

STATE PAPER ON THE RE-ORGANISATION OF THE
LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN GUYANA

A. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

1. (1) By Resolution NO. CXXIII of 21st July, 1978, the National Assembly established a Constituent Assembly ⁽¹⁾ for the purpose of devising a new Constitution for Guyana. This Constitution, the first to be fashioned by the Guyanese people for themselves, was intended to be consistent with and reflect the prevailing ethos, the social objectives and the aspirations of the Guyanese people ⁽²⁾. On 20th January, 1980, the Constituent Assembly completed its work and, in accordance with its terms of reference, submitted a Constitution to the National Assembly. On the 4th February, 1980, the Constitution of the Co-operative Republic Bill, 1980, was introduced in the National Assembly for the purpose of enabling the Constitution submitted by the Constituent Assembly to be considered, debated and, if the Parliament so willed, to be enacted into law. The Bill was passed with amendments on 14th February, 1980 and received the President's assent on the 20th February, 1980 ⁽³⁾. Such a far reaching enterprise as the elaboration of a new Constitution of necessity had implications for and impinged upon every aspect of national life, not the least important being the Local Government System.

(1) The Constituent Assembly comprised members of the National Assembly and an advisory panel consisting of delegations from the Trades Union Congress, the Guyana Association of Local Authorities, the Guyana Co-operative Union, the Guyana Assembly of Youth, the Council on the Affairs and Status of women in Guyana, and the Christian, Hindu and Muslim Faiths. It held sittings in twelve geographic locations apart from Georgetown and considered 139 written memoranda from organisations and individuals in addition to 71 oral submissions.

(2) The Declaration of Sophia: Page 19.

(3) Under the Act, the Constitution will come into force on a date to be fixed by the Presidential proclamation but not later than 6th October, 1980.

2. The new Constitution reflects the overwhelming option of the Guyanese people for a democratic society. It affirms the principle of the sovereignty of the people and, for the practical and effective exercise of that sovereignty, prescribes the elective processes and representative democratic institutions. The Constitution identifies and enshrines the Local Government System as one of the most important of these democratic institutions. Indeed, the pivotal and pervasive role assigned to Local Government ⁽⁴⁾ and its integral importance in the political framework constitute an essential characteristic of the democratic organisation of the State. The Local Government System, as it exists, is too narrow in its conception, too limited in its scope, and too archaic in its structures to be accommodated within the bold scheme of local democracy which the new Constitution has put in place. On general principles, then, the remodeling of our Constitution has necessitated the recording of existing Local Government arrangements ⁽⁵⁾.
3. The Local Government System has for many years now attracted widespread criticism. Councillors and others who administer or are closely associated with the system have complained about its inadequacies and problems. Citizens who should be the beneficiaries of a properly administered and effective local government system have complained about its virtual ineffectualness. Undoubtedly, the problems are legion and deep-seated and, on all sides, there is unanimity that these should be resolved as urgently as possible. Indeed, for some time now, the Guyana Association of Local Authorities has been urging with persuasive insistence that the extant system is outmoded and should be replaced. On an objective analysis, it has been generally agreed that the problems are inherent in the very structure of the system and cannot be resolved by merely tinkering with it. What is required is a complete thorough-going re-organisation.
4. (1) The existing system has had its origins in colonial times, was cast in a colonial mould and is riddled with the inhibiting defects of a colonial institution. The worst of these defects is a lack of self-reliance and self-sufficiency and a resulting dependence on the political centre.

(4) "Local Government by freely elected representatives of the people is an integral part of the democratic organisation of the state."

Article 12 of the Constitution.

(5) As was to be expected the Constituent Assembly spent a great deal of time considering and debating memoranda, oral submission and other evidence submitted on the question of Local Government re-organisation as an aspect of the new Constitution. The Guyana Association of Local Authorities' delegation on the Advisory Panel intervened vigorously on this issue helped considerably to shape the outcome of the provisions in the Constitution relating to the Local Government system.

In the colonial context, Local Government was peripheral to the political and economic life of the country. It was never intended to have anything more than a minor and inconsequential role. It could never, in the circumstances, mature to a stage which would enable it to acquire a self-sustaining life of its own and assume major responsibility for organising and managing the development of the rural areas and the regions. This status of dependency was not accidental; it was crucial to the imperialist/colonial system which was based on the theory of an economically dominant centre (the “so called” mother country in Europe or North America) and a weak and subservient periphery (the colony). The complex of rules which regulated the relationship between the two was designed to secure and perpetuate the dominance and prosperity of the centre and the continued inferiority and underdevelopment of the periphery. The internal arrangements of the colony narrowed inevitably its external relationships. A strong political and economic centre in the capital dominated the countryside which, together with its institutions was relegated to a position of dependency. Thus, Local Government, which is an ideal institution for mobilising the rural population and resources and liberating the productive forces for development, could not be organised for such a task since this would have run counter to its role in the scheme of colonial government.

(2) It is not surprising, then, that all systems of Local Government we have known in this country have had one common element; namely, they were not devised by the Guyanese people and did not originate out of their experiences: on the contrary, they had always been fashioned by the colonial administering power. It is interesting to note that Dr. Marshall, an Englishman whose Report ⁽⁶⁾ formed the basis of our present Local Government arrangements, was appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies “to enquire and report on all aspects of Local Government both in rural and urban areas of the colony and to make such recommendations as may be practicable and desirable.” His appointment followed criticisms of the Local Government system made in 1954 by the Robertson Commission, which had itself been appointed by the British Government.

(3) The Marshall proposals were made in the context of and with reference to the colonial polity which existed at the time. In retrospect, the selective implementation of the Report in 1969, after we had acceded to independence, may well have been a mistake. We had the opportunity then to draw upon the wisdom, experience and genius of our people (and particularly those many Guyanese who had had long and extensive experience in Local Government) to design mechanisms more appropriate to our needs and our circumstances. The indisputable fact remains, however, that the Local Government system we operate at present is a continuation and extension of the system which obtained in colonial times. On that ground alone it stands condemned as being unsatisfactory and inappropriate. But more than that; the evidence is abundant that the present system had outlived whatever useful purpose it may have served and with every passing day is proving to be more and more ineffectual.

(6) Report on Local Government in British Guiana By A.H. Marshall: May, 1955.

5. As organised at present, local authorities cannot cope – and cannot be expected to cope – with the complex and massive developmental demands of their respective areas. In the present context, development should be their main task, but they have not been designed for it. Whatever may be their legitimate ambitions, their limitations (legal, organisational and other) effectively inhibit their efforts to assume a developmental role with any hope of success. It has been perceptively remarked that the Marshall report was concerned with Local Government reform and not with the development of the country ⁽⁷⁾. The Local Government arrangements which emerged from the report inevitably perpetuated the passive role of local authorities in the scheme of national development. The author did not conceive of local authorities as primary agents of development: indeed, he required development as a precondition for the establishment of local authorities. Thus, they remain rooted in the tradition of following rather than initiating development. Their activities could not expand beyond conventional regulatory and maintenance functions into the wider and more vital arena of development.
6. (1) At the heart of the problem is the fact that Local Government did not evolve within a national policy framework for the eventual country-wide extension of local democracy. Nor did any coherent philosophy inform its activities, define its objectives and set its goals. Its development has therefore been unsystematic, fragmented and directionless. In the result, local authorities have tended to be unviable and operationally ineffective, and have suffered from the inability of the system to involve large numbers of citizens directly in the work of managing their communities.

(2) Local Authorities are by and large unviable. They were not conceived as economic units and their boundaries were not drawn with an eye to their economic resources. They do not have the geographical expanse and the resource base to make them economically viable. One local authority, for example, has an area of less than one square mile; and all of them have too limited a land base to permit of the emergence of economically strong, self-sustaining units. Local authorities depend almost exclusively on rates and taxes for their revenues which are usually inadequate to enable them to provide and maintain many basic services – much less expand these – or to engage in any major developmental activities. On average, they collect no more than 50% of projected revenues. This low level of rate collection is bound up with the deficiencies of the Local Government system as a whole. These are reflected, among other ways, in the declining economic bases in the villages and the high incidence of owners of village land who earn a livelihood in ways unconnected with the use of their land.

(7) T.A. Earle, Commissioner of Lands and Surveys: “The New Regional System”: An unpublished paper.

(3) Inevitably, the boundaries of local authorities do not conform to any discernible logic. They cut cross infrastructure, land and other facilities and resources which should be treated as an entity or as an economic unit, as the case may be, and managed as such. This haphazard pattern has created intractable problems for the proper management of local authority areas and has often led to absurd consequences. Since some facilities, for example, drainage and irrigation systems, are often not wholly within Local Government areas, it is not even possible for a group of local authorities to co-ordinate their efforts to manage such facilities. Thus, infrastructure vital to the well-being and development of local authority areas are more often than not completely outside their control. The existing arrangements are in most cases a legacy of the plantation system and remains effective barriers to the assumption of greater responsibilities by local authorities for managing and developing their areas. These arrangements do not facilitate co-operation and coordinated action by local authorities in planning, developing and managing the areas within their jurisdiction. Moreover, they lead to inept planning at a national level and consequential wastage and inefficiencies ⁽⁸⁾.

(4) One of the most serious defects of the system is that its focus does include the vast majority of the citizens as active participants in the management of those areas of activities which they perceive to be vital to their welfare, well-being and, indeed, their very existence. As a result, most citizens have come to regard Local Government as something which does not involve them in a direct and personal way. Rather they tend to see it as a fringe institution comprising a few citizens styled "Councillors" who can afford the luxury of spending their time on insubstantial matters not germane to economic existence. The system itself stultified the growth of local democracy and prevented citizens from assuming (or even recognising) their full civic responsibilities. Thus, the great reservoir of human resources available for national development remained virtually untapped.

(8) "There are thirty-three (33) drainage and irrigation areas throughout the coastlands of Guyana consisting of various sizes ranging from 27,000 acres to 77 acres. This variation is very great and is a typical example of the effects of planning from the part to the whole." T.A. Earle: op. cit.

7. (1) Given the limitation of resources and the inadequacies of the system within which they had to operate, local authorities have been unable to make the kind of sustained impact necessary for the physical and economic improvements of their areas. Their intervention in the field of social and cultural development has not been evident. To this perceived non-performance by local authorities, citizens have reacted in various unfavorable ways varying from resentment to apathy. Councillors, caught up in this dilemma, have tended to regard their positions more and more as honorific. They showed a disposition to avoid the leadership task of mobilising people and resources in their communities and to depend more and more on rhetoric in the face of the real problems of development. As a solution to such problems, they fall back upon the old colonial tactic of offering to “lead a delegation” to a Central Government Minister. This is understandable since they perceived quite correctly, that financial and other resources – and therefore the power to get things done – lay with the Central Government.

(2) Within recent years, the Central Government has speeded up the decentralisation of its activities by the establishment of the regional system. The objective has been, among other things, to accelerate the rate of development by facilitating prompt decision-making, more effective co-ordination of programmes and activities, and greater involvement of people at the local level in the various decision-making processes. However, the Local Government system was not geared to respond to these new developments in the Central Government arrangements. As a result, Central Government agencies in the regions remained agents of the centre rather than initiators of regional development; and they have tended to overshadow local authorities and encroach on the already limited areas of responsibility which were properly the latter's. In these circumstances, it was natural for Councillors to gain the impression that their influence, prestige and authority were being eroded. All of these things compounded the problems affecting Local Government and underscored the inadequacies of the existing arrangements.

8. The new Constitution sweeps away the old Local Government system and the concept which relegates Local Government to a peripheral and indeterminate role in the political scheme of the State. It establishes Local Government as the foundation of the democratic structure of the State, assigns it a dominant role in the organisation of national life and confers upon it extensive powers and responsibilities for the management and development of the regions. Local Government will span the entire country; will provide opportunity for massive, direct involvement of citizens in the decision making, management and development processes; and will be the major institution for creating self-reliant, productive communities possessed of the confidence and political awareness to organise and manage their own affairs. Moreover, the Constitution has established mechanisms to permit Central and Local Government to integrate and harmonise their activities in a symbiotic-relationship under which each will support and enrich the other.

9. The Constitution envisages the conferment of widely-ramified duties and responsibilities on the people at the local level for the management and development of their communities. Collaterally, it provides for a real devolution of power to enable them to discharge these duties and responsibilities. The new Local Government system places the responsibility for organising their lives and managing their affairs firmly and unequivocally where it belongs, that is, in the hands of the people themselves. It dissolves the colonial nexus of dependency which to date has characterised the relationship between Local and Central Government; and it confers on the people themselves, through the practical application of socialist democracy which it facilitates, the power to determine the direction, pace and quality of the development process. The introduction of the new system will constitute one of the most significant acts of decolonisation we have undertaken so far and will be an important watershed in our history. The reformation of the Local Government system is a necessary requirement for the removal of the remaining inhibitions to rural self-reliance and self-sufficiency and is an indispensable precondition for the full liberation and mobilisation of the productive forces in the regions.

B. PROPOSALS FOR A NEW SYSTEM OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. The Philosophical Underpinnings

- (a) The Constitution establishes the State firmly on foundations of democracy. The democratic nature of the State is its dominant and recurring theme. Indeed, it defines the goal of political development in terms of the extension of democracy, as follows: “The principal objective of the political system of the State is to extend socialist democracy by providing increasing opportunities for the participation of citizens in the management and decision-making processes of the State.”⁽⁹⁾
- (b) Democracy, as the party and Government understand the term and intend it should apply in Guyana, does not consist merely or essentially in periodic voting at elections. The elective process is an intrinsic characteristic of democracy, but the term has a deeper and more pervasive quality. Socialist democracy requires and demands the active involvement of the people in the various decision-making and management processes in all sectors of national life. Socialist democracy is not confined to the periodic or occasional exercise of some legal right. On the contrary, it is a continuous activity, an intrinsic and indispensable part of the fabric of the daily life of the society.
- (c) For such a system of democracy to flourish and have vitality and efficacy, there must be a great measure of decentralisation and devolution of authority and decision-making. In other words, power within the State must be diffused rather than concentrated. The inevitable consequence of socialist democracy is that people of all levels have to assume greater responsibilities and duties for the management and development of the communities in which they live.

2. This concept of socialist democracy has inspired and informed the arrangements of Local Government in the Constitution ⁽¹⁰⁾.

(9) Article 13 of the Constitution.

(10) cf: Cde. L.F.S. Burnham: “The concept of my Government of Local Government is that it is an expression of the will, the desires, the objective and the goals of the people in the various communities and areas..... The argument has gone on as to the merits and demerits of centralisation and decentralisation. My Government is convinced that there must be decentralisation, that there must be a wider area of responsibility given to the Local Government agencies, there must be a greater autonomy than we have had in the past, there must be specific tasks undertaken by them which in the past were undertaken and ineffectively carried out by the Central Government oblivious to the wishes and aspirations of the people in the far flung corners of our country.” Address to the Caribbean Regional Seminar on Central Services to Local Authorities on 8th March, 1971.

2. Main Objectives of the Local Government System

- (1) The Local Government system is intended to be a major institution for transferring power to the people for socialist development. In terms of the Constitutional provisions, it is oriented towards development. Essentially, its overriding objective is to activate and speed up the process of development in every region, and create self-reliant, productive communities of people who understand the nature of national development and accept individual and collective responsibility for the task.
- (2) Chapter VII of the Constitution outlines a dynamic and pervasive role for Local Government. Given our concept of democracy, there is no aspect of national life that cannot fall within the purview of Local Government and which Local Government cannot influence and enrich. Its maintenance and service functions will be preserved and enlarged. But its primary objective will be to promote and protect the permanent interests of the citizens. To this end, Local authorities will be required to create, sustain and systematically improve the material and cultural conditions of life in the various communities. Their responsibility carries with it a right and a duty to be involved in planning the development of their areas, exploiting its resources, and marketing its produce. Equally, it implies a power to engage in economic enterprises of all kinds and in the providing of all kinds of goods and services which can accelerate the pace of development.
- (3) All Local Government activity must aim at improving people's living standards and cultural and environmental conditions. Local Government mechanisms will therefore be geared to facilitate the mobilisation of people for production, and for cultural and educational activities. Such mobilisation is the basis for rapid and sustained improvements in production and productivity.
- (4) In sum, the objective of the system is to provide the institutional channels for harnessing power and collective wisdom of the people for the development of their regions and for the continuous improvement of their living standards and quality of life.

3. The Guiding Principles

- (1) Certain clear principles have guided and informed proposed Local Government arrangements: These may be summarised as follows:
 - (a) Local Government should as far as practicable cover the entire country.

- (b) Local authority areas should be economically viable or have a potential for becoming viable. To this end, the system must be designed to enable extensive land areas with adequate economic resources to fall within the boundaries and jurisdiction of local authorities for planning and development purposes. At the same time, it must accommodate small Local Government entities within the framework of the larger authorities to maximise the advantages to be gained from social cohesion and to facilitate the involvement of as many people as possible in the management of the areas in which they live. The boundaries of local authorities should be drawn in a way that enables them to exercise control over resources and infrastructure which ought logically to be managed as a single entity.
- (c) The development of Local Government areas should not depend upon accidental circumstances; for example, whether or not they are fortunate enough to have a sugar factory or a mining enterprise within their boundaries. The revenue of local authorities should not depend merely or primarily on rates or taxes. Hence the importance of ensuring that local authorities areas have an ample economic base.
- (d) The development programmes of Local Government authority areas should be integrated into the national development plan and Central Government resources allocated on definite principles for financing such development.
- (e) Local authorities should be vested with a clear duty and responsibility for managing and developing their respective areas.
- (f) Local Government should be development-oriented and should be organised with this end in view.
- (g) Membership of Local authorities should not be a mere honorific position. It should carry with it, by law, a duty to give leadership by example. The law should prescribe the duties of Councillors and of local authorities. In this connection, Councillors and local authorities should periodically, between elections, give an account of their stewardship to the communities they serve; and Councillors who are in dereliction of their duty should be subject to recall.
- (h) The Local Government system should be so structured that it affords an opportunity for large numbers of citizens to become involved as of right, as members of the system, in the work of managing and developing their communities.
- (i) Linkages between Local and Central Government should be institutionalised and mechanisms established for ensuring a continuous interrelationship and fruitful collaboration in the work of managing and developing the country.

(2) These principles have emerged after years of intensive study; analysis and deliberations by the Guyana Association of Local Authorities ⁽¹¹⁾, its affiliates, and a wide cross-section of organisations and citizens who have addressed their minds to the problems of Local Government. The debates and deliberation of the Constituent Assembly considerably influenced the crystallisation of the principles.

4. Mechanics of the New System

(1) (a) On the basis of the principles outlined above and pursuant to Article 72 (1) of the Constitution, it is proposed to divide the whole country into ten (10) Local Government regions ⁽¹²⁾. The boundaries of these regions have been demarcated in accordance with the criteria specified by Article 72 (2) of the Constitution; Namely, population, physical size, geographical characteristics, economic resources and the existing and planned infrastructure of each area as well as the possibilities of facilitating the most rational management and use of such resources and infrastructure with a view to ensuring that area is or has the potential for becoming economically viable.

(b) Each region has been sub-divided into sub-regions, districts, communities and neighbourhoods. Each neighbourhood has been further sub-divided into a number of basic units (known as people's co-operative areas) ⁽¹³⁾. In sub-dividing regions, care has been taken to ensure that existing villages are preserved as entities.

(c) The Local Government system will therefore have six (6) sectors of local democratic power. It will start with a relatively small geographical area, the people's co-operative as its core sector, and spread out centrifugally to encompass the entire region.

(2)(a) Every sector will be administered and managed by a local democratic organ, comprising the elected representatives of the citizens who live in the particular sector.

(b) Every sector will have its specific duties and responsibilities clearly defined by law.

(3) The Regional Democratic Council will be the supreme Local Government organ in each region with responsibility for the overall management and administration of the region and the co-ordination of the activities of all local democratic organs within its boundaries.

(11) GALA deserves much credit for the work it has done over the years by way of discussions, lectures, seminars and research on the question of Local Government re-organisation. For many years, its Executive maintained on-going dialogue with the Minister responsible for Local Government and submitted many memoranda on the subject. Mention must also be made of GALA's valuable contribution to the work of the Constituent Assembly.

(12) See Appendix 'A': (1) Description of the Boundaries of the Ten (10) regions and maps of regions.

(13) See Appendix 'B': Breakdown showing the proposed number of sub-divisions in each region.

(4) (a) The legal status of existing towns – Georgetown, New Amsterdam, Linden, Rose Hall, Corriverton – will be preserved. They will continue to elect their mayors and Town Councilors as in the past and discharge their existing duties and responsibilities. However, they will assume the larger and more dynamic role with which the Constitution has invested local democratic organs. Since these towns will be part of larger geographical entities, i.e. the regions, they will be required to work in close liaison and co-ordinate their activities with the Regional Democratic Councils and other local democratic organs within the boundaries of which they fall. Towns will be sub-divided into sectors on principles similar to those applicable to other Local Government areas to enable citizens to assume responsibilities for managing and developing the sub-divisions in which they live and to participate directly in the work of Local Government.

(b) Similarly, the status of Councils established under the Amerindian Act Chapter 29:01, will be preserved and appropriate mechanisms put in place for linking their activities with the work of other local democratic organs.

(5) (a) Within each region, local democratic organs will co-operate with one another and co-ordinate their activities in a systematic way. Institutional arrangements will be put in place to achieve this objective.

(b) At the national level, the Constitution has established the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs as one of the Supreme Organs of Democratic Power. Membership of the National Congress will comprise persons elected in accordance with law from local democratic organs. The National Congress will have responsibility for representing and promoting the interests of Local Government in Guyana and will discharge such other duties and functions as may be assigned to it by law.

(6) (a) In order to facilitate effective, continuous co-operation between Central and Local Government, Local Government interests will have direct representation in the Parliament. Each Regional Democratic Council will elect one of its members to sit in the National Assembly. These members will represent the geographical area from which they come and thus provide a link between the Central Legislature and Particular regions of the country.

The National Congress of Local Democratic Organs will elect two members to sit in the central legislature. These members will represent broad Local Government interests throughout the country. Thus, Local Government interests will be represented in the National Assembly by 12 members.

(b) The link between Central and Local Government will be further strengthened by the fact that the Supreme Congress of the People provides a high Constitutional forum where members of the National Assembly and the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs will convene to deliberate on important matters of State and, among other things, tender advice to the President of Guyana.

(c) In the economic sphere, the Constitution requires the development plans of local authorities to be integrated into the national plans and directs the Central Government to make appropriate budgetary allocations to enable them to be implemented.

5. THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

(1) Local Democratic Organs will be composed entirely of elected re-presentatives of the people. These representatives will be elected in accordance with law as part of the democratic processes of the State. Generally, the qualifications to be an elector or a candidate at Local Government elections will be the same as those required for General Elections. An estimated 16,000 citizens will participate directly in the new system as Councillors.

(2) Elections for Regional Democratic Councils

- (a) These will be contested on a party basis in accordance with the system of Proportional Representation which regulates General Elections.
- (b) Elections will take place at such times as the President may appoint by proclamation; but it is envisaged that they will normally take place at the same time as General Elections.
- (c) Regional Democratic Councils may be dissolved at such times as the President may appoint by proclamation. However, the Constitution provides that the life of the Regional Democratic Councils shall not exceed five years and four months, which is also the length of the life of the National Assembly.

(3) Elections for Town Councils and Amerindian Councils

- (a) Towns: The existing electoral procedures for the towns will be retained subject to any necessary modifications to ensure congruence with the provisions of the Constitution and the new concept of Local Government.
- (b) Amerindian Councils: The procedures for election to Amerindian Councils under the provisions of the Amerindian Act will be retained subject to any necessary modifications.

(c) Elections for Other Organs of Local Democratic Power

- (i) Elections to these organs will be contested on a Party basis in accordance with the system of Proportional Representation.
- (ii) A qualification for standing as a candidate will be that the person must be resident in the particular Local Government sector in which he is seeking election.
- (iii) (1) Direct elections in the sectors of the basic unit (i.e. people's co-operative areas) will be the foundation of the local democratic system under the Regional Democratic Councils.

(2) A single set of elections will be held to elect candidates to fill all the seats in these local democratic organs.

(3) Parties will submit lists of Candidates for each sector as is usual under the system of Proportional Representation.

(4) On election day, all electors in the region will cast their vote for the party of their choice in the basic unit (i.e. the People's Co-operative Area) in which they reside.

(5) (i) Votes will then be counted in each People's Co-operative area and seats allocated to Parties according to the percentage of votes gained.

(ii) Votes will then be counted on the basis of the unit sector (i.e. the neighborhood) and seats allocated to Parties in these councils according to the votes gained.

(iii) Votes will then be counted on the basis of the next sector (i.e. the community) and seats allocated accordingly and so on right up to the sector of the Sub-Region.

6. FUNCTIONS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND POWERS

- (1) The Constitution sets out in clear terms the duties and responsibilities of local democratic organs ⁽¹⁴⁾. Their primary duty will be to ensure the efficient management and development of their areas and to give leadership by example. They are, in effect, directed to be action and development-oriented. In the discharge of their broad responsibilities, they will be required to create the environment and establish the facilities to enable the political, economic, social and cultural life of the people to burgeon and flourish. Thus, they will have a shared responsibility for encouraging economic activities; stimulating production; promoting increasingly higher levels of efficiency; maintaining and preserving public property; protecting communities from criminal, vandal and other anti-social activities; raising cultural standards and levels of civic consciousness; cultivating the social life of the people, and generally safeguarding and improving their legal and other rights. In mobilising the people for active participation in these many-sided activities, local democratic organs will be required to co-operate with the social organisations of the working people.

(14) Article 74.

(2) Under the proposed scheme, local democratic organs will be empowered to engage in any activity which is calculated to have a favorable impact upon the development of their areas or on the welfare of citizens.

Thus, they may engage, for example, in agriculture, manufacturing and other productive enterprises in marketing and in the provision of services. It is expected that they will in time undertake, in their own right and also as agents of the Central Government, many of the services now provided by the Central Government in certain fields such as health, education and training, social welfare and agriculture, to name a few. Many regulatory monitoring and record keeping functions now performed by the Central Government will eventually be decentralised. Local Authorities will undertake these functions and will also act as agents for public corporations in a wide field of activities. A sadly neglected but nationally important task, will be to initiate and encourage research into the history of villages and the regions and to identify with a view to their preservation of historical documents and material.

(3) Obviously, local democratic organs will have to be vested with legal powers to enable them to discharge these large, important and complex responsibilities. In terms of the Constitution, the necessary laws will be enacted to enable them to raise their own financial resources and to take decisions which are binding on their agencies and institutions and upon the communities and citizens of their areas ⁽¹⁵⁾. Under the general law, they will be clothed with appropriate authority to discharge their functions effectively.

(4) In order to emphasise the principle that Local Democratic Organs and their members will have the primary function of service to the people, the law itself will set out their duties, impose upon them specific tasks and responsibilities and prescribe sanctions for dereliction of duty. One important sanction will be the right of recall which will be given to electors. Additionally, these organs will be required to give an account of their stewardship to the communities they serve at stated periods between elections.

(15) Article 75

- (5) To ensure that the people's energies and the resources of their regions are not dissipated or diverted from the developmental objective, the mechanisms (including the supporting legislation) will institutionalise the co-operative approach to Local Government activities. They will be designed to reduce the scope for self-defeating conflicts, disruptive behavior and negative attitudes. Such conduct will be penalised. On the other hand, the mechanisms will facilitate and put a premium on the practice of working in the interest of the community through consensual, co-operative arrangements. To give point to this emphasis, the basic Local Government unit will be named the People's Co-operative.

C. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. The proposed ten Local Government regions have been demarcated in conformity with the directive in the Constitution that they should be economically viable. Their boundaries were drawn after careful assessment of their economic resources, their communication system or communication possibilities, their topography and their existing infrastructure among other things. For purposes of developmental planning, each Local Government region will also be an economic planning region.
2. The Local Government system will be intimately involved in the process of national economic planning upon which we have embarked. As the party and government conceive it, such planning does not mean authoritarian dictation from the centre and a smothering of local initiative. Indeed, if it is to be successful, it will require the active involvement of all Local Government agencies and a continuous two-way flow of information, ideas and experiences. It will require, too, a great measure of decentralisation and devolution.
3. Local democratic organs, then, will have important ongoing responsibilities as an integral part of the national planning system. They will be able to carry out tasks such as surveys, the collection of local statistics and other data, the identification of local resources and the gathering and initial assessment of a wide range of information. Indeed, they will be a principal source of much of the information which the planners will use in elaborating national and regional plans. But their role in the planning process will not be limited to gathering raw data for the central planners. It is expected that the regions will establish in time their own planning agencies for drafting their development plans, within the framework of national planning guidelines and procedures. The regional planning agencies will be linked with and collaborate closely with the State Planning Commission.

D. LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONAL SYSTEM

1. The expanded responsibilities and functions projected for local democratic organs of necessity imply and require a contraction of the over powering Central Government presence in the regions which is a feature of the present political organisation of the State. As the new Local Government system takes shape, the Central Government will withdraw from its anachronistic avuncular role as the people begin to play a larger role in managing their communities. In particular, the Central Government arrangements known as the regional system will undergo a qualitative change as local democratic organs progressively assume responsibility for many of the activities now carried out by the central government in the regions.
2. However, the regional system will not diminish in importance and relevance. It will take on new dimensions and interact in new and dynamic ways with the Local Government system. It will continue to maintain an overview of regional development; it will continue to co-ordinate the activities of the Central Government and other public sectors agencies, Local Government agencies and the people; and it will continue to constitute the formal link in the regions between the Local Government authorities on the one hand and the party and the Central Government on the other.
3. Freed from the time absorbing responsibility for monitoring a complexity of central Government activities, the regional Ministers and their staff will be in a better position to give encouragement, guidance and support to the people in their efforts to develop their communities. They will be better able, too, to ensure that at the local level there is a deeper understanding of the national approach to economic and cultural liberation and a keener awareness of national policies, programmes and objectives; and, on the other hand, that the central government has an intelligent and timely appreciation of local problems, issues and strategies. It will be the institution which will enable day to day interaction between the Central and Local Government systems and facilitate harmonious relations and the coordinated effort.

TRANSITION

These arrangements for the re-organisation of the Local Government system are far reaching and mark a sharp break with the past. They impose a clear duty on local democratic organs and on individual councillors to manage efficiently and develop their communities. They will vest in local democratic organs the powers commensurate with their extensive responsibilities. Obviously, the transition from the old order to the new will not take place overnight or without problems. It is going to take time and require patience. People will have to learn and understand the mechanics of the new system, and to accept and accommodate themselves to their new and enlarged powers and responsibilities. The introduction of the new system therefore will have to be phased in a programmed and systematic way. The Government proposes that the new system of local democracy should be put in place completely within twelve months of the Constitution of the first parliament to be elected under the people's new Constitution. In the transitional period, the central government will lend every support, particularly by way of training and secondment of personnel to local democratic organs.

CONCLUSION

1. These proposals for the re-organisation of Local Government are part and parcel of the political developments which have been taking place in this country since it became independent in 1966. These developments represent settled and publicly declared policy of the party and government. They have as their principal aim the transference of decision-making and management responsibilities within the State to the people; in other words, to invoke the popular phrase, the transference of “power to the people” in an orderly and structured manner. This is an ongoing process.

2. The actual implementation of plans is never a simple and clear-cut matter. This is particularly so with the introduction of a new system which makes a novel and radical departure from the traditional. There are bound to be problems and difficulties as we proceed. But these are inherent in any process of breaking out of the trap of underdevelopment and dependency; they do not constitute an adequate reason for hesitancy, doubt and fear. When all is said and done, we Guyanese have devised bold, innovative arrangements for the transformation of the Local Government system in Guyana. We have constructed a framework within which there can develop and mature an efficient and dynamic system of local democracy which can meet the needs of the time, respond rapidly and flexibly to the demands of future years and hasten our advance towards a socialist society. The great point about these arrangements is that they derive from the experiences, ideas and recommendations of the Guyanese people. It remains for us to demonstrate that we can make our own ideas work in practice.

5th August, 1980