

## Roopnarine proposes shared governance at NDC level

Posted March 10th, 2003 By Rupert Roopnaraine

A new proposal to give meaning to Article 13 of the Guyana constitution has been put forward by Dr Rupert Roopnaraine, co-leader of the Working People's Alliance. He made the proposal in an address to the Georgetown Rotary Club's Annual World Understanding Day Dinner, held on Friday at Le Meridien Pegasus.

Roopnaraine, an ex-pert on the work of Guyana's national poet, addressed the topic "Understanding Martin Carter: his message for Guyanese." Roopnaraine's proposal is that the concept of shared governance should be put into practice at the level of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) which could serve as a laboratory to test the concept of shared governance which people keep telling him cannot work.

If it works, Dr Roopnaraine said, "happy days are ahead of us. If it doesn't then we would need to try something else." What I know is this the situation cannot continue as it is. The deteriorations are severe. The outward exodus of Guyanese [has] increased. We are losing our friends and families on a daily basis.

And unless we arrest this degeneration and decline, I fear for the future." Dr Roopnaraine proposed the formal abolition of the 65 NDCs whose members were last elected in 1994 and which all agreed were dysfunctional and too large to be the smallest unit of local government. He said that they should be then be reconstituted as Interim Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (INDCs) to serve until the next local government elections were held. He did not foresee these elections being held within the next twelve months.

Roopnaraine said the INDCs should be co-chaired by persons from governing and opposition parties and the membership of these bodies should be constituted equally from the governing and opposition parties. His formulation is the governing party should nominate half the members and the opposition parties, the other half. He said that he made the proposal because of "all the talk of shared governance in the air and power-sharing and the dogmatic assertions by people that this can never work [and that] executive power-sharing is out because there is not enough trust and all of this."

"My suggestion is that we should try this at the lowest and least threatening level of governance. At the Neighbourhood Democratic Council no one is threatened.

Hopefully the parties will see the wisdom of putting into these bodies, not party activists but leaders of the community in their own right. People who know the villages and can be relied on to deal with housekeeping, which is what local government is all about." Roopnaraine argued that the advantage of his proposed composition of the council "is that the people who have been kept out of this debate while it has been raging in the letter columns of newspapers and in closed rooms... are the people themselves.

"My proposal really will bring the question of shared governance right there to the people among them and the NDCs could be for me a laboratory in which we can test this idea which people tell me cannot work."

He continued, "My own experience working with the political parties in and out of parliament is that

when we sit together we can achieve things," and described what he called the obsession with the composition and numbers on the [parliamentary] management committees and select committees as so much humbug. "I think I have worked in every select committee in the House for the last several years and I have never known a single select committee to actually vote. There is no voting. We work by consensus."

Roopnaraine said that his proposal was in the mode of that quintessentially Carterian spirit which permeated Carter's articles in *Thunder* from March to September 1955, as he chronicled the impact of the split in the national movement in 1955. He cited an editorial of March 5, 1999 entitled "No Separate Salvation" which Carter, whom he described as an early evangelist of national unity and reconciliation, which warned about a sharp polarisation of the masses of the people as they huddle together in their separate racial camps.

He referred to another article where Carter had described British Guiana before 1950-53 and as it was after the split. Vitality, gaiety and charm of manner had characterised the pre-1950 period and the post-split period had been characterised as one in which "every man looks at you from the corner of his eyes.

When he speaks to you, he listens very carefully to what you say because he wants to know where you are coming from." Referring to a speech Carter gave at the Inter- American University of Puerto Rico, Roopnaraine again cited the poet's description of the dilemma the governing and ruling parties face. "The very structure and nature of both of the parties and their leadership, do not allow for a formulation of the problems of the people, on national terms. What they allow is the formulation of the problem in their own limited interests.

As I said, in such a situation objectivity flies away, and everyone interprets every problem in terms of his own self interest." He cited another quotation from the same passage of the same address, which could aptly describe Guyana 2003 as it did British Guiana in 1964. "Someone was saying recently that BG needs a consensus. I contend that there is a consensus, a consensus that there should be no consensus.

And I say that deliberately because the actions of the leaders and the followers provide enough evidence to support this argument." Another reference cited by Roopnaraine also set the search for a solution to the governance issue in perspective.

He cited Carter's conclusion he arrived at after the February 1962 upheavals in which he declared, "None of the groups in Guianese society is prepared to have another group ruling it. Not until each group is confident that no other group will rule will there be a real peace in this country.

Thus although recent and contemporary events manifest themselves in political terms, we should try to understand that they spring from even deeper social and psychological undercurrents." The Georgetown Rotary Club also presented awards to Banks DIH Chairman, Clifford Reis, the Gift Centre's Managing Director, Doris Lewis, and Medicare Pharmacies boss Jaimantie Bacchus for the excellence they had achieved in their vocational lives and the high ethical standards they maintained in their professional lives.