

# Desmond Hoyte (1929-2002)

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## *A souvenir to treasure*

*This souvenir edition contains tributes and reminiscences on the life of former Executive President, Opposition Leader and PNCR Leader Hugh Desmond Hoyte by Sir Shridath Ramphal, Dr Rupert Roopnaraine, Dr Henry Jeffrey, Clarence Hughes SC, Ronald Austin and Nills Learmond Campbell. We have also reprinted excerpts from his August 16 address to the PNCR Congress at which he was returned as leader. There are also dozens of photographs. Mr Hoyte is to be interred at Seven Ponds, the Botanical Gardens on Monday, December 30.*

## [Hugh Desmond Hoyte: The Man](#)

*By Ronald Austin*

Mr. Desmond Hoyte's private persona was as interesting and fascinating as that revealed by his political life. As an educated individual, he pursued interests outside of the political domain and was decidedly a man of considerable culture. What were these interests?

Above all things, Desmond Hoyte had an enduring fascination for literature. His Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Literature forged a relationship with the great English, European, and Latin American literary tradition. Novels, plays, and poetry aroused his interest. It was the latter that became a pre-occupation. Desmond Hoyte enjoyed reading poetry aloud and sharing the insights derived with friends and colleagues. In fact, most people turned to Desmond Hoyte to locate a passage of poetry that may be required on the occasion of a death or an event, which was being celebrated. Desmond Hoyte's knowledge of poetry and his understanding of English Literature as a whole were a source of comfort as well as pride. He would become discomfited if he could not identify a verse of poetry or a chapter of an important novel.

Literature brought consolation. Whenever challenged by events or behaviour or political adversaries, he would recite poetry or quote from the great works of Literature to restore his

mental balance.

Music was also a great love. Desmond Hoyte's taste was Catholic: he loved Classical music, Jazz, Calypsoes, and Folk music, particularly the Guyanese variety. An inspiring piece of Classical music or the lifting tones of a Winton Marsalis interpretation of a standard Jazz work, like Literature, was a great source of relaxation and comfort.

Desmond Hoyte had accumulated a vast collection of music as he had books. He would often reach in to this collection and play pieces suitable to his mood. With music in the background, he could be the great conversationalist and raconteur that he was. Conversation brought him alive especially if it touched on issues, which were close to his heart.

Often he saw the funny side of things and this could only have come from a deep appreciation of the weakness as well as strength of human nature.

When his political opponents stumbled he would comment ironically, but was never one to continually seek the benefit from the indisposition of his foes.

Literature and music and his ample education humanized Desmond Hoyte. He was therefore a devoted and loving husband, a thoughtful and caring father and above all a human being whose activities were rooted in deeply held principles. Hoyte was a father who would patiently teach his children poetry and pianoforte. He took a strong interest in the education of his children, which he regarded as not merely a means of acquiring a qualification, but more importantly a vehicle for living a principled and service oriented existence.

Desmond Hoyte was blessedly free of the rancour and petty actions of the Guyanese political scene. Once he had stated his position and a clash with his political opponents, he was prepared to carry on the battle at the level of ideas. In this sense he was a unique individual as well as a politician and a man. *(Back to top)*

## I remember Desmond Hoyte

*By Raphael Trotman*

The death of Hugh Desmond Hoyte has shaken me to the core as my image of him is not of a sick and ailing person but of a strong man, upright and resolute. The suddenness of his death has left no time for preparation or understanding. Why I ask did he have to die and not say goodbye? Death always finds us napping even though we know that it is inevitable. In Desmond Hoyte's case we knew his age, we knew his medical history, we knew he pushed himself but yet still we never knew that he would be snatched away just as we prepared for the merriment of Christmas and the seriousness of the new year.

My first serious encounter with him was at the Office of the President in 1992 where at a meeting meant to solicit support for his re-election bid I let him know that the then government had not done enough for the young people of Guyana. He took my criticism in good stride and proceeded to convince me that despite my rebuke he had a plan and needed an opportunity to see it fulfilled. I left that office convinced that Mr Hoyte was the best person to lead Guyana out of the difficult and dark years that it had been caught in. I continue to this day to believe sincerely that Desmond Hoyte should have been given a second term as President to fulfill his desire to set Guyana firmly on a path of recovery and restoration.

As the years went by, my relationship with him blossomed and became richer. He became my mentor and advisor and I came to regard him as the father of my political life. In 1993 he telephoned me and asked that I accompany him to Venezuela to meet with the then President and to deliver a lecture. That visit shall live with me forever as from it I believe developed an unbroken

and sacred bond between us. I know that through the years I did things to cause him worry and perhaps anger but like a true father he extended always a forgiving hand, and accepted that views sometimes differed but that the filial relationship remained intact.

It was both a pleasure and an honour to have worked with Desmond Hoyte. His disciplined and dedicated approach to whatever task he was undertaking is a lesson in life that all those who encountered him could not help but inculcate into their own lives.

I have never heard him cry out for pain, for hunger, or discomfort and those he must have felt, but he always strode proud and tall like the true leader that he was. At meetings he was full of energy, of ideas and of laughter. This is the man that I choose to remember.

I shall miss him and as I grieve I remind myself that sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier times. The happy moments you spent with us shall be our memory, and the lesson you taught shall be our guiding light as we strive to fulfill your dream of making Guyana truly a place of one people, united and working together as one nation with one destiny to fulfill. To his grieving wife, I again extend my deepest sympathy on my own behalf and that of my family. May God keep you comforted and strong.

**I close with a few words borrowed from the poet John Milton:**

*"Yet can I not persuade me thou art dead  
Or that thy corse corrupts in earths dark wombe  
Or that thy beauties lie in wormie bed,  
Hid from the world in a low delved tombe;  
Could Heav'n for pittie thee so strictly doom?  
Oh no! for something in thy face did shine  
Above mortalitie that shewd thou wast divine."*

***May his soul rest in peace! (Back to top)***

## Thinking about Desmond

*By Rupert Roopnaraine*

I was next in line at the ticket booth at Liverpool Street Station in London when I received a call from Georgetown on my mobile to tell me that he had died that morning. I was stunned by the suddenness of it. A train journey, I remember thinking, would be a good place to focus on the death of Desmond Hoyte and, because of all that he was, of its effects on his party and its supporters and on the future of us all in Guyana.

A more efficient mental machine might have immediately gotten down to work on these complex and burning issues. But on that English winter's day, it was easy to yield to the pull of the landscape going past my window, the heavy grey clouds low over fields bare and glistening from the drizzle. Every thing conspires to make winter the season best suited for thoughts of mortality. My thoughts strayed to Martin and the poem that inspired Stanley Greaves' assured pen and ink drawing, "One", the first of his poems of mortality.

**And a lizard upside down walks on the moon**

*Trees are arranged like mourners by a sadness.  
Roots, stem, and wreath, and high above, the crown.  
And a lizard upside down walks on the moon.  
Futile rebuke of mourning. It will fall.  
Balance was never. The spindle warps the thread.  
The spin the spindle. And a work the work.*

*Body of soul, which world is like this one  
If not this one? Which waywardness as right  
As this scale leaning? The thing to be before  
Must be the thing again. More is that which was first  
And stays the first. Again because before.  
Apart because between. All is dominion.  
The beach it breaks on is what makes it ocean.*

I am glad that we were able to meet and sit together on my last visit to Guyana in November. I arrived at Congress Place for our 4 o'clock meeting. Uncharacteristically, he was seven minutes late. Characteristically, he courteously apologised for keeping me waiting. We talked for about an hour, mostly on the present political situation. The conversation was as always in the nature of a civilised exchange of views. As I invariably find in my conversations with the highest political leadership of the country, our areas of agreement were larger than our areas of difference. Which is not to say that our areas of difference are not real and in some instances profound. My own ongoing regret is that they are permitted to so overwhelm our areas of agreement. Before I left, talk turned to non-political things. We spoke about his health. He seemed satisfied with the results of his recent check-up. He told me of the party's insistence that he remain in position, against some of his own strong wishes.

He had spoken to me on previous occasions of his desire to be left alone, with time to read and enjoy the private things, away from the cares and burdens of public life. He spoke of the putting down of Joyce's dog, her close companion of many years. It was the closest he ever came to hinting at the inconsolability of loss. As is well known, he was the most private of men. It was, the more I think about it, a curious intrusion of mortality in what was to be our last conversation.

I am glad that, near the end, he found merit in the proposals for a national government and ungrudgingly came over to the side of reconciliation. He would have been a formidable ally in the early days of this proposal, albeit in its raw form. He changed his mind and boldly said so. For a man with an earned reputation for stubbornness and severity, he had a way of changing his mind when it most mattered for Guyana.

He won widespread respect for changing his mind about the economic and political direction of Guyana after the death of the late President Burnham. We have said it before: it is an iron fact that Desmond Hoyte was leading a reform movement in the party and the state following his accession to the Presidency of the Republic. His reforms came up against the wall of resistance against release of party control of the election machinery, and came to be compromised by the unreformed state. In 1990, fuelled by the revolt against the Voters' List and the entire election apparatus, the crisis came to a head. Towards the end of the negotiations between President Hoyte and the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy, mediated by the Carter Center, he changed his mind at the critical moment on the chairmanship and composition of the Elections Commission. It was in this period that I was to meet him for the first time. The story is not well known, outside of a narrow circle of participants, although I have spoken about it publicly on more than one occasion.

Without notes and records at hand, I cannot be certain of the dates of the meetings I am about to describe, but they took place on the eve of the extension of the life of the government beyond 1990. At a meeting of the PCD at Freedom House, I put forward on behalf of the WPA, a proposal that we put to the Hoyte government a proposal for a Caretaker Government for a limited duration with a commitment to the completion of the electoral reforms for genuine elections at the end of the agreed period, and a minimum economic programme.

We were asking the PCD to consider a power-sharing cabinet shared equally between the PNC and the PCD and chaired by President Hoyte. The discussion did not get as far as the details of an arrangement. The overwhelming opinion of our colleagues in the PCD was that Hoyte and the PNC

would never agree to any such thing and that the WPA was dreaming if they thought they would. But the PCD would have no objection to the WPA writing to President Hoyte on the matter if they wished to do so. We duly wrote, putting forward the Caretaker Government proposal.

Within days we received a reply inviting us to a meeting at the Office of the President to discuss the idea. It was the first time that the WPA and the PNC were to be face to face since the days of the civil rebellion of the late seventies. I led the delegation to the meeting and was surprised to find that several senior ministers were present, including Mr Keith Massiah, the Attorney General, armed with his constitution, and Foreign Minister Rashleigh Jackson, among others.

The presentation of the proposal led to a number of discussions on points of detail, such as, how would portfolios be allocated, what were the constitutional provisions, and so on. We had some few suggestions of our own, but felt that those details could be worked out once the proposal was agreed on by all sides. The meeting ended with President Hoyte responding that if the WPA could persuade our colleagues on the PCD, he would be prepared to discuss the matter further. At a specially convened meeting of the PCD at Freedom House, I reported on the meeting with the President and his colleagues and relayed Mr Hoyte's response, urging that the invitation to further discussions be taken up.

After some debate, the response was rejected by our colleagues of the PCD and the WPA was accused of entering into a conspiracy when we were on the verge of victory in the fight for genuine elections. We proposed the Caretaker Government, sensing the likely social tension between a long entrenched regime and a new one, however legitimate in all the circumstances of Guyana. What followed is history, and, in the words of Eusi Kwayana, "recent history."

When I heard that he had embraced the proposal that is a historic step forward on the way to national reconciliation, I felt glad that he had changed his mind. Back to where it was when he began his historic reforms, and to where it was that day in 1990, I continue to believe, when he opened the door to a negotiated solution made by ourselves without external assistance. My colleagues may have been right and Hoyte and the PNC were not to be trusted. It was not my sense. It was my first of many exchanges with him that lasted until last November, some as an opposition Member of Parliament with the Leader of the Opposition, others as citizens of Guyana one with the other. All our exchanges were cultured and patriotic.

The latter are the ones I shall remember most keenly, when gravitas fell away and revealed a man, moved by the grief of his wife over the loss of her dog.

*Amsterdam*

*December 24, 2002 (Back to top)*

## [Hugh Desmond Hoyte: A Tribute by 'Sonny' Ramphal](#)

Some months before Forbes Burnham died he and I had a conversation that I would long remember. I was at the Commonwealth Secretariat and we were meeting on Commonwealth business; but it became a specially intimate Guyanese moment. Forbes brought up with me the matter of his succession.

It was the first time he had ever done so; and he did it without implying an intent to step down; still less a premonition of tragedy. It was as if he needed to talk about it and share his thoughts with someone. I was perhaps one of the few with whom he felt he could do so.

He spoke of his early wish to nurture someone in the Party of Indo-Guyanese stock to whom he could eventually pass the mantle; but acknowledged that he had failed.



His successor, he recognised, had to come from within the present Cabinet. His clear choice, he told me, was Desmond Hoyte. He was aware, he said, that Desmond did not have a great yearning for the Presidency, but strangely he did not regard that as a deficiency; strangely, because he often voiced his view that a good political leader must have a great hunger for leadership.



*PNC Leader Desmond Hoyte in a jovial mood with former Commonwealth Secretary-General Sir Shridath Ramphal at a meeting at Congress Place on June 7th, 1998. Sir Shridath had earlier in the year been instrumental in the brokering of the Herdmanston Accord along with Sir Alister McIntyre and Henry Forde. The accord came after unrest triggered by the results of the December, 15 1997 results and saw the PPP/Civic agreeing to cut its term in office by two years.*

What determined his choice, he told me, was Desmond's 'intellectual integrity'- not just, he stressed, intellectual capacity (though that was essential) but 'intellectual honesty'. (Those who knew Forbes well can testify to his lifelong distaste of 'intellectual dishonesty'.) All else, he told me, would follow if that basic quality was present; without it, real leadership was not possible. I was a listener; he was telling me, as if a scribe of his political will, who he wished his successor to be.

Six months later, Forbes was gone. Desmond Hoyte, without seeking to, became President. How right Burnham was about both assessments; and how critical to Guyana's political future they were. It was Desmond's absence of 'hunger' for personal primacy that led to the 1992 General Election and a democratic change of Government - one that could not have occurred unless Desmond Hoyte had acknowledged to himself before the Election that he could live without being President. Guyana owes him a monumental debt for establishing that democratic bench-mark.

Much later, as a member of the CARICOM team that fashioned the Herdmanston Accord in 1997, when Guyana was on the brink of calamitous political destabilisation, I can testify to Desmond Hoyte's fundamental commitment to these democratic values, and his statesmanship in carrying his Party with him.

And how manifest too was that quality of intellectual integrity. It was this that sustained Desmond Hoyte through his quite remarkable period in office that saw fundamental policy changes in Guyana without an all too fashionable debunking of the past. Desmond knew that it was time for policy change on the economic front in particular; but he knew too that he had to inaugurate a new environment of non-racial governance - as others before and after him were to try to do as well.

In this matter, failure does not rest only or directly with the political leadership. The forces of race so happily benign at the social and cultural level are so sadly virulent at the broad political level that they overwhelm the best leadership intentions. Before we blame our leaders we must blame ourselves.

Desmond and Joyce Hoyte were our family friends. Our youngest daughter was in the age group of the Hoyte girls who died so tragically in 1985, and their close friend. We shared their grief as 'family' and admired from close range the astonishing strength with which Desmond carried on his political life; and we knew how both he and Joyce suffered. Of all this is a public life comprised; but how seldom we allow our judgements to encompass them.

As I pay my tribute to a friend and a political leader who has passed on I feel deeply that Guyana, for all its present problems, is a better place because Desmond Hoyte was there to bridge the Presidencies of Forbes Burnham and Cheddi Jagan, and in doing so to establish those markers of national democracy and personal integrity that are the monuments already erected by his life of service to Guyana.

Such leadership bridges that offer confident passage to a new era are essential to national progress. May Desmond Hoyte's passing be the occasion to apply to Guyana's polity the highest values toward which he reached, however much they eluded his own grasp in his lifetime. ([Back to top](#))

## [In his own words to the PNCR Congress](#)

***On August 16, PNCR Leader Desmond Hoyte addressed his party's congress in what was to be his last such presentation. In it, he made what was seen to be a ground-breaking concession to those in his own party who were arguing for shared governance/power sharing. At the end of the congress, he was overwhelmingly returned as the party's leader. Below we publish some excerpts from that presentation.***

### **The role of the PNCR in Guyana's future**

We are an open Party. Our Constitution prescribes that, "Membership of the Party is open to all Guyanese regardless of ethnic origin, cultural background, geographic location or religious persuasion", and it further emphasizes "that the Party opposes all forms of racism, discrimination, intolerance and oppression". We are wedded to no outmoded ideology, nor are we bogged down by any intellectual or operational baggage of the past. We reach out to all Guyanese whose dominant objective is the good of Guyana and all its citizens. And so, all Guyanese who have ideas or insights for creating a better Guyana that is free from ethnic insecurities, social injustice, poverty, crime and sectarianism can feel comfortable and be at home within the ranks of People's National Congress Reform.

We reach out to such citizens; we welcome them. We believe that, given our policies, programmes and general political philosophy, we offer the best - indeed the only - hope at this time for rescuing the nation, providing opportunities for all our people, and advancing their best interests.

In recent weeks, we have received formal and informal notification from civil society organisations and groupings of their intention to exercise their constitutional right to play an active role in the political life of the country. To this end, they have proposed some initial ideas for addressing our major national problems and challenges, including possible reforms to our system of governance.

We have publicly declared that Our Party welcomes these initiatives and fully understands the patriotic motivations which inspire them. Indeed, we have considered their paper entitled "Shared Governance" and believe it to be a valuable document and a useful basis for discussions. We stand ready to respond constructively to further proposals when they are solidified and to participate in any forum organized to study these issues. Our minds are not closed and have never been closed to new ideas.

### **The PNCR and change: The party**

Congress is an important, emotional occasion for us, delegates and observers, to recommit and rededicate ourselves to the service of our Party, to its policies and programmes, and to the grander objective of promoting the development of our country in conditions of peace, security and prosperity. It provides a forum for us to engage in frank and open discussion, to debate and analyse issues rigorously, and to make clear-cut decisions. We therefore must approach its agenda in a mood of creativity and innovation and a spirit of inquiry that allows us to question our methods, strategies, policies and programmes, with the full understanding that, in our Party, there are no sacred cows or immutable traditions. In other words, we must approach Congress in a revolutionary vein. And if revolutionary thinking produces ideas and projects hitherto unfamiliar to us, let us nonetheless examine them keenly and, if necessary, embrace them bravely in a spirit of change. Change is as necessary a part of politics as it is of life.

Those who do not change become dinosaurs, irrelevant and eventually extinct. If we do not adapt to

new circumstance, new challenges and new responsibilities we cannot survive, much less overcome.

Against this background, I would wish to adumbrate three proposals for your fuller consideration during the Congress discussions and debates.

First, I would like to remind you that our Party had, from the outset, been conceptualized and structured not merely as an instrument for periodical elections, but also as an organisation to be mobilized on a permanent basis for community and national development. Over the years, the latter aspect of Party organisation and work has undoubtedly experienced some drift. We need to correct this. The challenges of the period ahead seem to demand that the Party recapture this aspect of its purpose and adapt its structure to sustain educational and development work in our communities.

To this end, I would respectfully suggest that the Party consider the establishment of a supportive or parallel organization which would have as its primary task the mobilizing of resources for training, education and fostering entrepreneurship, especially among young people, and for benevolent work in local communities. We should always have the capability, whether in or out of office, to promote development of people in their several communities and provide requisite support to help them to become productive and enjoy enhanced conditions of life.

Second, an adjusted system of governance for our country - whether we call it "power-sharing", "shared governance" or any other name - appears to be an idea whose time has come. It could hardly be claimed that our present arrangements are working in the best interests of the country and its citizens. The imperfections obtrude everywhere and are a serious obstacle to national cohesion and development. In the circumstances, the imperative of constitutional adjustment appears to be unavoidable. We cannot stand on the seashore and bid the waves recede. I suggest, therefore, that we as a Party give careful and anxious consideration to the insistent voices that are calling for constitutional and political reform.

We should not shy away from examining possible modalities for a transformed system of governance that meets the needs of our peculiar situation; nor should we be diffident, as a Party, about putting forward proposals as part of any national debate on this subject.

Third, our Party cannot stand still; it must grow or decline. For us, growth is the only option. We ought, therefore, to reflect profoundly on feasible options for attracting new members and expanding the base of our Party. To this end, it might be useful for us to revisit and appropriately strengthen our "grass roots" structures; update and intensify our training and public relations techniques; modernize our financial and management operations; and develop fresh approaches for reaching out to a wider cross-section of society. Your ideas and recommendations on these matters will go a far way towards fortifying and equipping our Party to successfully carry out the tasks which Congress will mandate.

### **The PNCR and change: The country**

We need to have a deep appreciation of the fact that Guyana must change to survive; and we must be in the forefront of the battle to bring about such change. By the same token our Party will have to transform itself accordingly to facilitate and to cope with the inevitable change. It must therefore be our duty to explain and advocate clearly, consistently and vigorously the necessity for change. It is not reasonable to believe that our country or our Party can continue along the same old paths and use the same old methods which we have tried thus far, even if they had validity in the past. Both the country and the Party have evolved through phases.

In the past, there were strategies necessary for achieving and consolidating independence, for finding our unique place in an interlinked world, and for asserting our right to choose our own road to development. The rhetoric and the policies of the past no longer have resonance. Changed times require changed responses. At both the national and the Party level we will have to craft new policies, design new structures, experiment with new ideas to survive comfortably in the new local and world dispensations.

In our present circumstances, we cannot continue to think of government and politics as a zero sum game in which the results of an election confer on some citizens (the government) the right to behave in an unregulated and lawless way, while denying the rest (the opposition) any opportunity to contribute to the national decision-making and management processes. Given the realities of Guyana, the traditional forms of political management cannot continue unreformed. In many countries of the world, best practice in many key sectors has changed; and, in our own country, the problems and challenges that now confront us are exerting powerful pressures for change. Unless our country adapts to change, it will continue this slide into backwardness, ignored in the world, and wracked by underdevelopment, poverty and schisms. It must therefore be our inescapable duty to espouse and work for necessary change in our country at the same time as we change and refashion our Party.

As face the future, we cannot and must not dissipate our time and energies in sterile political polemics, in fruitless disputations and controversies.

We have had enough of words, of useless verbiage. We must now let our actions speak for us in eloquent and passionate terms. For us it will be more beneficial to concentrate on the policies to be crafted, the programmes to be designed, and the work to be done to strengthened our Party and stimulate development in the interest of all the Guyanese people.

### **PNCE Agenda: A comprehensive programme for National Restoration/Reconstruction**

In our present situation of near anarchy, the restoration and maintenance of good order in the State and the security of citizens are matters of absolute priority. Critical to this issue is the functioning of the Guyana Police Force and the Security Services. There can be no question about it. We have to reform these Services urgently. Unless we do so, failure will attend all other efforts at national reconstruction and development. We have to work vigorously to ensure the setting up of a Commission of Inquiry to review the operations of the Force. This will give all citizens, including members of the Force themselves, the opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses and proffer recommendations for its rapid transformation into a highly effective and respected service.

Such a Commission will deal with recruitment, training, remuneration, conditions of service, public relations, and the establishment and maintenance of public confidence and support. The Commission would also identify and make recommendations for eliminating unacceptable patterns of behaviour by the few undesirable types, such as brutality and extra-judicial killings, which tarnish the image of the Force and militate against the effective discharge of its policing responsibilities.

Above all, a successful outcome of our efforts at national reconstruction will require us to create or revive key national partnerships in the economic and political spheres. We will have to establish modalities and mechanisms for identifying the major areas for national consensus building and for deriving agreed broad-based policy positions. Such an arrangement will allow opportunity for full participation of the various political and social forces, remove major policy considerations from the exclusive arena of partisan politics, and move it into the sphere of national consensus. The time has come for us in Guyana to concede that we can only move forward on the basis of an agreed framework of national strategy in which all the stakeholders have ownership.

The grand objective to which we must bend our efforts will be to reorganize our country in ways that make it more creative, more efficient, more competitive; in other words, to locate it in the modern world. To this end we have to remove the deadening hand of government as the principal force in allocating resources and introduce arrangements in which key programmes and sectors are mutually reinforcing and generate their own synergies. Required, too, is the introduction of a national system which automatically supports in all feasible ways, initiative, creativity and innovation at every level of society, whether it be individuals, companies, the university or other institutions of learning. In particular, the University must emerge as an institution which serves as a main focus for technological and economic change.

We have to encourage our business managers, both public and private sector, to leapfrog to the best and most competitive technologies possible as a means of stimulating change and innovation. In this highly competitive world we have to match world standards if we are to survive and prosper. To achieve this objectives, we have to pursue a grand strategy that utilizes all tools at our disposal to train and equip our human resources and get them enthusiastic about the objective.

Too many young people are leaving without being able to gain employment and without skills. The reintroduction of the National Service, with the element of compulsion removed, would seem to be a desirable initiative for imparting appropriate skills and attitudes and inculcating a spirit of confidence and adventure in our young people. There are two huge reservoirs of human resources that we have constantly, over the years, failed to utilize fully. These are children and young persons and women. A heavy investment in them is always justified. It would yield significant returns. In this connection, I would invoke the opinion of Erasmus, the Dutch renaissance scholar. (He was speaking about young people, but his remarks are equally applicable to women). It was sensible to invest resources in young people because, he contended, "from no quarter was a richer return to be expected seeing they were the harvest field and raw material of the nation". We need not fear making large investment for the harvest will be truly bounteous.

As the old saying goes, knowledge is power. Thus, access to information which is the source of knowledge, is absolutely necessary for empowerment in these modern times. Today, at the very heart of the modern economic environment is the information revolution which touches all aspects of life. It affects financial operations, management, communications and training and education, among others. It is critical to the success of any development strategy. We must therefore encourage our young people, in particular, to familiarize themselves with the tools of this technology. It is vital that the country make a giant step to participate fully in the information age. Of necessity, we must adopt what is called, in the jargon, the "informationalisation" of society. To this end, we must do everything possible to promote the acquisition and the utilisation of the new technology and persuade all our citizens, both urban and rural, and all our various sectors, a public and private, to make use of the tools. This is necessary to keep abreast of the world, to achieve and maintain a competitive edge. We have to aim to make our country an active player in the global economy and not a mere looker-on floundering on the periphery. (*Back to top*)

## [Desmond Hoyte: A comment](#)

By Henry B. Jeffrey

The materialist conception of history, which insists upon the decisiveness of context, has long been discredited. Nonetheless, we can never properly act or even conceptualise our actions independently of the existing reality. Since context is more or less objective, predictions become possible. A leader must be able to adequately assess the alternatives existing within his situation and be willing to take decisive action. For me, a good leader is one who not only acts decisively but has the courage to take action that falls outside the considered predictive scope.

In 1985, days after Burnham died, my publisher requested a network article (which became the final chapter of a collaborative book) on Guyanese politics in the immediate post-Burnham years. Of Mr. Hoyte I wrote:

"It is Hoyte who, over the last decade, has been responsible for economic management in Guyana and, as we have seen, this period has been one of steady decline. His ability to pull Guyana out of its present problems must therefore be in serious doubt, but since he will be aware of this, it is likely that he will make economic recovery a priority not only to rectify a somewhat tarnished reputation but also to provide foundations on which to build his popularity.

"Recovery will be extremely difficult if the status quo is to be maintained and serious concessions

are not made to the PPP. So, since Hoyte is more technocratic than ideological and guards the equation (a tactical understanding with international capital to keep Jagan/communism out of government in Guyana) with his life, we can probably expect the discussions with the PPP to gradually wither away and major concessions to be made to international capital, hoping that the latter will provide the resources which the economy badly needs if it is to take off. Hoyte is not disliked by the United States but after its experience with Burnham the United States will demand a more stringent commitment to free enterprise for any aid they provide. But even in dealing with this source, the new President will have to face a serious problem.

Over the years it is he who has constantly been responsible for whittling away the people's standard of living, so if he intends to build a popular base he will have to be cautious in accepting any financial package which could lead to a further cut in living standards."

**I concluded thus:**

"In the near future the top leaders of the PNC will be signalling left but wanting to turn right, only to find the road to the right blocked by the historical ideological position to which they have committed themselves. The two orientations will have to co-exist in the PNC for some considerable time. The question is what will happen to the Guyanese people in the meantime? We are not hopeful."  
(Guyana: Politics, Economics and Society: 1986)

In our final prediction we were wrong, for by the time Hoyte left office in 1992, although the populace was still reeling from the harsh measures of the economic recovery programme, the economy was growing and there was a greater feeling of hope than had existed for over a decade. I know that Mr. Hoyte was aided by a stable racial support base, the extant ideological dynamics of the PNC's leadership and the level of authoritarianism which then existed, but I still believe that, if not for his economic policy per se, Mr. Hoyte had to overcome significant internal opposition to his offering the political concessions upon which the ERP was contingent and that he did so with speed and courage.

It is argued by some that the first Hoyte elections in 1985 were perhaps the most rigged in our history and that the democratic and other political concessions Hoyte made were forced upon him by the changing context. Had Soviet communism not fallen and made the PPP less geopolitically relevant, international capital, for fear of introducing communism in Guyana would not have added its voice to the demand for free and fair elections. On the contrary, it would have continued to support electoral manipulation and Hoyte in government. There is some truth in the above contention, but matters not how suppressive, contexts always offer alternatives and we are measured by which alternative we choose.

True, a more democratic world order had dawned, but Hoyte could have sided with those who, notwithstanding the cost to the Guyanese people, sought to buck the trend and maintain blatant autocratic rule. Indeed, in October 1992, after it was clear that the PNC had lost, it is generally presumed that he shunned many urgings to seize victory. With twenty-two years in government and a positive programme now maturing, the temptation must have been enormous. To accept defeat showed courage, faith and a commitment to freedom.

Since 1992, the PNC has continuously attacked the PPP/C as racist, corrupt and incompetent, without being able to properly manage the dysfunctions of this approach.

In my opinion, these attacks have given rise to political actions that have negated the expected positive outcomes. Through two elections, the expected increased levels of political support and disassociation did not materialise.

In societies such as ours, racism, incompetence and corruption are always present, but difficult to prove or disprove.

They are good opposition rallying points. However, charges like these - particularly the charge of

racism - necessarily and dangerously radicalise sections of one's constituency. My point here is not to argue a case for or against but only to spotlight Hoyte the politician attempting to manage this partly dysfunctional context: trying to articulate the interest of his primary constituency at the same time as providing a place for the wider populace and holding together the factions of his party.

Watching Desmond Hoyte seeking, by way of constructive engagement, to remain influential tells us much about the power of contexts and the character of the people who must manage them. He opened the PNC to the middle class reform, he attended Blackie's funeral; he started dialogue and put it on hold when it came under internal fire; he spoke of inclusiveness at his last congress and then went to Buxton and spoke ambiguously.

Had it not been for his main legacy, the radical opening-up of the Burnham system, his standing as a national leader would have been shattered.

Nowhere is his capacity to play the surrounding reality to remain relevant better seen than in his approach to executive power sharing. After years of raising legitimate concerns about it, by his last congress he had resorted to "adjusted government" and finally he succumbed to "shared governance".

As I was on my way to Sophia to sign the book of condolence, I wondered if there was place reserved for comments and if so, what I would say about the life of Hugh Desmond Hoyte.

I settled on: "He believed he was serving the cause of freedom". There was no place. (*Back to top*)

## The Desmond Hoyte Chapter

*By Nills Learmond Campbell*

Young Guyanese, who are often referred to as the "Rice Flour Generation", may well remember late President and Opposition Leader, Hugh Desmond Hoyte as the man who brought back flour to Guyana.

However, Desmond Hoyte was much more than the crusader who returned flour to the supermarket shelves. When students of history accomplish their tasks of penning that phase of our history, Desmond Hoyte's courage in implementing the Economic Recovery Programme, (ERP), would prove one of his greatest achievements in the bread and butter issue.

It was no easy task for him and his Chief Financial Lieutenant, then Finance Minister, Carl Greenidge to convince the Nation that at worst, the radical financial and social changes were necessary evils. Late President, and at the time Opposition Leader, Dr. Cheddi Jagan listened attentively to arguments advanced by then Education and Social Development Minister, Mrs. Viola Burnham in supporting the cause of the ERP, and the merits in the IMF agreement that formed part of the adjustment package. Dr. Jagan while still seated, responded to Mrs. Burnham, "Ah gon send Burnham jumbie to choke you."

This statement reflected the bitter pill that previous IMF agreements had left in people's throats. The man in the street had readily picked up the chant that ERP stood for "Empty Rice Pot. A determined Desmond Hoyte pressed on with his radical changes. A private chat that I was privileged to have with the successor of Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham revealed that he seriously saw the IMF package, including the ERP, as being the only way out of the country's financial dilemma.

The bottom line of his argument was where else could we get the money to turn around the economy outside the IMF and its harsh conditionalities. In his capacity as Vice President for Economic Planning and Finance, it was Hoyte who had headed the Guyana delegation to the meeting of COMECON.

Now ailing Cuban Leader, Dr. Fidel Castro sought out Mr. Hoyte and his Guyanese delegation during the talks and issued advice. The bottom line was for Hoyte to tell Burnham that even if COMECON wanted to finance the Guyana package, he knew that it did not have the money to do so. Castro's advice was that Guyana should use COMECON as a bargaining chip to maximize the best package that was possible from the International Monetary Fund.

Subsequent events proved Fidel Castro correct. Secondly, that piece of advice was never lost on Desmond Hoyte. This perhaps more than anything today explains why he was so determined to implement the Economic Recovery programme.

Once he conceded the 1992 elections, he sought to "guide" the government from his seat in the Opposition benches for them to continue to implement the programme since he remained convinced that therein lay Guyana's economic salvation. Doubtlessly, he was disappointed that while his successors basked in then glory of aspects of the financial agreement with the IMF that allowed for the construction and repairs of schools etc. they failed to continue changes in the bauxite and rice industries, and withdrew among other things the tax holidays that would have attracted other investors.

That however formed only part of the chapter of the life of the late Hugh Desmond Hoyte. The fight for financing for the country's Multilateral Schools by the World Bank in the seventies formed another significant part of his political life. The World Bank was insisting on certain preconditions that would have excluded local contractors from bidding for the project.

An irate Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham, had told his Party Congress that Guyana would construct the Multilateral Schools starting with the fingernails of its people before bowing to such an agreement.

The man who was heading the turbulent negotiations and who eventually won out so that local contractors could also bid for the jobs was Desmond Hoyte. During the construction phase of the project he motored to Linden and during an impromptu visit to that school, Desmond Hoyte, who knew too well the rigours of negotiations that eventually turned the tides in Guyana's favour, pleaded with local workers to work efficiently, and with dedication.

When he served as Minister of Works and Communications, it was a young Community Development Officer, named Robert Corbin, who first brought to Hoyte's knowledge efforts of a group of Kwakwani Bauxite workers who on their own initiative and with the assistance of a condemned bulldozer that they had repaired, started to build the road link to Linden, via Ituni.

An inspired Hoyte adjusted his Linden visit and flew to Kwakwani to address the workers and assured them that he was taking their case to Cabinet immediately so that they could get the necessary support. "You are an ideal example of a self reliant people," Hoyte enthusiastically told the Kwakwani workers. Today that roadway is a reality.

What might also be forgotten is that as Works Minister, he led a safari to Lethem in the Rupununi in a major attempt to link Georgetown to Rupununi and subsequently with Brazil through the 200-mile road.

Clearly, Desmond Hoyte's death is providing a young President Bharrat Jagdeo the opportunity as a Statesman, to demonstrate that youth ought not to be an impediment for promotion. Since Hoyte was not the person to name places after himself, President Jagdeo could gain a crowning moment by naming one of, or both roadways after the former President. *(Back to top)*

## [My memories of Desmond](#)

*By Clarence A. F. Hughes, S.C.*

I first met Desmond in the year 1957 when he came up to London to read law. He was a master at that prestigious secondary school, Grenada Boys School. When Desmond arrived in London he had already obtained the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

We met at the British Council Student's Hostel at 1 Hans Crescent, Knightsbridge. It was a famous student hostel for overseas students. Several Guyanese students lived at that residence from the early 1950's.

Upon arrival in London Desmond was admitted as a student at Gray's Inn. He also enrolled as a student at the Council of Legal Education, Chancery Lane. The Council was the body which was responsible for the education and training of students who wished to qualify as Barristers-at-law.

My first impression of him was that he was dignified, aloof and of a stern countenance. This first impression was confirmed over the years through a close association with him.

Desmond was a very serious and highly disciplined student. He was not light hearted nor given to student revelry. He was successful at the Bar Finals in the year 1959 and in June of that year he was successful at the LL.B. Finals at the University of London. He was called to the Bar in the year 1959.

Desmond returned to Guyana in early 1960. He was admitted to practice at the Guyana Bar very shortly after his return. His petition for admission to the Bar was presented by Mr. Aubrey Fraser who at that time was a leading member of the practising Bar.

After his admission to practice at the Bar, Desmond immediately established chambers in Croal Street, and entered private practice. He quickly developed a busy practice. This was largely on the civil side. He gained a reputation for hard work, dependability and reliability. Solicitors began to brief him for work in the High Court. He always prepared his cases thoroughly and with meticulous care.

In January 1961 he joined the law firm of Clarke and Martin. This firm was one of the leading law firms at that time. The head of Chambers was Mr. L.F.S. Burnham. The other members of the firm were Mr. Fred Wills and Dr. Fenton Ramsahoye, Barristers-at-Law and Mr. Eric Clarke and Mr. Babington Martin, solicitors.

Later on in the year 1961 Dr. Ramsahoye left Clarke and Martin and established his own Chambers. Mr. Fred Wills followed suit shortly afterwards. Mr. Burnham became increasingly engaged in preparing for the General Elections which took place in 1961. Consequently the burden of litigation in the firm was borne by Desmond.

It was in this period that Desmond began to flourish as a civil lawyer. Whenever he appeared in Court he had thoroughly mastered the facts of the case, he had researched the law involved and always made a logical presentation before the court.

He was at all times courteous and respectful to the court, counsel on the other side and to witnesses. However he was firm and stood up for his client. He was a skilful cross-examiner and always presented his case with clarity.

I was very surprised and in a state of disbelief when he came to my Chambers in 1969 and told me that he had accepted a ministerial appointment in the Government. I thought at the time what a great loss this was to the Bar. I still think it was a great loss to the Bar, but what a great gain it has been to the country!

In 1970 Desmond was appointed a Senior Counsel. A well deserved and meritorious appointment. Although he left the Bar, his heart has always been with the Bar. I believe that he always thought of

himself first as a lawyer. His years at the Bar gave him a clear, incisive and logical mind. He continued to enjoy the company of lawyers to his last days.

After he assumed ministerial duties, whenever there was any dispute between the government and the Bar, he was the minister who would meet with the Bar and have discussions with them. The relationship between himself and the Bar remained warm and cordial.

In addition to being a good lawyer he was a formidable classical scholar and a very widely read person. He always had an appropriate quotation for every situation, invariably a Latin quotation and not infrequently a biblical quotation.

In 1985 August when Mr. Burnham died, Desmond became President. Within three weeks of his appointment as President he announced that he was appointing seven new Senior Counsel. There had been no appointment of senior counsel for ten years. This announcement was a clear signal to the Bar that he intended to put right the injustice which had been done to the Bar for the previous ten years.

In October 1985, seven new Senior Counsel were appointed. This was the largest number of Senior Counsel to be appointed on any one occasion.

Included in the number of persons, who were appointed senior counsel in October 1985, were two former solicitors, namely Mr. Eric Clarke and Mr. Sase Narain. This was the first time that former solicitors were appointed Senior Counsel. Previously only Barristers-at-Law were qualified to be elevated to the rank of senior counsel.

In summary I would say that Desmond Hoyte was an excellent lawyer, he was a lawyer's lawyer, a formidable classical scholar, an undoubted intellectual and a fine gentleman.

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GEORGETOWN, Guyana, CMC - Opposition People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) Leader, and former Guyana President, Desmond Hoyte died Sunday morning at his 14 North Road, Bourda, Georgetown home.

According to information from Congress Place, Sophia, Headquarters of the PNC/R at about 8:00 a.m. Sunday, Hoyte was taking breakfast to his wife Joyce "when he slipped, fell and hit his head."

He was 73.

Hoyte was born in Georgetown on March 9, 1929 to Gladys Marietta Hoyte and George Alphonso Hoyte of Georgetown.

He received his primary education at St Barnabas Anglican School and went to Progressive High School both in Georgetown.

After leaving school in 1948, he began his career in the Civil Service. He was also a teacher and taught at home and subsequently outside of Guyana, at the Grenada Boys Secondary School.

In 1950, Hoyte passed the external examinations and obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of London.

Later, he proceeded to London to read law and in 1959, obtained the LLB degree from the University of London, completing his professional examinations the same year and was called to the Bar at the Honourable Society of Middle Temple.

Hoyte returned to Guyana in 1960, entered private practice, and played an active role in the Guyana

Bar Association, of which he was the Secretary for many years.

His legal career was marked with success, and in 1964, he became a member and Chairman of the Legal Practitioners Committee, the statutory body dealing with disciplinary matters related to the legal profession.

In 1966, he was appointed to the National Elections Commission.

From 1966-1968, Hoyte served as Chairman of the Customs Tariff Tribunal. In 1967 he was appointed Chairman of the Timber Grants Wages Council. The same year he was also elected Vice-President of the Guyana Bar Association.

In 1970, as a result of his successes and leadership at the Bar, he was appointed Queens Counsel (QC) and in 1970 when Guyana became a Republic, he was appointed to the new dignity of Senior Counsel (SC).

Hoyte was also actively involved in the Trade Union Movement, being Legal Advisor, from time to time, to the Guyana Trades Union Congress (TUC) and several other bargaining bodies.

He also represented the bargaining agencies at conciliations and arbitration proceedings and in wages and other negotiations.

Hoyte's keen mind, academic prowess, and his sense of commitment to his country, all contributed to his election to Parliament in the People's National Congress (PNC) government in 1968. This was the beginning of his active political involvement and his subsequent rise to prominence.

He held a number of key portfolios in the PNC. He was a member of the General Council since 1962, and became a member of the Central Executive Committee in 1972. He was also legal adviser to the General Secretary from 1973, and Chairman of the Production Sub-Committee of the Central Executive Committee in 1984.

As a Minister of the Government, he held the portfolios of Home Affairs Minister from 1969-1970; Finance Minister 1970-1972; Works and Communications Minister 1972-1974; and Economic Development 1974-1980.

In 1980 he was appointed Vice-President with responsibility for Economic Planning and Finance, and in 1983 he was re-designated Vice-President, Production.

In August 1984 he became Prime Minister and First Vice-President, a post, which he filled with dignity and a high level of political maturity projecting his indomitable will as well as his clear insights, on national and international issues.

The following year, he was appointed President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and PNC Leader on Tuesday August 6, 1985 after the death of President Forbes Burnham and less than six months after his two children died in a road accident on the Linden/Soesdyke Highway.

Literature and Historical Research were among his special interests. Hoyte also liked reading, music, swimming and walking.

He led the PNC to successive general election defeats in October 1992, December 1997, and March 2001.

He has left to mourn his wife Mrs Joyce Hoyte.