdevelopment.

The consequences of poverty are: lowest nutritional intakes, lowest life expectancy, and highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the CARICOM countries; inadequate pre- and post-natal care; very high percentage of illegal abortions; homelessness; street children; primary school dropouts; poorest high school examination results in the Caribbean; juvenile delinquency; crime; increasing prison population; production, use and export of narcotics; emigration, especially of skilled people.

Having inherited an economy in a prolonged decline of more than two decades, the PPP/CIVIC Government is faced with an enviable task in its search for economic growth with social justice and eco-justice. The constraints are -

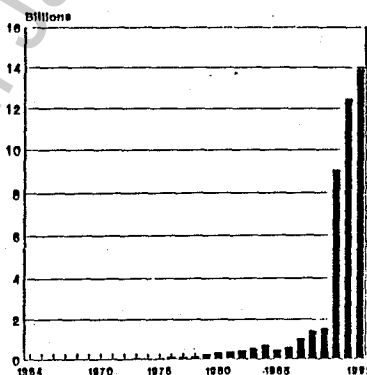
- \* a huge debt burden, the servicing of which absorbs most of our foreign exchange and revenue;
- \* an extremely weak public sector management;
- \* a narrow revenue base;
- \* ruined physical and social infrastructure;
- \* low level of technology;
- \* decline in quality and level of education which has eroded our human resource base;
- \* inadequate remuneration of public sector employees;
- \* widespread demoralization which has adversely affected motivation and moral standards.

Guyana has an unmanageable burden of debt, which is the greatest contributing factor to poverty and underdevelopment.

In terms of budgetary finance, debt payments mushroomed due to devaluation in the structural adjustment period. (See Table I)

TABLE I

DEBT SERVICE  
GUYANA DOLLARS



As shown in Table II below, payments constituted 105 per cent of state current revenue in 1992 and 90 per cent in 1993. Consequently, finance is inadequate for payments of salaries and wages in the Public Service and social services.

TABLE II

CURRENT EXPENDITURE (G\$million)

	<u>1964</u>	<u>1985</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>	<u>1993</u>
1. <u>Employment Cost</u>	27	301	2,248.3	3,630.9	3,963.7
2. <u>Debt Servicing</u>	10	685	18,009.8	17,707.7	19,194.0
% of Revenue	15%	105%	152%	105%	90%
% of Expenditure	14.5%	60%	98%	96%	89%
3. <u>Social Services</u>					
% of Expenditure	30%	19%	6%	8%	14%

**Guyana's foreign debt of over US\$2 billion is perhaps the highest per capita in the world.**

Nearly 60% of Guyana's foreign commercial earnings is utilised to servicing the foreign debt, equivalent to nearly three times the average (23%) for the 47 least developed countries in the world. When to this very high debt-service ratio is added 40 % for fuel imports, Guyana's balance of payments problem is compounded. Economic growth and human development cannot take place without foreign exchange for the import of capital goods, spares and essential consumer goods especially when less than 10% of the GDP of Guyana is from the industrial sector.

The Commonwealth Study Group, headed by Sir Alister McIntyre, noted in its report in 1989 that Guyana's high debt service ratio was not conducive to sustained economic growth.

A minimum wage of less than US\$2 per day and a maximum salary of less than US\$100 per month in the Public Service do not facilitate the entry or retention of persons in the Public Service. Salaries in the private sector and in the Caribbean and North America are much greater, leading to a brain drain.

Consequently, it is impossible to maintain the administrative capacity for the implementation of projects. For example: US\$170M. had been approved by the IDB for projects but they could not be implemented because of the lack of skilled/technical/professional personnel.

The social services sector of current budgetary expenditure was allocated in 1992 a totally-inadequate 8%, as seen in Table I. As a result of cuts, particularly in Foreign Affairs and the Presidential Secretariat, social services expenditure was increased from 8% in 1992 to 14% in 1993. But even this amount is

inadequate in view of our run-down health and educational services. It is necessary to increase expenditure rapidly to the levels prevailing under the previous PPP government, when health and educational standards were among the highest in the Caribbean.

Given this reality, and taking cognisance of the factors -- bureaucratic/command type of Government and management without popular participation, no coordinated Development Plan, political and racial discrimination, denial of freedoms and human rights, extravagance, bribery, corruption -- which led to economic collapse, a huge debt burden, poverty, alienation, frustration, hopelessness and emigration, the PPP/CIVIC Government is proceeding very much conscious of the need for strong policies and practices internally to manage efficiently available resources. These include an entrenched democratic culture, good governance, transparency and honesty in public administration and integrity in public life. Corruption, extravagance and lack of accountability, vices which characterised the past, will not be tolerated by my administration.

**An enduring foundation for our economic take off is democracy. We see democracy and development as being inter-related and are key to achieving our goals of social and ecological justice.** After 28 years, Guyanese with certainty can expect regular, free and fair elections to choose their government. But more than that, our Government has deepened the content of our new democracy by involving various interest groups such as labour and the private sector in a genuine consultative process. Additionally, more and more civic groups and community and service-oriented NGOs are mushrooming and playing a meaningful and direct role in community development to complement the national effort. We intend to strengthen this process by holding local government elections, last held more than two decades ago. In a sense, we in Guyana are re-inventing government, learning from experiences of the past and avoiding the pitfalls of so many countries which failed to understand the nexus between democracy and development.

**Democracy is essential for economic growth and human development. Equally, human development is necessary for the sustenance of democracy.**

The previous administration ratified the UN Covenant on Civic and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, but honoured them in the breach. It had a dismal record of reporting to the United Nations on the fulfillment of these rights, and it refused to sign the UN Optional Protocol to the two covenants.

The PPP/CIVIC government will provide regular reports to the United Nations. It has agreed to ratify the Optional Protocol and intends to strengthen the Ombudsman. It also proposes to retrace the footsteps of the PPP government in the 1957-64 period when

there had been attained both economic growth (an average annual rate of 10% in rice, 7% in sugar and bauxite, and 8% in manufacturing) and human development (high levels of education and health, constitutional guarantees of Fundamental Rights, a multi-party political system and periodic free and fair elections).

A necessary corollary to these developments is the practice of good governance, prudent financial husbandry, justice and equity. Already, mechanisms are in place to stop the endemic corruption in government, a policy which has won the confidence of the people.

We are pursuing a multi-faceted strategy to lay the basis for long-term growth and development.

Development is a harmonious mix of developed physical infrastructure, adequate production, just distribution of the national wealth, and genuine social and cultural upliftment within a growing political, economic and social democracy. It is the progressive realisation of the capacities, abilities and talents of each individual for his/her own satisfaction and enhancement of the social good, and harmonious relationship with the environment. These concepts, one might refer to as 'human development' or 'people centered' development or more broadly a 'basic needs strategy' as distinct from economic growth alone -- the growth of income and profits without ensuring the broad-based distribution of those benefits. It is evidently clear that unlike the previous administration, the PPP/CIVIC government will pursue steadfastly a policy to achieve the most equitable distribution in the process of achieving growth. Additionally, we view poverty not merely as the negative effect of structural adjustment; we see also its cause and cure in a more fundamental way.

With each passing day, the new Government fights against the legacy of emasculated institutions. The previous administration had made the State indistinguishable from the ruling party, and subverted and emasculated the state institutions, such as the Public Service Commission, Police Service Commission, Teachers Service Commission and the Judicial Service Commission, and made them instruments of "party-paramountcy".

The police, army, public service and judiciary are once again asserting their independence and professionalism, and ridding themselves of overt and covert political influences. The results of these bold policies have been a clean administration and increased revenues, especially at the Customs Department.

The PPP/CIVIC government respects fully the independence of the institutions, which deal with employment. Employment and promotion will be carried out irrespective of political affiliation, race, ethnicity and religious persuasion. Qualification, merit and experience is the basis for employment and promotion. In this



regard, and also to cope with fears of racial/ethnic insecurity, a Task Force on Race Relations has been set up under the leadership of the distinguished Bishop of Guyana, the Rt. Rev. Randolph George. A draft report is being circulated for broad discussion with the objective of enacting a Race Relations Act and establishing a Commission to deal comprehensively with all forms of discrimination and racist incitement.

The Government is committed to accelerated development of the Amerindian people. A Task Force has been set up to elaborate a comprehensive Development Plan and projects for the separate communities.

The Guyana Airways Corporation (GAC) instituted in 1993 a scheduled air service to various parts of the Interior. This has proved to be a boom, particularly for the Amerindians.

Women play an important role in Guyanese society. They are well-represented in the National Assembly and two are Ministers of Government. It is proposed in 1994 to enact legislation to guarantee equality of opportunity for women, to provide greater opportunities for education and to embark on urban and rural projects for gainful employment opportunities.

Young people have been affected seriously by the mal-administration of the PNC regime. The decline in education standards along with the absence of sports, cultural and leisure facilities contributed significantly to the demoralisation of Guyanese youth leading to migration, drug addiction and other social vices.

In the cultural field, Government is working to develop culture houses throughout the country and to broaden training with more sports coaches and equipment. The provision of facilities in culture and sports will greatly assist in diverting the youths from alcohol and narcotics. It will also facilitate the improvement in educational standards and technical skills.

The expansion of operations in the fields of mining and forestry has raised concerns about effects on the environment. There is a serious shortage of trained personnel in the environmental Sector. Government is in the process of establishing an Environmental Protection Agency.

An Environmental Protection Act will shortly be presented to Parliament and a National Environmental Action Plan is being prepared with the assistance of the World Bank.

The University of Guyana started in January 1994 a degree programme in Environmental Science run by an inter-faculty Environmental Studies Unit, assisted by the EEC.

Human resource development -- an educated and healthy populace and workforce -- and a clean environment are essential for economic growth and human development.

Government is taking steps to increase significantly science education at all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary). The decline over the last two decades has resulted in an almost total collapse of the educational system with the most drastic effects in the area of science.

Forty years after "Forbidden Freedom" was written, I feel justified about the conclusion I made in another book, "The West on Trial" where I said: "The Struggle will be long and hard. Sacrifices will be many. But history and time are on our side. And win we will."

Win we did at long last on October 1992. And history has absolved me. In April 1990, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., admitted that he was sorry for what he had done thirty years before, and that "a great injustice was done" to me. As President John F. Kennedy's adviser, he had advised in 1962 that I should be replaced in government by L.F.S. Burnham through a change in the first-past-the-post voting system to the list system of proportional representation, what the then British Opposition Leader, Harold Wilson, had called "a fiddled constitutional arrangement."

The recent release of British Official Papers of the 1963 period also disclosed the conspiracy of the CIA and British Intelligence (MI5) in destabilising the PPP government in the early 1960s.

In discharging their responsibilities, the American and British governments played a key role in restoring democracy on 9 October 1992. Now, they must safeguard democracy by assisting in the reconstruction of Guyana. In keeping with the call of the Caribbean Council of Churches for a mini-Marshall Plan and as compensation for our gift to the world -- the Iwokrama Project of 900,000 acres of virgin rain forest -- for scientific studies in forest management and protection of the environment and biodiversity, our foreign debt should be cancelled in a debt-for-nature swap. And, since Guyana's debt servicing/total inflows ratio was extremely high: 95.1% in 1992 and 76.6% in 1993, more grants should be offered for reconstruction, as was recently proposed by the EEC Commission Delegate, Joel Fessaguet.

On our part, with democracy restored, the PPP/CIVIC government is fully committed to working vigorously for the rapid development of the well being of the Guyanese people and to contribute to the goals of world peace and a New Global Humanitarian Order.