

## Reader Comment...

# Education in Guyana is free; in 'developed' Canada, price rises

by Grantley W. Walrond

The article captioned "WUSC: Mobile Travel Agency?" appeared in the Nov. 18 issue of *Gateway* and written by Mr. Thakur left me more than a little disturbed about the author's credibility, sincerity and above all, his scholarship.

In fact, it became increasingly apparent to me that my address on Guyana Night on the subject of "Underdevelopment, its manifestations and constraints to development" was extremely relevant, not only to the Canadian audience for which it was intended, but for the likes of Mr. Thakur and his heckling associates. I simply treated Guyana as an underdeveloped country which faces more or less the numerous problems of underdevelopment faced by the nations of Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania.

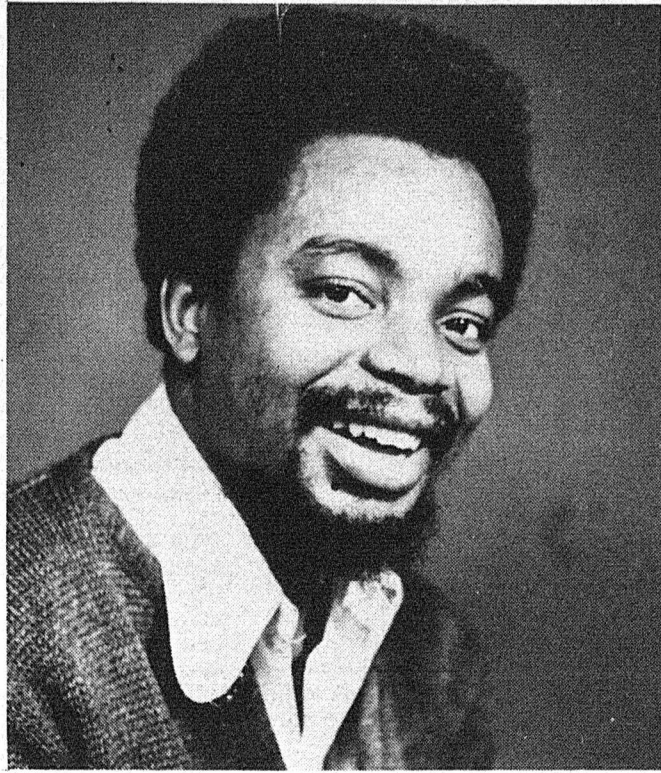
By doing so, I attempted to put in perspective the debate on 'North-South Dialogue,' that was raging on campus with the opponents being Thomas Enders, US Ambassador and Mel Hurtig, Canadian publisher. I attempted to document the view of the underdeveloped world and the cause of the "Group of 77," which Guyana has championed. By understanding these positions, one would have a clear picture of not only what Guyana represented but the course it was charting.

## WUSC people were objective...

This was acceptable to the WUSC organizers who invited me to give the address. The address, thought, supplemented the very commendable slide show and insightful commentary on Guyana by WUSC personnel, Chuck Morrison and Roger DeWinter. I was impressed with their objectivity, and their analyses of the Guyanese situation, and I would like to publicly thank them for doing a job that a Guyanese would not have been able to do without running into a tremendous degree of 'hostility,' as Mr. Thakur puts it.

I am convinced that Mr. Thakur's 'mystification' may have resulted from his own inability to appreciate a documented case. It is apparent that his expose was best suited for a 'street-corner' political rally where sloganeering and catch phrases and name-calling may be well-received by an audience that identifies with the speaker. It's a far cry from the objective appraisal that befits a scholar in a university community.

The central point, Mr. Thakur, is that making qualitative assessments based on quotes from some obscure author in the *New Yorker* about contemporary matters about which you claim yourself knowledgeable, is both un-scholarly and in bad taste. Certainly Jane Cramer does not identify with the Guyanese people, nor do the interests she



This article is a reply to *Rishee Thakur's Reader Comment* that was printed in the Nov. 18 *Gateway*. Mr. Walrond is a graduate student in geology at the U of A, and was a speaker at *Guyana Night*, sponsored by the WUSC (World University Service of Canada) and held on campus on Nov. 6.

represents have any Guyanese flavour. To base more than three-quarters of your entire statement on Cramer's partisan views makes you appear like a "... tale told by a fool, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Whatever is meant by "...the ethnic division of the country is along economic lines," I will never know, but it certainly sounds imprecise, if not simply unintelligible.

If I can infer from Mr. Thakur's observations at the Nov. 6 meeting, and from the anonymous letter I received in my mail, and which mail I can trace to Mr. Thakur and his associates, I am convinced that Mr. Thakur is one of those Guyanese who as he says, are "unwilling and unable to racially co-operate."

The observation about the disparity between incomes of the Ministers of the Guyanese govt. and the average worker was nothing short of a callous attempt to discredit a revolutionary government. The figure of \$80,000 which was quoted as the ministers salary represents approximately \$20,000 to \$30,000 as personal gains for the ministers while the remaining \$50,000-\$60,000 are allocations for ministries to be used for entertainment, maintenance, etc. This sum is accountable and is not at the disposition of the minister for his personal use, but is allocated to the entire ministry. This is a normal practice of any organization anywhere in the world, but is construed in this case to represent disparities in which the government officials prosper at the expense of the people. What treachery!

## Opposition changes mind

I certainly credit Dr. Jagan and his opposition, Peoples Progressive Party, with much more insight than Mr. Thakur does, on the political, economic and social realities that operate in a Guyanese context. It is certainly significant that Dr. Jagan,

and since 1955 when the split came between himself and Forbes Burnham, has bitterly opposed Burnham and his Party, should twenty years later announce that he was supporting, albeit critically, the developmental plans and strategy of Prime Minister Burnham's government.

## Survival is key...

To my mind, it's a positive sign that the achievements of the Burnham government are not only being acknowledged, but that the Guyanese people who have been divided for nearly an entire generation have finally found a unifying formula: a formula that is predicated on the struggle for survival in an extremely hostile world.

One Canadian student made a very interesting observation at the Guyana night, and it is instructive that I repeat it here while reacting to it, as many more Canadians have approached me on the subject. She said, "You Guyanese are fighting amongst yourselves, tearing your country apart ... I came here to hear about the achievements of Guyana."

To those who felt the same way, it was only fitting that I talk about some of the achievements of Guyana, and in capsule form highlight the tremendous progress and transformation that Guyana has seen since its independence from Britain ten years ago.

— Guyana now owns and controls all the resources of Guyana. The bauxite, sugar, timber and other resources have been internalized into Guyanese hands.

— More than 65 per cent of the expenditure for the 1972-76 Development Plan was met by the deploying of internal resources. Not the least of which was the application of a co-operative and self-help philosophy. Over the ten-year period, Guyana's GDP grew at approximately six per cent per annum.

— Through the Guyana Marketing Corporation, farm incomes have been stabilized

and distribution of food is ensured.

— Through the agencies of the Guyana National Co-operative Banks of Mortgage Finance and Agriculture, Guyanese have made tremendous gains in feeding, clothing and housing themselves. I should point out that this is the first development priority of PM Burnham's government.

— Through the Small Industries corporation, small businessmen have more than an adequate chance to express their innovative and entrepreneurial abilities, while getting financial backing and advice from a very qualified staff.

— A comprehensive social security system in the National Insurance Scheme has been implemented. This has been so successful that the Caribbean is adopting the pattern.

— Over 30,700 more places for primary education and over 10,500 more secondary school places were created in the 1972-76 period alone. The education program has been revamped to give expression to the needs of Guyana, and reflects a strong technical orientation. Agriculture and other technical skills are part of the regular school curriculum as evidenced in the multi-lateral school concept.

## All university is free...

— All education in Guyana from the elementary to university levels is free.

— Trade, which is so essential to Guyana, is completely controlled, and imported goods are essentials that cannot be currently produced in Guyana.

— The Hydroelectric scheme when it is completed in 1982 will allow Guyana to go on an imaginative industrial scheme, not the least of which is to process our own bauxite.

— The setting-up of the Guyana National Services Scheme which is aimed at bringin

Guyanese closer to the land and to each other. My experience in the National Service will long be remembered. It helps to keep one in touch with the realities of Guyanese life. For the pseudo-educated, given to showings of elitism, it is a rude awakening. The close contact with less fortunate Guyanese can only reaffirm one's conviction that there is a *serious* job of nation-building to be done.

— The bursting open of the Hinterland by roads and airstrips is putting before the Guyanese people for the first time the riches of the Hinterland.

I could go on, but space restrictions do not allow it. If the above leaves one with the impression that all is well in Guyana, it is far from the truth. We do have problems, some more serious than others. To my mind, one of our greatest problems is the lack of adequately-trained manpower, and the consequences that follow therefrom. Policy can be legislated, but interpretation and implementation of policy is often sadly lacking to the point where the intent of the policy is compromised. Such ills can only be remedied with increasing education and disciplining. We have problems raising developmental finance. Because of Guyana's commitment to a socialist alternative, funds from the developed capitalist world are hard to come by and when they come, they're very high priced.

## "isms" are not always the answer...

We are borrowing in the European money market at ridiculously high usurious rates such as 16 per cent.

These are some of the points I tried to make during my address, if Mr. Thakur and his heckling friends had listened instead of disrupting, they might have learned something.

In conclusion, I will repeat what I said on Nov. 6, when I concluded my address. I made a plea for third world scholars to learn as much of the theory and practice of the developed world, while always keeping an eye out for the relevance of what they learn in their own countries. We must recognize that the challenge of societal transformation must take into account the social, political and economic realities of our respective countries. Internationalism, Marxism, capitalism, or any "ism" are only as good as the environment in which they are applied. We must develop the capacity to find meaningful solutions to our own problems. We must define for ourselves what specific terms mean instead of the parrot-like chanting of professional jargon and catch phrases which some rehearse with the belief that it is scholarly to do so. In fact, we must ensure that our "better" education will enable us to be sources of meaningful change rather than sources of alienation and self-destruction.