Public Policy and Governance: Managing the Collective Good in Guyana

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Introduction

Public Policy as doctrine and practice proceeds on the assumption that there is a clear and unambiguous distinction between private reason and public principle. However, while this view may have come to acquire a certain hegemonic presence in the literature it is not always evident where private reason ends and public principle begins. Nor, it is equally clear, how we are to decide on what constitutes the public good: the divide between private reason and public principle. Moreover, it is often presumed that once we decide on the meaning of the public good then the means through which it is to be achieved become obvious and self-evident, in fact suggest themselves, requiring nothing more than a series of formal moves that entail little or no debate and often best left to experts.

Further, two considerations served to cloud the practical and theoretical divide and, not unexpectedly, have been the primary source of contention between “men of affairs” and those of the academy. First, political circumstances and climates of opinion have always had a considerable sway in deciding the parameters and content of public policy. We need only think of the experiences in our own brief histories to see and understand the dramatic consequences that politics have had on public policy. At one end there appeared the once firm and unshakable conviction, since the 1930s, that the state/public authority had both a moral right and political responsibility to intervene in deciding the direction of public policy in order to create the regulatory framework for stability and confidence that would also guarantee equal participation and fair inclusion.

Within one generation an equally firm and corresponding conviction has emerged to say exactly the opposite. Now the very state that was to guarantee fairness and minimum equity, including participation and inclusion, has become the problem. It is not just the size of state intervention that is at issue but the intervention itself. The state has not been just a poor manager and bad interlocutor but, more and the essence of the matter, is attempt to regulate the free play of market forces has done two things: first it automatically distorts prices and, second, imposes an authoritarian calculus on the provision of collective goods and services. In the end state intervention undermines
efficiency and encourages rent-seeking, while public policy and the collective good are obscured and eventually lost in an endless game of “log rolling” and “pork barrel politics”. Public choice is the only way out.

Second, an equally important consideration in the making and practice of public policy is its association with distinct groups of political apparatchiks and cadres of administrators. It is usually presumed that different groups/generations, possessed of idiosyncratic views and discrete styles of their own, will tend to influence public policy differently, the political circumstances or climate of opinion of the day, notwithstanding. Here the debate is usually framed on the left-right continuum and has usually been conducted on the “less state” versus more or different state principle. Of course, much of this is presumed on the assumption that public institutions, however captive to the apparatchiks of partisan political and/or administrative interests, are expected to provide a minimum of fairness, and equity in the provision of public goods.

These questions have become particularly troubling in large parts of the third world where the meaning and constitution of the public good is still a matter of considerable debate and controversy and where public institutions often lack the legitimacy to make demands on large sections of the citizenry. Because of the democratic deficit that emerges in the mismatch between the rights of citizenship, on the one hand, and duties and obligations, on the other, states and citizens square-off in a new Hobbesian stand-off, producing in the process what is euphemistically defined in the literature as failed states, rogue states, even criminal states.

Despite what some may have suggested, we in the Caribbean have not escaped elements of nor symptoms of the affliction. Indeed, for prolonged periods of our individual and collective histories we have been examplars of both the climate of opinion and the cadre of administrators and apparatchiks that have decided the direction of public policy in ways that proved destructive of the public good because we failed to heed the discretion required in the distinction between private reason and public principle.
Private reason and public principle, we want to suggest, has an added dimension in large parts of the third world and not to be confused with its individualistic assumptions of the west. Communities continue to see and define themselves in collective ways and respond to public overtures in precisely those ways – Althusser’s famous interpellation of subjects. And despite the many difficulties in definitional precision or in mapping the outlines of communities there is nonetheless something unique and irreducible about them, hence the need for collective recognition.

If we agree, then, as I do, that there is such a thing as a collective identity requiring collective recognition how are we to treat with the public/private divide? How is public policy to be constituted when the meaning of private is to be constituted out of a collective subject?

Tentatively, I want to suggest that the late Sir Arthur Lewis provides us with a way out of the dilemma. In his short essay of 1965 on West African politics he sets the outlines of such a solution and while much of it has been overtaken by events his sketch provides a remarkable prescience of the dilemma that would confront much of the world after the Revolutions of 1989. But more of this below.

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1 A growing body of literature now challenges the traditional assumption that the west has or can escape the same collectivist assumptions that afflicts much of the third world. The literature began to acquire a certain density and referential authority after the publication of Iris Marion Young’s Justice and the Politics of Difference (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1990). In addition see Charlest Taylor Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992), Will Kymlicka Multicultural Citizenship (Oxford university Press, Oxford, 1995), Seyla Benhabib (ed) Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundary of the Political (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996), Ian Shapiro and Will Kymlicka (eds) Ethnicity and Group Rights, Nomos XXXIX, (New York University Press, New York, 1997), and Amy Gutman Identity in Democracy (Princeton University Press). For a critique and principled hold out, insisting on the correctness of the individualistic ethic of the old liberalism, see Brian Berry Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2001). Others, of course, think differently and see this as so much intellectual hubris, attempting to reconstitute a left politics after John Rawls and the fall of “presently existing socialism”, but that’s another story.

2 This is not to suggest that cultural/ethnic communities are monolithic, hermetically sealed units. On the contrary, culture/ethnicity is the terrain of an ongoing contest around which the very meanings of identity is formed. I have argued elsewhere that many of the assumptions that inform such collective identities are made up of what is usually defined as “feel good politics”, even when it proves destructive as a strategic tool of intervention. See my Writing the History of the East Indian Diaspora:; Occasional Paper Series, No. 1, Berbice Campus, University of Guyana, 2003. See also Cornel West Race Matters and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. “Race”, Writing and Difference (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986)
More to the point I want to take this opportunity to interrogate elements of the dilemma Sir Arthur recognized in West Africa because I believe his outline tells the very story that is unfolding in Guyana today with many of the same consequences, particularly when we confuse private reason with public principle.

The story is essentially about the activities of a fishing Coop in the community where I live and the response of public agencies to them – agencies with both the authority and obligation to oversee and regulate its operations.³

**ii: The Fishing Coop**

The rumour has been thick and heavy. However, like so many before, residents have become “corned” to it. Most now shake their heads in cynical and knowing acknowledgement as if only to ask “What else is new?”

But this one may just be a little different, if only because of the sheer obviousness. For the past six weeks (since the end of November, 2003) the village next to the fishing Complex at the 66 Creek has been regaled with tales of corruption, collusion and intrigue.

The latest story, as it is told and makes its way around the village, is that one store clerk responsible for the sale of gasoline could not account for about one thousand (1,000) gallons of the liquid gold, retail price at about five hundred dollars a gallon, amounting to about five hundred thousand dollars (G$500,000) or about two thousand five hundred dollars US currency (US2,500) – a princely sum in these parts.

³ Much of the information for the ensuing narrative has been gathered over the past five years when it became obvious that there was something more than just fishing at the Coop. Some of it has been ad hoc, gathered from residents in the community in casual conversation or from fishermen over a beer. Others have been acquired through extensive formal structured conversations with both fishermen and employees of the Coop. On other occasions information simply came my way through unknown sources because it was known that I had taken an interest on what was happening at the Coop. The Coop itself and the office of the Chief Coop Officer, at the Ministry of Labour, has been less than forthcoming when not simply hostile claiming that the Coop was a private Society and, therefore, under no obligation to impart with information about its activities. The “private” claim continued even after two Ministers of the Government were informed of the activities of the Coop especially the breaches in its lease and failure to observe several public statutes, including several sections of the Environmental Protection Act, etc. It gradually came home to me how public information has been transformed into a political commodity to be traded for either obedience or silence.
At an internal investigation early in the new year, 2004, we are told, the sales clerk was asked to bring in his mother. Apparently it was suggested and agreed that if the mother could and would guarantee that the sales clerk would make some effort to replace the missing gas or its cost then he could retain his job, presumably the proceeds from which he would also seek to make good on the value of the missing gas.

Unfortunately, it was discovered that the mother was out of the country. That appeared to have ended the short career of the sales clerk and closed the investigation, at least for the moment.

Some suggest that the matter is not likely to go much further. It is intimated that the management of the fishing Coop cannot afford a public investigation by calling in the police since there are too many loose skeletons in those fishy closets. Others, on the other hand, believe that the problem maybe more immediate and discrete. They suggest, adding their own spin, that the management dare not call in the police for the simple reason that the departing sales clerk seems to know a little too much for everyone’s comfort.

Tongues continued wagging when it became publicly obvious that the clerk was building his own fishing boat – nets, ice box and all.

This, unfortunately, is only the latest saga in the history of the fishing Coop.

The fishing complex itself is a donation of the Canadian Government, compliments of Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). It was part of a larger project in which CIDA constructed several fish ports along coastal Guyana as part of an extensive economic package to rescue Guyana in the late 1980s. Canada had joined other western nations (Paris Club) to aid Guyana in its economic recovery and make it stable, ready and credit worthy for an IMF bail out in 1988.
Briefly, the fishing Coop was formed in 1965, located in the border town of Corriverton, next to neighbouring Suriname, and engaged mainly in inshore fishing. The complex at the 66 Creek was completed in 1988 and handed over to the government, Ministry of Agriculture, who then turned it over to the fishing Coop. With its ice factory and larger berthing facilities the Coop is able to accommodate trawlers and larger boats and enable local fishermen to compete with their Surinamese counterparts for the lucrative continental fish trade. Not unexpectedly, the original Coop at Corriverton soon lost out to the 66 complex and eventually moved its operations to the new fish port. In fact, as we shall see shortly, the original operations at Corriverton had to close shop entirely and has become a source of some controversy, if not embarrassment.

iii: The Political Economy of Fish

There is no doubt that the Coop has brought benefits to the community: increased jobs - a God-send in an area of chronic under- and unemployment; increased production of food; a host of ancillary economic activities such as construction, especially in boat building, retail trade for supplies to the fishermen, etc.

The original output of the two machines that came with the plant is estimated to have produced about fifty thousand pounds of ice per day. More recently, since the September 2004, the two old machines have been replaced and a third has been added with a capacity of near one hundred thousand pounds of ice per day. These serve not only the fishermen but also supply ice to local businesses and consumers. A booming trade has emerged during weekends and holidays when citizens flock the 63 Beach for picnics and family outings. In one day the entire stock of a hundred thousand pounds can be gone, and at retail price of four dollars a pound brings in four hundred thousand dollars.

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4 The location of the 66 Complex is not without political significance. It is situated in the heart of Region Six, one of the ten new regions in Guyana created after the Constitution of 1980 and intended to decentralize administration and introduce a more nuanced electoral system to dissipate and fragment racial voting. Not surprisingly, it did neither. Demographically Region Six is predominantly East Indian, estimated at about eighty five percent of the population, and contains about twenty percent of Guyana’s total population of about eight hundred thousand. Not unexpectedly, it delivers a solid bloc of votes to the ruling Party, People’s progressive Party, and usually returns between eleven and twelve seats to the latter.
It is estimated that an equipped fishing boat runs to near two and half million Guyana dollars (G$2,500,000) or about thirteen thousand (US$13,000) in US currency\(^5\). The actual construction of a thirty feet boat is about eight hundred thousand dollars, seine is about 1.2 million dollars, a seventy-five horse power outboard motor costs about four hundred thousand, while the four-ton ice box is about one hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Importantly, all the boats are built locally with local lumber and labour. About the only imported items for construction are quantities of tar and twine for caulking and sealing. It is estimated that about half the cost of a boat is labour - master builder and four carpenters.

In addition, of the estimated one hundred and twenty five fishing boats registered at the Coop near eighty are active at any one time. One trip of seven to ten days costs near two hundred and sixty thousand dollars ($260,000) in supplies and requires a five-man crew to fully manage. Supplies for the fishermen in the form of food and drinks is about forty thousand dollars, gasoline of two hundred gallons at six hundred dollars per gallon runs about one hundred and twenty thousand dollars, ten gallons of lube oil at seven thousand dollars per gallon costs seventy thousand dollars while ice to fill the eight-thousand pounds ice box, at three dollars and fifty cents per pound, runs to another twenty eight thousand dollars.

At any one time, employment is in the neighbourhood of near five hundred (500) permanent jobs. In addition to boat crews of about four hundred, ancillary support staff to patch seines, boat builders and repair men, caulking crews and painters, full time staff at the Coop - about twenty altogether, including store clerks (4) supermarket, canteen (2), watchmen (7), operators (4), char woman (1), handy man (1) and manager – add another hundred jobs.

\(^5\) Currency is stated in Guyana dollars. At the moment (January 2005) it exchanges against the $US at G$200 to US$1.
It is estimated that a successful trip nets about four tons of fish mainly grey snapper, ocean trout and shark. Catches sometimes include the expensive Gillbaka and varied species of quarryman, cuffum, etc. Over the years fishermen have come to prefer the grey snapper because of their marketability and would normally bring in about half a catch of snapper, a quarter ocean trout and a similar amount of shark, mixed with gillbaka, quarryman, cuffum and other species. In addition, their firmer flesh allows for better “icing”, ensuring longer stay during catch and safer transportation to markets in Georgetown and overseas with minimum spoilage.

While prices vary it is estimated that the grey snapper fetches an average of about one hundred and fifty dollars per pound while the ocean trout brings in about one hundred and twenty dollars per pound. Shark on the other hand goes for about two hundred dollars per pound, while the gillbaka, a local delicacy, is retailed at about five hundred dollars per pound. Receipts also include glue from the snapper and trout. Current estimates suggest a fifteen pound snapper yields about half a pound of glue and sells for one thousand, five hundred dollars per pound, while a ten pound trout carries about quarter of a pound and sells for one hundred dollars per pound.

A full catch, given the usual species of snapper, trout and shark, including gillbaka and glue, will yield about four thousand pounds of fish estimated at six hundred thousand dollars. After deductions for supplies – food, gas, ice, etc. – the remaining receipts are divided equally between crew and owner. This will usually provide about forty thousand dollars per fisherman per trip, while the captain will receive an additional five thousand dollars for his efforts.

Most of the catch is sold at 4:00-6:00 A.M., daily except Sundays, on the Coop wharf to buyers for exporters in Georgetown, who then transport their cargo in refrigerated trucks to the capital. Some local entrepreneurs, wising up to the trade, have constructed their own refrigerators fitted to trucks and now actively compete with their Georgetown

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6 This was not always the case. When operations began in the late eighties the “catch” (after deductions) was divided 60:40 with the larger share going to owners. After grumblings about unions and organizations some three years ago owners yielded and agreed to a 50:50 share.
colleagues for the trade, and now supply not only exporters but also retail outlets and restaurants in Georgetown.

Recent estimates suggest that a boat can and will make, on average, about five trips every two months or about thirty trips a year. However when we make allowances for dock time, especially for repairs to boat and seine, bad weather and sick crew a boat in reasonable condition can and will make about twenty five trips a year.

Similarly it is opined that while a full catch is not unusual it is not the norm either. Most catches fall somewhere between half and three quarters of the two-ton capacity. There is an in-built incentive for the crew, for a “reasonable” catch, who must at least recover the cost of food and drinks and whatever other portions of the supplies would have been used up. It is not unusual, therefore, for fishermen to stay out “as long as necessary”, as long as food and other supplies will allow, to, at least, recover cost and “make a little pocket money”.

But easier said than done. Two problems have emerged to stymie and blunt the efforts of fishermen. First, since the early nineties, as the border dispute between Guyana and Suriname heated up into open confrontation, fishing licenses have become a hot ticket and scarce item. The grey snapper, for which the fishermen hunt, feeds mainly on the plankton and other aquatic life found on the continental shelf, located off the east and west banks of the mouth of the Corentyne River, the north west portion of which falls within Suriname’s 200 mile exclusive economic zone. Fishermen must, therefore, obtain Surinamese licenses to fish there. But these do not come cheaply. The annual license fee is now pegged at five hundred dollars US currency or about a hundred thousand local currency annually. Some fishermen have attempted to get around the problem by pooling their resources to “buy” the Surinamese licenses and then share it between two or three boats. But one of the conditions attached to the licenses creates difficulties and inconveniences. The licenses stipulates that portions of the catch must be sold in Suriname.
But this is not always possible. For this to happen the fishermen must return to port, unload gear, sell off portions of their catch then spend at least two days in Suriname disposing of the remainder. Owners, captains and crews find this a most trying exercise – a foreign language, unknown customs and practices, ignorance of Suriname’s laws, unschooled and unlettered owners and fishermen, staying overnight in strange and unfamiliar places, is not very encouraging. Even if possible, the crew is not entirely confident that this task should be left to owners in uncertain conditions and are loathe, therefore, to agree or participate in them. In addition, disposing of a catch in Suriname comes with its own hazards and disincentives. First, there is the question of price and since this is not always set a process of “on the spot” bargaining is assumed and given the Guyanese the fishermen’s ignorance of language and local practices they are placed at a decided disadvantage. Second, taxation in Suriname is both accepted and observed as a normal part of any business transaction. Not so in Guyana where it is seen as an unwelcome intrusion in a private agreement and evasion seen not as an illegitimate or an unethical practice. Third, taxation, sales receipts, and other business transactions in Suriname leaves a paper trail and an uncomfortable knowledge of the transactions and practices of boat owners. This is not encouraging to the latter since any of these little pieces of paper can be used to either frustrate their efforts or worse blackmail them.

Under the circumstances Surinamese authorities are willing to provide about forty licenses and turn a blind eye to the rest since they lack the administrative means to police the Guyanese fishermen, while playing CARICOM partner and good neighbour. Guyanese fishermen, on the other hand, are willing to accept the compromise as part of the *modus vivendi* and allow sleeping dogs to lie.

None of this, of course, is known with any certainty because of the clandestine manner in which it is done – the don’t know, don’t tell policy. Nor can it be accurately verified because of the fear of the paper trail. Not even at their home port at the 66 Complex do fishermen participate in formal transactions involving receipts or other paper-generated processes. Part of the problem is that the Coop deliberately shield boat owners from public evaluation and assessment. Even where the law requires it boats are not locally
registered nor any records of their transaction kept for the scrutiny by the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), social insurance agency responsible for employment and employment and sick benefits, or the Guyana Revenue Authority, for purposes of taxation.

The Second problem that has emerged to temper the enthusiasm of fishermen is open piracy on the high seas. This occurs at the mouth and lower reaches of the Corentyne River where pirates waylay incoming and outgoing fishing boats. Over the last year there have been at least six reported incidences in the area\(^7\). Most observers are convinced that this is the handiwork of local bandits who are keenly aware of the activities and habits of fishermen because of the efficiency and precision with which they operate. In some instances boats are identified, stalked and ambushed on their way out by speedboats with supercharged engines and armed pirates. On other occasions, pirates with high powered binoculars await incoming boats at the mouth of the river and pounce on the unsuspecting crew demanding and taking whatever is of value on board – seine, engine, portions of cash, gasoline, lube oil and sometimes food.

Fear and loss are combined because of the immediate threat to life and limb and the loss of property. Unfortunately, and worse still, neither public protection nor private support has provided much help or confidence since not a single bandit/pirate has been apprehended by Customs, BASS or the marine unit of the army nor are any of our insurance companies willing to provide insurance to fishing boats

\(^7\) This information comes from local customs officials and the Berbice Anti- Smuggling Squad (BASS), both located at the border town of Corriverton. The latter organization is a matter of continuing controversy. It was established in the early 90s when the new Government took office in 1992. It was popularly believed that customs had been incorrigible corrupted under the previous administration and illegal cross-border trading had gone out of control. The unit was created not necessarily to stop the trade but to regulate and bring it under control, especially the small-arms gun-running and the illegal traffic in drugs. However and despite the open boast and public claims of success its real statutory authority and official location has cast considerable shadow over its operations. Moreover, its early high handed methods and abrasive style has not endeared it to a wary and suspect public. Unfortunately, much of this remains unreported in the local press since most news agencies - newspapers, television and radio – do not have local reporters. They depend entirely on local persons, letters to the press, or “busy bodies” phoning in a sensational story like “piracy on the high seas”. Even when these do appear there is little follow up, thus acquiring the characteristic of aberrant sensationalism without either antecedent or consequence.
Formally the Coop is run by a Management Committee selected from among the active fishermen in the Coop while the day to day functions and the business of the Coop is under the control of an independent manager with ancillary staff to assist – stores clerk, watchmen, sales persons at the canteen, ice machine operators etc. Originally the complex consisted of two ice machines, locker rooms/warehouse to store and keep fishermen’s equipment, including engines, a store that carried supplies for the fishermen and a small workshop. Later an outlet for the supply of gasoline and a canteen (rum shop) were added.

From early on rumors emerged that the Coop while doing a lucrative, if not booming, trade was less than diligent and transparent in its business practices. Stories freely circulated and it soon became apparent that the management committee had transformed the Coop into a conduit for private gain and abandoned their managerial responsibilities for immediate, personal aggrandisement. Not unexpectedly, there were frequent changes in the management committee, each “catching their hand” in the process, while leaving the mess and the rest to their incoming colleagues.

In the meantime several reports had reached the Chief Coop Officer that all was not well at the 66 Fish Complex. After several complaints, some from fishermen themselves, the Chief Coop Officer initiated an investigation and sent in a local Coop Officer to have a look.

The outcome was two reports. The first consists of an “inquiry” into the operations of the Coop from January 1997 to November 2000, conducted between 8th November-14th December, 2000; while the second was an “inspection” exercise covering the period 27 February-30th September, 2001, and conducted from 4th September-7th October, 2001.

Needless to say the “inquiry” only served to confirm what had been a matter of public knowledge for sometime. The Report began by noting that the “inquiry comes in the
midst of allegation of gross mismanagement of the society’s affairs by the Committee of management …”. (p. 1.) It then went on to tabulate the problems in two categories.

Managerially it found that the Management Committee failed to observe the rules of its own constitution and either set aside or cared little for the terms and conditions of the Coop Act itself. Among others it noted that:

- the membership list, which was officially given as 276 members, deliberately obscured the true state of things since half of these were inactive and in clear violation of the rules of the society.

- padding of the membership list by refusing to terminate inactive members is a clear violation of rule 9, subsection e, of the rules of the Coop

- padding of the membership also concealed the fact that persons who were no longer members still held positions in the Management Committee and in violation of Rule 23, subsection 4.

- while the rules state that sales to members must be on a cash basis but credit can be extended adequate security must be obtained for such credits. Large credits, however, were offered and taken without any security, in violation of rule 29.

- there was no Supervisory Committee in place as required by Rule 33.

- accounts and records are not kept or in very poor condition, in violation of rule 37, subsections b, c, j and l.

- Regulation 58, requiring the regular audit of the books of the Coop, has simply been set aside and no one seems to care.

- the Management Committee deliberately kept things to itself by refusing to call regular General Meetings of the membership, in violation of Rule 22, subsection 3 and Rule 23, subsection 5, of the Society’s Rules.

- the employment of the funds of the Coop did not appear to have any clear purpose and seemed to be outside “the stated objects of the society”, and in violation of Rule 18.
Financially things were worse that thought or expected.

- because of poor financial management the Corriverton complex had to be closed, saddled with dead stock, no written records, and payment vouchers not authorized by appropriate officers of the Coop. In addition, it owed the 66 Complex nearly one million dollars.

- at the 66 Complex “vouchers are not authorized by the Chairman for months in order to validate payments …”.

- for two years, 1999-2000, purchases were “unaccounted for in the stock cards” and a random check of “store items with stock card balances” revealed “many discrepancies”.

- stock cards were found to be out of date, while credit sales were not deducted from stock, an open invitation for pilfering and theft – maybe that was the intent.

- internal controls with checks and balances were non existent. The same person who delivered the sold goods also received the cash and wrote-up the receipt.

- credit sales are poorly monitored which allows easy evasion. “Some present and former members of the Management Committee and their families have large outstanding credit”.

- because of poor record keeping “Income and expenditure accounts could not be prepared with any accuracy because no records of stock taking could be found for the years 1997, 1998 and part of 1999.”

- as of 31 September, 1999, debtors stood at twenty five million, seventy two thousand and three hundred and forty nine dollars. Of this sum, it is estimated that sixteen million was is in fact outstanding credit. A large portion of this, as we have seen, was given out to members of the Management Committee and their families. Now, much of this is remain “uncollectible” since, not unexpectedly, “many have sold their boats and migrated”.

- as of the same date the Guyan Electricity Corporation, the Government Corporation that provided the Coop with power, was owed 8.4 million dollars.

- no armed guard or any security provided for banking, while weekend sales are taken home by employees.
in the end, the “inquiry” concluded that “The picture presented is that the Committee of Management is only there for the privileges. This is borne out when a look at the credit portfolio shows who are the major beneficiaries”.

The second Report, an “Inspection”, covering the period 27th February to 30th September, 2001, was conducted from 4th September to 7th October, 2001., “following several complaints of (continuing) mismanagement and a subsequent visit of the Chief Cooperative Development Officer to the Society”. The Inspection, however, was abruptly terminated when the Committee of Management “instructed the staff” to close the office to the Coop Officer charged with the investigation.

As a result of the “inquiry” and recommendations a special meeting of the Coop was held on the 19th February, 2001, where the previous Management Committee was removed and a new Committee was elected. The “Inspection Notes” observed that the new Committee was intended to be an interim Committee expected to last until the audit report was completed and a new Committee would be elected at the Annual general Meeting.

At the same time, the new Committee was mandated to undertake several reforms and bring the society’s under business under tighter management and more stringent financial control: appoint an internal auditor, arbitrate against debtors, streamline the accounting system, etc.

Instead on 3rd March, 2001, the new Management Committee terminated the services of the business manager on grounds that the Coop was in “serious financial constraint and gross mismanagement”. In his place the new Chairman of the Coop was mandated to “hold on” at a meeting of the Management Committee.

The new Chairman of the Coop appeared to be a man of action and things began to happen:

- while the services of business manager was terminated on grounds of “financial constraint and mismanagement” he was not provided any
notice or the usual one month’s salary in lieu of notice, in violation of the Termination of Employment Act.  

- in July 2001 the lower flat of the Corriverton complex was rented to the new Chairman’s son at ten thousand dollars per month. This according to the Inspection Notes, is outside the mandate of the Management Committee and can only be done with the approval of the general membership of the Coop.

- there were no tenders for the rental of the building, thereby avoiding a public and open bid.

- the rental was approved after an offer of forty five dollars a month by a Chinese businessman was turned down by the Committee on the spurious grounds that the businessman wanted a five year lease which the Coop could not entertain. After four years the Chairman’s son is still the occupant at ten thousand dollars a month.

- the Chairman presided at the Management Committee meeting when the decision was taken to rent the building to his son.

- other offers, from previous members of the Management Committee, to rent the building were not considered though their offers were superior to that of the Chairman’s son.

- at least three instances when the Chairman removed equipment and supplies from the complex without record or permission and only returned them when confronted.

- estimates to raise the canteen to build additional locker rooms underneath was drawn up and given at one hundred and twenty five thousand dollars ($125,000). No contracts were drawn up or bids submitted but the contract was allowed to proceed. In the end it is estimated that the project cost the Coop three hundred and thirty eight thousand, two hundred and eighty dollars ($338,280), or an overrun of two hundred and thirteen thousand dollars ($213,000), nearly twice the price of the original estimate.

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8 Equally alarming was the local office of the Ministry of Labour who refused to act, claiming that the Coop was a private society and outside the purview of the mandate of the Act. This would not be the first or last time for the summary dismissal at the Coop or the refusal of the Ministry of Labour to act. In addition, it appears that the manager was not entitled to either a hearing or review because the Management Committee was the sole authority in the Coop, without the benefit of a Supervisory Committee and where the Chairman of the Coop was now also the business manager.
- the parlour was raised without a plan or the approval of either the Local Government agency or the Health Department, as required by statute.

- in the meantime of the original fifty one locker rooms, rented at four hundred dollars ($400) per month “less than half is collected”.

- the Chairman in his capacity as manager freely approved credit to “committee members” despite the recommendation of the previous “inquiry”

- the Chairman’s son, it was found, owed fifty six thousand eight hundred and fifty dollars ($56,850) for purchases between June and July.

- the financial records were found to be in poor condition: ledgers were poorly written, a large number of receipts and vouchers not posted in ledgers, a high percentage of vouchers are not authorized to validate payments, some receipt dates were found to be inconsistent, improper and inaccurate financial reports, failure to implement the previous recommendation on banking procedures were not followed as a result one hundred and thirty eight thousand dollars ($138,000) went missing, etc.

- record keeping of the stock on hand was found to be in the same confused and confusing state: physical count of stock did not agree with Control Accounts figures, some stock was overstated, stock was stated at retail price thereby inflating its value, etc.

- two of the staff were interdicted from duty in May because of missing funds – one hundred and eighty three thousand dollars – and while one staff was paid a month’s salary the other was in the Chairman’s possession.

- in another instance one Committee member had paid twenty four thousand dollars towards his account of fifty thousand dollars but had not been issued a receipt for the sum. The Chairman volunteered that he would receive a receipt when the entire outstanding sum of fifty thousand dollars were paid in full. It is alleged that the Chairman had the twenty four thousand dollars in his possession.

- General Meetings of the Coop were not held as required by the Rules of the Society

- one Minutes of the Committee Meeting (for the period under review) recorded that the Coop had no money in the bank nor was there any
stock in store. A check of the bank records indicated that there was a bank balance, 20\textsuperscript{th} February, 2001, of four million, two hundred and twenty five thousand, seven hundred and forty five dollars while stock on hand, 26 February, 2001, was estimated at six million, seven hundred and sixty seven thousand and nine hundred and forty four dollars.

- the twenty five million dollars owed by members of the society remain outstanding.

- a cash shortage of three million, two hundred and forty four thousand, six hundred and twenty three dollars was discovered.

- it is against the statutes of the Coop Act for the Chairman to also act as business manager of the Coop.

- not a single task recommended by the “inquiry” had been acted on.

- the inspection made several recommendations, including:

  a) removal of the Chairman/business manager and institute “an investigation of this Committee of Management tenureship”;

  b) that the records of the Coop be impounded and an auditor be called in to do an immediate audit;

  c) the position of business Manager be advertised “with a view to urgently filling the position”; and

  d) a Special general meeting be called by the Chief Coop Officer to update membership on the workings and management of the Coop.

Subsequent investigation indicates that the Chief Coop Officer intervened but was never allowed to act as the “inspection” recommended. Several years after the fact the same Management Committee is still in place with no word of an audit either, while the Chief Coop officer went into retirement and another has take her place.

Indeed, it would appear that the Management Committee has been emboldened by the flush of victory over the investigations of the previous Coop officer and had been given a free hand by some “higher authority”.
In early 2003 it seemed that the Coop had undertaken an extensive reconstruction project involving: a) renovations to the building housing the two ice machines; b) dredging of both banks and the river bed of the creek, next to the Coop, to increase the berthing facilities for the fishing fleet; c) straightening of the river channel immediately east of the Coop to allow for easier passage and access to the Coop’s berthing facilities; and d) extension of the boat ramp to allow for trouble-free docking and repairs.

The first phase of the project included extension and renovations to the building housing the ice machines, replacement of the latter by three new machines at an estimated capacity of one hundred thousand pounds of ice per day. As in the previous case with the raising of the canteen no application has been found at the local agency responsible for building permits nor any with the Health and Environmental Officer of the district as required by the Central Housing and Planning Act.

The second phase of the project consisted of the dredging of both banks and bed of the river to expand berthing facilities for the fishing fleet. It also involved about six piles of about twenty feet each in length and about one foot in diameter sunk into the northern slope of the creek. In the process a group of squatters, employees of the fishing fleet, “borrowed” the Coop’s dragline to extend and build-up the area on the north bank of the creek to extend their “homestead”. Part of this area has also been taken up by with fishermen for repairs to seines and other ancillary activities. Three days after this part of the project was completed a mud slide occurred, because of the build-up of the unstable slush, and, reportedly, damaged several boats.

The third phase of the project consisted of straightening of the river channel by removing one meander. It involved dredging both banks and bed of the river for a distance of some five hundred meters immediately east of the fishing complex. The process entailed removal of the courida and mangrove vegetation from both banks and expanding the width of the river by about twice the original size.
Finally, the boat ramp was extended by an additional twenty feet east of its present position, from its original location immediately east of the building housing the ice machines.

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v: Public Policy: Protecting the Collective Good

One investigation at the Lands and Surveys Commission\(^9\) indicates that the Coop received, through the Ministry of Agriculture, a Provisional Lease from the Commission, dated 25\(^{th}\) June, 1998. Conditions of the lease reveal that: a) the application was made on 7\(^{th}\) May, 1990; b) a tract of 1.76 acres of state land, situated on the right bank of the 66 Creek, east of the 66 complex and north of the 67 Side Line Dam (north bank of the creek) was made available to the Ministry of agriculture; c) the lease was assessed and valued at twelve thousand dollars annually; and d) “The Sea Defence Board reserves the right to terminate any construction that does not follow the specifications laid out by the Sea Defence Board”.

Another suggests that there are at least five agencies with authority over and responsibility for the activities of the Coop as it relates to the Creek and its immediate environs. Among these are: the Drainage and Irrigation Board, the Sea Defense Board, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Committee, the local Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC), the local government agency charged with the responsibility of overseeing construction, design and repairs to buildings and ensuring observance of the building code.

When contacted none of these agencies indicated that they knew anything of the activities of the Coop. Nor, it now appears, after at least two statements in the press, that anyone was prepared to intervene despite the clear violation of several acts, statutes and ministerial directives.

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\(^9\) The public agency responsible for and in control of state/public lands along coastal Guyana.
The only reported act of intervention is a letter from the local NDC to the Chairman of the Sea Defense Board, dated 14th August, 2003, charging that the residents of the nearby communities of 66 and 67 Villages had complained of the expansion of the fishing complex. It noted that the increase use of “high powered engines” threatened erosion of the withholding dam especially the “feeble” area that had already succumbed to erosion. In addition, the NDC noted, that it was never consulted before the “expansion project began”. Needless to say, not only did the NDC not receive a response to its concerns but it did not even receive so much as an acknowledgement to its letter.

Moreover, a recent survey indicates that the same withholding dam, on the south bank of the creek, has been subject to further erosion and now a full twenty-feet section is in danger of being overrun or simply collapsing – a usually six-feet wide dam has been reduced to one of between six inches and one foot. In late 2003 the local Sea Defense officer had to intervene and cap the dam with sand bags to prevent flooding. Since, several bags have been damaged and once again the fragile section is in danger of being overwhelmed.

Between 1996 and 1999 workers at the Coop - the twenty odd watchmen, stores clerks, machine operators, sales persons and help at the canteen – applied twice for union representation. In 1996 the majority of the staff signed-up for representation with the National Association of Agricultural Commercial Industrial Employees Union (NAACIE). However, both the business manager and the Management Committee refused to invite the Union for discussion and acknowledge the workers’ demand. Instead they were simply told to “behave themselves and rest”. Request for intervention by the Ministry of Labour turned up the same old story – a patient hearing but no action. Three years later much the same thing happened when the workers invited the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU), to represent them. Once again both management and the Coop’s Management Committee refused the workers a hearing and
while the latter again took their case to the Ministry of Labour they met with the same stonewalling as before.\textsuperscript{10}

to the Ministry of Labour for representation and certification. On both occasions they were refused by the Coop, while, when the workers complained to the Ministry, their complaints fell on deaf ears.

An indication of the new authority, if not arrogance of the Coop, came in March 2004 when the Technical Supervisor of the ice machines and operators had his services summarily terminated. Without, it should be noted, either notice or a month’s pay in lieu of such notice as stipulated by the Termination of Employment Act. The Supervisor had been an employee of the Coop for some fifteen years and had risen through the ranks from watchman, machine operator to Supervisor. When he turned to the Ministry of Labour for redress it was the same old story of deafening silence – the refusal to intervene.

\textit{v: Looking for Explanations}

How could this happen and in such public view with so little apparent concern? Several possible answers suggest themselves.

First, this maybe nothing more that the usual “agency capture” that we are so familiar with from the literature on public policy/management\textsuperscript{11}. “Agency capture” occurs when a public bureau has been established to regulate, manage and police a particular industry, sector or activity and then confronts a hostile and more powerful client and/or

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\footnotesize\textsuperscript{10}There is not a little irony here. Both NAACIE and GAWU are “East Indian” unions with their historic base in the sugar industry and have now adopted the Caribbean pattern of becoming all purpose unions who “truck and trade” among familiar and sympathetic constituencies. Both have strong affinities to the Government and GAWU, in fact, is a creature of the PPP, having acquired its spurs through two decades of industrial strife and disputes.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{11}This is also referred to in the literature as “interest group” capture emphasizing the interest group side of the equation. See Robert Jenkins “Liberal Democracy and the Political Management of Structural Adjustment in India: Conceptual Tensions in the Good Government Agenda”, Special Issue of \textit{IDS Bulletin}, Towards Democratic Governance, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1995.
\end{flushright}
consumer/interest group. In the ensuing confrontation the latter emerges the winner and, in some instances, begins to influence policy and even control day-to-day managerial procedures and processes of the captured agency.

Second, an equally important theme in the literature, this maybe a reflection of the “public trough” syndrome where successful political parties make available to their constituencies some of the spoils of public office. In the process public agencies are simply transformed into conduits for party loyalty and support. And while this may be done with varying degrees of openness and bravado it is not an uncommon feature of “democratic politics”.

Third, in large parts of the third world, there is nothing new here. Such “captures” are usually the result of benign neglect in which the administrative arm of the state is not long enough or powerful enough to impose its authority throughout the country. This happens most frequently when there is a duplicity of functions, producing overlap and confusion and where no one has either the means or the wherewithal to assert his/her responsibility or authority. Consumers and or clients are allowed to get away with this, moreover, not only because of the “absence” of the respective public agency or their watchdog counterparts but also because of an absent media, which are unable, for financial and managerial exigencies, to maintain staff and equipment in the outlaying areas in many third world countries.

12 This is usually associated with patronage and offered as immediate material reward for continuing support. In the North America of “interest group liberalism” this is known as “Madison’s dilemma”, after James Madison (1751-1836) “Father of the American Constitution” and of “The Federalist Papers” fame. According to one author “The political resources needed to compete fairly in the interest group contest are, of course not distributed evenly: the flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper class accent”. Significant political resources such as time, money and access are more available to some interests than others. Thus, interest group politics are not neutral in their effects: they help the advantaged over the disadvantaged, the rich over the poor, the organized over the unorganized. In the process the public interest becomes distorted or ignored”, Ronald G. Landes The Canadian Polity: A Comparative Introduction, Second Edition (Prentice Hall Canada, Scarborough, 1987) p. 354.

13 This is a neglected area of concern in the literature on governance especially in the wake of “conditionalities” that calls for lean and clean governments that often resulted in dismantling of public agencies in remote areas because they could not match the logics of economic efficiency based on the criteria of “cost benefit analysis”. Of equal import, it may also be a deliberate and conscious decision by governments to keep public agencies away from such areas because they could not fail to see the patronizing-hand of the government, or otherwise, depending on the political allegiance of the particular community.
Fourth, this maybe indicative of failed “transition” and the return of rent seeking. This usually occurs when the transition to democracy becomes stuck as a result of backsliding or the failure of political will to push through the necessary reforms in the face of mounting opposition. The state yields and groups with cultural and political connections or economic clout, are granted concessions and intervene to take advantage and control of strategic institutions or public agencies which enables them to impose a non-economic cost on goods and services, i.e. a rent.\(^{14}\)

Fifth, there is something much more insidious here and represents a far more intractable problem than any of the above. In the view of some this is the real dividend bequeathed to us at the end of the Cold War. In the wake of the collapse of “presently existing socialism” the world has been re-tribalised in ethnic blocs where strident assertions of identity and belonging drown out rival claims in zero-sum-game. Not a little of this is exacerbated and driven by the logics of globalization where communal insecurity and fear, in multicultural societies, become the tinder box for an unsettled, if not explosive, coexistence.\(^{15}\) Each political administration now serves its own ethnic community.

While the present situation at the Coop contains elements of all of these and can be shown to be understandable by the logic of each it is a combination of the fourth and fifth views that explain what is happening. In other words, the “transition” in Guyana has been blocked and in danger of receding altogether. Economically, rent seeking (corruption) is publicly recognized as one of the more important public issues to address and while the Government has new legislation for procurement and bidding procedures these are easily bypassed by those with “connections”. On the other hand, more substantive political

\(^{14}\) Rent seeking was a prominent feature of the neo-liberal critique of Development Economics/Studies that emerged as early in the 40s and 50s and began to claim public attention in the 70s and 80s. The view is that the economic policy of “industrialization by invitation” under protectionist trade policies invited rent seeking because production and sale did not occur in an open market and efficiency did not have to contend with competition. Taking advantage of government policy a new “governing class” moved in to establish pioneer industries and act as managers of state enterprises with the intent of manipulating the rules of the game under protectionist trade policies. Rent seeking under the circumstances came easy. For some of this see John Toye The Dilemmas of Development, Second Edition, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1993) pp. 137-142.

\(^{15}\) See the special issue of Caribbean Dialogue, Vol 3, No. 2, June 1997, especially the articles by Ralph Premdas, Selwyn Ryan and George Danns.
reforms have been blocked at the level of “free and fair” elections. The ruling party has convinced itself that elections are not only a necessary condition for democracy but also a sufficient one and appears in no hurry to accommodate critics or the opposition.

The irony, of course, is that it has recognized, since 1992, that it cannot be business as usual despite free and fair elections and its own majoritarian mandate.

Several things were clear. First the internal infrastructure were at the point of collapse when simply non existent – water, electricity, transportation, telecommunication. Correspondingly, public institutions were eviscerated, shorn of most professional skills through migration, while buildings, equipment and other support systems were beggared beyond repair. The new sub-national administrative/political system that had been put in place after the 1980 Constitution, ten new regions, as a means of decentralization and some ethnic balancing, had none of the means to function either effectively or autonomously: financial or statutory.\(^{16}\)

Similarly, the economy was teetering on the brink. Bauxite had long lost its luster and the only thing left of the once proud flagship of the previous government’s nationalization programme were the craters in the ground, rusting equipment in the tropical sun, dilapidated buildings and a skeleton work force. Sugar fared no better and there were difficulties even in meeting the EEC quota of 165 thousand tons - an industry with an estimated capacity of 400 thousand tons. By 1990 production had fallen to 130,000 tons. To add insult to injury domestic needs had to be met by imports from Guatemala. Rice, the third largest foreign exchange earner, had also succumbed and by the late 80s was only capable of 150 thousand tons from an estimated capacity of 350 thousand tons. In

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the meantime, the Cooperative sector which was to be the driving force of the new socialist economy had not even gotten off the ground. In fact, many coops operated on capitalist lines, while others simply served as conduits for partisan interests and personal gain.

Since, there has been considerable improvement in the economy. Both sugar and rice have seen spectacular recovery. Sugar production passed the 330 thousand ton limit in 2002 while rice reached 335 thousand tons. But even here the future is uncertain. Most of Guyana’s rice and sugar are sold in protected markets in Europe which will soon come to an end – sugar in 2006 and rice in 2007. Moreover, it is now estimated that Guyana’s sugar production lags considerably behind world market prices. Some estimates suggest that while Guyans’s sugar is produced at between 18-22 cents per pound the world market price is 11 cents per pound. A World Bank study found, for example, that

In 2002 Guyana exported 184,000 tons of sugar to the EU, at an EU protocol price of $474 per ton and a EU SPS Sugar price at $448 per ton. Another 12,000 tons was exported to the US at a tariff-rate quota price of $397 per ton, and 55,000 tons was exported to CARICOM markets at prices some 40 percent above world market prices. No sugar was exported at the prevailing world market price of $132 per ton (F.O.B. Guyana).\(^\text{17}\)

Similarly, despite its private character and under the control of government supporters, the future of rice is seen as equally bleak. The same World Bank study found that while the industry recovered much of its previous buoyancy it is poorly placed to face a competitive future. As the World Bank noted

Guyana’s cost of rice production is in the order of US$340-US$400 per MT, compared to production costs in the range of US$80-US$100 per MT in China, Vietnam, Thailand, and Burma the leading global exporters. Given that rice production is highly labour intensive and wages in Guyana are four to five times that in low-cost Asian states the long term competitiveness of this industry is questionable.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^\text{17}\) The World Bank *Guyana: Development Policy Review*, the World Bank, Washington, 2003, f.n. 85, p. 57. It is interesting to note that the Government has been engaged in its own “rent seeking” and subsidises near 20 percent of local production amounting to about 2 percent of GDP, see the above World Bank study op. cit. p. 44.

\(^\text{18}\) The World Bank Guyana: op. cit. pp. 46.
The three elections since 1992 only confirmed what was already a matter of public knowledge and the basis of much theoretical speculation and political debate for the past forty odd years. Every legitimate election since 1961 – 1961, 1964, 1992, 1997, 2001 – indicated that the Guyanese electorate was now firmly cemented around two ethnic blocs: Africans and East Indians. Predictably, each outcome was met with the same expected result: violence. At the end of one of these, 1997, Prof. Ralph Premdas suggested that the country was at the end of its tether and really ungovernable. He did not hold out much prospect for its future and maintained that foreign intervention was the only hope to get the warring parties apart, if its hapless, though schizophrenic, citizens were to be spared the logic of ethnic cleansing. In another instance he noted that Guyana no longer appears to fit the Caribbean pattern and looks more like countries outside the region “such as Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Sri Lanka because of the politics of ethnic hate that have left the place pathetically prostrated and poor”.\(^\text{19}\)

As Prof Premdas predicted it took two interventions by CARICOM to lever the warring parties apart and produce a modus vivendi.\(^\text{20}\) Unfortunately, the dialogue and rapprochement that it was supposed to produce did not materialise. Instead, disaffection in the African Community produced eighteen months of sustained violence between late 2002 and early 2004 that has traumatized the country, perhaps, some suggest, beyond repair.\(^\text{21}\)

Finally, the IMF/World Bank-sponsored bail out of the economy in the late 80s under the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) initiated by the PNC did what was intended and returned the country to some semblance of sanity. There was, however, one serious downside to it. Serious attrition due to the economic downturn and freezing after the


\(^\text{20}\) The first, The Herdmanston Accord, was signed by leaders of the two parties overseen by “The Three Wismen” from CARICOM, in 1998 after the post-elections violence in 1997, while the second, the St. Lucia Agreement, was signed again between the leaders of the two parties in 2000.

conditionalities of ERP – 7 of 18 ministries were closed – saw a significant reduction in public employment. Based on a British-funded diagnostic appraisal began in 1989 the Public Sector Reform Programme was projected to last two years\textsuperscript{22}. By the time the new PPP government took office in 1992 it is estimated that the public sector lost more than 30,000 jobs. The Central Government alone is reckoned to have lost more than 24,000 jobs. Employment there went from 42,000 jobs in 1980 to 18,006 in 1992\textsuperscript{23}. Needless to say much of this fell on the Afro-Guyanese community who had long been the mainstay of the public service since they gravitated to urban areas in the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century. On the other hand, the private sector saw an exponential increase in both activities and employment. Between the late 80s and mid 90s it is estimated that sugar grew by 65 percent while rice expanded by some 154 percent. Under ordinary circumstances while this maybe seen as mixed blessing it was disturbing statistics in Guyana. It left the distinct impression that while it may not be a zero-sum-game, Indian gain at African loss, an Indian government in power was aiding its historic constituency. It was not just troubling but a powder-keg waiting to explode given the historic antipathy of the African urban working and middle classes to a rural/Indian based PPP since the 1960s.

If what happens at our local fishing Coop is taken as example then we would have to respond with a categorical yes! In fact one recent study, more than ten years after the Peat Marwick McLintock assessment of the public service, does not seem to hold out much hope. In fact, the very size of the Report, Four Volumes and close to a thousand pages, ensures that few are likely to read it, while fewer still are likely to digest its varied technical content.

The study, Public Sector Modernisation Design Plan, found that the continuing belief in horizontal and centralized planning ‘impedes the government’s ability to mobilise human


\textsuperscript{23} Ferguson op. cit. p. 52.
and financial resources, plan for their utilization, manage the delivery of programming and assess performance”\textsuperscript{24}. In its view

There is an overlap and duplication with respect to organizational roles and responsibilities and blurred lines of functional authority within a number of elements of the public sector, including arms length agencies, resulting in planning difficulties, inefficient use of human and financial resources and confused lines of accountability.

The present management paradigm within the GoG (Government of Guyana) emphasises procedural compliance at the expense of a focus on results (what a programme is designed to change or improve).

The present programme structure of the public sector is uneven at best, not based on logical models that link resources with anticipated results and does not enable sensitive and timely performance assessment. Further, programmes are not organized around citizens service.

The present HRM (Human Resource Management) systems of the GoG are either imperative, have never evolved or have even been left to ossify.

There is only a nominal policy formulation and programme evaluation capacity within the GoG, with many individuals confusing the concept of “policy formulation” with the articulation of operational procedures. Performance assessment is limited to simple accounting of what has been done and financial bookkeeping, and does not entail the crucial core function of programme evaluation – the assessment of impact and outcome.

Few programmes have been developed within frameworks that link expenditures to anticipated resources and performance milestones. Few have been based on programme logic analysis. Ministry of Finance procedures appear to inhibit even medium-term planning, which could link expenditures with outcomes.

A command and control management culture, which imposes successive levels “sign-offs”, inhibits managerial delegation and appears not to have a solid understanding of

\textsuperscript{24} Government of Guyana Public Sector Modernisation Design Plan (Georgetown, 2003), Executive Summary, p. 17
the relationship between the public sector – both politicians and society at large. This limits the ability of the GoG to respond to changing circumstances and to absorb the challenges that modernisation will bring.

There are few, if any, regularized means of seeking citizens input into public sector decision-making, and few, if any, means of ascertaining client satisfaction and/or building consensus for initiatives. The level of transparency of decision-making appears to be opaque and few means have been provided to show the public what government programming is achieving – and how it is doing so.\(^{25}\)

In other words we are dealing with a public sector that continues to be plagued by all the old problems of secrecy, horizontal and centralised management, overlapping and duplication of functions, little avenue and encouragement for public participation, a dearth of performance appraisals and a singularly lack of professional skills to understand the distinction between “policy formulation and articulation of (simple, routine) operational procedures”. We are not, it would appear, going anywhere in a hurry.

Not a little of this, I want to suggest, has do with the secrecy in which public policy is formulated and then retailed as reasoned truths for collective consumption. There is a historic fear associated with openness and inclusion, premised on the assumption that to make public policy an open and transparent process, to encourage inclusion and participation is to open the floodgates to Armageddon. But that is another story that I have sought to explore elsewhere\(^{26}\).

\(vi\): Looking for a Solution

Does this mean we are back at the old racial stalemate, embroiled, once more, in a zero-sum-game, where the public policy and the collective good are determined by a racial calculus?

\(^{25}\) Ibid pp. 17-18.

\(^{26}\) “Pluralism, Ethnicity and Governance in the Southern Caribbean” presented at the Conference on Conflict Analysis and Resolution, CAU/UG Project on Conflict Analysis and Resolution, University of Guyana, Georgetown 4-6 February, 2004.
The prospects at best are ambiguous and therefore uncertain. On the one hand, the Government and opposition have agreed to a number of institutional and procedural changes. Some of these included electoral changes that provide greater representation to the Regions and the inclusion of more women in the electoral process. The new Election Laws (Amendment) Act 2000, put in place for the 2001 elections, stated that while there will continue to be sixty five members of the National Assembly there would now be a differential allocation of seats. According to the new system twenty five seats would be allocated to the regions, fifteen more than before, while the remaining forty seats “shall be chosen from lists supplied by contesting parties and such lists shall be designated ‘national top up lists.’ In addition, the new act also stipulated that thirty percent of all candidates on the party’s “top up list” shall be women, while women would constitute no less that one-third of the number of candidates for geographical constituencies.\(^{27}\)

In addition seven new Parliamentary Committees have been created to provide for the greater participation of the opposition parties in the business of government. But the national dialogue on which much of this depends has been stuck between the intransigence of the opposition and the arrogance of the government.

In the meantime, other, perhaps more pressing, issues remain in Committees with accusing fingers coming fast and furious from both sides. Local Government reform, for example, has been stalled and there are no indications when and if it is likely to get under way. The last local government elections were held in 1994, officially scheduled for every two years. Since, most local government units, including municipalities, have become dysfunctional lacking both legitimacy and authority in the absence of elections. In the meantime services to local communities have become haphazard, at best, and non existent at worse. In other instances it is rapidly becoming a free for all, since those with political clout and connections can take and get what they want with impunity - as our neighbours at the 66 Fishing Coop.

There is however, some indication that all is not lost, if only theoretically. A number of theorists now recognize the wisdom of Sir Arthur Lewis’ argument that third world societies with a plurality of ethnic communities must rethink the logic of their politics since the Westminster model that we inherited has come unstuck. The sanguine hopes of the early decades of independence have not been realized and we now find ourselves in a logjam, hemmed in by collective insecurities.\(^{28}\)

We can only begin to untangle the mess we find ourselves in, and make a go of things if we accept the salience of Sir Arthur’s view: that while our ethnic identities may not be primordial and, therefore foundational, they constitute an irreducible moment of our identity and, therefore requires protection and representation\(^{29}\). Enough evidence exists to show that political contests in the southern Caribbean – Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname – have become racial censuses. No amount of breast beating can change that.

The second point of import, in Sir Arthur’s view, is to recognize that there are two concepts of democracy that we need to reflect on. First, is his view, the general concept of democracy that prevails in much of the world is part of an Anglo-American tradition where majority rule is seen as the founding principle. But this is a view that can only function in class societies and even here, in Sir Arthur’s, schema, politics is reduced to a zero-sum-game based on the utilitarian assumption that all participants are maximisers. This is a very thin view of democracy as we have come to know it in the west and most serious critics would find it wanting. What is approximate and closer to our experience is that, though some would be pleased to call these class societies, there is a consensus that the general outlines and the rules of the game are accepted as, if not fair, at least workable in which the majority is prepared to participate and accept as minimally fair. In other words, there is an acceptance of foundational principles which is not threatened by a change in political leadership and governance. However, as we have seen, not all accept the foundational principles and often do rail and argue against them. The point though is

\(^{28}\) For a summary of some of these see Selwyn Ryan “Reforming Caribbean Democracy in the Era of Globalisation” Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, University of the West Indies, St Augustine, 1999.

\(^{29}\) Much of this is taken from Chapter 3 of Sir Arthur Lewis \textit{Politics in West Africa} (Allen and Unwin, London, 1965) pp. 64-89.
that their numbers are not large enough to threaten the consensus, around which stability, security and order are maintained. Hence the commitment to it.

The third point of import in Sir Arthur’s argument is what he calls the “primary” view of democracy. By this he means that democracy can only exist and become functional in the public interest when all of those who are likely to be “affected by a decision participate in making that decision, either directly or through chosen representatives”. Moreover, in plural societies where groups often “live side by side in a long tradition of mutual hostility, restrained in the past only by neutral imperial power” consensus have been difficult when not impossible. When we add to this the irreducible character of ethnic identities foundational principles are hard to come by. Consensus can only begin to emerge when we accept that electoral contests, as a means of selecting representatives, are also group contests and apportion representation on the basis of group identity. Both institutional designs and procedural rules must then seek to accommodate group representation based on group identity as a means of ensuring representation in decision making and thereby institutionalize and make good the “primary” meaning of democracy.
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Cornel West *Race Matters* (

