

Groundings

Volume 2 | Issue 2


Article 12

December 2015

What "Context" Can Justify Walter Rodney's Assassination?

Rohit Kanhai
Caribbean Daylight

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/groundings>

 Part of the [African Studies Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kanhai, Rohit (2015) "What "Context" Can Justify Walter Rodney's Assassination?," *Groundings*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 2 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/groundings/vol2/iss2/12>

This Walter Rodney Remembered is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Groundings by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

What “Context” Can Justify Walter Rodney’s Assassination?

Rohit Kanhai

Rohit Kanhai is Editor of Caribbean Daylight, a New York-based Caribbean newspaper. Rohit Kanhai provided expert testimony at the Rodney Commission of Inquiry regarding the bomb apparatus that was used to assassinate Dr. Walter Rodney on 13 June 1980.

Context! Context! Context!

Like water crashing over the seawalls, there has been a rush of explanations, based on “context” to justify the shifting political sands, as it swirls with the waves. The “sands of time” seems to have shifted the “line in the sand” so much so, that all commonsense seems to have deserted the land of Guyana.

In the midst of this debate are Walter Rodney and the Working People’s Alliance (WPA). The debaters are WPA members and supporters. The debate itself would make such identities questionable. There are hints of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and *1984* in terms of the rewriting of the history.

Both Dr. David Hinds and Dr. Freddie Kissoon are into the “context” game. Kissoon has repeatedly claimed that the Burnham regime was much more acceptable than the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) regimes of 1992-2015. He has singled out Bharrat Jagdeo as the measure of bestiality. Hinds, in a likewise manner, has argued that the refusal by the PPP to make Red House the shrine of all presidents is out-rightly racist, making the point that Indians do not want Jagan and Burnham to co-habit politically, at least not in the same shared public space. This would suggest that secret rendezvous at Belfield House, or possibly on the seawalls, or midnight meetings embracing each other, as long as it was outside of the viewing public was acceptable. Halim Majeed, the author of “Political Dialogue and Power Sharing: The 1984-85 Burnham Initiative” which documented the secret meetings between the PPP and the People’s National Congress (PNC) with the intent to embrace each other, has been rewarded, being sent to Cuba in the role of Ambassador by the Granger Regime.

According to Majeed:

Time and again, he [Burnham] was at pains to explain that his difference with the leadership of the PPP were in part due to personality problems, tactical approaches to nation building, the PPP’s uncritical acceptance of the Soviets model of development and its dogmatic interpretation of socialism. But deep in his bosom he wanted a unified nation, a significant part of which looked to the PPP for leadership. (p. 26, Majeed)

Burnham’s “pragmatist” approach to nation building including the rigging of the 1968, 1973, 1980 elections and the 1978 referendum. His “undogmatic” interpretation of socialism was the Stalinist model of socialism characterized by the Paramountcy of the PNC party. The “personality problems” was that he wanted to rule under the Divine Right of Kings, forever. His hijacking of the

constitution by means of the fraudulent referendum of 1978, and the sweeping powers of a dictator as enshrined in the constitution, a virtual duplication of the PNC constitution, revealed what was “*deep in his bosom,*” a lust for absolute power. That was non-negotiable.

The crisis in Guyana was documented by Dr. Clive Thomas, in a booklet printed in 1973. As far as my memory goes, it was called *The Crisis of the Working People*. The color of the cover was a light green. The oil crisis of the 1970s was worldwide, and Guyana was not the only country affected. It compounded the Guyana crisis, but the Guyana economy was already in crisis, as noted by Thomas. On the other hand, Guyana had a spectacular windfall with the price of sugar skyrocketing. The Guyana government had a bonanza of some \$276 million dollars from the sugar industry, and the PPP and the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers’ Union (GAWU) engaged in the strike of 1977 over this money. The Burnham government sunk this money into the Hydro-falls project, which went the way of the road to Brazil, nowhere. I still have a vivid image of Burnham, with chainsaw in hand, posing on the page of the newspaper, as he embarked on the project of the road to Brazil. He, from hindsight, qualifies as a Brazilian nut, given the ‘chainsaw massacre’ of the Guyana economy that ensued, as well as the political degeneracy.

Guylines became the norm in Guyana. Once people saw a line, they simply joined it, and then would enquire of someone in the line, ‘what were they lined up for?’ I remember quite clearly, using chicken fat as “oil” not wanting to stand in line. I thought that I had found a smart way to beat the system. Milk, flour, split peas, potatoes, etc., became museum pieces. Guyanese found ingenious means of obtaining these commodities, by bartering sugar and rice to Suriname in exchange for toothpaste, toilet paper, and other necessities.

Burnham and the PNC’s response were to extoll slogans such as “Eat Less, Sleep Less, Work More,” “Produce or Perish,” etc. There was no foreign currency at the banks, and as is well known, “necessity is the mother of invention.” Burnham and the PNC invented slogans to cover-over the reality of the deplorable conditions of Guyana. The social reality also was transformed by changing the conversation as words began to assume newfound definitions. Black-out became “load-shedding,” retrenchment became “re-deployment,” scabs and strike-breakers became “patriots,” PNC henchmen became “functional managers,” and fascists became “democrats,” etc., Orwellian-style. All this in the name of “pragmatic” and “undogmatic” approaches to modifying social reality by means of psychological warfare.

But all was not in the realm of psychology. The Wikileaks revelation that:

Gov’t request to purchase tear gas in 1978 seen tied to referendum, economic situation – US cable

A request in 1978 by the Government of Guyana (GoG) to the US for the purchase of 14,500 tear gas grenades and projectiles raised concerns in Washington that this was not a routine transaction and reflected fears of unrest associated with the approaching referendum and declining economic conditions.

Released by the whistle-blowing website WikiLeaks, a May 11, 1978 cable from the US State Department to its Georgetown Embassy...

was indicative that the Burnham regime had enough money to invest in riot control, instead of

alleviating the suffering of the masses. What is also revealing about this “*riot control*” is that it was aimed at the “black masses.” This was the working-class support of Walter Rodney and the WPA that thronged the streets during the Civil Rebellion that rallied to the WPA as it became a political party in 1979. As Burnham and the PNC knew that it was not dependent upon electoral support, it was now prepared to move against its “black base,” which was being “misled” by Rodney and the WPA. It was open warfare by Burnham and the PNC against the upstart Rodney and the WPA, along with the “misguided” black masses that sought deliverance from economic misery and despair.

The Burnham-led PNC regime knew that the 1980 elections would be a total disaster with the emergence of Walter Rodney and the WPA. It would no longer be a racial contest between the PPP and the PNC. The WPA had enough of a popular following to fundamentally change the political equation. Burnham and the PNC had not rigged elections in order to be removed from power by the emergence of the WPA splitting the black votes. Something had to be done quickly, in order to change the electoral dilemma. For someone who had masterminded the 1968 and 1973 rigging of elections, the constitutionally due 1978 elections had to be addressed. The 1978 referendum was masterminded to circumvent this impasse, with the 1980 elections bringing into being a president with dictatorial power “as if elected.” It is not accidental or incidental that Walter Rodney was assassinated after the referendum of 1978 and before the elections of 1980. Mischief was afoot. This was the context in which Burnham and the PNC masterminded the assassination of Walter Rodney and the decapitation of the popular head of the WPA.

“And finally they killed him.”

There are persons associated with the WPA who currently feel that Walter Rodney was responsible for his own death by engaging in activities that made him vulnerable to the Burnham regime. This is total hogwash. Even if Walter Rodney did engage in activities of whatever sorts, it was the Burnham regime that must be held responsible for the conditions of dictatorship that was imposed on the country. Were it not for the systematic rigging of elections, closing off all paths to the democratic removal of the regime, there would have been no necessity to seek “*any means necessary*” to remove the dictatorship. Furthermore, the WPA was engaged in democratic political struggle. It was the assault on the WPA by the PNC dictatorship that forced it to adopt means of self-defense, and the possible necessity to wage an insurrectionist struggle against the dictatorship. The means of the removal of the dictatorship was dictated by the behavior of the dictator and the PNC party and government. There was no getting around this formidable obstacle to democracy. The issue of the rigging of elections by the PNC is a taboo subject. The PNC wants this part of its history to be exorcised. The population that experienced the rigging of elections must somehow perform some form of Freudian lobotomy to remove this memory from their psyche. By some mystical means, the PNC demands this “exorcism” of the collective consciousness, perhaps inspired by the movie, “*The Exorcist*.” This would certainly make Guyanese heads spin around.

The only point I am making here is that the “*subjectivism*” of persons associated with the WPA who feel that Walter Rodney was responsible for his own death must be brought into the open for debate. It must not remain in the “repressed state” festering and creating doubts as to who are the true architects for the demise of Walter Rodney. Furthermore, there is another dimension

to those who take a “soft” approach to the assassination of Walter Rodney. They feel that Walter Rodney was “adventurist.” Again, this is crass ignorance, to put it kindly and not use the word I initially did. It is only from “hindsight” that we can seek to make such a claim.

There is the feeling from “hindsight” that had Walter Rodney and the WPA waited, then Burnham would have died, and it was just a matter of time before the WPA would have been in a more democratic environment and, who knows, it might have been able to win an electoral victory. This is a “*What If?*” scenario, and it is quite impressive for idle minds. For instance, “*What If?*” the Archduke’s driver had not made a wrong turn, presenting the Archduke as a “sitting duck” to the assassin who had abandoned the plan to assassinate him? Would the world have been spared World War I which supposedly was ignited by an assassin’s bullet?

Those who espouse this interpretation of history, must also ask the “*What If?*” question, that if we had waited long enough, “*What If?*” Bharrat Jagdeo and the PPP turned out to be the saviors of Guyana during the reign of Jagdeo, sometime in our reinterpretation of history some three decades from now? Perhaps we should not have struggled against the PPP during the period 1992-2015. Maybe future events will prove that the removal of the PPP paved the way for the re-establishing of the PNC dictatorship, and buttressed by the oil dollars, they were able to rig the 2020 elections and plunge Guyana into one of the darkest period of its history. Given this “*What If?*” scenario, should we now begin to work with the PPP to ensure that the APNU+AFC (A Partnership for National Union + Alliance for Change) government does not attempt to rig the forthcoming 2020 elections to prevent this glimpse into the future? Who could have glimpsed into the future in 1980 and see the remnants of the WPA joining hands with the assassins of Walter Rodney?

The very persons who argue from “hindsight” that Burnhamism was not so bad after all, cannot escape the possibility that Jagdeoism was not so bad after all, since there is a distinct possibility that we can plunge into darker days ahead. So what do we do? Sit down, wait on the verdict of history, and if it does not work out the way we hoped for, pick ourselves up and try to reverse history many years after it had happened? Are we attempting to re-enact a “*Back to the Future*” scenario?

Since we are not ordained to have a glimpse into the future, we must act on good faith in our own actions. And what indeed are our actions? We must respect the fact that we fought against a dictatorship, holding the highest ideals possible in the given situation. Walter Rodney and the WPA sought the healing of Guyana from the terror of racial disharmony. We operated from the “hindsight” of the violent sixties, which remain within our memories. Today we are operating as if it is a thing of the past, which is not guaranteed. The only thing that protects us is that we struggled against the degeneracy of the times, as we saw it, and battled against the forces of evil as we called it. I hope that someone has the speech of Martin Carter, delivered in 1979 at the inauguration of the formation of the Working People’s Alliance as a political party in 1979, a speech in which he called out the degeneracy of the Burnham dictatorship.

The struggles of Walter Rodney and the WPA were captured in the booklet “*Walter Rodney*” by Eusi Kwayana. As late as 2014, Eusi Kwayana chose to give testimony to the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry (COI). This would lead anyone to the conclusion that Eusi Kwayana has a

profound interest in ensuring that Walter Rodney, Donald Rodney, and the Rodney family are not deprived of due process, even though it was three decades late. From June 13th, 1980, this has been the quest of the WPA, despite the horrendous barriers erected by the Burnham-led PNC, as well as the Hoyte-led PNC to prevent this from becoming a reality. After 1992, the responsibility for this must be laid at the doorstep of the PPP, and to a lesser extent to the WPA. The PNC did what it was supposed to do, making every attempt to ensure that the inquiry did not come to fruition. The present behavior of the Granger Regime suggests that the PNC, despite the label of reform, is seeking to turn back the hands of time when it comes to the issue of Walter Rodney and his assassination by the Burnham dictatorship.

So what do we do about the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry at this juncture in our history?

The formation of the APNU+AFC government, with WPA Leaders Rupert Roopnaraine and Clive Thomas playing prominent roles in the administration has posed a serious challenge to the WPA in relation to the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry. The fact that WPA Leader Rupert Roopnaraine is seen as “*compromised*” in the dealing with the life of the Commission is a very serious matter, not only for the credibility of the Working People’s Alliance, but also for the future of Guyana, and even more importantly, for the integrity of those who championed the cause of Walter Rodney, as distinct from Walter Rodney himself. It must be borne in mind that the WPA was comprised of various organizations that preceded the return of Walter Rodney to Guyana. Those organizations worked together as a unified organization, and espoused the values of the Working People’s Alliance that was formed as a political organization in 1979. It was not Walter Rodney that created those values, but the organization that preceded him.

Walter Rodney articulated those values and became the spokesperson for those values, and it was his personification of those values, his popularization of those values, his resonance with the masses as the carrier of those values, that made him, in the eyes of the public, the leader of the WPA. I have been constantly reminded of this whenever it is felt that I sing praises to Walter Rodney as if he were the WPA, only to be reminded that he certainly was not, and he was the embodiment of the values of the WPA.

It was being the public bearer of those values that cost him his life, since it posed a mortal threat to the body politics of the PNC and the PPP.

He did not lose his life for engaging in some “*clandestine*” activity that was not within the “*purview*” of the party. We have to be very clear about this. This is why I made the earlier charge that it is seen as if Walter Rodney was being “*adventurist*” by those who are being “*subjectivist*.” Were Walter Rodney not the political threat to the Burnham regime, he would not have been assassinated. This is the primary reality that we must be concerned with, the objective reality. That is what made him the target of assassination, otherwise Burnham and the PNC were total idiots, which some may not doubt.

The contempt which some PNC bigwigs dismiss Walter Rodney today, as if they had him and the WPA under wraps, is a product of “*hindsight*.” At the time of the “*Civil Rebellion*,” Burnham

and the PNC were apprehensive to the point of ordering “riot equipment,” and it was not intended for the PPP crowd. This arrogance, to dismiss the challenge of Walter Rodney and the WPA in the height of the *Civil Rebellion*, would make the PNC guilty of paranoia, a psychological defect if there was no social base for this personal dysfunction. Why bother assassinating him, if he was not a threat to the political aspirations of Burnham and the PNC? This would put Burnham and the PNC into the Guinness Book of Records for political stupidity, as well as candidates for the Nobel Prize for Stupidity. Those who would make this argument would also qualify.

It is important, at least from my point of view, that we call on the APNU+AFC government to accept and embrace the findings of the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry. We must do so before the Commission delivers its verdict. There would be no point in doing so after, since the persons who tried to “shut down” the Commission in an attempt to discredit its finding, anticipating that had it continued, it would have been a great embarrassment, if not indictment to the Burnham-led PNC dictatorship, will continue to argue that the Commission was misguided in its judgment. These very parties would now seek to discredit the findings of the Commission. There is a gap between the government and individuals who seek to discredit the findings of the Commission. We cannot muzzle individuals from exercising their legitimate rights. But we can demand of the APNU+AFC government to honor the commitment to the findings of the Presidentially-mandated Commission.

The current government did not “shut-down” the Commission on the basis of any wrongdoings. It claimed that the Commission was a financial burden upon the nation. That is a very different argument from claiming that the Commission was prejudiced in any way.

Furthermore, there was no evidence given that the Commission was prejudiced in any way. It was claimed that the Commission was the creature of political posturing on the part of the PPP, but no evidence to substantiate the charge of political bias during the sitting of the Commission, despite the rantings and railings of the PNC’s lawyer, Basil Williams, was presented. That both Attorney General Basil Williams and President Granger shut down the Commission at the earliest opportunity cannot be a good sign for democratic politics in Guyana.

Had the APNU+AFC government provided any evidence whatsoever of bias on the part of the Commission, it would have provided the necessary proof for the dismissal of the Commission. No such case was made then and now, other than the rants of the PNC lawyer, Williams and Trade Union Congress (TUC) lawyer Selwyn Pieters.

The submission of the PNC and TUC lawyers tried to bring Shaun Samaroo into the proceedings. The Chairman of the Commission inquired of them if Shaun Samaroo had appeared before the Commission and had given testimony. This not being the case, the Chairman stated that he did not want to hear anything about any Shaun Samaroo. The Chairman also told Mr. Pieters, the PNC and TUC representative when submissions were being made, that Shaun Samaroo was not employed by the Commissioners, a claim insinuated by Mr. Pieters (who at closing session of the COI, now represented the PNC, having resigned from his representation of TUC).

If the APNU+AFC had any doubts about the conduct of the Commission, they did not

take any legal action whatsoever to make a legitimate case. The only “legal” sanction applied to the Commission was in terms of it being a financial burden to the public, and on the basis of this concern, the life of the Commission was terminated, with the proviso that “Salmon Letters” would be accepted on the part of all parties that felt they had a contribution to make to the proceedings. The APNU+AFC government deemed this procedure as capable of rectifying any shortcomings that may have resulted in the shortening of the life of the Commission. In this way, the APNU+AFC government was claiming that the Commission had enough resources at their disposal to carry out its mandate. According to a *Guyana Times* report of August 9, 2015, under the caption “*Roopnaraine agreed to abrupt end of Rodney CoI*,” it is stated:

Roopnaraine agreed to abrupt end of Rodney CoI

August 4, 2015 - By GuyanaTimes

Startling revelations...

- admits succumbing to PNC-dominated Cabinet pressure

BY ALEXIS RODNEY

Leader of the Working People’s Alliance (WPA), Dr Rupert Roopnaraine has confessed that he was a signatory to the precipitous decision to scrap the Walter Rodney Commission of Inquiry (CoI), but said that he is still prepared to offer his statement to Commissioners who are yet to present their findings.

By making this admission, Roopnaraine, who was appointed Senior Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Minister in the new Government, has confirmed reports that the decision of the Peoples National Congress Reform (PNCR)-dominated Cabinet to abruptly end the life of the Commission was unanimous.

The COI, which was established under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), to probe the circumstances which led to the death of the founding leader of the WPA, Dr. Walter Anthony Rodney, came to an abrupt end last week, with lawyers representing various interests pleading for the most, two weeks, to complete the investigation.

Minister of Governance and Patrimony Raphael Trotman had told Journalists that the decision to scrap the Inquiry was a collective one made at the level of Cabinet; of which the Working People’s Alliance forms part. Questions were raised about the WPA’s real position on this move, particularly because it has for years been calling for an independent probe into the cause of death of its leader.

Speaking to *Guyana Times* during an exclusive interview on Monday, Roopnaraine said “It was a Cabinet decision. We don’t break ranks at Cabinet on issues like that. We took a point of view and the consensus from Cabinet is inclined to take a particular position, that is it”.

Submission of his statement

He continued “My own feeling was that the Cabinet felt that the time had come for it to come to an end and that enough had been invested in the Commission and that it has had sufficient time to come to its conclusion”, Roopnaraine said, continuing that he will “compensate” by dispatching the statement he has prepared to the

Commission, “so that they would not be deprived of my own evidence, which to the investigation will definitely rob the Commission of a comprehensive, thorough and fair outcome”. On another note, the WPA Leader told this publication that it would have been more satisfying for the party to have the opportunity to present its case to the Commission.

“We have been represented by counsel, who has done a good job, but had the Commission gone on for one or two more sessions, complete with all the witnesses, it would have been great”.

He said “I had a statement in readiness for the Commission, expecting at some point to be called. But what I will do, I will be submitting my statement to them; although it will not allow time for a cross examination but at least they would have my statement”, Roopnaraine said.

According to the WPA Leader, his statement has been “sitting there” and ready for months, noting that nothing that has transpired in the Commission could incline him to change it.

“It remains what it was two or three months ago. I’m anticipating that I will send that statement during the course of the week”.

The Commission of Inquiry met for its last two sittings last Monday and Tuesday, where lawyers representing various interests in the investigation made their final submissions, summarizing the evidence that have been so far presented.

They too had a lot to say about Government’s decision to have the final session wrapped up in a mere two days. Chairman of the Commission, Sir Richard Cheltenham said while Commissions of Inquiry were “creatures of the executive”, the move by the David Granger Administration will not speak well for the fairness of the final report which commissioners were expecting to present by November.

The COI, which was convened in February 2014 by former President Donald Ramotar, has had some 66 sittings with a total of 29 witnesses giving evidence; three of whom are still to be cross-examined. The evidence of those witnesses – retired Major General Norman Mc Lean, former Police Constable Allan Gates and Holland Yearwood were said to be crucial to the investigation. Further, the Commission was still to hear from witnesses such as former Crime Chief Cecil “Skip” Roberts, Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine and former People’s National Congress Leader (PNC) Robert Corbin – all of whom have been issued with Salmon letters to appear before the Commissioners.

Cheltenham said there was adverse evidence provided against many individuals who were alive, who have not been provided with an opportunity to come forward to confront that evidence and comment on it.

Meanwhile, Queens Counsel Andrew Pilgrim, the Attorney representing the interest of the widow and children of Dr. Rodney had urged Commissioners to petition the new Administration to see if it could give some leverage to its decision

to allow for at least two more weeks, so that the remaining pertinent witnesses could be heard.

Waiting 35 years for closure

He said the family members of Dr. Walter Rodney, the WPA co-founder, have waited some 35 years to find solace and closure. He urged the Administration to take into consideration the Salmon letters that were sent. He said there was still time for Government to make a decision in this regard, noting that he was willing to support any entreaty the Commission would make in that manner.

Lawyer for Donald Rodney (Dr. Rodney's brother and the only witness), Keith Scotland said "history will be unkind to us", as the Commission was very close to the end of the hearing and the premature end would only open the new Government to criticism that it had "politicized" the COI. He said the hearing, which has taken 34 years to commence, might very well be referred to a "pappy show".

The Commission, including its Chairman Barbadian Attorney, Queen's Counsel, Sir Richard Cheltenham; Jamaican Queen's Counsel Jacqueline Samuels-Brown and Trinidad-based Guyanese Senior Counsel Seenath Jairam, was set up to investigate who or what was responsible for the massive bomb blast that caused the instant death of the WPA Co-founder on the evening of June 13, 1980.

At the time, President Ramotar had said that the establishment of the Inquiry was owing to the persistent request made by Rodney's widow, Patricia, and their three children. However, the People's National Congress (PNC), the major partner in the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) coalition, had maintained that the move was a political stunt taken to tarnish its reputation. (End of Report)

Since Dr. Roopnaraine was a member of the Cabinet, he was within his constitutional rights to abide with the decision of the Cabinet. This did not rule out his dissenting voice, but that is for the WPA and Dr. Roopnaraine to deal with.

What needs some explanation is the statement that:

It was a Cabinet decision. We don't break ranks at Cabinet on issues like that.

We took a point of view and the consensus from Cabinet is inclined to take a particular position, that is it.

The Cabinet is made up of persons. The "We" is not a unified voice when an issue is being debated. Each person must present his/her point of view on a matter, and when the dialogue/discussion is over, a decision is made as to what action must be taken. It is here that consensus is reached. Consensus is different from unanimity. Consensus allows for dissent on the part of a minority. Unanimity demands no dissenting voice. Consensus is the will of the majority, and that will becomes the decision of the body. Cabinet decisions are not made in advance of the meetings, otherwise the Cabinet would only be a "rubber stamp" for whoever already made the decisions that must be ratified. It is similar to a jury that demands unanimity as distinct from consensus, as some cases require. But the jury must first of all hear the facts, evaluate the facts, and then make a decision. The decision does not precede the deliberations.

The statement “We don’t break ranks on Cabinet issues like that,” is perplexing. Dr. Roopnaraine needs to assist us in understanding what he meant. As the Minister of Education, this is one “particular position” that he can educate the nation on, in his first Civic lesson to the nation. As the Minister of Culture, Dr. Roopnaraine must be responsible for setting the standards of a new culture that is fundamentally different from that of both the PPP and the PNC. Dr. Roopnaraine, who has been engaged in a struggle for a new political culture, must also be aware that every word that he utters will be subjected to the most severe scrutiny, since he is seen as being one of the best and the brightest, and ranks very high for being one of the leading lights in the struggle for a better Guyana. After all, he was one of the persons whom Eusi Kwayana held up his hands and raised it high at the Walter Rodney Mall, declaring that this was symbolic of the racial unity of the working people. The other hand that was held high by Eusi Kwayana was that of Walter Rodney. The clasping of those two hands remains embedded in the minds of those who witnessed it. It was a moment to remember, a sight to behold. It is engraved in my mind, and will forever remain there. Today, the hand of Walter Rodney is no more, at least, as a body part. But the sacredness of those hands still remains in the clasp of Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine. Letting go of what Dr. Walter Rodney stood for, and gave his life for, still remains within the hands of Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine. Otherwise he would be nothing less than a betrayer of the hopes and aspiration of Dr. Walter Rodney and the Working People’s Alliance. The hopes and aspirations of the working people of Guyana of all races still lies in the hands of Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine.

There is nothing in the statement by Dr. Roopnaraine that invalidates the findings of the Commission. According to him:

“My own feeling was that the Cabinet felt that the time had come for it to come to an end and that enough had been invested in the Commission and that it has had sufficient time to come to its conclusion”, Roopnaraine said, continuing that he will “compensate” by dispatching the statement he has prepared to the Commission, “so that they would not be deprived of my own evidence, which to the investigation will definitely rob the Commission of a comprehensive, thorough and fair outcome.”

If my understanding of Dr. Roopnaraine “compensation” is correct, he has assured us that the submission of his evidence will ensure that the findings of the Commission will have a “comprehensive, thorough and fair outcome.”

Most of the evidence presented to the Commission was not “new” insofar as its contents revealed. The Burnham-led PNC government did everything to thwart the presentation of the evidence, as well as subverting the judicial process. Much of what was presented was public knowledge. The evidence had accumulated, and was incriminating to the regime. A lot of energy was expended by the regime to ensure that the evidence did not make it way to the judicial process, and when it did, the Burnham-controlled judicial process subverted the evidence. Due Process was not facilitated by the authorities that were constitutionally charged with doing so – this is why a Commission of Inquiry was necessary. The International Commission of Jurist Report (ICJ) remains one of the most objective documents concerning international standards, standards to which the Guyana government is signatory to, in terms of honoring its commitment to the wider world in which Guyana is a part of.

Dr. Skuse Report

The most important evidence, in terms of the cause of death, was under the jurisdiction of the forensic scientist, Dr. Frank Skuse. Dr. Skuse was sent by the British government at the request of the Burnham administration, along with Dr. Molesworth Johnson, a pathologist.

Dr. Skuse presented his report to the Guyana government, and this was acknowledged by Crime Chief, Cecil 'Skip' Roberts, who studied the report. This report was never presented to the courts in any of the proceedings that needed the findings contained in them. The findings were totally disregarded in the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) report.

Dr. Skuse identified the device used as belonging to the Harris Porta Phone system of walkie-talkies. This was forensic evidence taken from the bomb scene, and some of it recovered from the body of Dr. Walter Rodney, located by means of X-ray plates. The crystals were identified as of the frequency range of 151.025 MHz, the Very High Frequency (VHF) range. It had specific peculiarities, such as line of sight, meaning that the antennas of the transmitter and receiver had to "see" each other in order to send and receive signals. The fact that the walkie-talkie was sitting on the lap of Dr. Rodney meant that it was just about two-feet off the ground imposing a severe limitation on the distance that the signal traveled. The fact that the device was located inside of a motor car meant that the metal body of the car acted as a "shield" from radio signals, and only those that entered through the windows could have activated the device. The fact that the prison fence was a block away also meant that signals emanating from a given direction and height would be blocked.

The hands of Dr. Rodney were not damaged. This led both Dr. Skuse and Dr. Johnson to the conclusion that he was not handling the device at the time it exploded. It led to the conclusion, giving all the other evidence, that the device was activated by remote control. Yet the CID report contradicted this forensic evidence, and made the claim that it was a timing device.

The nature of the explosive, identified as TNT, was also a major contributor in deciding the nature of the explosive device. The fact that TNT, as a substance is deemed "high explosive," means that it cannot be set off without the use of a "high-explosive" detonator. TNT was, under the conditions obtaining on the night of June 13, 1980, impossible to be activated, without the use of a detonator. This meant that the focus shifted from the explosive substance itself, and focused on the detonator.

The detonator itself was subject to heat, friction, impact, or electromagnetic induction as a means of being activated by accidental means. Heat could be ruled out, since the detonator was inside of a wood box, the engine turned off. Friction could be ruled out, since the detonator was in a wood box, and was not subject to any frictional forces. Impact could be ruled out, since the detonator was in a wood box, and sitting on the lap of Dr. Rodney. Since the hands of Dr. Rodney were undamaged, no handling of the device took place. No timing device or any indication that a timing device was used was indicated in Dr. Skuse's report.

Dr. Skuse came to the conclusion that the device was activated by a radio signal. There were no "ifs" and "buts" about his conclusion. It was based firmly on the forensic evidence of the bomb

scene.

The quantity of explosives used was designed to kill a person. It could not have been more than two to three ounces, ruling out completely that Walter Rodney and Donald Rodney were on their way to blow down a prison wall, in order to facilitate the escape of prisoners, an absurdity if ever there was one based on the evidence. The quantity could kill a person, no doubt, but it could not do much damage to a wall in the open atmosphere. The damage done to the car was because of the enclosed nature of the vehicle, with the resulting bottling up of the shock waves. Both Dr. Skuse and Dr. Johnson noted the “anti-personnel” nature of the device. This meant it was designed with the specific intent upon killing a person, not doing damage to property.

Gregory Smith’s book, supposedly the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, proved to be his undoing.

First of all, the evidence found by Dr. Skuse on the scene, forensic evidence, contradicts Smith’s claim of providing Dr. Rodney with a toy walkie-talkie set. The Harris Porta Phone device, in its most basic model, was sold for approximately US\$800.00 in 1979. This was an exceedingly expensive set, used for military and security purposes. In comparison, a toy walkie-talkie would be valued at US\$10-30 at most. And the number of electronic components would be miniscule in comparison to that found on the scene of the explosion, a toy set having about 30-40 components in comparison to the Harris Porta Phone which carried more than 300 components. Even more damning was the discovery of crystals and the frequency of operation. Furthermore, a toy set could not operate within the frequency range that was identified by Dr. Skuse’s evaluation of the forensic evidence.

Smith’s claim of toy sets was intended to prove that the device went off accidentally, subject to the millions of radio waves that pervaded the atmosphere, even from abroad. He emphasized this time and again in his book, desperately trying to convince readers of the accidental nature of the explosion that killed Dr. Rodney. The forensic evidence revealed a highly sophisticated military grade device that was not subject to any “spurious signals” in the sense Smith claimed. Furthermore, the frequency of 151.025 MHz in the VHF range meant that the signal was highly localized. From a height of six feet to six feet between transmitter and receiver, the distance of a signal would travel at most 5.4 miles. The box sitting in the lap of Dr. Rodney could not have been more than two feet off the ground, thereby imposing a severe limit on the line of sight range of the signal, with the engine block of the car in the way.

According to Donald Rodney, the first test took place without the turning of any switch. And the device worked. This would suggest that the device was already powered up and running. Smith had, according to Donald Rodney, turned the switch in a given direction, and asked him, Donald, to repeat the action. Donald Rodney complied with Smith’s request. Smith had to be extra-ordinarily confident in the quality of the device to have taken such a risk, if it was subject to “spurious signals.” Nevertheless, the first test went according to plan, and the signal was received.

Upon receipt of the first signal, following instructions, Donald Rodney turned the switch to the position as instructed. In the scheme of things that followed, this meant that the explosive

device was now “switched” into the circuit. When the second signal came, instead of merely causing a light signal to flash, it activated the detonator, which in turn activated the explosives, resulting in the death of Dr. Rodney and injuries to his brother Donald Rodney.

This is all the forensic evidence needed to incriminate Smith.

The question is how did explosives get into the device, since Smith claims that he gave a toy walkie-talkie to the Rodneys.

The Skuse report reveals that there were no traces of explosives on the hands of Dr. Rodney. This means that he was not handling explosives at the time. The tests done on the vehicle, especially the steering wheel also revealed no traces of explosives, and by inference Donald Rodney was not handling explosives either. This would suggest that the explosives were planted in the box, unknowingly to the Rodneys.

Smith’s account on how he left Guyana was proven to be blatantly untrue. His sister, Anne R. Wagner, contradicted many important details in Smith’s book, and incriminated Smith with her testimony. She did not have anything to say about the authenticity or truthfulness of Smith’s account as stated in the book. Everything she claimed to be true was a regurgitation of what her brother told her, “Hook, Line, and Sinker.”

Captain Gerry Gouveia’s evidence also incriminates Smith, and the Guyana Defence Force, along with top ranking state officials. The evidence is on record. This point was noted by Commissioner Jacqueline Samuel Brown, as she read from the pages of Smith’s book, and the sister added the information about the presence of Smith’s girlfriend and two children.

The issuing of the passport by the Burnham government and state officials is devastating. The fact that Smith traveled to Guyana in 1982 is beyond comprehension, but the truth is what it is. Thankfully, Ms. Wagner indicted the state, acting in collusion with her brother, something we could not have anticipated in our wildest dreams. Her presentation to the Commission of the actual passport that Smith used was incriminating. The application by the Guyana Defence Force for the issuance of the said passport to Gregory Smith, and the approval by GDF was conclusive evidence of the state’s involvement and full knowledge of the identity of Gregory Smith.

I do not have to recite the damning evidence that the Commission has at its disposal, the above being merely the more technical parts of the evidence that I was personally involved with. There is a super-abundance of incriminating evidence, and this is why there is a concerted effort to abort the hearings and discredit the findings of the Commission. It would suggest that President Granger is under pressure to satisfy the demands of the Burnhamist faction of the PNC party.

In closing, I would repeat the point, that we should call on the APNU+AFC government to accept the findings of the Commission, regardless of what the Commission verdict is. The reason that I would like us to make that call before the Commission releases its finding is, if the Commission’s verdict is against the PNC, there would be no incentive on their part to accept the decision. It must be done before the verdict is given.

On the other hand, the involvement of the WPA in the present government must be on the basis of principle. If the assassination of Walter Rodney is justifiable in the eyes of the PNC, and by extension those who are trying to subvert the Commission's work as well as its decision, then we are as guilty as they are, if we, out of opportunism, fail to raise our voices in protest. We would be justifying Jagan's famous quote in relation to the demand by Shaka Rodney for an inquiry into his father's death, "*What useful purpose would it serve?*" It would appear that there are some of us who now share this view. I certainly do not!

If the APNU+AFC government wants the support of the WPA, then it must be based on the principles that Walter Rodney and the WPA fought for, and still struggle for. We must hold the current government to the promises of a better future for Guyana. Even Captain Gerry Gouveia told the Commission of Inquiry that he did not want a return to those days of Burnhamism, despite being a beneficiary of some of the malpractices.

The 2020 election will be one of the most challenging elections that Guyana will be faced with.

The background of all elections in Guyana's future will be the oil dollars. Some will claim it is in the foreground. But the lure of Black Gold is too enticing to ignore. If we do not solve our political problems before the oil well begins to gush out oil, we will compound all of our problems, and we will be dancing on a slippery slope. This means that we have to engage in the struggle of our lives over the next five years. If we do not want a return to the degeneracy of the PPP, then we will have to make one of the greatest efforts imaginable to prevent this. But the first step in this direction is to give the PPP supporters a glimpse of what Guyana's sons and daughters can be, in the present, not of the past and in the future. If we fail to do so, in the very near future, Guyana will be faced with a carnage the like of which we can never imagine possible. There is no way that the Black population will subject themselves to the PPP in office given the experience of the past twenty three years. The horrendous polarization of wealth in the country neutralized the PPP and allowed Indians to surrender power, under threat of black discontent. We cannot allow any justification for the return of degenerate pro-Indian rule, fueled by discontent with the current government. Despite inheriting a horrendous situation, with some degree of prudence, it is possible to raise the quality of life in Guyana for all, thereby diffusing the racial tensions that exist, as reflected in the voting pattern. But it is a razor's edge to walk on, and if we only err, it will be to our destruction. I am not saying anything that is new. We cannot sing praises to the 28 years of Burnhamist abuse, or to the 23 years of PPP's degeneracy. We are left to creating a new reality, one that inspires the confidence of the entire population, of all races. The major task is to win over that slim majority that is necessary to keep the PPP out of power, by legitimate means. A return to the past and a justification for the rigging of elections as a means of keeping the PPP out of power is not something that should even be contemplated under any circumstances whatsoever. Just another "*What If?*" for those who want the supposedly easy way out.

The claim by the PNC that it was the WPA's struggle that led to the victory of the PPP, thereby bringing twenty three years of pain and suffering to the Guyanese people is another set of hogwash.

It was the PNC that chose the path of rigging elections as a means of staving off the PPP's Indian majority. There were enough "What If" scenarios that the PNC could have opted for, but it chose a particular one that brought forth the WPA as a means of putting a halt to the degeneracy of the PNC.

Election rigging brought forth an economic disaster as Burnham and the PNC had to create a military infrastructure to facilitate a dictatorship. It was virtually impossible to sustain life with dignity in Guyana under those conditions.

The PNC's response of assassinating Walter Rodney and brutalizing the WPA led to the emergence of the PPP in 1992, and was the direct result of the PNC's behavior and arrogance. It was the PNC that created the conditions for the twenty-three years of the PPP. Those who want to lay this on the doorsteps of the WPA must reassess their role in bringing Guyana to its knees.

We are at a pivotal point in our history. Imagine a Guyana without the WPA, and we are back into the racial camps of the PPP and PNC. It is the legacy of Walter Rodney and the WPA that gives us hope that a multi-racial Guyana is possible despite all the problems that we have.

The migration of Guyanese from Guyana is making the nation vulnerable to external forces. If Indians flee Guyana, and relinquish what their forefathers have paid in blood for, so be it. If Blacks are contented to allow the country to change dramatically with the introduction of foreigners to fill the void, so be it. But the complaint will be the same; that they are losing what their forefathers paid for in blood. So the new arrivals will become the new targets of political power, unless they can be contained. And the merry-go-round continues. The Amerindians continue to suffer regardless, and the gold dredges continue to contaminate their environment, despite having celebrated Amerindian Heritage Week not too long ago. Eat, Drink, and Be Merry for a day, and then back to the daily routine of suffering. Let the gold rush begin, another OMAI (massive Guyana gold mine, plagued by past disasters) in the making. And let the rush for Black Gold begin also. In terms of making Guyana a better place for ALL Guyanese, we will be pursuing Fool's Gold.

Dr. Clive Thomas' (now Presidential Adviser to the Granger government) dictum in his work, "Bread and Justice" still rings true:

"Bread, or more correctly, the promise of bread cannot be traded for justice."