

Make public servants salaries a national priority

By [Stabroek News](#)

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Dear Editor,

As Guyana continues to be mired in disagreements spanning a number of crucial economic issues, I have been thinking to myself that we need to hit the reset button, to return to the core values about ourselves as a people, this being the basis for our push for our Independence from Britain in 1966. More particularly, all Guyanese, but especially the People's Progressive Party, are encouraged to reflect, to return to the original set of values and purpose upon which Dr. Cheddi Jagan along with his wife and Ashton Chase, established the People's Progressive Party in January 1950. Many Guyanese may be surprised that Forbes Burnham himself was also a PPP founding member. Sydney King (Eusi Kwayana) also shared Dr. Jagan's vision. The PPP's values and vision at the time reflected the true character of Dr. Jagan himself, who remained committed to equality, equity, fairness and development for all Guyanese regardless of race, 'class' or religion.

For me, these values of equality, equity and fairness were godly, innocent, reflecting a caring love and concern for all Guyanese, without prejudice. The PPP's own return to the vision and values of Dr. Jagan would be transformative since there would be a return to the concept of equity in development and delivery of government services to all Guyanese. A critical area in national development, for example, is ensuring that public servants, be they workers across the various ministries, nurses, teachers who create tomorrow's leaders, or the joint services, receive incomes which allow them to lead normal lives where they can provide adequately for themselves, their children, their parents and other extended family. This is in addition to owning their own homes and acquiring all the amenities that come with living in a modern world. This is a basic principle of society, that the incomes of public servants be a standard for valuing compensation within society.

Reflecting on real world outcomes, there have been long running disputes between government and unions to the point where government-imposed salary increases became the norm. In the circumstances, it is quite obvious that public servants have been underpaid for the duration of the time government-imposed wage increases have been applied. The concern has always been that government doesn't have enough money, among other number of excuses. The claim about inadequate resources should now be laid to rest with the inflow from our national oil resources. With this as our guide, the administration is encouraged to take the initiative and sit with unions to resolve this issue

as a matter of priority. Given that it is likely that disagreements over salaries will continue, the administration and unions should nominate persons to an arbitration panel tasked with commissioning an independent study so that an impartial recommendation can be made to reflect the welfare concerns of public servants.

This panel should also be tasked with making recommendations for payments of salaries covering the period of years over which public servants were underpaid, the most probable year being that when the administration imposed public servants' salary increases. Without question, resources can be prioritized from within the current budget framework together with available funds from oil revenues for poverty elimination and the promotion of welfare growth across all segments of the population. Incomes of public servants should be addressed as a matter of national priority, not to mention our under-represented pensioners who have given their lives in our service, alongside the push to stimulate investment and growth in the other economic sectors.

Sincerely,

Craig Sylvester