

ODEEN ISHMAEL

**FROM AUTOCRACY
TO DEMOCRACY IN GUYANA**

**ASPECTS OF POST-INDEPENDENCE
GUYANESE HISTORY (1966-1992)**

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Introduction

Introduction

On 26 May 1966, Guyana became an independent nation after being a European possession for three and a half centuries. Initially, the country, comprising three separate “colonies”, was colonised by the Dutch at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It was seized briefly by the French during the late eighteenth century, restored to Dutch rule, then captured by the British at the beginning of the nineteenth century, handed back to the Dutch within a year, but then taken back in 1803 by the British who finally obtained full ownership by a treaty signed in 1814.

From that time, the country—which became known as British Guiana in 1831 when the three original colonies were united—was ruled by a succession of British governors. On the attainment of independence, the British governor was re-designated “Governor-General” and remained as the representative of the Queen of England, the official Head of State of independent Guyana.

The management of the internal and external affairs of the country was now totally in the hands of the coalition government led by Prime Minister Forbes Burnham which succeeded the government of the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) after the December 1964 elections. Up to the time of independence, the country had internal self-government with no control over foreign affairs which were handled by the British government.

But the government was still politically fragile since it was a coalition of Burnham’s party, the People’s National Congress (PNC) and the small right-wing United Force (UF), led by the Peter D’Aguiar, the Minister of Finance. From the early days of the coalition government in 1965, D’Aguiar expressed concerns over the manner in which Burnham handled economic and financial issues, but he was encouraged to remain in the coalition by the American government fearing that the opposition

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socialist PPP, led by Cheddi Jagan, could return to power should the coalition collapse.

But Burnham maintained a heavy hand in ruling the country, and finally D'Aguiar, denouncing certain corrupt practices, resigned from the government in 1967. However, he did not withdraw his party from the coalition.

By that time, Burnham was busy encouraging parliamentarians from both the opposition PPP (which was the largest party in the National Assembly) and the UF to resign from their respective parties and cross over to the PNC. By 1968, through this action, the PNC had acquired a slim majority in the National Assembly and did not even need the UF to pass legislation.

Meanwhile, Burnham's rule became more and more autocratic and by 1968 he began his plans to retain power by non-democratic means. Systematically, he put plans into operation to rig the December 1968 general elections for which he obtained tacit support from the American government. The rigging was so crude that it received total condemnation locally and internationally, but not by western governments which maintained their support of the Burnham regime.

With his party, the PNC, now having a rigged majority in the National Assembly, Burnham's autocratic rule became more and more dictatorial, and this became even more evident in the rigged local government elections of 1970, and later for the July 1973 general elections when he utilised the Guyana Defence Force to seize ballot boxes and spirit them away to secret locations where they were switched for other boxes containing heavily padded PNC votes. This electoral fraud in 1973, to which the western governments, in particular, again turned a blind eye, resulted in the PNC "winning" a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly.

The rule of the PNC was highlighted by a total lack of democracy. The rigged 1973 elections were followed in 1978 by a rigged referendum allowing the PNC to introduce a new constitution which created an executive presidency for which Burnham became the first holder. Then came the rigged 1980 elections through which the PNC further expanded its majority in the National Assembly.

Burnham died in August 1985 and was succeeded by Desmond Hoyte as President of Guyana. But, despite first expectation that he would reverse the autocratic and dictatorial nature of the PNC, the election of December 1985 were even more heavily rigged than before.

During all this time, the PPP waged a campaign locally and internationally for the return of democracy but made little headway since the western countries, notably the United States, continued to support the PNC which they saw as a bulwark against the "communist" PPP.

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These countries were fully aware of the undemocratic nature of the PNC, but they did not want the PPP to ever return to power.

But after 1985, even these western powers began to have second thoughts since the undemocratic nature of the government was stifling economic development and forcing Guyanese to emigrate in larger numbers. Further, the congressional and parliamentary representatives in those countries had begun to pressure those governments to press the PNC government in Guyana to hold free and fair elections. And in Guyana itself, the PPP was joined by other opposition parties and civil society groups in the campaign locally and internationally for free and fair elections. This campaign eventually resulted in the involvement of ex-US President Jimmy Carter who succeeded in urging Hoyte to concede to these demands.

The October 1992 elections, internationally supervised and especially with the votes counted at the polling places immediately after voting concluded, saw the defeat of the PNC and a resounding victory for the PPP, with its leader, Cheddi Jagan, being elected as President.

This volume comprises a collection of articles describing aspects of Guyanese history from 1966 to 1992, the period of the PNC-led governments. All of these articles originally appeared between September 2005 and November 2008 in the *Guyana Journal*, a monthly magazine published in New York. They have been re-edited for this volume, but there is very little change in their original content. They give the reader a general picture of the historical transition of Guyana from the time it became an independent nation and set out the political and economic problems that the Guyanese people had to confront during more than two and a half decades of PNC rule. At the same time, they show the nature of autocratic and dictatorial government and the efforts and related problems in the political struggle to move the country away from that type of “governance” to freedom and democracy.

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The Ankoko Incursion

Chapter 1

The Ankoko Incursion

Venezuelan intrusion on Guyanese territory

In February 1966, the Governments of Venezuela, the United Kingdom and Guyana signed the Geneva Agreement aimed at resolving the controversy over the Venezuelan claim that the arbitral award of 1899, which settled the border between Venezuela and Guyana, was null and void.

The Agreement provided that “no new claim or enlargement of an existing claim to territorial sovereignty in these territories (of Venezuela and British Guiana) shall be asserted while this Agreement is in force, nor shall any claim whatsoever be asserted otherwise than in the Mixed Commission while that Commission is in being.”

Despite this declaration, a few months later a well-armed group of Venezuelan soldiers, along with civilians, encroached upon and occupied territory on the Guyana side of the border. This encroachment occurred, unknowing to Guyana Government, on the Guyana half of the island of Ankoko at the confluence of the boundary rivers, Cuyuni and Wenamu (Wenamo). It took the form of the introduction of military and civilian personnel and the establishment of an airstrip and the erection of other installations and structures, including a post-office, school and military and police outposts.

The incursion on Guyanese territory on Ankoko Island by Venezuela was reported to the Guyanese authorities early in October 1966 by a diamond prospector who was in that forested and almost uninhabited area at the time. As a result, a Guyanese team of senior officials,

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including police officers, visited the vicinity on 12 October 1966 and verified that Venezuelan personnel were occupying the Guyana side of the island where they had already constructed an airstrip.

Subsequently, on the morning of 14 October 1966, Forbes Burnham, as Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs of Guyana, dispatched a strong protest to the Foreign Minister of Venezuela, Ignacio Iribarren Borges, and demanded the withdrawal of Venezuelan troops and the removal of installations they had set up on Guyana's territory.

Shortly after, Burnham called in the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, to brief him of the situation. Later that morning, in a radio broadcast Burnham informed Guyanese of the developments. Urging them to remain calm, he added that every step was being taken "to retain our territorial sovereignty by peaceful means."

Protest in Guyana

Burnham's announcement immediately galvanised all Guyanese to condemn the Venezuelan action. A few hours after the broadcast, members of the Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO) and the Young Socialist Movement (YSM), the youth arms of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the People's National Congress (PNC) respectively, mounted a large protest outside the Venezuelan Consulate General in Middle Street, Georgetown. In the course of this noisy demonstration, some of the protestors invaded the compound and pulled down the Venezuelan flag from the mast and then proceeded to burn it on the street.

An immediate protest to the Guyana Government was made by the Consul General, Señor Aranguren to whom the Guyana External Affairs Ministry later in the evening sent a letter expressing regrets over the flag-burning incident. On the following morning, 15 October, the Minister of State and Attorney General, Shridath Ramphal, sent a note of apology over the desecration of the Venezuelan flag to the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry and, shortly after, Burnham met with the Consul General to personally express similar sentiments.

The opposition PPP, on the same day, condemned the Venezuelan incursion on the Guyanese side of Ankoko Island. Some days later, the United Force at a public meeting in Georgetown also criticised the Venezuelan action.

Venezuelan reply

The Venezuelan Foreign Minister replied on 18 October to the Guyana protest. In a note to the Minister of External Affairs, (Burnham), Iribarren Borges stated that "that the Venezuelan Government does not

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accept the said protest, as the island of Ankoko is Venezuelan territory in its entirety and the Republic of Venezuela has always been in possession of it.” He added that if Guyana “should have any reclamation to formulate,” it should do so through the Mixed Commission created by the Geneva Agreement.

Analysis of Guyana’s protest over Ankoko

Guyana regarded the Venezuelan reply as totally unsatisfactory, and there followed an exchange of diplomatic notes between the two countries throughout the rest of the year. Guyana suggested that in preference to the matter being raised at the United Nations, representatives of both Governments should carry out a joint examination of the boundary map, prepared in 1905 by a joint team of British and Venezuelan surveyors, for the purpose of determining the position of Ankoko in relation to the existing boundary. This was rejected by Venezuela who insisted, again, that if Guyana wished to discuss the matter it must be done through the Mixed Commission.

In a booklet entitled *The Ankoko Affair*, (published by the Ministry of External Affairs of Guyana in 1967), the Guyana Government carefully analysed its protest over the incursion on its part of Ankoko Island. It stated that in protesting against the Venezuelan incursion on the territory given to Guyana by the Arbitral Award, it was upholding the Geneva Agreement while at the same time complaining of its seemingly unilateral cancellation by Venezuela. The object of the Geneva Agreement, the Ministry said, was clearly to keep matters in the pre-existing state until it should be otherwise decided under the procedure laid down by the Agreement. A party which was asserting rights larger than those assigned to it under the map was, therefore, asserting a claim, and if it did so otherwise than through the Mixed Commission, it was in breach of the Geneva Agreement.

The Guyana protest, therefore, indicated that Venezuela, acting outside the Mixed Commission, was asserting, by military means, certain rights larger than those accorded to it and was, thus, in breach of the Geneva Agreement. The Ministry stated that the Venezuelan suggestion that Guyana’s protest amounted to an assertion of claim—which could only be done through the Mixed Commission—was, therefore, fallacious and misleading.

The Guyana protest also sounded a warning of the expansionist nature of Venezuela’s ambitions and its unwillingness to be deterred either by the general principles of international law or by specific terms of bilateral or multilateral international agreements that it had solemnly concluded.

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The dividing of Ankoko Island

The Arbitral Award of 1899, which settled the boundary between Guyana and Venezuela, stated clearly that the boundary should run “along the midstream of the Acaribisi to the Cuyuni, and thence along the northern bank of the River Cuyuni westward to its junction with the Wenamu to its westernmost source. . . .” At the junction referred is the island of Ankoko with an area of roughly six square miles.

In connecting the boundary from the north bank of the Cuyuni to the midstream of the Wenamu, the Mixed Venezuelan-British Boundary Commissioners drew a line passing through the island and dividing it from north to south in roughly equal parts—the eastern part of about three square miles falling on the British Guiana (Guyana) side of the boundary and the western part falling on the Venezuelan side. A boundary map showing these details was signed on 7 January 1905 by the Boundary Commissioners, Harry Innis Perkins and Charles Wilgress Anderson of Great Britain and Abraham Tirado and Elias Zoro of Venezuela.

Ever since the completion of the work of the Boundary Commission, the eastern part of Ankoko was recognised as juridically and administratively part of Guyana and totally within its boundaries. The Venezuelan Government had never before challenged the validity or accuracy of the map produced by the Boundary Commissioners and had at no time asserted sovereignty over the entire island of Ankoko. The Geneva Agreement and the discussions which led up to it concerned the sole issue whether the Arbitral Award of 1899 was null and void; they involved no challenge to the accuracy with which the boundary line as shown on the 1905 map reflected the terms of the Award.

The boundary of Ankoko as shown on the 1905 map was indeed reproduced on Venezuelan maps published in 1911 and 1917, the former having been issued under the express authority of the administration of General Gomez, then President of Venezuela, and signed by F. Alicantara, the Venezuelan Minister of Internal Affairs.

But the most convincing demonstration of the degree to which the 1905 delimitation had at all times before been accepted by Venezuela was shown on 13 December 1965 when the Legislative Assembly of the State of Bolivar formally acknowledged that the eastern part of Ankoko Island was in fact Guyanese territory.

The State of Bolivar, a constituent State of the Republic of Venezuela, forms part of that country's boundary with Guyana in the vicinity of Ankoko Island. An *Extraordinary Gazette* of the State of Bolivar on 3 January 1966 published the relevant portion of the law passed by the Legislative Assembly which declared the boundary with Guyana to be:

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. . .down the River Acarabisi to its mouth with the Cuyuni and from this point upstream along the River Cuyuni on its left bank as far as the Island of Anacoco, where running from north to south it divides it into two portions, the western portion belonging to the State of Bolivar and the eastern to British Guiana; from the southern terminal of this line on the above mentioned Island of Anacoco it follows the left bank of the River Wenamo. . .

Venezuelan reaction

However, despite the wealth of historical and legal evidence to prove that eastern Ankoko was Guyanese territory, the Venezuelan Government continued to maintain, after its incursion, that eastern Ankoko was Venezuelan territory. And even though soldiers from the recently formed Guyana Defence Force were rushed to the border area to establish a military post at Eteringbang on the south bank of the Cuyuni River in the vicinity of Ankoko Island, the Venezuelans refused to withdraw its personnel from the Guyanese part of the island. Shortly after the incursion, the Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Dr. Iribarren Borges, at a press conference in Caracas adamantly insisted that the entire island “has always been Venezuelan and the presence of Venezuelans there is permanent.”

In addition, while the first Guyana protest was being considered in Caracas, the semi-official newspaper, *La Republica*, on 17 October 1966, while stating that Guyana’s protest completely lacked foundation, revealed that Venezuelan troops had been installed in eastern Ankoko six weeks before the incursion was discovered by Guyana.

Noting that Guyana’s protest should have been directed through the Mixed Commission, the paper stated that Burnham preferred to make a prior “demagogic posture” in addressing the Guyanese people on the radio. The paper further claimed that the Guyanese Prime Minister made a political blunder when he sought the support of Dr. Cheddi Jagan in the “unfounded protest against Venezuela. . . One does not know to what point the demagoguery which Jagan is putting into practice against our country might lead, as deduced from his recent speeches.”

No doubt, the Venezuelan newspaper was referring to speeches made at public meetings in Guyana in which Dr. Jagan severely castigated Venezuela for seizing Guyanese territory, and urged the Guyana Government to raise the matter in the UN Security Council.

Announcement in National Assembly

On 25 October, the National Assembly (Parliament) of Guyana met to hear a statement from Prime Minister Burnham on the situation. The statement set out the background to the drawing of the boundary line through the island of Ankoko and gave details of the border controversy

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up to that time. A motion by Dr. Jagan to debate the issue was refused by the Speaker of the Assembly who said that the time was not opportune. As a form of protest over the Speaker's action and the Government's refusal to agree to a debate, the PPP representatives staged a walk-out from that sitting of the Assembly.

Statement by Venezuelan Ambassador

Matters remained at a stalemate for the rest of the year with Venezuela determined not to withdraw from Guyanese territory. By the beginning of 1967, Venezuela upgraded its Consulate General to that of an Embassy and appointed Walter Brandt as its first Ambassador to Guyana. On 26 April 1967, the Guyanese evening newspaper, *Evening Post*, featured on its front page an article based on an interview with the Ambassador. According to the paper, Brandt insisted that the entire island of Ankoko was Venezuelan territory, none of which would be yielded to Guyana. The island was one of Venezuela's border outposts, he stated. He explained that when the Guyana Government objected to Venezuela's occupying the eastern section of the island, the impression was gained that the Venezuelans had just invaded that area. He claimed that Venezuelans had long been living all over the island which became known as "Anakoko" because a Venezuelan woman named Ana used to sell coconuts on the island.

Brandt told the newspaper that the island was not being used as a military base, and that the airstrip built on the island was to allow for an air service to be operated between the island and populated centres to enable the residents to obtain food and medicine.

The Ambassador also reported that relations between Guyanese on the Cuyuni River and the Venezuelans on the island were very friendly. He added that Guyanese and Venezuelan soldiers mixed freely, visited each other and played dominoes and other games, and exchanged food and gifts. No Guyanese soldiers, he said, were stationed on Ankoko and only the Venezuelan flag was flying on the island.

US interest

The invasion of Guyanese territory was viewed with great concern in the region and almost immediately the English-speaking Caribbean countries expressed solidarity with Guyana and called upon Venezuela to withdraw. The United States Government, a close ally of both Burnham and President Leoni of Venezuela, also became very worried over the border conflict and the military developments.

According to a State Department circular telegram from the Department of State to all American Republic Posts, dated 17 July 1968,

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the American Government encouraged President Leoni in mid-1967 to receive “a Guyana emissary” to discuss the situation. The subsequent discussions resulted in easing of tensions, and Leoni assured the Guyana Government that Venezuela had no intention to use force in the dispute and that the matter “would be played in low key during pre-electoral period in Guyana.” (Elections in Guyana were due in late 1968 and the US administration would later heavily involve itself in helping Burnham rig the results in his favour).

Meanwhile, the Guyana Government, despite being urged by the PPP to do so, refused in 1966 and the following year to raise the issue at the United Nations. The Government had even instructed its representatives on the Mixed Commission not to raise the matter at the meeting of the Commission Caracas during December 1966. It was apparent that Burnham wanted to allow the American Government to utilise its clout with Venezuela to encourage a military withdrawal.

However, in 1968, after Venezuelan issued a decree by which it declared “ownership” of a 12-mile strip of the maritime area off the Essequibo, the Guyana Government made mention of the Ankoko incursion in its statements to the UN General Assembly on Venezuelan aggressive actions. Minister of State Shridath Ramphal in a statement to the UN General Assembly on 3 October 1968, for instance, spoke of the Venezuelan occupation of the Guyanese part of Ankoko as an “aggressive act.”

Attack on Eteringbang

The Guyanese and Venezuelan military contingents in the area kept a close watch on each other during the period. For a while no serious incidents of interference were reported. But then on 21 February 1970, two days before Guyana was proclaimed a republic, Venezuelan soldiers on Ankoko open fire with guns and mortar on the Guyanese military outpost at Eteringbang. The firing continued intermittently throughout the next day, but there were no reports of injuries even though buildings were damaged.

On 22 February, Minister of State Shridath Ramphal made a verbal protest on these incidents to the Venezuelan Ambassador in Georgetown. Later that evening the Ministry of External Affairs delivered a note to the Venezuelan Embassy protesting in the strongest terms these recent attacks on Guyana’s territorial integrity, and calling upon the Government of Venezuela to provide adequate compensation for the damage done.

The information about the attack on the Guyana outpost was soon after brought to the attention of the UN Security Council following another protest note delivered to the Venezuelan Government. In

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response, Venezuela denied opening fire, and argued that its military forces had no interest in doing so.

Despite these protests, intermittent firing by the Venezuelans into Guyanese territory continued on 24 February, but according to a Guyana Ministry of Defence statement later that day “at no stage in any of the attacks was there retaliation by Guyanese personnel.”

A *Reuter* report from Caracas on the same day stated that while there was a Venezuelan troop build-up in the Ankoko area, and Venezuelan soldiers were evacuating civilians from all areas of Ankoko Island. The report added that more than 100 families were removed, while about 100 students of a Catholic school were also evacuated.

Another *Reuter* report from Caracas stated that President Rafael Caldera on 27 February urged the people and Government of Guyana not to consider Venezuela as an enemy and to realize that his country was not interested in war. He also insisted that the note handed to the UN by Guyana charging Venezuela with acts of aggression lacked justification.

Continued Venezuelan occupation

No doubt, with Venezuela in occupation of Ankoko Island, any dispute over the occupation, according to the Venezuelan view, had to take the form of a claim to possession of the territory by Guyana. That was why, in those early post-independence years, Venezuela kept insisting that Guyana should raise this “claim” to eastern Ankoko Island in the Mixed Commission set up under the Geneva Agreement—despite the fact that the division of the island had been clearly marked by a joint boundary commission since the beginning of the twentieth century. (The Mixed Commission, comprising Guyanese and Venezuelan representatives, was eventually dissolved in 1970).

At different times, Guyana took the complaints about Ankoko to various international forums, but most of the time action was limited to normal diplomatic channels. On the other hand, Venezuela expressed concerns that Guyana’s accusations were part of a strategy to present Venezuela as a warmongering nation.

By the 1980s the Ankoko issue declined in prominence, and both countries, since then, left this matter and also the efforts to find an overall solution of the “border” controversy in the hands of the Good Office of the UN Secretary General.

At the present time, Venezuela still occupies the Guyana side of Ankoko Island. By refusing to withdraw after 40 years of occupation, Venezuela, at the very least, created a genuine border dispute with Guyana over this tiny piece of territory.

Chapter 2

The Political and Economic Situation in 1966-1967

Rifts in the coalition government

Soon after Guyana attained independence in May 1966, rifts which had started early in 1965 between the governing coalition parties, the PNC and UF began to widen. While supporters of the UF in the business sector were somewhat satisfied with the policies of the coalition government, they expressed reservations about its employment practices. But the leadership of the UF itself was becoming very worried about the ruthless manner in which the PNC leadership was creating jobs for their supporters at the expense of those who supported the UF.

At the same time, the grassroots support of the PNC and UF was becoming restless as a result of the government's failure to solve the unemployment problem and to check increasing inflationary trends and the drop in living standards. To absolve themselves from responsibility for the failures of the coalition, the PNC and the UF resorted to attacking each other. In 1966, Peter D'Aguiar, the UF leader and Minister of Finance, charged that he was not being adequately consulted by PNC leader and Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, particularly on government expenditures. Early in 1967, he accused the PNC section of the government with spending \$1.5 million illegally on building the East Coast Demerara road, declaring that the Director of Audit had questioned the expenditure. Soon after, he asked for the removal of the Minister of Trade, UF member Mohamed Kassim, who promptly resigned from the party and joined the PNC. Kassim was not removed,

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and D'Aguiar, giving the impression that he was dissatisfied with the wasteful spending and the conduct of government affairs including frustrations by the lack of cooperation from Burnham, resigned from his post as Finance Minister on 26 September 1967. He was succeeded by Dr. Ptolemy Reid, a leading executive member of the PNC.

The UF in its organ, the *Sun*, also expressed strong criticisms and wrote about “squandermania” or public funds and blaming the PNC for failure to produce results. At the same time, the PNC launched attacks on the UF in the media and at public meetings. In an editorial, the PNC's *New Nation* declared that the coalition was on the verge of collapse and blamed the UF-controlled ministries for lack of achievements.

Sydney King (now known as Eusi Kwayana) and his ASCRIA group, while strongly backing the pro-western coalition government, from time to time issued statements to create the impression that the “socialist” PNC was encumbered by the “reactionary” UF. King had restored himself as a PNC loyalist, despite being expelled from the party in 1962, and was appointed by Prime Minister Burnham as head of the Guyana Marketing Corporation and, in addition, was empowered as the chairman of a national committee in charge of land distribution.

Political pressures

With all of these divisions publicly aired, Burnham, promoting himself as a pragmatic socialist, moved to strengthen the propaganda arm of the government by providing more resources to an expanded Ministry of Information to issue glowing reports of the regime's “successes” especially for foreign propaganda consumption. In 1967, he replaced Neville Bissember with Martin Carter, the renowned poet and an ex-PPP leading member of the 1953 period, as Minister of Information in 1967. He also appointed Kit Nascimento, the former UF election manager and a harsh critic of the PPP, as consultant to the Ministry.

To apply pressure on the opposition PPP and to clamp down on growing militancy of workers, the government had enacted in 1966 the National Security Act by which it could arrest and detain persons for long periods without trial.

Then on May Day 1967, faced with an increasing number of strikes, Burnham announced the intention of the government to enact anti-strike laws and other legislation for compulsory arbitration to settle labour disputes. But due to strong opposition from the PPP and resistance from some sections of the TUC, he reversed his position stating that the government would not enact anti-strike legislation, but would make provision for voluntary arbitration.

The strongest critic of the government was the PPP, some of whose supporters were still under detention on orders from the government.

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And with the coalition parties facing a backlash from their own supporters, they tried to divert pressures from themselves by attacking the opposition party as “communist” and for being “tied to Moscow.”

At its congress held in August 1966, the PPP, in its Central Committee report declared:

To remain in power in the face of these growing difficulties, the coalition will attempt to destroy the PPP and all progressive organisations. It will use the weapons of anti-communism, fear, intimidation, individualism and opportunism. . . The government will use the weapon of fear, detention and restriction to silence criticisms and political opposition. It will try to divert attention by creating scapegoats . . . and will psychologically prepare the people either for no general election or for a fraudulent election in 1968.

Burnham was also planning ahead for the elections due in 1968. Through his Minister of Home Affairs, he set up in early 1967 his own election registration machinery manned by PNC activists, thus bypassing the Elections Commission. By this method he began the scheme to rig the elections.

Decline in agriculture

By mid-1966, the economic situation in the country had deteriorated. A business recession was quite visible and the cost of living was spiralling upwards. As compared with the average for 1962-1965, business turnover was about 30 percent lower.

And for a country highly dependent on agriculture, the government's policies were misdirected in that sector. The opposition PPP was of the view that because the rural areas were its strongholds, the coalition government was deliberately applying policies detrimental to the agriculture sector.

During the 1964 election campaign, the PNC had promised farmers that each of them would receive 30 acres of land with proper drainage and irrigation, and that they would be guaranteed good markets and fair prices. The party also said that the Cuban rice market acquired by the PPP government would be retained, and farmers would obtain for rice \$10 more per bag than was obtained from Cuba.

However, by 1966, the situation was quite the opposite. In the first place, there was grave land hunger. The plans laid out by the PPP government for drainage and irrigation schemes were scrapped; a drainage and irrigation project for 6,000 acres of land in the Pomeroun area, which should have been a follow-up to the Tapakuma land development scheme, was shelved. The government also decided not to proceed with the planned Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary and the Greater Canje projects, both of which would have made available hundreds of

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thousands of acres for agriculture. Instead, the government withheld irrigation water from Black Bush Polder farmers in 1966 and threatened to increase drainage at irrigation charges throughout the country.

Adding further woes on farmers, the coalition government cancelled all trade agreements with Cuba, thus refusing to sell rice to that lucrative market. This cancellation was clearly due to the anti-communist posture of the coalition government which, at the same time, restricted imports from socialist countries. The refusal to trade with Cuba also hit many Amerindian loggers and saw-millers very hard since railway sleepers they produced could no longer be exported to that country.

After the abandonment of the Cuban market, the government employed the Connell Rice and Sugar Company of the USA, with a retainer fee of a little over a quarter of a million US dollars a commission of 1 percent, to sell Guyana's rice abroad outside the Commonwealth Caribbean territories. This rice was sold by Connell under its own brand name "Rooster". Connell also paid the Rice Marketing Board (RMB) a low price while selling in the world market at higher prices.

Based on statistics published by the *Economic Survey of Guyana, 1966*, there was a progressive decline in agriculture. For the agriculture sector including sugar, rice, ground provisions, other crops, and livestock, the Gross Domestic Product was 19 percent in 1966. (It was 22.5 percent in 1961, 22.2 percent in 1962, 24 percent in 1963, 21.4 percent in 1964, 20.5 percent in 1965). It was clear that the position of agriculture in 1966-67 had deteriorated even when compared with 1964, the worse year of civil unrest, riots and disturbances in the country.

This was due to the fact that government had no overall policy in the various fields—drainage and irrigation, minimum guaranteed prices, bonuses, price control, land distribution—which was necessary for success in agricultural production.

Everything was done to shackle agriculture and to discourage the farmers. In the face of an increased cost of living and rising costs of production, prices received by farmers for products such as plantains, milk, citrus, coffee and rice fell drastically. And as a result of withdrawal by the Rice Marketing Board of certain grades of rice and reduction in prices, rice farmers suffered heavy losses.

The coalition government placed added burdens on the rice producers by its merger of the Rice Marketing Board and the Rice Development Corporation (RDC). But in doing so, it removed control of the industry from the rice producers and deliberately created a huge bureaucracy, resulting in heavy losses at both the RDC and the RMB.

Before this change, farmers had a majority of 11 out of 16 members on the RMB; with the change, the number was reduced to only 3. And when up to 1964, profits were made by both the RMB and RDC, there were continuous losses in 1965, 1966 and 1967.

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The merger was strongly opposed by the rice farmers whose net income was sharply reduced, since the losses suffered by the two entities, along with the debts they owed, were passed on to them.

Other areas of agriculture also suffered. Benefits received by the farmers were reduced; for instance, crop bonuses for the diversification of agriculture were cut by 45 percent in 1967 when compared to 1966. Aid to the fishing industry was also by roughly 45 percent—from \$92,000 in 1966 to \$50,000 in 1967.

Duty free gasoline concessions for the rice and timber industries were abolished while prices escalated for agricultural machinery and parts, and increased licences for tractors and trailers. Subsidies for rice bags and insecticides were also eliminated.

The decline in agriculture resulted in increased imports of foods, which jumped from \$28.7 million in 1964 to \$30.7 million in 1965 and \$33.4 million in 1966. In terms of the balance of visible trade, which showed a surplus from 1961 to the end of 1964, there was a deficit in 1965 and 1966 by \$4.3 million and \$7.6 million respectively; and in the first half 1967 by \$26 million.

Meanwhile, the government produced a White Paper claiming that it was losing \$14 million annually as a result of subsidies to agriculture in the form of guaranteed minimum prices and crop bonuses, subsidised drainage and irrigation rates, and deficits by the Transport & Harbours Department.

D'Aguiar, the Finance Minister, made it clear that the government could not afford these losses; that in the future government bodies like the Guyana Marketing Corporation and the Transport & Harbours Department must pay their way. This accounted for increases in fares and freights on trains and steamers, which affected farmers considerably, especially in the river bank communities and remote areas.

Slow progress in industrialisation

While in 1966-1967, the future for agriculture was bleak, it was no different in the manufacturing sector.

Regarding industrialisation, except for one mosquito coil factory, little was done in 1966 and much of 1967 to establish new industrial enterprises. All that was done was the extension of some existing factories.

It was apparent that local investors preferred trading to manufacturing enterprises. As a result, industrial projects for the manufacturing of glass, cement, bicycle tyres, shoes, food processing, among others—planned before 1965—were shelved.

On 2 June 1966, the government amended the Industrial Development Corporation Ordinance, renaming it the Economic

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Development Corporation. The corporation was formed to promote, facilitate and undertake the establishment of industry.

However, the amendment removed the keyword “undertake”, thus indicating that the corporation could only “facilitate and promote.” This was seen as a sign that the government, despite the PNC’s claim that it was socialist, was not keen in promoting public enterprise such as government ownership of industrial, banking, insurance and trading concerns.

As regards the future development of industry, the prospect was dismal. The *Economic Survey of Guyana, 1966* stated:

In 1966 fixed investment in the manufacturing sector did not achieve the level expected and is now estimated at \$2.5 million; and practically a third of this was attributed to the Guyana Electricity Corporation. It is apparent that most companies did no more than maintain their capital intact.

The Governor of the Bank of Guyana admitted in mid-1967 that no loans were made up to the end of 1966 from the Private Investments Fund, which was established with the help of US\$2 million from the US Agency for International Development. A major obstacle might have been the particular condition that goods and services must be purchased from the United States of America for the establishment of light industries.

Unemployment

The immediate post-independence period was marked by a growing unemployment problem. This was borne out in 1967 by a man-power survey which showed that the unemployment rate was 17 percent for Georgetown and 23 percent for the rural areas. The factors responsible included: mechanisation, as in the sugar industry; the result of a fall in trading in agricultural machinery due to the lack of purchasing power of rice farmers; retrenchment; and the growing number of school-leavers. The man-power survey report showed that there were about 30,000 children, 14 years and over, in primary schools who would be thrown on the labour market because of the government’s decision to reduce the age level in the all-age schools.

While the labour force was increasing by about 8,000 to 10,000 a year, the 7-year (1966-72) development programme placed less than 2,000 persons in government employment. Meanwhile, retrenchment continued unabated. About 1,000 workers were retrenched in the sugar industry during 1966, while the sea defences and the Transport and Harbours Department retrenched about 1,000 workers in early 1967. In August 1967, Manganese Mines Ltd. of the North West District retrenched 150 workers, and at the end of the year a further 600 became unemployed when operations were closed down. Two months later,

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Demerara Bauxite Company announced that 1500 workers would be retrenched during over the next 18 months.

All of these factors produced a migration pattern of people leaving the rural areas for Georgetown in search of employment.

In addition, the cost of living was on the increase. Higher prices and increased taxation on consumer goods led to a lowering of the standard of living. Contributory factors included the increase in railway fares and freight costs; the withdrawal of subsidy on cooking oil; and the government's decision to limit education in all-age schools from GCE to College of Preceptors level; and the failure of the government to standardise primary-school textbooks.

The PPP blamed wasteful expenditure of public funds by the government, and to bribery, corruption and nepotism as other factors. It noted that the 1961-64 PPP government had 10 Ministers and 3 Junior Ministers while the PNC-UF coalition government had 15 Ministers and 6 Junior Ministers. The PPP pointed to the fact that the Prime Minister spent more than a quarter of a million dollars to repair and redecorate the building formerly occupied by the Director of Agriculture as his residence, while certain government functionaries such as Attorney General Shridath Ramphal and the High Commissioner in London, Lionel Luckhoo, were being paid abnormally high salaries and allowances.

Other economic issues

It was obvious, too, that the economy was suffering because of a lack of confidence in the government from a substantial proportion of the population.

In 1965, the deficit was cleared by the collection of arrears of income tax and in April 1966, the budget was balanced by the \$5 million independence gift (for development) from the British government. There was an additional inflow of \$2.5 million from taxation on consumer commodities such as "yachting" boots, exercise books, cotton goods, and khaki drill, which negatively affected the poor.

On the attainment of independence, the country was nearing bankruptcy. At the end of December 1964, the PPP government had left a general revenue balance of \$5.4 million. But one year later, the PNC-UF coalition government reduced it to \$0.6 million and owed \$8 million.

In his budget speech on April 5, 1966, the Finance Minister D'Aguiar admitted:

Indeed, with this deficit and the advances to the Post Office Savings Bank and the Rice Marketing Board, the cash balances have deteriorated by \$8 million during this year. The government in fact had a bank overdraft of

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about \$6 million and outstanding Treasury Bills of \$1.8 million at 31 December, 1965. The position will worsen in the near future. A spending spree, an expanding bureaucracy and security apparatus, and increasing debt charges will all add a crushing burden on the people, which will have to be met either by more taxation and/or loss of services already enjoyed, such as education, pensions, health, subsidies and bonuses.

The coalition government in 1965 had removed foreign exchange controls which the PPP government had imposed in 1962; the result was a steady outflow of capital amounting to more than \$15 million in 1965-1966 which reduced Guyana's foreign reserves which eventually contributed to the devaluation of the Guyana dollar in November 1967 by 14.3 percent, the same extent as the British pound. This devaluation led to increased prices of goods from non-Commonwealth areas.

Investment was not expanding; in August 1966, John Jardim, a past president of the Chamber of Commerce, indicated that local investors were "holding their hands" as they were uncertain of the future. (Paradoxically, Jardim became a member of the PNC in January 1968!)

Further, there was a shortage of credits. The government, Georgetown Town Council, the Rice Development Corporation, the Rice Marketing Board and the Guyana Electricity Corporation were heavily committed in overdrafts with the commercial banks. Consequently, little money is available for credit to business and agriculture. And the Guyana Credit Corporation reached a position where it virtually stopped giving out loans, particularly to the "small man."

Added to all this, there was an increasing number of strikes, from 146 in 1965 to 172 in 1966, and 170 in 1967. In fact, the great majority were called by workers who were government supporters. These strikes were all due to the attitude of employers, increased taxes on consumer goods, and the government's economic, fiscal and trade policies.

There were concerns that the economy would face added pressures with the \$300 million 7-year (1965-72) development plan. Since almost three-quarters of the expenditure was on infrastructure—roads, sea defence, harbours, airport, public buildings, etc.—most likely this was expected to cause increased debt charges with each succeeding year and annual budgetary deficits. Those charges which were 12 percent of budget expenditure in 1960 jumped to 16 percent in 1967.

But this plan itself was running into problems. In the first three years of the coalition government, the yearly average expenditure of \$43 million was not reached; \$24 million was spent in 1965, \$32 million in 1966, and \$41 million in 1967. Despite all of these problems, the government insisted that all was well and that it intended to "maintain progress". But production of real material wealth was negligible. The *Economic Survey of Guyana, 1966* noted:

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In general the productive sectors, that is, those producing tangible goods, are expected in 1966 to provide an increase in net output of 4 percent. The services sector including construction would probably generate an increase in incomes of approximately 12 percent, while. . . incomes arising from the current spending by Government—central and local—will probably increase by 13 percent.

Much of the real wealth was produced in the bauxite sector, not in manufacturing and agriculture. The same *Survey* revealed:

Thus with the failure of other productive sectors to achieve any substantial real growth, it was the mining sector, particularly bauxite mining and processing, that accounted for some 22 percent of the growth in the economy during 1966.

Outside of the extractive bauxite industry, very little was achieved in the field of manufacturing. This sector accounted for only 7.2 percent of the Gross Domestic Product in 1966, mainly as an increase in production in industries already established. Actually, the *Survey* admitted that “the rate of expansion was slowing down.”

Social concerns

By 1967, the declining economic and social conditions led to an increase in unemployment, crime and juvenile delinquency. So alarming was the situation that Chancellor of the Supreme Court threatened choke-and-robbers with life imprisonment, and a senior magistrate observed that if the crime rate continued to climb there would be no room in the jail.

Cleveland Hamilton, Deputy Lord Mayor of Georgetown, a strong supporter of the PNC also launched a vicious attack on the snobbery of the new ruling elite, and on bigotry, corruption, nepotism and favouritism in high places. He said:

There is a real danger that a new, larger area of snobbery is being created in this country, or alternatively, that old areas are being activated or fertilised, or merely perpetrated or revived in a country where the professed aim by politicians and other leaders is the building of a classless or equalitarian society. . .

Commenting on bribery, he said:

It is all over the place, and is fast becoming a national scandal. . . Every citizen's position is in peril where he may not justly achieve what is bargained for, where h pays far more than he ought, and where even his rights may be delayed or even denied altogether. The harm done in any

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situation in which bribery, corruption, nepotism and favouritism assume national proportions and is a way of life from top down, can never be calculated.

Even the Civil Service Association (CSA), politically sympathetic to the PNC, in a letter in August 1967 to the TUC asking for its intervention, accused the government of causing a breach in industrial principle and a display of gross irresponsibility and arrogance. The CSA also expressed its grave dissatisfaction with several appointments made by the Public Service Commission (PSC) appointed and controlled by the Prime Minister. Some of the appointments the CSA considered “most questionable, and have seriously disrupted the association’s confidence in the integrity of the PSC.”

As a result, there is deepening disillusionment and frustration. So much had the situation deteriorated that a strong supporter of the coalition, writing under the pseudonym of Lucian, wrote in the *Guyana Graphic* on 16 June 1987: “Many people—Guyanese and non-Guyanese—are disgusted with the recent state of affairs in this country. Some are packing up to leave out of sheer frustration, while others are dejected from unbearable disgust.”

Chapter 3

Foreign Policy During 1966-1970

When Guyana became an independent nation on 26 May 1966, it was faced with the situation of its western neighbour Venezuela refusing to recognise western Essequibo as part of the Guyanese state. And by that time, too, a well-armed group of Venezuelan soldiers along with Venezuelan civilians, unknowingly to the Guyana Government, had already begun encroaching on the Guyana half of the six-square-miles Ankoko Island at the confluence of the boundary rivers, Cuyuni and Wenamu. There was also the continuing claim by Suriname of the entire border Corentyne River in addition to the New River triangle, a forested and almost uninhabited area of 6,000 square miles on the south eastern corner of Guyana.

For the entire period from 1966 to 1970, Guyana's foreign policy was shaped to counter the Venezuelan claim to Guyana's territory. The pattern of change evolved further after Venezuela in July 1968 extended its claim off the Essequibo coastline to a nine-mile belt of ocean beyond Guyana's three-mile territorial sea limit.

However, this foreign policy, in addition to focusing on the territorial claims by Venezuela and Suriname also emphasised, in an inter-related way, the development of closer relations with Brazil, support for the African liberation movements, Caribbean integration, close coordination with the Commonwealth, the active utilisation of the United Nations, and the pursuit of non-alignment.

As a whole, foreign policy was managed by Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, who was also Minister of External Affairs, and Shridath Ramphal, the Attorney General and Minister of State.

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In the same period, the PNC-UF coalition (which lasted until December 1968) was strongly pro-western and depended heavily on American aid. This was understandable considering that the American government worked very closely with both the PNC and the UF to destabilise and eventually remove the pre-independence PPP government in December 1964.

Even after the elections of 1968, which Burnham rigged to retain power with the full knowledge and support of the USA, Burnham's foreign policy remained practically unchanged. The reason was most likely because of the continuation of the Venezuelan claim to western Essequibo and Burnham did not want to risk losing the support of the USA, and also Brazil, its large powerful neighbour to the south. At the same time, he did he want these two countries to remain neutral on the issue.

PPP push for socialist policies

The socialist-oriented PPP, now in opposition, tried to pressure the PNC section of the coalition to apply some socialist policies in the administration of the country. Among its demands was the nationalisation of agriculture, banks, insurance companies and other foreign companies—all regarded as key sectors of the economy. No doubt, the PPP still had some hopes that the PNC, which claimed it was a socialist party, would bend in that direction particularly after Guyana became an independent state. However, the PNC leader and Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham, rejected the PPP demands and continued the application of capitalist economic policies.

Two significant actions were heavily criticised by the PPP. One was the special relationship of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) with Great Britain. In addition to the GDF receiving equipment and training from Great Britain, its first commander was a British officer. The PPP felt there were qualified Guyanese to fill that post.

The second action referred to special permission granted for a 17-year period to the US to use the international airport (then known as Atkinson Field) and for rights of fly-over of the Guyana's airspace by the United States military. This permission was given by the Burnham government through a secret agreement signed at the time of independence when the airport, used as an American air base, was officially returned to the Guyana government.

Meanwhile, the PPP moved to strengthen its links with the international socialist movements, and took militant positions on international issues which coincided closely with those of Cuba. In January 1966, the Party participated in the Tri-Continental Conference in Havana and was elected to the committee to organise assistance for the

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national liberation movements of Africa, Asia and Latin America. A year later, at the conference of the Latin American Solidarity Organisation, also in Havana, the PPP was elected to the organising committee. Finally in 1969, the Party declared itself as Marxist-Leninist and formally entered the international communist movement.

Burnham's pro-American position

In 1966, the PNC-UF coalition government introduced a seven-year development plan which was totally pro-western in orientation. It was aimed at promoting industrial development, encouraging private sector growth, attracting investments, and expanding the export market. Dr. Wilfred David, then an adviser in the Ministry of Economic Development in an article in the London *Financial Times* of 30 October 1969 said that the development plan was private sector friendly and that the philosophy behind it was "cooperation and not of confiscation."

Prime Minister Burnham also distanced himself from his previous links to socialist beliefs. Actually, he had already done that when he allied himself with the UF and the United States in 1962-1964 to help destabilize the PPP Government. In a series of speeches after May 1966, he re-affirmed his firm opposition to the socialist ideology and maintained positions on international issues similar to those asserted by the United States.

It was therefore, not surprising, that the PNC-UF government downplayed relations with the socialist countries. Trade with Cuba, initiated by the PPP administration, was drastically slashed despite the obvious economic benefits it was bringing to Guyana. Rice exports to Cuba were reduced from G\$5.9 million in 1964 to G\$1.2 million in 1965. One year later, the Cuban commercial mission in Georgetown was closed and trade with Cuba came to an end. Similarly, trade with communist Eastern Europe and China declined sharply from G\$5.6 million, or 1.6 percent of the total commerce of 1965, to G\$1.6 million, or 0.3 percent, in 1970.

Clearly, up to 1970, Guyana's pro-western foreign policy was similar to that of countries of the English-speaking Caribbean. But in reality, Guyana's relations with the US were probably closer than the other Caribbean countries. This was reflected in the aid the US gave to Guyana. For instance, in 1969 Guyana received about 50 percent of the aid of USAID for the entire Caribbean region, and 93.4 percent of the total provided to the English-speaking Caribbean. As a matter of fact, in 1969, 76 percent of the Development Loan Fund of USAID was disbursed to only eight nations: Chile, Colombia, India, Pakistan, Turkey, South Korea and Guyana. Further to this, other western countries, such as Great

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Britain, Canada, West Germany, Japan and Switzerland provided aid towards Guyana's economic development.

Guyana-Brazil friendship

In the light of the Venezuelan claim, the post-independence period was marked by a diplomatic offensive by Guyana to win solidarity internationally. It received ready support from the English-speaking Caribbean countries and from the Commonwealth. Support and solidarity also came from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). But the Guyana Government did little to lobby support from Latin American governments, even though they never showed any leanings towards the Venezuelan position. The reason for this lack of outreach to Latin America on the part of Guyana was possibly an inherent belief that the Latin American would show solidarity to Venezuela and also because of Guyanese (and also the English-speaking Caribbean) lack of knowledge of the history, culture and other aspects of the way of life of Latin Americans.

However, there was intensive diplomatic activity with Brazil, friendship with which, in the view of Guyana, could positively counter-balance the Venezuelan threat. In this period, Brazil since 1964 was ruled by an anti-communist military dictatorship which, no doubt, regarded the PNC-UF coalition in Guyana as a welcome change to Jagan's PPP government.

The PPP itself was no friend of the Brazilian dictatorship and openly described it as fascist and also as a bastion of US imperialism in Latin America. The Venezuelan government had also broken off diplomatic relations with Brazil as a result of the *coup d'etat* in 1964 which overthrew President João Goulart.

Burnham quickly realised the importance of cultivating good relations with Brazil which had initially remained neutral over the Venezuelan claim. In principle, Brazil maintained a consistent policy in favour of the sanctity of established international borders through arbitration agreements and opposed any change of borders in the South American continent. It also disagreed with any unilateral renunciation of international arbitrations which delineated borders between countries since a great part of its own borders was defined by such agreements.

In the case of Guyana's border with Venezuela, it was clear that should Venezuela take control of Guyana's western Essequibo region, it would result in a substantial change in territorial ownership and most likely swing the strategic equation in South America in favour of Venezuela.

In 1968 July, immediately after Venezuelan President Raul Leoni decreed "ownership" of a nine-mile strip of ocean off Guyana's three-mile

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territorial sea limits, the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, José de Magalhaes Pinto, stated that his government believed strongly, as it always did, in the sanctity of treaties and the fruitful fulfilment of international agreements.

This statement was favourable to Guyana and was regarded as support to its position in the controversy with Venezuela. It also helped to promote closer bilateral relations, and on 26-30 August 1968 Ramphal and the Deputy Prime Minister Ptolemy Reid visited Brazil for discussions with leaders of the Brazilian government. As a result, a cultural agreement was signed and an agreement was reached for the opening of a Brazilian embassy in Georgetown. In November 1968, Brigadier General José Horacio de Cunha Garcia eventually took up his post as the first Brazilian ambassador to Guyana.

Meanwhile, the Burnham administration continued to downplay relations with socialist Cuba. Immediately after the "Leoni decree," the Cuban government, hoping to improve relations with the Guyana Government, offered military aid to Guyana to counter any aggressive designs from Venezuela. This was immediately refused since it would have hampered relation with Brazil which was vehemently anti-Cuban. Further, there was an indication that the acceptance of Cuban military aid would encourage Brazil to support the Venezuelan claim to western Essequibo.

It was obvious, too, that Brazil saw advantages in pursuing closer relations with Guyana. Brazil was interested in the port of Georgetown to gain access to the Caribbean and was thinking of construction of a highway to link its Roraima state with Georgetown. With this in mind, the Brazilian Foreign Minister in August 1969 invited Ramphal to Brasilia where they signed technical cooperation and commercial agreements. The two Ministers also had preliminary discussions on a proposal for Brazil to obtain eventual free port facilities in Georgetown on the completion of the envisaged highway.

In January 1969 when some Guyanese ranchers launched an armed uprising against the Guyana government—an uprising encouraged by Venezuela—Brazil in a precautionary move, mobilised its troops in the border region. Many of the local Amerindians who supported the rebellion fled to Brazil when the uprising collapsed; some of them were held by the Brazilian army and handed over to the Guyanese security authorities across the border.

This might have been the genesis of military cooperation between the two countries which moved forward in October 1969 when two senior officers of Guyana Defence Force (GDF), including its commander Brigadier David Granger, went to Brazil in October 1969 for training in combat operations. Then in April 1970, a Centre of Brazilian Studies was inaugurated in Georgetown.

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In the Caribbean region, there was understanding for the closeness of Guyana-Brazil relations. In an editorial on 13 August 1969, the daily Barbados *Advocate* felt that Guyana's relations with "the colossus of the South America" would be of an incalculable value if Venezuela or Suriname tried to use their troops "to solve their territorial controversies with this country."

Guyana-Suriname relations

With regard to relations with Suriname, Guyana stoutly rejected its eastern neighbour's claim to the New River triangle. This claim was also not recognised by the Brazilian government, which in the 1930s together with Great Britain and Holland—the colonial powers—had formally agreed on the triangulation boundary point of the three countries.

Suriname apparently was determined to physically enforce its claim and its government sent a team of surveyors into the area to carry out mapping exercises. However, in December 1967 Guyanese police arrested them and later sent them back across the Corentyne River to Surinamese territory. This action raised a strong protest from the Minister-President of Suriname, Johann Pengel who insisted that the New River triangle was Suriname's territory. This assertion was firmly rejected by the Guyana Government.

Nevertheless, Suriname continued to clandestinely send its military personnel into the territory. On 19 August 1969, the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) discovered a Surinamese military camp in the area and arrested a group of Surinamese soldiers and seized a quantity of arms and ammunition and other military equipment. The Guyana Government declared that the presence of a permanent camp with armed Surinamese military on Guyanese territory indicated that such action had hostile intentions. As was expected, this incident soured relations between the two neighbours.

Two months later, Suriname held national elections and Pengel's party was defeated. A new coalition government led by Minister-President Jules Sedney displayed a more flexible attitude and was willing to improve relations with Guyana. As a result, Dr. Eric Williams, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, agreed to mediate an understanding, and both Sedney and Burnham met with him at Chaguaramas on 9-10 April 1970.

This led to a visit by Sedney to Georgetown on 24-27 June 1970 and one by Burnham to Paramaribo three months later on 4-8 September. As a result of their discussions, Burnham and Sedney agreed that the frontier zone would immediately be demilitarised; that both countries should pursue a policy of economic and cultural cooperation; and that all disputes between the two countries should be settled peacefully.

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However, sovereignty over the Corentyne River remained a sore point. Despite the non-existence of any formal agreement, Suriname continued to exercise ownership of the entire river and disagreed that the international boundary should follow the *thalweg*, or deepest channel.

The Suriname authorities, as they had done in the past, also continued to issue licences to Guyanese vessels plying the river and, from time to time, Guyanese fishermen using unlicensed boats were arrested and arraigned before the courts in Suriname. The Guyana Government raised lukewarm objections to such actions which served to give recognition to the *de facto* control by Suriname of the entire border river.

Support for African liberation movements

But Guyana's international relations were also directed at other significant areas of interest. The PPP pre-independence administration was very vocal in championing the cause of the third world liberation movements and had always declared its opposition to the racist system in the countries of southern Africa—Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Namibia and South Africa. In particular, it stood in solidarity with the African National Congress (ANC) in the struggle against the abhorrent apartheid system in South Africa. To an extent this policy was continued by the PNC-UF coalition and, from 1969, by the PNC government. But in relation to the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, Burnham at first was hesitant in rendering total support for the ANC, and often equated it with the rival Pan-African Congress, which had relatively little support among the majority non-White South Africans. This position was similar to that of the US and other western powers which felt that the ANC was communist oriented because of the support it drew from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

Guyana, during 1966-1970, also showed deep interest in anti-colonial movements in other parts of Africa, especially Angola and Mozambique, and spoke out forcefully in support of these movements at various international forums. However, in the case of Angola, the Guyana Government stubbornly refused to support the popular pro-Soviet Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA); instead it sided with the pro-western National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) which had little support from the Angolans.

Interestingly, too, Guyana challenged other countries to provide financial support for the liberation movements fighting against racism in southern Africa, and led by example in donating US\$50,000 annually towards this cause. This act from a poor country far removed from the African continent was politically effective and it won for Guyana reciprocal support and solidarity from governments and liberation movements throughout the African continent. This "African" policy was

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very popular among the Afro-Guyanese, the main political supporters of Burnham's PNC, but it was also supported by the PPP which historically championed this cause. This policy proved to be of enormous benefit in the diplomatic confrontation with Venezuela since Guyana could always count on diplomatic support from the African countries.

In addition, it catapulted Guyana into the position as a champion in the western hemisphere for the developing countries of Africa and Asia. And when in May 1967 the UN General Assembly created the UN Council for South West Africa (later Namibia), Guyana was elected unanimously for one of the eleven members. The Guyana Mission to the UN was very active in the work of this Council and also was involved in active discussions with the African Group in many political and economic matters raised at various forums of the United Nations.

Making full use of international bodies

Guyana's participation in the United Nations, where it was also an active member of the Latin American and Caribbean Group, was pivotal in the expression of its foreign policy. Guyana saw the organisation as a defensive mechanism forming part of the country's "security system." Ramphal, from 1967, made full use of the UN, not only to highlight the unjust Venezuelan claim, but also as a form of preventive mechanism of collective security to discourage any prospective military attack on Guyana. Addressing the General Assembly in October 1967, Ramphal, referring to Venezuela's aggressive designs, argued that the developing states should rid themselves of the burden of having armaments to defend their right to survive as sovereign states, and that it was the role of the UN to firmly support their independence and the territorial integrity.

Guyana suggested a similar principle for the Commonwealth to which it also turned for support to counter the Venezuelan threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Just a few days after the Rupununi rebellion was crushed, Burnham attended the Commonwealth summit in London on 7-15 January 1969. There he proposed that the organisation should develop an effective method to defend the territorial integrity of its new members which did not possess the capacity to defend themselves. This view won support from the other leaders and many of the leaders agreed with Burnham that the Commonwealth should initiate urgently an international effort to assure the territorial integrity of all the small developing countries. They felt this was necessary because threats to their territorial integrity and sovereignty placed serious pressures on their resources and energies which should be applied to their economic development. The final communiqué of the summit also expressed

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concern over the difficulties that Guyana was experiencing in relation to the claim of Venezuela on more than half of its territory.

Interestingly, the Guyana Government's quick action in suppressing the Rupununi uprising solidified its hard-line opposition to the right of secession and the disintegration of states. Clearly, the threat to Guyana's territorial integrity, as a result of the claims by Venezuela and Suriname, was the overlying reason. Significantly, the issue of secession arose in March 1969—just two months after the Rupununi revolt—when the British military intervened in Anguilla after that tiny island unilaterally seceded from its federation with St. Kitts and Nevis. While the governments of Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica vehemently opposed the military intervention, Guyana supported the British action in suppressing the island's secessionist movement.

Caribbean integration

Regional integration formed an important plank in Guyana's foreign policy since it was a main instrument to hold back Venezuela and Suriname. In this respect, the commitment to Caribbean unity was the main element of Guyanese foreign policy. Addressing Guyanese on the occasion of the first anniversary of Guyana's independence on 26 May 1967, Burnham emphasised that while the maintenance of the territorial integrity and the defence of the country's borders remained most important, it was also very necessary to build Caribbean unity and regional integration.

Actually, Guyana had already moved to achieve the objective of Caribbean unity and integration since two years before. During 1965, Guyana, Antigua and Barbuda and Barbados had initiated discussions to establish a regional organisation aimed at uniting their economies and giving them a joint presence in the international arena. These discussions resulted in the signing of the Dickenson Bay Agreement in Antigua on 15 December 1965 establishing the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA).

Following a supplementary agreement signed by the representative of the three countries in March 1968, Trinidad and Tobago joined the Association in May 1968. By August 1968 Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Jamaica and Montserrat all became members. Belize joined the Association in 1971.

While CARIFTA had mainly economic objectives, it evolved rapidly into a unifying regional body which also examined regional and international political issues of importance to the countries of the English-speaking Caribbean. Soon the body was speaking with a united voice on matters of crucial importance to the region, and these included statements of support for Guyana in the face of the aggressive territorial

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claim by Venezuela. Guyana made full use of this new regional forum to regularly inform its Caribbean partners on developments regarding this issue.

The policy of non-alignment

Meanwhile, in the face of strong criticism from the PPP regarding the subservience of the coalition to US interests, Burnham stated that his government was practising active “neutralism.” On 22 July 1966, in an address to the Washington’s Women Press Club at the Statler Hotel in Washington DC, Burnham declared:

It is my Government’s determination that Guyana will never become the pawn of neither East nor West. . . It must be understood, however, that our support of the Western bloc or any of its members in any stand that they may take on the international scene is not automatic. On every international issue we shall exercise our own judgement on the basis of facts at our disposal, having regard always to our national interests and the cause of world peace.

Despite this stance of “neutralism,” except for Yugoslavia in November 1968, it refused to establish diplomatic relations with any communist country before 1970. Yugoslavia, under Josef Broz Tito, was widely regarded as independent of the Soviet bloc and was also a leader of the growing Non-Aligned Movement which Guyana eventually joined.

Actually, Guyana began to actively pursue the policy of non-alignment. Rationalising this policy in June 1967, Ramphal, in a lecture at the Carnegie Seminar on Diplomacy at the Institute of the International Affairs, University of the West Indies, declared:

This is why the new nations—the developing nations, the poorer nation, the smaller nations—have for the greater part found a natural affinity with the policy of non-alignment and have found it possible, within its philosophy, to create a climate of international opinion which recognises their right to retain freedom of action and to exercise an independent judgement on the great issues of world affairs.

Despite, such pronouncements, Guyana withheld recognition of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Vietnam and the regime of Sihanouk in Cambodia, questions very much debated in the Non-Aligned Movement. In general, the Guyana government refused to be critical of US military and political policies in the Vietnam conflict. And although it refused to give support to the Asian liberation movements, it did express active support for the some African liberation organisations. And as stated above, it gave support to the pro-western FNLA, instead of the

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popular MPLA which had the support of the great majority of Angolans, and also the NAM, in the struggle against Portuguese colonialisation.

With regard to the recognition of the government of the People's Republic of China and its admission to the United Nations, it voted against the General Assembly resolutions in 1967 and 1968, and abstained in 1969 and 1970. It also maintained recognition for Taiwan which, through an agreement signed August 1970, began to render technical assistance for Guyana's rice industry. And when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, it took a strong anti-Soviet position, contradicting its stance on intervention of just three years before when it had firmly supported the US invasion of the Dominican Republic.

Even though these contradictions existed, Burnham continued to insist that Guyana was following a policy of neutralism. In this respect, non-alignment developed into a significant platform in the country's foreign policy. This policy of non-alignment was consistently propagated by both Burnham and Ramphal who saw it as an extension of the policy of integration which formed an effective instrument in the defence of territorial integrity. No doubt, this was why Guyana became a very active member of the NAM from around 1970, especially since most countries whose positions were in opposition to the Venezuelan territorial claim also belonged to this large and expanding multilateral body.

Chapter 4

Economic Aggression and New Maritime Claims by Venezuela (1967-1968)

Matters surrounding the seizure by Venezuela of Guyana's half of Ankoko Island reached a stalemate after October 1966. The Guyana Government refused to raise the issue in the UN Security Council, and Guyana's representatives on the Mixed Commission (established by the Geneva Agreement earlier in the year) refused to raise the issue at the third meeting of the Commission held in Caracas in December of that year.

The Kabakaburi affair

Relations between the two countries simmered down for a while. But on 14 April 1967 the Guyana government announced that a meeting of Amerindian chiefs held at Kabakaburi on the Pomeroon River (in the western Essequibo area claimed by Venezuela), a Venezuelan diplomat and the British husband of a Guyanese Amerindian participated and carried out subversive activities relating to the border controversy with Venezuela. The government claimed that the chiefs were influenced by these persons to move a resolution in favour of "joint development" by Guyana and Venezuela of the western Essequibo region.

One week later, the chiefs were summoned to Georgetown for a meeting with the Minister responsible for local government and Amerindian affairs. At the end of this meeting, they issued a statement

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denying that they had advocated joint development, and insisted that they were always loyal to the Guyana government. But the fact remained that the chiefs indeed passed the resolution as was indicated in the Government's announcement of 14 April, and it was widely believed that they were pressured to issue the denial at the meeting with the minister.

There was much mystery surrounding the Kabakaburi meeting, and all that Guyanese were told was that the police authorities were carrying out investigations. Eventually, an Englishman, Michael Wilson, was arrested and while he was in detention, amendments to the Expulsion of Undesirables Ordinance were rushed through a specially summoned meeting of the National Assembly. These amendments gave the government additional powers to deport any non-Guyanese in the interest of "good order" by removing the conditions that persons facing deportation should first be placed before the courts.

Then on 1 May, Leopoldo Talyhardat, Vice-Consul for Venezuela in Guyana, returned to Venezuela after the Guyana Government declared that he was "unacceptable." Here again, there was mystery surrounding his departure, but newspaper reports indicated that he was linked with the Kabakaburi conference. In a statement on the same day, the Guyana Government said that "Guyana wishes at all times to maintain friendly relations with neighbouring Venezuela and the question of Senor Leopoldo Talyhardat being unacceptable to the Government should not be regarded as an indication of any new policy on the part of Guyana towards Venezuela."

However, there was no doubt that Talyhardat's expulsion was due to his involvement in the Kabakaburi affair which was regarded by the Guyana government as a clandestine attempt by Venezuelan diplomatic personnel to interfere in the internal affairs of Guyana through the subversion of members of Guyana's indigenous Amerindian community.

Opposing Guyana's access to international forums

Meanwhile, Guyana was attempting to gain greater access in international organisations, but was finding that such access was not always very easy due to opposition from Venezuela. On 23 May, three days before Guyana's first independence anniversary, Guyana's Ambassador to the USA and the UN, John Carter, asked the Venezuelan Government to withdraw its claim to Guyana's territory so that Guyana could join the Organisation of American States (OAS). (The OAS Charter at that time precluded any country having a territorial dispute with a member-state from being accepted as a new member). However, Venezuela refused this request and maintained that its claim to the western Essequibo was just, and that Guyana's entry to the OAS could not be considered because of the existing territorial "dispute."

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Similarly, Venezuela used this excuse bar Guyana from signing the Latin American Treaty of Denuclearisation. Despite repeated requests that the date be set for Guyana to sign the treaty, Guyana was not been permitted to sign.

Difficulties also existed at meetings of the Mixed Commission in which Venezuela wanted to raise territorial issues. However, Guyana took the view that the correctness of the existing boundary could not be discussed unless Venezuela first make good in the Mixed Commission its contention that the Arbitral Award of 1899, under which that boundary had been established, was null and void. This Venezuela persistently refused to do.

Venezuela then stepped up its economic aggression. On 15 June 1968, the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs placed an advertisement in the London *Times* stating that the Essequibo region of Guyana belonged to Venezuela, and that the Venezuelan government would not in consequence recognise mining concessions granted in the region by Guyana.

Guyana protested on 28 June 1968 to the Venezuelan government declaring the advertisement “as a deliberate attempt by the Government of Venezuela to retard the economic development of Guyana through the intimidation of persons, organisations or governments genuinely prepared to contribute to the development of Guyana and to the advancement of the economic well-being of its people.”

Guyana also viewed the act of “economic aggression” as a new violation of the Geneva Agreement which did not prohibit Guyana from continuing to grant concessions over any part of the territory within its existing boundaries.

Despite the Guyana statement, two North American oil companies, Continental and Globe, which had been granted mining concessions in the Essequibo region of Guyana, gave up these mining rights and closed down their exploration operations. It was obvious that these companies which held business connections with oil companies operating in Venezuela succumbed to intimidation following the publication of the Venezuelan advertisement.

Venezuela’s Decree of the Sea

Venezuelan economic aggression increased further on 9 July 1968 when President Raul Leoni issued a “Decree of the Sea” which purported to annex as part of the territorial waters and contiguous zone of Venezuela, a twelve-mile belt of sea lying along the coast of Guyana between the mouth of the Essequibo River and Waini Point. The decree also ordered the Venezuelan armed forces to impose domination over that belt of sea.

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It must be noted that since 1954 this belt of sea became internationally recognised as Guyana's maritime space when by the British Guiana (Alteration of Boundaries) Order in Council made by the Queen in Council of the United Kingdom, the country's territory was extended seawards to cover the entire continental shelf.

Burnham's statement to the National Assembly

On the day after the decree was published, Guyana's Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham, issued a brief statement condemning the Venezuelan action. On the morning of 12 July, in the absence of PPP leader Dr Cheddi Jagan who was out of the country, he conferred with the party's deputy leader, Ashton Chase, on the new situation; and in the afternoon, he addressed the National Assembly on the issue.

After reviewing the history of the Venezuelan claim to Guyana's territory, Burnham showed how Venezuela frustrated the work of the Mixed Commission and violated the Geneva Agreement.

Burnham continued:

Now comes the preposterous decree signed on the 9th instant by the President of Venezuela. The decree is, we contend, a nullity and will be exposed for the unprecedented absurdity that it is. Whatever positions individual countries may take in relation to the breadth of territorial sea, it is palpably clear that only one state may possess sovereignty over the territorial sea relating to the same coast.

If this needed demonstration, it is shown by Article 1 of the 1958 Geneva Convention of the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone, which provides that "the sovereignty of a State extends beyond its land territory and its internal waters, to a belt adjacent to its coast, described as the territorial sea". Venezuela signed the Convention on the 30th October, 1958, and ratified it on the 15 August, 1961, without any reservations relating to that Article. Indeed such reservations as there were related to Trinidad, Aruba and Curacao. The Convention itself came into force on the 10th September, 1964. Unless and until a decision in favour of Venezuela is forthcoming under the procedure of the Geneva Agreement, Guyana's sovereignty over the generally recognised continental shelf and territorial seas cannot be disturbed. Indeed, Venezuela has at all material times heretofore recognised Guyana's sovereignty over the territorial waters in relation to the coastline in question, and she cannot claim sovereignty over territorial waters relating to the same coastline. . .

The Venezuelan Decree is an unmistakable attempt to assert a claim to the Essequibo region of Guyana outside of the Mixed Commission and is, therefore, yet another calculated breach of Article V (2) of the Geneva Agreement which expressly provides that no claim whatsoever shall "be asserted otherwise than in the Mixed Commission while that Commission is in being."

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Burnham revealed that he had asked Guyana's Ambassador in Caracas to return to Georgetown for immediate consultations. He also announced that at the request of Guyana's Permanent Mission to the UN, the UN Secretary General had circulated to all member states a report of the Venezuelan decree together with the earlier statement he had issued.

In addition, he stated that he spoke with the British High Commissioner in Georgetown, since the United Kingdom was a party to the controversy with Venezuela and a signatory to the Geneva Agreement. And based on the lengthy discussions with the deputy leader of the PPP, Ashton Chase, it was agreed that the National Assembly would meet the following week to discuss and debate fully the Venezuelan decree.

American opposition to the decree

The United States government was concerned over this new situation and expressed its opposition to this decree. On Saturday 13 July, the Under Secretary of State, Nicholas Katzenbach, called in Venezuelan Ambassador to the United States Tejera Paris to discuss the developments. He told the Ambassador that the meaning of the decree was unclear to the American government and would appreciate an explanation since it was potentially serious both from the point of view of international law and also of internal Guyanese politics. He said that if the intent of the decree was merely to put the world on notice that "when and if Venezuela attained sovereignty over territory it claimed," the United States would have no problem with it, although it was difficult to see what advantage there was to Venezuela in issuing this decree at that time. However, he added that the US did not accept decree's validity if it implied actual exercise of sovereignty and, if the matter came up in any international forum, the US could not support Venezuela.

The United States also viewed the decree as serious in terms of the Guyanese electoral situation. The American government felt that it was of more immediate interest to Venezuela and hemisphere if Forbes Burnham—whom the Americans were supporting—would win the forthcoming elections in December 1968 in order to prevent Jagan and the PPP from re-gaining power. Katzenbach believed that moves such as this claim made by the Venezuelan decree were not helpful because they eroded Burnham electoral strength and diverted his attention during the critical remaining six month campaign period. Accordingly, it also made it difficult for the American government to counsel Burnham to use moderation whenever he felt obligated to defend his position.

The details of this meeting were set out in a secret telegram sent by the Secretary of State Dean Rusk to the US Embassy in Caracas. Copies were also sent to the American Embassies in Georgetown and London.

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The telegram instructed the US Embassy in Georgetown to “convey general line of conversation to Burnham in strictest confidence but should avoid giving him any encouragement to take matter to international organizations.”

In a response, the US Embassy in Caracas in a secret telegram to the State Department on 16 July 1968 reported that Venezuelan officials were “piqued over US position on decree as stated Saturday by Katzenbach.” In a meeting held on the same day with the American ambassador in Caracas, Maurice Bernbaum, the Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Iribarren Borges, declared that Venezuela’s “territorial claims must take precedence over any consideration their effect on Guyana’s domestic political situation.” The telegram also stated that on the same day Minister of Interior Leandro Mora told an Embassy officer that the State Department did not appreciate “Venezuela’s ‘feelings’ on this matter.”

(These telegrams were declassified and published in 2004 by the US State Department in *Foreign Relations, 1964-1968, Volume XXXI, South and Central America; Mexico*).

Resolution of the Guyana National Assembly

The debate on the Venezuelan decree took place on Wednesday 17 July in the Guyana National Assembly and the leading members of the three political parties—PPP, PNC and UF—were unanimous in condemning Venezuela. However, Dr. Jagan was the only leader who urged that all matters relating to Venezuelan aggression should be raised in the Security Council of the United Nations. He also sharply criticised the government for signing the Geneva Agreement.

Burnham, in his speech, did not fully agree with approaching the Security Council immediately since support first had to be obtained from the regional groupings. He qualified this by saying:

The Government and people of Guyana, in the present circumstances, have got to think in terms of support not merely of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and the USSR. It has got to think in terms of the support of the United Nations from the large range of members who are in groups. It is proposed also to hold discussions with all the groupings in the United Nations and each of these groupings there are members of the Security Council.

At the end of the debate a resolution condemning the Venezuelan aggression, including the occupation of Guyanese territory on Ankoko Island, was unanimously passed by the National Assembly. By this resolution the members of the National Assembly:

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(i) declare the decree to be a nullity and approve of it being so treated by the Government of Guyana insofar as it purports to relate to any part of the sea, including the territorial sea and the contiguous zone, adjacent to any part of the coast of Guyana and to any part of the continental shelf forming part of the territory of Guyana;

(ii) condemn the said Decree as constituting a threat of aggression against Guyana and a situation likely to endanger peace and security;

(iii) denounce as an act of aggression against Guyana done contrary to the Charter of the United Nations any attempt by the Government of Venezuela to implement the said Decree over any part of the sea, including the territorial sea and the contiguous zone, adjacent to any part of the coast of Guyana or any part of the continental shelf forming part of the territory of Guyana;

(iv) approve of the Government of Guyana taking all necessary steps to secure the territorial integrity of Guyana, including the rights under international law to and over the sea adjacent to its coast, including the territorial sea and contiguous zone, and the continental shelf forming part of the territory of Guyana.

A copy of the resolution was sent on 19 July 1968 by the Guyana government to the Venezuelan of Foreign Affairs Minister. Just the day before, Guyana also sent to Venezuela an official protest note strongly condemning the decree as a form of aggression.

At the same time this protest was sent, Guyana's Permanent Representative at the United Nations, John Carter, issued a statement to the Latin American Group at the United Nations in which he described the decree as an act of "international lawlessness."

Pressures against going to the Security Council

Most likely, Burnham was pressured into not raising the issue in the Security Council. The day before the debate in the National Assembly, the US Ambassador to Caracas, Maurice Bernbaum, declared in the Venezuelan capital that the United States would take a neutral position on the border issue. And according to the *Guyana Graphic* of 20 July, the American government was not anxious for Guyana to take its territorial controversy with Venezuela to the United Nations Security Council. The paper reported:

The *Graphic* was reliably informed yesterday that the reasons for the American anxiety were clearly stated to the Guyana Government by the US Ambassador in Georgetown, Mr. Delmar Carlson.

To quote authoritative sources, "the intricacies and ramifications" that would be involved if the border row with Venezuela went before the Security Council at this stage, was impressed upon the Government.

The same sources also confirmed that the US Government was seeking to influence both Venezuela and Suriname against pressing their border

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claims on Guyana at this stage since this may add to the problems of Prime Minister Burnham's Government and militate against him at the forthcoming elections.

The American Government has made it clear that while it was friendly disposed to the Burnham Government—which it was committed to support—it was also mindful of America's responsibility towards Venezuela, and the hemisphere as a whole.

On 20 July 1968, Burnham left Guyana for a visit to the United States where, among other duties, he was engaged for an address to an Overseas Press Club on "political conditions and the communist threat" in Guyana.

On his arrival in New York he said that his government was considering taking the border issue before the UN Security Council in order to appeal for protection. His government would also appeal to "friendly nations" such as Canada, Britain and the USA for such protection.

Later, in the US capital, Burnham brought US Acting Secretary of State, Nicolas Katzenbach, up to date with the border developments. On 27 July, he conferred with President Lyndon Johnson, and on the same day departed for Canada where he later held discussions with Canadian Government leaders.

PPP condemnation of Venezuela

The first meeting of the Mixed Commission after the issuing of the Venezuelan Decree of the Sea opened at the City Hall in Georgetown on 26 September 1968. The delegates were greeted with a massive picketing demonstration organised by the PPP and its youth arm, the Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO). At the same time the demonstration was going on, the PPP issued a statement which said:

The PPP has again picketed the Mixed Boundary Commission in protest against the continued meetings which are considered absolutely useless in the light of Venezuela's hostile acts of aggression.

The PPP believes that continued collaboration with the Venezuelans at this period makes a mockery of Government's protestations concerning the occupation of Ankoko and the Decree issued by the Venezuelan President in relation to our territorial waters.

Guyana's statement to the UN General Assembly

Despite Burnham's threat to raise the territorial issue, and particularly the Venezuelan new maritime claim, at the UN Security Council, the Guyana government never actually did so. Nevertheless,

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Guyana's Minister of State and Attorney General, Shridath Ramphal, did refer to Venezuela's unilateral decision to reject the arbitral boundary award of 1899 and that country's claim to Guyanese territory, when he addressed the UN General Assembly on 3 October 1968. There he questioned the unilateral renunciation of border treaties stating that such action would be to the disadvantage of a small State anywhere in the world. He added:

Indeed, it could be the experience of any State at the hands of some powerful neighbour, once boundary settlements lose their sanctity and become forever arbitrable in response to the dictates of power. My Government invites this Assembly to consider the chaos and confusion into which most of the world's frontiers would be thrown if all that one party to a boundary settlement need to do to secure that boundary's revision is to constitute itself a judge in its own cause; to assert that the settlement is not valid; to proclaim a new boundary consonant with its own ideas; and to assume the right, once it has the strength and power, to extend its frontiers into the territory of a neighbouring State. It is preposterous and unthinkable that such a situation can be tolerable twenty-three years after the signing of the Charter, and yet this is the course upon which the Government of Venezuela has embarked. . .

Chapter 5

How the US Government Helped Burnham to Rig the 1968 Elections

The 1968 general elections in Guyana were rigged by the People's National Congress (PNC) regime of Forbes Burnham. The electoral fraud enabled that party to retain power following the dissolution of the coalition government he partnered with Peter D'Aguiar's United Force (UF). However, what was significant about this electoral fraud was the fact that the United States government had full knowledge about Burnham's electoral rigging plans and even subscribed funds to both the PNC and the UF for their election campaign. The United States government just winked at Burnham for they knew his "victory" would fulfil its Cold War objective of preventing the Marxist Cheddi Jagan from regaining power.

Cheddi Jagan had always accused the US government of complicity in removing him from power and of giving political support to Burnham. With the release early in 2005 of some of the State Department's declassified documents on Guyana for the period 1964-1968, Jagan's charges have now become proven facts backed up by the State Department's own documents. (See: *Foreign Relations, 1964-1968, Volume XXXII, Dominican Republic; Cuba; Haiti; Guyana*)

CIA provided funds in 1962-1968 to PNC and UF

In an introduction to this collection of declassified documents, the Historian of the US State Department wrote that the Special Group/303 Committee of the National Security Council approved approximately

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\$2.08 million for covert action programmes between 1962 and 1968 in Guyana. A good proportion of this covert funding was given to the PNC and the UF in 1963 and 1964 when they were trying their best to overthrow the PPP government.

The Historian stated:

After Burnham was elected Premier in December 1964, the U.S. Government, again through the CIA, continued to provide substantial funds to both Burnham and D'Aguiar and their parties. In 1967 and 1968, 303 Committee-approved funds were used to help the Burnham and D'Aguiar coalition contest and win the December 1968 general elections. When the U.S. Government learned that Burnham was going to use fraudulent absentee ballots to continue in power in the 1968s, it advised him against such a course of action, but did not try to stop him.

Obviously, the provision of covert electoral funds by a foreign government to political parties was a breach of Guyana's laws. But in the campaign to keep the PPP out of government, the provider and the receiver of such illegal donations had no qualms about stepping beyond the bounds of law.

Burnham requested financial assistance

Burnham's rigging plans were hatched shortly after Guyana became independent in 1966. Delmar Carlson, the United States Ambassador to Guyana, reported in a telegram to State Department on July 15, 1966 that "Burnham has confided to close colleagues that he intends to remain in power indefinitely—if at all possible by constitutional means. However, if necessary, he is prepared to employ unorthodox methods to achieve his aims. In these circumstances, probably the best that can be hoped for at this time, is that he might respond to guideline and thus take the most effective and least objectionable course to attain his goals."

It was apparent that the United States government wanted Burnham to be re-elected and it began to give a positive view to the idea of providing his party with financial support despite his plans to utilize "unorthodox methods" to gain re-election.

The 303 Committee, in a memorandum prepared on 17 March 1967, reported:

Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, leader of the majority People's National Congress (PNC) in the coalition, . . . has stated that he is fully prepared to utilize the electoral machinery at his disposal to ensure his own re-election. Burnham has initiated steps for electoral registration of Guyanese at home and abroad, and has requested financial assistance . . . for the PNC campaign. It is recommended that he and his party be provided with covert support in order to assure his victory at the polls. At the same

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time, it is believed that support to Peter D'Aguiar and his United Force (UF), the minority party in the coalition government, is also essential in order to offset Jagan's solidly entrenched East Indian electoral support. It is recommended that the 303 Committee approve the courses of action outlined in this paper.

The amount of money recommended still remains as classified information. A footnote to this memorandum quoted the following paragraph from a document, the file name of which is still classified, but more likely a telegram from the American Embassy in Guyana:

In a meeting on 16 September 1966, Burnham requested money for various political purposes and outlined his plans to issue identification cards to all Guyanans above the age of 10, and to identify and register all Guyanans of African ancestry in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States in order to get their absentee votes in the next elections. "Conversely," Burnham acknowledged with a smile, "East Indians living abroad may have trouble getting registered and, if registered, getting ballots."

The March 1967 memorandum also noted that Burnham was planning to establish his campaign headquarters in Georgetown and other urban areas where the African vote was concentrated. He was also sending "a trusted political adviser" abroad to survey the potential absentee vote which he can expect from Guyanese residing in the US, the UK, Canada and the West Indies.

The memorandum added:

Burnham believes that he would have great difficulty ensuring his own re-election without support from the U.S. Government. He has requested financial support . . . for staff and campaign expenses, motor vehicles, small boats, printing equipment, and transistorized public address systems. He also wishes to contract for the services of an American public relations firm to improve his image abroad and counteract Jagan's propaganda in the foreign press.

Since we believe that there is a good likelihood that Jagan can be elected in Guyana unless the entire non-East Indian electorate is mobilized against him, we also believe that campaign support must be provided to Peter D'Aguiar, the head of the United Force (UF) and Burnham's coalition partner.

US government was privy to Burnham's plans

The Committee then examined the risks involved in the US political assistance to Burnham. It said that because Jagan had consistently and publicly accused the American and British Governments of having undermined him and of having aided Burnham, it was expected that he

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would continue to make these charges. It added that “Jagan has cried wolf so often in the past that a reiteration of the same charges is not expected to carry much impact, particularly if the timing of the operation is handled appropriately.”

It was apparent that the 303 Committee was privy to Burnham’s plans. It pointed out:

Burnham is thinking of utilizing voting machines in certain districts in Guyana, knowing that this will attract Jagan’s attention and lead to charges of fraud. Since Burnham does not intend to rig the machines, and the tallies will in fact be accurate, he believes this will not only divert Jagan’s attention during the election campaign but will add credibility to the results after the fact.

Burnham was also made aware that the American Government would attach the utmost importance to tight security practices in the event that he received American support for the elections. The memorandum explained:

He recognizes that any exposure of this support will reflect on him as well as on the US Government, and he is prepared to deny receipt of any such aid. American and British press coverage of the 1968 elections must be expected to be relatively intensive, and it is likely that some British and American correspondents may be favourably predisposed to Jagan. For this reason, it will be essential that Burnham not only counter Jagan’s assertion that Burnham represents a minority of the electorate, but also that the US Government’s involvement not be revealed in any way.

The Committee concluded:

. . . we recommend the immediate and continuing injection of fiscal support to both the PNC and the UF, and we propose to maintain close contact with Burnham and D’Aguiar and their principal associates in order to influence the course of the election wherever necessary. This should be initiated at the earliest possible date, so that alternate tactics can be considered.

Burnham’s meeting with Ambassador Carlson

Ambassador Delmar Carlson, met with Burnham in early June 1967, and in a telegram sent to the State Department he revealed Burnham’s plans to rig the votes in the next elections:

In course discussion with Prime Minister Burnham last night I raised subject coming elections and explained election mathematics at my disposal tended show that the PNC majority over the PPP and the UF would require

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at minimum 60,000 votes additional. Even Prime Minister Burnham does not consider that overseas vote can be blown up to that extent; even 50,000 figure used by him very hypothetically and 30,000 accepted as more realistic (Embassy finds in excess of 25,000 not believable). Earlier Prime Minister Burnham said that overseas vote figures could be manipulated pretty much as he wished and he tentatively had in mind say 25,000 for a new coalition government and 5,000 for the PPP. When pressed by these mathematics, Prime Minister Burnham said he “would not break his lance” over the PNC majority, meaning that if the U.S.G. made issue of it he would not pursue it. Clear however he intends to follow number of election tricks to add to the PNC totals and detract from the PPP votes. Accumulated total of these may well produce a surprisingly good showing for the PNC, though falling short of absolute majority. Adds that he well aware of need that these election tricks be done smoothly and without controversy.

During that meeting, Carlson also suggested to Burnham that he should continue to work closely with D’Aguiar and his United Force. Burnham was already having difficulties working with D’Aguiar, and the ambassador suggested that the solution to this problem “lay less in engineered majority than it did by arranging for D’Aguiar’s honorable withdrawal from politics and government after the election is won and a new coalition government formed.”

Despite Carlson’s best efforts to encourage a working relationship with Burnham, D’Aguiar resigned from the cabinet on 26 September 1967.

Earlier, on 7 August 1967, some of original sum proposed for assistance to the PNC and UF was committed by the US government. Part of the funds was to be used for the PNC and UF to contact overseas voters and also for these parties to purchase motor vehicles and boats to reach Amerindian voters in the remote areas of the country.

US approved covert support to PNC

On 6 December 1967, William Trueheart, the Deputy Director for Coordination of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the State Department, sent a memorandum to Thomas Hughes and George Denney, the Director and Deputy Director, respectively, of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research of the State Department, in which he reported that the 303 Committee on 10 April 1967 approved a proposal to provide Burnham “with covert support in the next national elections” to assure a PNC victory over Cheddi Jagan and the PPP. Some covert monetary assistance was also to go to the United Force.

Trueheart’s memorandum predicted that the result of the elections would be very close even with assistance provided to Burnham. It revealed that the 303 Committee decided to “make 12 equal monthly

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payments to Burnham to help him in revitalizing his party and in organizing his absentee vote strength.” According to the Committee, if Burnham’s electoral prospects appeared bleak, certain measures (not revealed) would be implemented. In an ominous revelation, Trueheart stated: “These measures, it was hoped, would forestall the necessity of exile of Jagan, or his detention, or coup d’etat after the elections.”

It must be noted that the Venezuelan government in 1964 was prepared to support the overthrow of Cheddi Jagan, and to seek US support for this venture. According to this plot, Burnham and D’Aguiar would be encouraged to form a “Revolutionary Government” after a coup initiated with the assistance of 100 trained men given 30 days special training in Venezuela; and at the same time Cheddi and Janet Jagan would be kidnapped and taken to Venezuela. A memorandum from William Tyler, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs, to Secretary of State Rusk on 10 July 1964 gave details of this arrangement.

Apparently a similar plan, according to Trueheart’s memorandum, remained in active consideration in the event of a Jagan victory in 1968.

The plan to increase the African vote

A CIA report prepared with the participation of the intelligence organisations of the Departments of State and Defense, and the National Security Agency on 7 December 1967 stated that Burnham was working on various schemes to enlarge the African vote for his party. He was trying to obtain a substantial number of absentee votes from Afro-Guyanese residing abroad. Beyond this, the report added, he was also exploring means to merge Guyana with one of the Caribbean islands (most likely St. Vincent) so as to increase the proportion of African voters.

The report continued:

If Burnham became convinced that such arrangements would not suffice to keep him in power and Jagan out, he would probably rig the election. In any case, he would have to rely on the small civilian police and Guyana Defence Force (GDF), both of which are predominantly Negro, to maintain order. They probably could do so, except in the unlikely event of a major East Indian uprising.

It also saw this scenario in the case of a PPP victory:

If Jagan’s party won, he would probably not be permitted to exercise power. Burnham could use force to keep him out, or suspend the Constitution and rule by fiat, or even press for a grand coalition which he

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himself would seek to head. Alternatively he could permit Jagan to take office—only to subvert his government at a later date.

Burnham's meeting with Dean Rusk

Burnham visited the United States in January 1968 for a medical check-up at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. After his release from the hospital, he held a 45-minute discussion with Secretary of State Dean Rusk at the State Department on 23 January.

Burnham informed Rusk that he was confident about the outcome of the elections which had to be held before March 1969. He said he was also counting “heavily” on the overseas absentee ballots concentrated in the UK and in the US. He said that US Supreme Court decision in 1967 allowing Guyanese nationals who had become naturalised US citizens to vote without losing their US citizenship would be helpful. However, Rusk was uncertain whether the decision contemplated voting by such citizens while they were resident in the US, but he promised to look into this matter. Burnham stated that there would be objectionable electioneering in the US and pointed out that Jagan was already setting the stage among his followers for a defeat by claiming the elections would be rigged.

Rusk also met with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Dr. Ptolemy Reid on May 24, 1968. Reid's primary purpose in coming to the United States was to whip up electoral support for the People's National Congress (PNC) among Guyanese residing living there.

Burnham's plan to rig the elections

A memorandum prepared for the 303 Committee on a progress report on “Support to Anti-Jagan Political Parties in Guyana” and dated 5 June 1968 set out clearly the plan by Burnham to rig the forthcoming elections. The relevant part of this document stated:

[less than 1 line of source text not declassified] representatives met with Prime Minister Forbes Burnham in late April to discuss operational matters related to the electoral campaign. At this meeting Burnham stated unequivocally that he plans to conduct the registration and voting in such a manner that the PNC will emerge with an absolute majority in the Guyana National Assembly. Burnham said that he will never again allow the life of his government to depend upon his coalition partner Peter D'Aguiar and that if the voting should turn out in such a manner that he could not form a government without the help of D'Aguiar, he would refuse to form a government. Burnham said that he plans to register 17, 18, 19 and 20 year old PNC adherents (minimum voting age is 21 years) to make up part of the vote he needs and will direct his campaign in such a way as to attract enough additional East Indian voters to put the PNC approximately on a par with the PPP in Guyana. The additional votes he would need to give the PNC an

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absolute majority would come from the overseas Guyanese. On the other hand Ambassador Carlson . . . in Georgetown have commented that they believe this is wishful thinking by Burnham. They believe Burnham would encounter insurmountable administrative and organizational difficulties in attempting to rig the elections to the extent necessary to assure the PNC an absolute majority.

It should be noted that Burnham's plans to get an absolute majority in the elections constitute a basic change in strategy. Planning heretofore had been based upon the PNC and UF running separately but re-forming the coalition after the elections. Burnham will probably still be willing to have a coalition government after the elections but wants an absolute majority so that the coalition will be formed on his terms and so that the life of his government will not depend on the UF and Peter D'Aguiar.

Burnham's plan to rig the elections was amplified in another memorandum prepared on 12 June 1968 by Thomas H. Karamessines, Deputy CIA Director for Plans, for Walt W. Rostow, Special Assistant to President Johnson. (Source: *Linden B. Johnson Presidential Library, Document E.O. 12958, Sec. NI.J 94.268 – 12 Jun 1968*). The document, titled "Plans of Guyana Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, Leader of the People's National Congress (PNC), to rig the elections scheduled for late 1968 or early 1969," showed US government complicity in this arrangement because, even though it had knowledge of Burnham's plans, it did absolutely nothing to prevent the fraud and actually provided full encouragement. This memorandum, copied to Paul H. Nitze, Deputy Secretary of Defense, and Ambassador Covey T. Oliver, Assistant Secretary of State, made the following revelation:

1. . . a. In meeting of high level government and People's National Congress (PNC) leaders . . . Forbes Burnham, Prime Minister of Guyana and leader the PNC, gave instructions to rig the election scheduled for late 1968 or early 1969 in order to permit the PNC to win a clear majority. [In the last elections, held in December 1964, the PNC won 40.5 per cent of the total vote; the United Force (UF) won 12.4 per cent; and the Communist-led People's Progressive Party (PPP) made up principally of East Indians, won 45.8 per cent.] Burnham said that the registration of East Indians, who traditionally vote for the People's Progressive Party (PPP) should be strictly limited in order to keep their number of eligible voters as low as possible. He also gave instructions to his party leaders to increase the size of the PNC electorate by registering some PNC adherents who are between the age of 17 and 20 years of age, although the minimum age for voting is 21 years of age. He said he plans to have written into the electoral law a provision for increasing the use of proxy votes.

b. Through these means and by campaigning diligently, Burnham said he hopes the PNC will receive approximately half of the total vote cast in Guyana. In order to provide the winning margin for the PNC, he has arranged for Guyanese who reside overseas to vote in the Guyanese

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elections. He believes that there are sufficient PNC adherents overseas to give the PNC a clear majority. If it appears that the overseas registration is not sufficient to provide this majority, Burnham said he has instructed his campaign organizers overseas to provide enough false registrations to give the PNC the desired majority. [The PNC is conducting registration of overseas voters principally in the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States.]

2. The above information further clarifies Burnham's intentions regarding the forthcoming elections in Guyana. In April 1968 Burnham stated that he will not form a government if he has to continue to depend on his coalition partner, Peter D'Aguiar, leader of the United Force (UF), after the elections. In order to avoid having to depend on D'Aguiar, Burnham said that he will rig the elections in such a way that the PNC will win a clear majority. After winning a majority, he said, he would welcome a coalition with the UF, because he would not have to depend on the UF to maintain the government.

Thomas H. Karamessines,
Deputy CIA Director for Plans. . . .

Discussions on the level of the rigging

Apparently, there was some concern about the extent of the planned rigging. In a June 21 telegram John Calvin Hill, Jr., Director for North Coast Affairs, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Department of State, had advised Ambassador Carlson to warn Burnham not to rig the elections so extremely as to show an African majority in the population.

According to a telegram sent to the State Department on 28 June 1968, Carlson had a long discussion with Burnham the day before "to assess his attitude" on the "dimension of possible electoral results."

Carlson seemed to be somewhat worried about the rigging plans. He reported:

Some of the friends of Guyana in Washington had recently become apprehensive as to whether Prime Minister might plan Tammany Hall tactics on so massive a scale as to taint the results, raise questions of legitimacy, and embarrass the U.S. I was sure that he would no more want to have us all in the funny papers than would our friends in Washington. I said I assumed that Sonny Ramphal had already mentioned to him that John Hill has expressed this anxiety to Ramphal in New York."

. . . Burnham asked what these people thought was reasonable and I told him the matter was not one of any precise equation but simply one of dimension. We wanted him to win; we had backed him to the hilt; neither of us wanted a scandal. He agreed. I asked him what he really expected electorally. He said he foresaw the PNC in about the same range of votes in Guyana as the PPP; i.e., roughly even, perhaps not quite as much as the PPP, or perhaps slightly more but in general about the same order of magnitude.

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Burnham told me he expects work hard on Muslims and hopes have some success as well as with various other non-Africans so as to give PNC more multi-racial image. He hoped part of this process could take place before election and mentioned various individuals including Kit Nascimento and Ann Jardim.

As far as overseas was concerned, he thought registration of as many as 50,000 was within realm of possibility because of ease with which persons can qualify as Guyanese, i.e., descendant if mother was Guyanese and even foreign wives of Guyanese under the law qualify. He was urging his agents to work vigorously toward this large registration but he thought prospect was not good for high voter participation overseas. He expected not more than about 30,000 to vote if registration went high as 50,000. We agreed that overseas vote should be heavily PNC, i.e., 75–90% (with him more inclined to the latter figure). We agreed that it was entirely logical that it should be heavily PNC.

Carlson concluded:

Since all indications from collateral reporting showed that his intentions were much more reasonable than had been feared this was far as I thought it necessary to go. Our conversation generally tended to confirm reports from several other sources few days before . . . that Burnham is not planning or expecting massive rig. . . (H)e is mentally prepared to accept plurality and is hoping for 26 seats with thought that if coalition is not reestablished (presumably due D'Aguiar on scene trying set terms) that he will be able persuade at least two if not three UF legislators to join him in forming majority.

Aiding and abetting fraud and dictatorship

A final progress report on “Support to Anti-Jagan political parties in Guyana,” prepared for the 303 Committee on 21 November 1968 by the State Department, noted that the elections would be held on 16 December 1968. The report described “the problems facing Burnham stemming from his having padded the registration lists in the United Kingdom excessively in an attempt to win an outright majority in the elections. This report also notes the security implications arising from Peter D'Aguiar's having become aware of this padding and his efforts to counter it.”

It further stated that the US authorities would continue to provide financial support and electoral guidance to the PNC and the UF for their campaigns in Guyana and overseas. The PNC, it said, contracted a US-based motion picture company to produce newsreel films showing the progress made by the Burnham government. The first two of a projected ten films were being shown in Georgetown and depict Burnham inspecting self-help projects in small villages and the visit of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to Guyana.

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The report concluded:

The United States government will continue to exert all possible influence to persuade Burnham to pursue a moderate and statesmanlike course toward the PPP and the UF with regard to the registration problem and to the objections of these parties to the electoral law. To date, however, Burnham has not responded in the manner desired to US advice to avoid an overly large false registration and to US urging to plan for the formation of another coalition government after the elections. . . Racial considerations are most likely a significant ingredient in Burnham's attitude. Thus we have no assurance that he will accept our guidance in this regard.

Wholesale rigging by the PNC enabled to "win" almost 56 percent of the votes in the December 1968 elections. But the State Department's declassified documents of the period show clearly the machinations that were used to impose the anti-democratic PNC regime on the Guyanese nation. Cold War apologists of these actions will always claim that this was a necessary evil to keep the Marxist Cheddi Jagan and the PPP at bay. But no amount of whitewashing can ever remove the stain that these deeds left indelibly on the country and its people. They perpetuated divisions and showed that fraud and wrong-doings, not democracy, were the ideals of those who had no respect for the rights and wishes of the majority of the Guyanese people. They gave Burnham and his PNC the licence to continue with electoral fraud and to trample on democracy and human rights. By covertly—and overtly—funding the PNC's election campaign in 1968, the United States government cannot absolve itself from aiding and abetting the imposition of a long period of dictatorship and oppression in Guyana.

Chapter 6

The 1968 Electoral Fraud

Having been assured that the Johnson administration in the United States would not oppose its plans to rig the next elections, the PNC in 1967 decided to put its fraud machinery into motion. By this time, the PNC-UF coalition was falling apart and the PNC was taking full control of the government.

To initiate the rigging process, the PNC secretly selected personnel, set up a national registration office, and began the registration of Guyanese 14 years of age and older. In so doing, it by-passed the constitutionally established Elections Commission which by law had the responsibility to direct and supervise the registration of voters and to administer the conduct of the elections.

This registration office, located on High Street, Georgetown, was ringed with barbed wire and armed security. Almost all the employees were PNC activists and the office was under the direct control of the Minister of Home Affairs, Llewellyn John.

To supervise the registration, the government hired the American firm, Shoup Registration Systems International. The *New York Times* on 17 December 1967 reported that Shoup had previously carried out voter registrations in Trinidad, Jamaica and Venezuela, and also in South Vietnam in 1966 where a rigged voters' list was draw up for that country's much publicised fraudulent elections.

There were strong suspicions that Shoup was a CIA front to help the PNC win the elections. The *New York Times* queried this but reported that CIA would not comment on the allegation. However, after the elections held in December 1968, Shoup conveniently disappeared.

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Elections Commission powerless

The Elections Commission at that period was chaired by a PNC loyalist, Sir Donald Jackson, and its membership was made up of representatives each from the PNC, PPP, and the UF. In June 1967, shortly after the government's registration exercise began, Janet Jagan, the PPP representative, expressed fears at a meeting of the Commission that the government, by carrying out a compilation of a national register of citizens, was usurping and undermining the role of the Elections Commission.

Faced with the accusation that the government would compile the voters' list from the register prepared by Shoup, the PNC member on the Elections Commission, Desmond Hoyte, on 30 June 1967 stated adamantly at a meeting of the Commission:

. . . The National Register could not be the electoral roll. . . The compilation of the national roll was a matter for the Commission who shall 'exercise general direction and supervision over the registration of electors'.

The Commission had nothing to do with the preparation of the National Register. Whatever might be the purpose of the Register, it certainly could not be the electoral roll.

Under the constitution, the Commission alone was charged with the function of supervising the registration of electors. It followed, therefore, that a Register not prepared under the general direction and supervision of the Commission could not be a register of electors for the purpose of the constitution.

But despite this assurance from Hoyte, exactly what the PPP representative alleged was what actually happened. Names of persons 21 years and older were extracted from the National Register to form the electoral roll, and in this exercise, thousands of under-age persons were deliberately included as "legitimate" voters. Subsequently, the government passed the National Registration Act in the National Assembly which validated the electoral roll extracted from the National Register compiled by the Shoup with the assistance of PNC activists.

By mid-1968, it was clear that the PNC had geared up its machinery to rig the upcoming general elections. Protest statements were issued by the UF which by this time had been pushed out from the coalition government. And in the light of the blatant rigging of the voter registration process to give the PNC the advantage, the PPP planned country-wide demonstrations in protest, but police permission was bluntly refused.

Prime Minister and PNC leader Forbes Burnham had earlier announced that Guyanese living in foreign countries would be allowed to vote and the necessary constitutional and electoral amendments were

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passed in the National Assembly. The PPP stoutly opposed this plan for overseas voting on the grounds that it would open the opportunity to the PNC to further pad the electoral roll in its electoral rigging process.

The United States government was totally aware of the PNC scheme but did absolutely nothing to discourage it. Democracy could not be allowed since it might allow the re-election of the Marxist Cheddi Jagan, regarded by the Americans as one of their worst ideological foes who must be kept out from power by any means necessary.

The Elections Commission, with no control over the process, just acted to rubber-stamp the decisions handed down by the Minister of Home Affairs. In disgust, Janet Jagan, the PPP nominee, tendered her resignation before the elections.

The UF representative also resigned after his party raised objections to voters' lists and the electoral arrangements including overseas voting. (Just before this, Hoyte was replaced by Fred Wills as the PNC representative).

Padding the voters' list

The elections were marked by a padded voters' list, extensive proxy voting in favour of the PNC and ballot-box tampering. Almost all the election officials were PNC members and supporters. In addition, the PNC's victory was assured by the heavy bloated overseas voters which eventually accounted for six seats in the party's total allocation after the "results" were finally announced.

The padding was reflected in the fact that for the four-year period, 1964-1968, the voters' list increased by 21 percent, even though for the preceding 11-year period (1953-64) the increase was only 19 percent. This deliberate padding, indicated by this large increase for 1964-1968, was concentrated in areas of PNC strength. In PPP areas, the increase varied from only 6 to 10 percent, but in PNC areas like Mackenzie, Mazaruni-Potaro and Abary the increase was 189 percent, 58 percent and 49 percent respectively.

In sub-districts of Abary with large PPP support, the increase was only 5 to 6 percent, but in the sub-districts with PNC supporters, the increase ranged from 50 to 100 percent. Many of the names on the voters' list were non-existent and included in it also were hundreds of under-aged and deceased persons.

With the compilation of this fraudulent voters' list, the PNC administration and its subservient Chief Elections Officer and the Elections Commission refused to provide the final list to the PPP, even though by law they should have been made available at least four days before the elections. Even after the elections, the officials refused to give a copy to the PPP.

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Fraud in overseas voting

The outright fraud was documented by the Granada Television Company of the United Kingdom in two documentaries shown on its “World in Action” programme. The first, *The Trail of the Vanishing Voters*, shown on 9 December 1968, revealed that most of the overseas voters registered in the UK were fictitious. In a sample of 551 registered in London, it found that only 117 were real, while in a sample of 346 registered in Manchester, only 19 were genuine.

The film showed John Hughes, a PNC activist who, as a registration officer, registered 41 voters in Wolverhampton, strongly doubting that more than 200 persons were on the voters’ list for that area.

Shortly after, the Guyana High Commission in London issued a statement accusing the television company of being mischievous. And in Guyana, the editor of the *Evening Post* newspaper was charged with public mischief for carrying Associated Press reports on the film that “two horses were grazing where Lily and Olga Barton should have been;” and “Where Gladys Porter should live, there had been a railway since 1874.”

The second documentary, *The Making of a Prime Minister*, shown on 6 January 1969—three weeks after the elections—declared that “a hanged man voted in the Guyana general election. So did children.” It added:

The newly elected Prime Minister of Guyana, Forbes Burnham, arrives in London today for the Prime Ministers’ Conference. He should not be attending.

This documentary also revealed that only 4,700 of the 11,750 registered “voters” in the United States and 13,050 of the 43,301 in the UK were real. It stated that if all the 12,550 voters registered in other parts of the world were genuine and had voted, the most generous estimate of Guyanese voters abroad should be 30,300, but 36,745 voted. The film commented: “Inescapably, at least 6,445 voters were faked, and that’s being excessively cautious.”

In addition, it showed an interview with Humphrey Taylor, director of Opinion Research Centre which had carried out its own independent survey. Taylor declared:

Obviously, I don’t know what happened in Guyana, but as far as Britain is concerned, the compilation of the register was a totally dishonest and corrupt operation. And as we have clearly established, the great majority of the people listed do not exist. This I would think is unprecedented for a Commonwealth country, as far as I know; and it’s, you know, a pretty awful and disgraceful episode.

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Election day

The elections were eventually held under the system of proportional representation on 16 December 1968. The PPP had earlier lodged numerous protests to the Elections Commission and the Minister of Home Affairs over the domestic and overseas voters' lists, the abuse of proxies and the overall manner in which the elections were to be conducted. All of these protests were disregarded and in the end, the party decided to contest the elections under protest.

Election day was very peaceful with a heavy voter turn-out, particularly in areas with strong PPP support. With the PNC in full control of the election machinery, almost all the officials at voting centres were PNC activists; and in a number of cases, they denied entry to PPP agents to these places and so prevented them from observing the polling process.

Proxy voting was also shamelessly abused. Over 19,000 proxies, amounting to 3 seats, were allowed to enable the PNC to vote for dead, under-age and non-existent voters and even for legitimate voters whose names PNC activists forged on proxy forms. When they turned up to exercise their franchise, hundreds of these legitimate voters who were not sympathetic to the PNC found that their votes were already cast by proxy. Needless to say, more than 90 percent of the proxies were cast for the PNC.

In the final analysis, out of a domestic electorate of 300,500, a total of 277,501 or 92 percent voted. Of the 68,588 overseas votes registered in 29 countries, 36,745 or 54 percent were cast. The overall average turn out (both locally and overseas) was 85 percent.

After the poll closed, the Police and election officials collected and transported the ballot boxes to three counting centres in Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice. (For the 1964 elections, there were 38 counting centres—one for each electoral district). Opposition agents were prevented from accompanying or following the vehicles which transported the boxes which were totally under the control of the PNC activists. For long hours, opposition candidates and their counting agents were not allowed to enter the counting centres to keep a watchful eye on the ballot boxes.

Tampering of ballot boxes

What resulted was a wholesale tampering of the ballot boxes after the poll closed and this guaranteed the PNC "victory." In one instance, a ballot box for the Pomeroon district, when opened in the presence of representatives of political parties, contained four parcels of ballots bound with rubber bands and all marked for the PNC! When the UF

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counting agent objected to the counting of these ballots, the presiding officer ordered that the ballots be replaced in the box and handed to the Police for safe keeping until he received instructions from the Chief Elections Officer in Georgetown.

Having received instructions the following day, he summoned the counting agents of the various political parties and ordered the counting of the ballots. The box was duly collected from the Police station, but when it was opened the ballots wrapped in rubber bands were no longer marked for the PNC but for the UF! However, since these ballots did not carry the official stamp of the Elections Commission, they were discarded as spoilt votes. No investigation was ever launched as to how these votes were switched overnight in the Police station.

During the vote count, several boxes were also found to contain more ballots than the number of people who voted. For example, in the Buxton area, a PNC stronghold, the final result showed a vote count amounting to 102 percent!

The “results”

The official results showed the PNC “winning” 55.6 percent, the PPP 36 percent and the UF 7 percent of the votes. The distribution of seats in the 53-member National Assembly was 30 for the PNC, 19 for the PPP and 4 for the UF.

Interestingly, the PNC “won” more than 90 percent of the “overseas votes,” amounting to six seats in the National Assembly. This was expected considering the heavy padding with fictitious names. The rigged “ballots” from the United Kingdom were personally and proudly transported to Georgetown from London by Guyana’s High Commissioner Sir Lionel Luckhoo.

Significantly, among the first governments to send messages of congratulations to Burnham were those of the United States, the English-speaking Caribbean and the United Kingdom. In glowing platitudes extolling the victory of “democracy” in Guyana, those governments expressed firm support for the PNC administration thus giving encouragement for the perpetuation of a long period of undemocratic rule in the country.

But PPP leader Dr. Cheddi Jagan declared that the elections were an “international scandal.” In a statement to the media on 18 December, he added:

The 1968 general election was a fraud from beginning to end. There is sufficient evidence to prove that the ballot box results do not reflect the wishes of the people. . . We fought this election under protest. We wish openly to declare that we will not cooperate with this puppet regime which is committed to the betrayal of our country and people. We will now resolutely

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work to bring down this regime which has usurped power by foul means. We will openly oppose this puppet neo-colonialist regime; we will continue to work for a broad-based unity based on genuine patriotism, nationalism and anti-imperialism.

Even associates of Burnham and the PNC were astounded by the fraud conducted before their very eyes. United Force leader Peter D'Aguiar who helped bring Burnham and his PNC to power in 1964, stated in shock and amazement at the unbridled electoral thievery that occurred: "To call it an election is to give it a name it does not deserve; it was a seizure of power by fraud, not election." But the distinct epitaph of PNC electoral fraud was etched by another UF member, Randolph Cheeks, who was Minister of Local Government in the PNC-UF coalition. In an unforgettable comment he declared:

Fraud is a mild word to describe the motions which Guyana went through on December 16. . . Down the corridors of the centuries, this day will be remembered with shame.

Establishment of the Cooperative Republic

Armed with its fraudulent majority, the PNC regime, on 23 March 1969, tabled a constitutional motion in the National Assembly to proclaim Guyana as a republic, and after a period of three months, the issue was debated in August 1969. Prime Minister Burnham explained that by transferring from a monarchy to the republic in early 1970, the country would establish a unique "cooperative socialist republic" under the ideology of "cooperative socialism." He saw the establishment and growth of cooperatives performing the leading role in national development, and explained that "cooperative socialism" would make "the small man a real man."

The PPP, while firmly supporting the move to republican status and the relevant constitutional change, sharply criticised the idea of "cooperative socialism," arguing that it was utopian and urging the PNC and the government to adopt Marxism-Leninism, the "real scientific socialism," as the guiding ideology.

On the other hand, the UF sharply opposed the change even though the broad mass of the people was firmly supportive of the idea of becoming a republic.

It was expected that the Sir David Rose, the Guyanese Governor-General, would in due course be elected by the National Assembly to become the first titular President of the new republic with no less powers than those held under the monarchical system. In November 1969, he went to London for meetings with British Foreign Service officials and also for an audience with Queen Elizabeth to perform the formalities of

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ending his service as her representative in Guyana. On 11 November, while on his way to a meeting at the Foreign Office, heavy scaffolding on a building collapsed on his car and immediately killed him. His funeral was held in Guyana the following week and Sir Edward Luckhoo was soon after named acting Governor-General.

Eventually, the republic was proclaimed in 23 February 1970, the anniversary of the Berbice slave rebellion of 1763. Sir Edward Luckhoo was sworn in as President, pending a meeting of the National Assembly to hold a formal election. The PNC government and the opposition PPP could not agree on a consensus candidate for this position; as a result, the government nominated Arthur Chung, a judge, while the PPP nominated Ashton Chase, an attorney-at-law, trade unionist and veteran politician. The National Assembly met in 17 March 1970 and Arthur Chung was elected as President by a majority vote of the PNC representatives.

Chapter 7

The Rupununi Revolt

At the beginning of January 1969, just three weeks after the December 1968 rigged elections in Guyana, a group of large ranch owners in the Rupununi region, supported by a number of Amerindians, broke out in open rebellion against the Guyana Government in the savannah area near the border with Brazil. The Amerindians involved in the uprising were mainly employees of the rebel ranchers who were Guyanese of European ancestry.

Causes of the Rebellion

In determining the causes of this insurrection, some analysts subsequently have pointed to various factors including frustrations over the recent rigged elections which returned the PNC to power, and opposition to the proposed demarcation of Amerindian lands as set out by the Amerindian Lands Commission. Whatever role these factors played cannot be fully determined, but it was clear that the rebels expressed their non-allegiance to the state and sought the assistance of a foreign government to promote the secession of part of the territory of Guyana.

The lands issue probably had a role in influencing some Amerindians to support the rebel ranchers. In retrospect, it was the PNC itself, nine years earlier, who first hatched the idea of an uprising in the Rupununi as part of a scenario to show Amerindians' dislike for the PPP. The *New Nation*, the party's weekly newspaper, on 27 August 1960 sensationalised a false and mischievous front page report in an attempt to scare Amerindians in the Rupununi by claiming that the PPP Government was taking over lands from the Amerindians in the area. The fictitious story, headlined "Amerindians

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Alarmed by Take Over Report”, stated:

The news item over [radio station] BGBS with regards to the intention of the PPP to take over the Rupununi lands has caused widespread anxiety among Rupununi Amerindians and settlers. At least two persons have volunteered to lead a revolutionary movement to safeguard Amerindian interest at all cost, if the Governor lets them down. One of them complained to some of the British priests and has threatened to join the movement. Another [Amer]Indian said that the PPP will have to kill him and his family first while others have planned moving over quietly to Brazil. Others again have pinned their faith in the PNC and its leaders to support them in their struggle for ownership of their lands.

Immediately after the *New Nation* report appeared, the Government protested to the manager of the British Guiana Broadcasting Service (BGBS) which subsequently disclosed that it never carried any such news, although there had been a news item about Amerindians’ concerns over the government’s land policy.

Ironically, the story the PNC concocted in 1960 began to play out when they themselves occupied the seat of government.

The uprising

In the course of this revolt, the ranchers declared that the Rupununi District had seceded from Guyana and that they would set up a Government of the “Republic of the Rupununi”. Valerie Hart, a 27-year-old UF candidate in the December 1968 elections in Guyana, and the wife of one of the rebel ranchers, shortly after declared herself as President of the “Republic”. However, she and the ring-leaders, on 2 January, fled to Venezuela and Brazil after the rebellion was crushed by the Guyana Defence Force (GDF).

Apparently, the Guyana government, through its investigations, was able to prove that Venezuela helped to organise, equip and support the revolt. The rebel ranchers from the North Rupununi savannahs were transported in late December 1968 by Venezuelan aircraft to Venezuela where they were trained by the Venezuelan army and supplied with weapons. Shortly after their return to Guyana on the 1 January 1969, they attacked the administrative town of Lethem and its outlying Amerindian villages, killing five policemen and two civilians and destroying a number of Government buildings. However, the revolt was quickly crushed by the Guyana Defence Force, but most of the rebels who managed to escape, were given refuge by the Venezuelan Government who resettled them in two villages, San Martin de Turumbo and Yuruani, close to the Guyana border.

A group of about thirty men, mostly Amerindians, were arrested by the Guyana security forces, but some were released a few weeks later after their

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detention in Georgetown. However, ten of them were later charged with the murder of the five policemen and the two civilians. Those charged were: Ignatius Charlie, 23; Anacito Alico, 20; Handel Singh, 28; Francis James, 20; Charles Davis, 20; Damian Phillips, 21; Brenton Singh, 43, Colin Melville, 22; Aldwyn Singh, 41; and Patrick Melville, 17.

Meanwhile, in Venezuela, the newspapers and radio stations on 3 January 1969 reported that there was an armed uprising of Amerindians seeking to secede the Rupununi district from Guyana and place it under annexation with Brazil or Venezuela. Interestingly, the Guyanese ambassador in Caracas, Eustace R. Braithwaite, (the author of *To Sir With Love*), later that day informed the international media, based in instructions he received from the Minister of State Sridath Ramphal, that there was “absolutely no truth” of an armed rebellion among the Amerindians but that “some trouble” had arisen among a few ranchers in the Rupununi and that the Government found it necessary to send security forces to the area to restore order.

Statement by Burnham to the National Assembly

However, on the afternoon of the same day, Prime Minister Forbes Burnham admitted that there was indeed an armed rebellion when he made the following statement in the National Assembly:

There have been considerable disorders in the Rupununi over the past two days and from information available to the government, these disorders have been instigated and propelled by certain sections of the ranchers, some of whom hold foreign citizenship, who have not scrupled those under duress the services of some of the native Amerindian inhabitants.

One of the persons principally involved in the disorders has since surrendered to the security forces, *cum* machine gun. There has been loss of life though it is not possible at this moment to give an authentic and accurate figure.

Detachments of the Guyana Defence Force and Police, well armed and supplied, have been deployed in the area which centres around Lethem and the northern savannahs. As soon as further and more definite information is available, I propose to communicate to the nation as much as security considerations permit.

In the meantime, I have been keeping in close touch with the Honourable Mr. Ramarran who has been deputed by the Leader of the Opposition to act and speak on his behalf during the latter's absence from the country.

The evidence so far suggests that the disorders were not spontaneous but masterminded and planned by hostile elements in and outside Guyana.

Broadcast by Burnham

Then in a nation-wide radio broadcast on the 4 January 1969, Burnham

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narrated his government's version of the events that occurred in the Rupununi:

The picture of the recent disorders in the northern Rupununi savannahs has now become sufficiently clear for me to place before the public the facts of these tragic and sinister events as they have so far unfolded.

On Thursday, 2nd January, 1969, at about eleven o'clock in the morning, the township of Lethem—which is the principal centre of Government administration in the Rupununi District—came under heavy gun-fire attack.

The main target of the attack was the police station which was manned by twelve members of the Guyana Police Force and a number of civilian employees and which had radio communication with Police Headquarters in Georgetown.

It is now known that the attack was made by a band of heavily armed ranchers of the Rupununi District, drawn mainly, but not exclusively, from the Hart and Melville families.

The Hart ranch is at Pirara, 15 miles from Lethem—and the control centre of the operation. It was from Pirara that the terrorists had set out earlier in the morning for Lethem.

On arriving at Lethem they opened fire on the police station with a missile-throwing bazooka and with bursts from automatic weapons. Policemen rushing out of the building were fired at, and at least one was killed in this way. The attackers then entered the station and, in the struggle that ensued, shot and killed three other policemen and one civilian employee, Victor Hernandez, an Amerindian, who was at that time a member of the Board of Governors of the School of Agriculture. The senior police officer at Lethem who was at the District Commissioner's Office at the time of the attack was shot and killed there.

Nor were the security forces the only object of the attack. The Government dispenser, who came down to the police station when the firing began, was shot at and wounded as he sought to take cover by his car.

The terrorists then rounded up the residents—including the District Commissioner, Mr. Motilall Persaud, and his wife—and held them prisoners and hostages in the abattoir. Other persons were locked into their homes. At least ten thousand dollars of Government funds were taken.

One of the early acts of the terrorists immediately after their attack on the police station was to block the airstrip at Lethem with seven-ton

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trucks and other obstructions, thus completely isolating Lethem except by a ground approach from some other point in the area. To make this isolation more effective, the terrorists simultaneously with the move in Lethem blocked the other airstrips in the area at Good Hope, Karasabai, Koranambo and Annai.

This left only the grass strip at Manari, five miles from Lethem, and it seems that the intention of the terrorists was to use this strip themselves with light aircraft. In fact, certain missionary priests who were at Lethem when the attack occurred were allowed to leave by road for Manari later on Thursday.

Contrary, however, to the expectation of the terrorists, news of the attack at Lethem had reached Georgetown by lunch time on Thursday and the same afternoon a number of policemen and the GDF personnel were flown into Manari by two Guyana Airways aircraft. Both planes were fired at from the approaches to the Manari strip, but neither was hit.

Within the next eighteen hours, a fully equipped and supplied contingent of the security forces was assembled at Manari and yesterday morning (Friday) they began to move on to Lethem. With the security forces advancing, the terrorists fled Lethem, probably for Pirara. On arrival at Lethem, therefore, armed forces were able to re-assert lawful authority without any resistance.

Their arrival confirmed the casualties earlier reported, and the wounded persons were immediately flown to Georgetown. The District Commissioner is now engaged in assessing the damage, both of a public and private nature, and the security forces have been assisting in the return to normalcy.

Meanwhile the terrorist groups that had closed down the airstrips at Good Hope and Annai on the morning of January 2, had also overrun the small police contingents there and closed radio communication between these outposts and Police Headquarters in Georgetown. So far, as we know, there was no loss of life at either Good Hope or Annai, but at both places, the policemen were tied up, placed in trucks and driven off towards Lethem.

By then, of course, Lethem was under the control of the security forces and, on discovering this, on their return journey, the terrorists dumped the bound policemen and fled.

Today, the security forces have continued their operations to restore all points in the area to normal governmental control and to pursue and capture these criminal elements that are already responsible for the loss of nine lives. The police posts at Annai and Good Hope have been relieved and the centres of terrorist activity at Pirara, Good Hope and Sunnyside have been razed to ground by our forces.

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A number of persons have been arrested in the area, and this afternoon word was received from the police authorities at Boa Vista (Brazil) that seven of the terrorists have been taken into custody there in the flight from Guyana. Steps are being taken to bring these fugitives to face trial under the criminal law of the land they have defiled and betrayed.

On the basis of what I have already said, the acts of insurrection and murder that I have narrated are of the most serious nature; but they are, in fact, even more serious and sinister than would appear on the surface. One of the terrorists [Colin Melville] who surrendered to the security forces yesterday has given an account of the entire operation—an account which places it in a different category from that of mere criminal terrorism. From this account it is now known that there was a gathering of Rupununi ranchers on the 23rd December [1968] at the home of Harry Hart at Moreru in the northern savannahs. At this meeting a plan was unfolded for capturing the main Government outposts in the Rupununi with assistance from the Venezuelan authorities and declaring the establishment of a separatist state in cessation from the rest of Guyana.

On the 24th December, a group of ranchers and ranch hands numbering approximately forty were flown from the Hart ranch at Pirara to Santa Theresa in Venezuela where the party spent the night. On Christmas Day, 25th December, the group were driven to an airstrip at Santa Helena and airlifted in a Venezuelan military aircraft to a Venezuelan army training camp at a point approximately two hours flying time away. They spent seven days receiving intensive training in the use of weapons with which they were supplied, including automatic weapons and bazookas. On New Year's Day, 1st January, 1969, the group were flown back to Santa Helena, again by Venezuelan military aircraft. The following morning, at dawn, they were flown to the Hart ranch at Pirara, and set out immediately for Lethem and the acts of terrorism and murder I have already related.

The insurrection as we know was planned, organised and carried out by ranchers of the Rupununi—the savannah aristocrats. Such Amerindian citizens as were involved were employed in a secondary capacity and appeared generally to have acted under duress and in response to the orders of their rancher employers. Nevertheless, within a few hours of the attack on Lethem, the Venezuelan press and radio were reporting an Amerindian uprising in the Rupununi and suggested that it arose out of the wish of these Guyanese citizens to come under the sovereignty of Venezuela.

In addition, Valerie Hart, the wife of one of the Hart brothers, and a

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candidate of the United Force at the recent election, was taken to Venezuela by the aircraft that brought the armed gang. In Venezuela, Valerie Hart has been provided with facilities for broadcasting appeals for assistance in support of what she describes as an uprising of the indigenous population. These appeals are beamed to the United States but call for assistance from all possible sources.

The pattern of this Venezuelan involvement is easy to discern. Going back to the Talyhardat incident,* the Venezuelan authorities have sought to manipulate the Guyanese Amerindian community to promote the spurious claim to the Essequibo region of Guyana. This was followed more recently by the abortive attempt to establish and finance a Guyanese Amerindian Party and in a variety of ways to promote an Amerindian movement favourable to Venezuela's territorial ambitions.

At the twenty-third session of the General Assembly in New York last October, Guyana warned of a massive effort being made by Venezuela "to subvert the loyalty of Guyana's indigenous Amerindian people". We pointed out that it was an effort that had no lack of financial resources and which functions through hand-picked agents, working under the direction of the Venezuelan authorities from bases situated on the Venezuelan side of the border.

Into the campaign of subversion the Venezuelan authorities have now recruited this group of Rupununi ranchers who have traditionally resented the authority of the central Government, more especially since independence when the authority passed from British to Guyanese hands. The results of the recent general elections which have confirmed the process of decolonisation, was apparently the signal for insurrection among these people who have induced in themselves a conviction that the grasslands of the Rupununi are theirs and theirs alone to the exclusion of others, including the Amerindian people, and especially to the exclusion of the Government of Guyana. Not surprisingly, they have found common cause with the Government of Venezuela who have once more—and again with a traditional clumsiness and indifference to Guyanese opinion—embarked on overt interference in Guyana's internal affairs with the objective of advancing their traditional claims.

It is perhaps not without significance that at the same moment that Venezuelan representatives were sitting down with their Guyanese counterparts at a meeting of the Mixed Commission in Caracas between Christmas and New Year, Venezuelan army personnel were training and equipping saboteurs and terrorists and launching them in a campaign of insurrection in Guyana. Nor is it perhaps without significance that they chose for the scene for their campaign a part of Guyana which has a frontier, not with Venezuela, but with the friendly State of Brazil.

I do not know where these events will lead us or what their excesses

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of armed interference Venezuela may be poised to embark upon. This may well be the beginning of a series of similar incursions launched by the Venezuelan government, and we must, therefore, expect further acts of aggression and intimidation from the new imperialism on our western doorstep. We must be ready as a nation to meet all eventualities and we must prepare ourselves for further attacks upon our national integrity from the combined forces of Venezuelan military authorities and disloyal and subversive elements in Guyana. . .

Burnham departed for London on the following day (5 December) to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference. He felt the situation in the Rupununi which was returning to “normalcy” should not impede his attendance at this “specially important conference”.

Activities in Caracas

During this period, a flurry of activities was taking place in Venezuela. On Saturday 4 January 1969, the Guyana Embassy in Caracas sent the following telegram to the Guyana Ministry of External Affairs:

Valerie Hart, (27), claiming to be a Member of Parliament elected on a UF ticket, arrived in Ciudad Bolivar on a plane owned by the Rupununi Producers' Association. From there she travelled by a private plane to Caracas for meetings with Iribarren Borges and Interior Minister Moro. Her intention was to solicit support for the armed resistance by ranchers and others in the Rupununi against the government. Hart claimed that the movement was headed by a person named Melville and had widespread support for the secession of the Rupununi to Venezuela. Hart stayed at the Hotel Conde near to the Foreign Ministry.

By Sunday, 5 January, Ambassador Braithwaite received copies by cable of Burnham's statement to the National Assembly and his radio address on the situation in the Rupununi. That afternoon he was visited by Mr. Herron and Mr. Walters, two political advisers attached to the American Embassy in Caracas, to discuss the situation. The American diplomats showed him transcripts of messages sent by the American ambassador in Georgetown giving details of the Rupununi situation, including a statement to the Guyana police by Colin Melville on his participation in the events and of circumstances prior and during the events as were known to him.

Braithwaite's meeting with Iribarren Borges

On Monday 6 January, which was a public holiday in Venezuela,

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Braithwaite sought a joint audience with the Venezuelan Foreign Minister Iribarren Borges and the Interior Minister Dr. Leandro Mora. Subsequently a joint meeting was arranged for 11.00 a.m. at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But on his arrival at the Ministry, he learned that Mora could not be located and Borges apologised for the Interior Minister's absence.

Braithwaite told Borges that his visit was routine and he was anxious to seek clarification from the Venezuelan Government regarding the situation in the Rupununi. Immediately Borges said that Venezuela was not involved and categorically denied any participation or identification with the uprising.

Braithwaite informed Borges that the Guyana Government had indisputable evidence volunteered by some of the major participants in the uprising that Venezuelan aircraft, personnel and weapons had been involved, and that planning for the operation and training in the use of weapons were carried out on Venezuelan territory.

However, Borges vehemently denied this.

Braithwaite pointed out that there was no direct air communication between Guyana and Venezuela, but nevertheless Mrs. Valerie Hart, a confessed leader of the rebellion, was able to fly from the Rupununi to Ciudad Bolivar and then to Caracas. Borges said that as far as he knew, Mrs. Hart had flown in a private plane from Rupununi to Venezuela, but she was not in any way assisted by the Venezuelan government.

Braithwaite reminded Borges that even though Mrs. Hart had entered Venezuela illegally, she was able, immediately on arrival in Caracas, to have meetings with him (Borges) and the Interior Minister. To this Borges replied that the woman had asked to see him, and as Foreign Minister he had no choice but to agree to meet her. In response, Braithwaite said that since the woman arrived in Caracas, she was in the care of the Venezuelan Government which was assisting her in arranging press conferences and radio and television interviews and in making appeals for arms and other support for the rebels. Borges replied that that the Government undertook to look after her purely on humanitarian grounds and again stated that his Government was in no way implicated in the uprising.

The Guyanese ambassador told Borges that on the one hand there were his repeated denials and on the other an accumulation of incontrovertible facts which placed his denials in very poor light. At this, Borges became quite agitated and ended the meeting after again insisting that he could do no more than assert his government's non-involvement in the uprising.

Later that afternoon, Borges at a press conference again denied Venezuela's complicity in the abortive rebellion, but stated that more than one hundred persons from the Rupununi were "given refuge" in Venezuela. He avoided mentioning if these persons were granted political asylum.

On the following day (7 January), according to a *Reuter* report,

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Braithwaite said that Guyana was absolutely certain Venezuela was involved in the uprising. He said his meeting with Borges “had no particular positive factor in favour of Guyana, but it left the impression that Borges was taken aback on learning of the rebels’ confession.” The ambassador admitted the Venezuelan Government might not have supported the uprising directly but felt sure that officials in Caracas were aware of military training to the Rupununi rebels and military airlifts to and through the Rupununi region.

Statement by Brazil

Meanwhile, the Brazilian Government expressed its concern over the situation and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued the following communiqué on 7 January 1969:

The Brazilian Government is following since its first moments and with the utmost interest the recent occurrence in the Rupununi region, in areas close to the Guyanese and Roraima Territory borders, and immediately has taken measures in order to intensify the control of the border, and prevent any violation of Brazilian territory. The Brazilian government, in accordance with its principles of non-intervention in domestic affairs of other countries, has expressed to the Guyanese Government in this difficult moment its belief that this bordering and friendly nation will completely overcome the movement that disturbs its internal security and menaces its territorial integrity.

Valerie Hart’s activities in Caracas

In Caracas, Valerie Hart continued to press the Venezuelan Government for military assistance and intervention in the Rupununi. But on 7 January, the Foreign Ministry turned down another of her appeals for Venezuela to invade Rupununi and take over the region. A *Reuter* report (of 8 January) of her meeting at the Foreign Ministry stated that the Venezuelan Government bluntly refused the request for any military intervention to aid the separatist movement which staged the uprising.

Speaking to the press shortly after her meeting at the Foreign Ministry, Hart insisted, “Venezuela must assert her rightful claim and not only the Rupununi but all the 50,000 square miles of territory of the disputed Essequibo region.”

But Foreign Minister Ignacio Iribarren Borges crushed the rebel leader’s slim final hopes with a flat and negative answer.

“We would never intervene directly in what is essentially a Guyanese problem,” he affirmed.

Nevertheless, Hart continued in Caracas to urge the Venezuelan Government for open support. She held several press conferences and gave

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television interviews, and it was clear that she received assistance from official circles since interpreters were provided for her on account of her inability to speak Spanish.

At one of her press conferences on 8 January—the day after the Venezuelan Foreign Minister refused her request for military intervention—she declared (according to a *Reuter* report): “If Venezuela does not intervene right now with troops they would have in their hands a situation similar to the Bay of Pigs.” She, no doubt, was referring to the Cuban situation in which opponents of the Castro regime had been promised support when the initial attempt at invasion proved abortive.

This statement openly insinuated that the Rupununi rebels had received some kind of support and possibly military training and arms as alleged by Guyanese Prime Minister Forbes Burnham.

Note of Protest

In Georgetown on 8 January, the Charge d’Affaires of the Venezuelan Embassy, Luis Martinez, was summoned to the Ministry of External Affairs and was handed a Note of Protest which bluntly blamed the Venezuelan Government for instigating and supporting the uprising and involving itself in Guyana’s internal affairs. The Note related the events as outlined in Burnham’s radio address, and added:

The Government of Venezuela, by the responsibility it bears for the training, arming and supplying of a group of wealthy, reactionary landholders, men who have resented the authority of the Central Government since the independence of Guyana was declared in 1966, stands indicted not only of the breach of every relevant principle of international law but of a consummate hypocrisy in the role it purports to play as part of the developing world which is a world of nations striving to better the lot, not of privileged groups, but of the great majority of their peoples.

The Government of Guyana denounces the Government of Venezuela for the invidious, divisive and self-serving support it has given to a wealthy, reactionary minority which sought to enrich itself by seizing lands which are the heritage of all Guyanese. . .

The Government of Guyana protests in the strongest terms this most recent act of intervention on the part of the Government of Venezuela in the internal affairs of Guyana. It represents the gravest act of interference in the internal political life of Guyana and is part of a pattern of such acts, one of which, as it will be recalled, led to the expulsion from Guyana as long ago as 1967, of a Second Secretary of the Venezuelan Embassy in Georgetown, who was responsible for organising and financing clandestine meetings of the indigenous tribes of Guyana in a futile effort to induce them to express support for the spurious Venezuelan territorial claims.

The Government of Guyana is constrained to express its disgust at this most recent attempt by the Government of Venezuela to advance its spurious

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territorial claims under cover of subversion and terrorism.

The Government of Guyana gives notice to the Government of Venezuela that it will avail itself of every opportunity to ensure that the recent actions of the Government of Venezuela are brought to the attention of the International Community. . .

Incident over the Note of Protest

That same afternoon in Caracas, Ambassador Braithwaite received by cable from the Guyana Ministry of External Affairs the Guyana Note of Protest to be delivered to the Venezuelan Foreign Minister. Just after 4.00 p.m., he went to the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry and handed the Note to Iribarren Borges who invited him to sit down and read it “aloud”. At the end of the reading he informed the ambassador that he would contact him in a few days’ time. But when Braithwaite returned to the Embassy half an hour later, he was informed by his staff that the Minister had called to invite him for a meeting at noon on the following day (9 January).

Braithwaite arrived promptly for the meeting and Minister handed him the Guyana Note of Protest explaining that his Government found the language “undiplomatic” and therefore it was unacceptable. Braithwaite departed and immediately after Borges told a gathering of media personnel that he had returned Guyana’s Note both in Caracas and Georgetown because of its “undiplomatic language”.

At the same time in Georgetown, the Charge d’Affaires of the Venezuelan Embassy in Guyana, (Martinez), met with Dr. Ptolemy Reid, the acting Prime Minister, for the purpose of returning the Note of Protest. Dr. Reid explained that so far as the Guyana Government was concerned the Note, having been received the day before by Martinez, was now the property of the Venezuelan government. Martinez then departed with the Note, but later he turned up at the Ministry of External Affairs where he sought to meet with the Permanent Secretary or the Chief of Protocol. However, his requests were denied and he subsequently departed.

Mora’s statement

Venezuela’s activism moved to a new stage on 8 January when Interior Minister Reinaldo Leandro Mora announced the granting of Venezuelan documentation to refugees of the Rupununi region who fled Guyana following the abortive uprising. He said Venezuela considered the refugees as fellow citizens since they inhabited part of the territory being claimed by his country. He further claimed that as a member of the United Nations, Venezuela had a right to do so, and added that the “refugees” had come from “a zone that is considered Venezuelan and are being persecuted.”

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He explained that the refugees who sought political asylum in Venezuela “in the past two days” would be given jobs or land according to their profession. At Santa Elena, a border village near to the Brazilian and Guyanese frontiers, over one hundred refugees were granted asylum.

On making the announcement, the minister said Venezuela was offering help and documentation “in this painful moment in which the inhabitants of the Rupununi region are suffering.” He reiterated Venezuela’s conviction that the Guyanese Government carried out a bloody reprisal against Rupununi’s inhabitants for taking up arms against the government.

Mora claimed this move to grant asylum did not mean that Venezuela was interfering in Guyana’s internal affairs, and denied any implication in the uprising, saying that if it did, his country would have been controlling the region. However, he admitted that Guyanese youths had received military training in Venezuela at the wish of their parents, but he did not specify the number and did not say whether they participated in the uprising.

Reid’s statement

In Georgetown, the Acting Prime Minister, Dr. Ptolemy Reid, responding to Mora’s statement and other statements reported in the media by Venezuelan Government officials on Venezuela’s involvement in the insurrection, said that Venezuela had now further admitted that Guyanese youths had received military training in Venezuela. He added that the youths had left Guyana illegally without proper travel documents while Venezuela had allowed improper entry. This action provided irrefutable evidence of Venezuela’s inspiration and support of the uprising. He refuted reports in the Venezuelan print media that Amerindians were being massacred, saying that those who died were all victims of the conspirators and denounced the attempted comparison (by the Venezuelan media) of the Rupununi situation with Biafra.

On the statement by Mora that Venezuela considered the refugees as Venezuelans since they inhabited part of the territory claimed by Venezuela, Reid said Venezuela “stands indicted of the breach of every relevant principle of international law” and the statement by the Interior Minister was consistent with Venezuela’s behaviour in the past.

Here, note must be made of the fact that just six months before, during the debate in the Guyana National Assembly on the Venezuelan Decree of the Sea, the Third Deputy Prime Minister of the then PNC-UF coalition Government, Randolph Cheeks, had stated that the Amerindians who were commuting between Venezuela and Guyana for decades “. . . do not recognise national boundaries or national borders”, and that according to existing regulations, “Venezuelan Amerindians can come here and enjoy the

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same benefits as the Guyanese Amerindians and vice-versa". Therefore, if the youths, as mentioned in Reid's statement were Amerindians, then according to Cheeks, those particular youths had not left the country illegally. Thus, there was some contradiction in the statements of two different high ranking members of the Government of Guyana, albeit at different periods separated by a mere six months.

Guyana's letter to UN Secretary General

On 9 January, Guyana's Ambassador to the United States and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Sir John Carter, officially informed the Secretary General, U Thant, of the situation through the following letter:

Excellency,

I have the honour to bring the following to your most urgent attention.

On January 2, 1969, there took place in the Rupununi District in the south of Guyana a series of armed attacks on Government centres and peaceful farming villages which resulted in considerable loss of life and property.

The Government of Guyana is now in possession of irrefutable proof that the individuals who organised and carried out those crimes were trained for the purpose within the territory of the Republic of Venezuela, and supplied with arms by authorities of the Republic of Venezuela.

During the General Debate at the Twenty-third Session of the General Assembly my Minister of State for External Affairs drew attention to the massive effort which was being made by the Republic of Venezuela to subvert the loyalty of our people in order to advance its spurious territorial claims. He said, on October 3, 1968:

"It is an effort which has no lack of financial resources; which functions through hand-picked and trained agents working under the direction of the Venezuelan authorities from bases situated on the Venezuelan side of the border. . . A more flagrant premeditated course of interference in the internal political life of a neighbouring country directed from a governmental level it would be hard to find."

The extreme gravity of the consequences which may flow from this most recent calculated violation on the part of the Republic of Venezuela of generally accepted norms of international law and civilised behaviour compels my Government to request that you bring this matter, at your earliest possible convenience, to the attention of all States Members of the United Nations by way of a copy of this letter and of the attached Note which was issued from the Ministry of External Affairs in Georgetown to the Venezuelan Ambassador to Guyana.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration. . .

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Letter from CLASC to UN Secretary General

It was apparent that the rebels managed to garner some international support from the Confederacion Latino Americana Syndical Cristiana (CLASC) [Christian Democratic Trade Union] which had consultative status in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which had its headquarters in Europe and branches in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Chile and Venezuela. In a letter to U Thant on 14 January, CLASC expressed support for the Rupununi rebels and urged the intervention of the United Nations. A copy was also sent to the UN Human Rights Commission. The letter, addressed from Caracas, and signed by its Secretary General, Emilio Maspero and Ernesto Molano of its "Organisation Division" stated:

As a result of the popular uprising in the Rupununi region of Guyana, the Government of that country led by Mr. Forbes Burnham has unleashed a bloody wave of retaliation against the entire Amerindian population.

The countryside has become a human hunting-ground for innocent peasants—villages and farms have been totally destroyed by incendiary bombs and those responsible have respected neither the civil population, women nor children. The Amerindians constitute the native population of Guyana and the great majority are peasants kept in misery and at the margin of survival, by successive Governments. Thousands of them are active members of the Guyana National Confederation at Workers and Peasants, a trade union movement affiliated to the Confederacion Latino Americana Sindica Cristiana (CLASC).

By means of this note we wish formally to denounce before the United Nations these acts which, by their unreasoning and repressive ferocity, threaten to transform Guyana into a second Biafra. Moreover, the incitement of this official violence is that of racial discrimination, the establishment at which is being attempted in the country, and which we wholeheartedly condemn and denounce.

In the name of all the workers of Guyana and in the name of the millions of workers of Latin America, CLASC demands intervention by the United Nations to restore peace in Guyana and to put an end to the official terrorism which the dictatorial Burnham Government has again launched against the Amerindian peasants of the Rupununi and other areas of the country. All workers must have equal opportunity and the fullest guarantees of their human and social rights. . .

A copy of this letter was handed by the UN Secretary General's office to the Guyana Permanent Mission at the UN for a response.

Further Activities of Valerie Hart

Meanwhile, in Venezuela, Valerie Hart continued to be active in trying to win support for her cause. On 20 January, she visited the eastern city of Ciudad Bolivar to meet with the other rebel refugees who apparently were now working in the area. She told them not to give up the struggle and that

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they must continue to strive for the recovery of the Rupununi.

On her return to Caracas, she gave her version of the background of the uprising during a television interview. She said the Rupununi ranchers had on several occasions made representations to the Guyana Government because they were not satisfied with the conditions in the area. She claimed that the Amerindians were treated in a sub-human manner and that Government officers in the Rupununi frequently mistreated and assaulted the Amerindian women. She added that the only action taken as a result of their representations was the transfer of the defaulting officers. As a result, the ranchers became disillusioned and decided to form a movement with the backing of the Amerindians.

She further claimed that they had not planned to kill anyone but merely to seize certain Government buildings, hold the officers as hostages and close down the airstrips. After that action, they planned to negotiate with the Government to get concessions.

Unfortunately for the rebels, a priest who was not held as a hostage, used his radio set to contact someone in Georgetown and other persons opened one of the airstrips to allow the Government planes to land.

When asked by the interviewer about the policemen who were killed, she said that they were killed in the ranchers' self defence, and emphasised that the rebels had only rifles and guns which they normally used for hunting, but no sophisticated weapons. She admitted that it was a great blow to them that the revolt failed, but they were making plans for another attempt to take over the Rupununi, details of which she could not divulge. She added that it was not the end of the struggle, and she considered it as only the first battle lost.

Venezuelan political links with the uprising

The failed uprising continued to hold the attention of the Venezuelan throughout January and February of 1969. In various commentaries in the Venezuelan newspapers, towards the end of January, there was speculation that the Rupununi uprising was one of a number of moves designed by the Acción Democrática (AD) [Democratic Action] party to prevent President-elect Caldera of Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI) [Social Christian Party] from assuming office. About a month prior to the December 1968 presidential election, one of the first of these moves was put into effect. A number of top army personnel known to be favourable to COPEI were dismissed. Then soon after the election, it was alleged that some AD ministers together with the governor of Bolívar State got together to instigate the Rupununi uprising. President Leoni, who had not yet been inaugurated, was not apprised of these plans. Significantly, one of the planes

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used in the operation belonged to Bolivar State. It was impounded by the Brazilian Government after it landed on Brazilian territory, and the Brazilian Government declared that it would not release it until it knew the intentions of the new Venezuelan Government.

Thirty-six years later, on 13 March 2005, the Caracas daily, *Ultimas Noticias*, carried an article by Diaz Rangel who mentioned that the AD administration in 1968 gave support to the separatist movement in the Rupununi. The article revealed that “military troops and the police force, apparently commanded by General Yépez Daga, were ready to back the Amerindian separatist movement in the Essequibo which failed. Assault troops and paratroops were left waiting.”

Ramphal’s letter to Guyana’s Mission to the UN

The CLASC letter to the UN Secretary General apparently raised some concerns within the Guyana Government since it urged the UN to investigate the situation in the Rupununi. With concerns that this could involve a visit by the UN Human Rights Commission, Guyana’s Attorney General and Minister of State, in a letter of 13 February to the Ann Jardim, the Charge d’Affaires at the country’s Permanent Mission to the UN, said that Guyana should be cautious of inviting the UN Human Rights Commission to visit Guyana. He explained that there were dangers in any such offer particularly since it would be difficult to resist a proposal from, for example, a Latin American country on the Commission to send an investigating committee in response to any such offer.

Ramphal insisted that he would be unhappy over such a visit because it was possible that Venezuela could ensure that rehearsed complaints were advanced by Amerindians. In addition, he believed that an investigating committee from the UN Human Rights Commission would attract unfavourable notice for Guyana and, whatever its final report, he was certain that Venezuela would make much mileage out of it. Further, according to Ramphal, matters could be made worse since the political opposition might make efforts to embarrass the Government during the proceedings.

Guyana’s response to the CLASC letter

On 13 February 1969, Jardim, (Charge d’Affaires at Guyana’s Permanent Mission to the UN), responded to the CLASC letter of 14 January 14, 1969, in the following communication to Secretary General U Thant:

Excellency,

The letter of January 14, 1969, emanating from Caracas and signed on behalf of the Confederacion Latino Americana Syndical Cristiana

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(CLASC) forwarded with Your Excellency's note of 8th February, 1969, hereafter referred to as "the CLASC letter", is consistent with the efforts currently being made by the Government of Venezuela to conceal its most recent interference in the internal affairs of Guyana behind a facade of distortions and fabrications.

Venezuela's efforts at subversion within Guyana and aggression against Guyana are designed to advance her frenzied territorial ambitions and the false allegations already made by the Venezuelan authorities, and now repeated to Your Excellency for the attention of the Human Rights Commission, are intended to provide a pretext for further Venezuelan acts of subversion and aggression against Guyana. Presented in terms of humanitarian concern for the Amerindian people of Guyana the recital represents merely another stage in the shameful campaign by the wealthiest State in Latin America to plunder more than one-half of the territory of one of the newest and smallest States of the hemisphere, and to do so within the first years of the new State's independence while she is pre-occupied with the essential tasks of development and of social and economic change.

The events in the Rupununi region of Guyana to which the CLASC letter refers have already been the subject of a separate report by the Government of Guyana to Your Excellency, a report which at the request of the Government of Guyana was circulated to the Permanent Missions of all Member States of the United Nations in Your Excellency's Note No. PO 220 VENE(2) of January 10, 1969. A copy of that report is enclosed herewith and the Government of Guyana wishes its contents to be regarded as incorporated in this reply.

The incidents referred to were not, as stated in the CLASC letter, a "popular uprising". There were, as the report to Your Excellency indicated, a series of attacks on Government outposts by a group of wealthy ranchers trained, armed and supplied by the Government of Venezuela. The attacks resulted in the destruction of property and seven persons, including members of the Guyana Police Force and Amerindian citizens, were killed by the attackers. The principal insurgents have since fled Guyana and the majority of them have received both asylum and succour from the Venezuelan authorities.

Contrary also to the statement made in the CLASC letter there has been no retaliation by the Government or any agency of the Government of Guyana against the Amerindian people of the area most of whom had nothing to do with the violence, who fled in the wake of the attacks by the ranchers and who have returned to their peaceful pursuits in the region with the restoration of normal conditions. In fact, the only acts of violence involving either in injury to persons or in death have been

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those of the ranchers themselves perpetrated with the arms and equipment supplied to them by the Venezuelan Government.

The letter from CLASC alleges that thousands of the Amerindian people are members of the Guyana National Confederation of Workers and Peasants, which it claims as an affiliate, and in its final paragraph the organisation purports to speak “in the name of all the workers of Guyana”. A trade union called “The Guyana National Confederation of Workers and Peasants” was registered in Guyana in 1964 but it has never become active, has no known membership and has never complied with the requirements of the law regarding filing of annual returns. The Guyana Trades Union Council, which is an affiliate of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), of its regional organisation the Inter-American Regional Organisation of Workers (ORIT) and its sub-regional group the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL), represents the great majority of the trade unions operating in Guyana and is the only organisation which can speak in the name of the workers of Guyana. The Guyana Trades Union Council has repeatedly condemned Venezuelan acts of hostility and aggression and of interference in Guyana’s internal affairs.

Having regard to the current attempt by Venezuela to disguise her territorial ambitions by a feigned humanitarian concern for the people of Guyana, there is enclosed herewith a copy of a public statement made by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Georgetown, Rev. Richard Lester Guilly, S.J. on his return from the 39th International Eucharistic Congress in Bogota and the Conference of Bishops which followed it. The statement was made on September 10, 1968, and reveals some of the Venezuelan attempts at subversion among the Amerindian people of Guyana.

The Amerindian people of Guyana share in full and equal measure the constitutional guarantees enjoyed by all the citizens of Guyana. In addition, however, the Constitution of Guyana imposes and the Government acknowledges special responsibilities for Amerindian affairs designed to advance the welfare of Amerindian people. These responsibilities are discharged with serious regard by the Government of Guyana within the limits of the country’s resources—resources, however, which must inevitably be diverted from development to defence as Venezuelan militarism and subversion become more threatening. In general, in terms of respect for their fundamental human rights Guyana’s Amerindian people take second place to the Amerindian people of no other State of Latin America. In particular, they are subject to no discrimination in any area of Guyana’s national life.

It is the view of the Government of Guyana that the Human Rights

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Commission should take no cognizance of the CLASC letter of January 14, 1969. If, however, this letter or any of the allegations it makes is to be discussed by the Commission, it is the wish of the Government of Guyana that it be invited to participate in such proceedings of the Commission and the Government of Guyana will be grateful for this wish to be communicated to the Commission. . .

Alleged atrocities in the Rupununi

After the uprising was crushed, claims were made by numerous Guyanese, including some Rupununi Amerindians, that particularly in the northern savannahs the security forces had harassed, and even killed, a large number of Amerindians in putting down the revolt and in their subsequent “mopping up” operations which continued weeks after the revolt ended. Actually, many Amerindians were so fearful of the security forces that they fled over the border to seek refuge in Brazil. The allegation of harassment and killings was subsequently denied by the Guyana Government and the administration of the Guyana Defence Force, both of which claimed that no one was killed in the suppression of the rebels.

The Roman Catholic Bishop of Georgetown, the Reverend R. Lester Guilly, was allowed by the Ministry of Home Affairs to make a four-day observation tour of the southern Rupununi Savannahs to see the condition of the Amerindians, most of whom were Roman Catholics. However, he was not allowed to visit the northern Rupununi where the rebellion actually took place.

On his return to Georgetown, he reported that at St. Ignatius and Macusi Village (both located near Lethem) the Amerindians were still nervous and that a number of them had fled across the border to Brazil. He said that the old school building was burned to the ground, but little damage was done to the newer school building.

Despite the fact that Bishop Guilly did not actually visit the areas where there were military activities, he concluded: “I am happy to say that I am quite satisfied that there have been no atrocities.”

However, the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, who had applied to the Government to visit the Rupununi District, which was now designated a restricted area to non-Amerindians, was refused permission by the Ministry of Home Affairs to visit the area to examine the situation. As a result of this refusal, the PPP sent two of its leading Amerindian members, Eugene Stoby, a Member of Parliament, and Basil James to the Rupununi by the Guyana Airways passenger flight to make on-the-spot observations. But on landing at the Lethem airfield, they were detained by the GDF authorities and sent back on the return flight to Georgetown where they were rigorously

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questioned by the police before being released.

PPP views on the situation

Based on the refusal by the Government to allow Dr. Jagan and the two PPP Amerindian members from going to the Rupununi, the party expressed the view that the Government had something to hide and that, most likely, some Amerindians had been killed by the GDF in the suppression of the rebellion.

The PPP felt that the Government's statement that no Amerindian was killed in the crushing of the rebellion was untrue since it was apparent that the army met resistance which caused it to burn down a number of buildings in which mainly Amerindian rebels had entrenched themselves. It would be unique, the PPP stated, for an army to crush an armed rebellion without inflicting any loss of life on the rebel forces.

In the July-September 1969 issue of *Thunder*, the theoretical journal of the PPP, Dr. Jagan in an article entitled "What the future holds for Guyana", wrote:

... The Government, having ruthlessly crushed the rebellion ... is moving to militarize our politics. Incessant calls are being made for greater sacrifices to build a bigger army and police so "that our nation can be protected".

The revolt had its origin in a combination of factors—resentment by the people of the Rupununi against the PNC Government for the electoral fraud and the eviction of the United Force from the coalition; dissatisfaction with the Government's high-handed action in connection with their leased lands; subversion by Venezuela in its quest for a Guyanese "fifth column".

Venezuela's claim to nearly three-fifths of our territory was part of the Anglo-American conspiracy. It was resurrected in 1962 to be used as an aggressive weapon against the PPP or any future progressive regime in an independent Guyana. . .

During the past four years this claim was used for jingoistic and diversionary purposes in support of US-puppet regimes in both Guyana and Venezuela. In the 1968 election, it served as an intimidatory weapon. The PNC, with its main electoral slogan, "peace not conflict", openly suggested the threat of Venezuelan aggression in case of a PPP victory.

These were the reasons for the failure of the PNC-UF coalition to take to the UN Security Council Venezuela's aggression (occupation of the whole of Ankoko Island), threat of aggression (Venezuela's edict authorising its Navy to patrol Guyana's offshore waters), and subversion. The USA, while not wishing to be placed in a position of deciding between Guyana's "right" and Venezuela's "might", wants at the same time the Venezuelan claim to remain open indefinitely.

Indeed, there is every likelihood that the USA either backed or connived at Venezuelan support (military training and refuge) for the Rupununi rebels. This is just one way in which the United States not only expressed disapproval of the

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expulsion of the pro-capitalist-imperialist UF from the Government, but also intends to keep the PNC regime in line politically. . .

The National Security Act

During early February 1969, the PNC Government rushed a National Security Act through the National Assembly in the face of strong opposition from the PPP. The Government claimed that the Act was aimed at curbing subversion in the country.

In the October-December 1969 issue of *Thunder*, under the article, “The Erosion of Civil Liberties”, a leading Executive Member of the PPP, Ranji Chandisingh (who later defected to the PNC in 1976) commented on this Act and the aftermath of the Rupununi revolt:

During the debate in Parliament (on the National Security Act of 1969 to restrict the movement of persons within Guyana and to prevent Guyanese leaving the country), Opposition members pointed out that in the vast Rupununi area—following the short-lived uprising—the Government imposed administratively a complete ban on persons entering the area. The charge was made that the Government had something to hide; it was not telling the whole truth about the situation in the Rupununi—particularly with respect to the treatment of the Amerindians. There was much speculation as to the number of deaths.

The PPP sent two of its Amerindian members—one an organiser, the other a Member of Parliament—to investigate. They bought airplane tickets from the Guyana Airways Corporation and duly boarded the plane. Shortly after they landed, however, they were rounded up by police and sent back to Georgetown. Even priests who had served in the area were hustled out and prevented from returning.

The Government had actually sealed off the entire area, long after there could be any military justification for this. Only Government officials and certain PNC activists were allowed in.

At that time the Government was acting without any legal or constitutional authority. It was only subsequently that the Government—through this Act (National Security Act, 1969)—gave itself legal authority for such action.

Shortly after the National Security Act was passed, a Defence Levy tax of three percent on imported goods was imposed. The aim of this new tax, according to the Government, was to raise revenue to strengthen Guyana’s defence capabilities.

Amerindian Conference

Nearly two months after the Rupununi uprising, Prime Minister Burnham invited all Amerindian Touchaus (Chiefs) to Georgetown for a

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four-day conference, from the 28 February to the 3 March 1969, ostensibly aimed at formulating a far-reaching programme of Amerindian development. At the end of the conference, the Amerindian chiefs, in condemning the Rupununi revolt, passed the following resolution:

Acknowledging our duties to the State of Guyana and prepared to share also with our brothers in Guyana responsibilities for the development and the defence of Guyana;

Concerned over the claims of Venezuela to that part of Guyana in which many of us live in peace and harmony with the other people of Guyana—hereby declare that we:

1. Pledge our whole hearted loyalty to the Government of Guyana which we consider our only Government;
2. Reject the unjust claims of Venezuela to any part of the territory of Guyana;
3. Deplore the action of those misguided persons who conspire with foreigners to the detriment of our State;
4. Condemn all persons who seek to overthrow by force the lawful authority of the Government of Guyana;
5. Call upon all Guyanese to resist by all means any attempt by Venezuela or any other State to take or gain control of any part of Guyana;
6. Inform all nations of the world that we will never agree to the destruction or division of our country or recognise the claim of Venezuela or any other nation to any of the territory of Guyana.

Rupununi revolt reported to the UN

As part of its diplomatic offensive, Guyana used the forum of the 24th session of the UN General Assembly to highlight the failed insurrection. In the general debate on 6 October 1969, Guyana's Attorney General and Minister of External Affairs, Shridath Ramphal, informed the delegates of the Venezuelan involvement in the Rupununi revolt. Of special interest was his statement that the leaders of the revolt were ranchers, "many of whom were not even citizens of Guyana", and all of whom resented the authority of the PNC Government.

On the following day, the Permanent Representative of Venezuela, claiming the right to reply, accused Guyana of using the UN to propagate its internal policies by bringing charges of "invented aggression by Venezuela" before that body. He claimed that the Guyana Government was attempting to draw attention away from the troubled racial situation—left by British imperialism—and from the economic problems facing the country at home. He added that Venezuela was justified in warning foreign companies that their land rights granted by Guyana might not apply when the disputed territory should become "part of Venezuela".

Then on 8 October, Guyana's Permanent Representative to the UN,

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Patterson Thompson, in a rebuttal, admitted that Guyana had its share of economic and social problems. But, he said, for Venezuela to attempt to present these matters as a reason for Guyana's justified complaints in the General Assembly against Venezuelan hostility, was to seek the flimsiest pretext for inhibiting discussion in the General Assembly and to divert attention from the real motives underlying that hostility.

The aftermath

Meanwhile, towards the end of the year, the trial of the ten men charged with the murder of the five policemen and two civilians during the uprising began in the Supreme Court in Georgetown. In its case, the prosecution alleged that the men conspired to take over the Rupununi from the administration of the Central Government. Evidence was also introduced to show Venezuela's implication in the rebellion in providing training and arms for the insurrectionists and giving direction to their activities.

On the other hand, the defence urged the jury to return a "not guilty" verdict since the men took part in the uprising under duress because they were afraid for their lives. Finally on 16 January 1970, after both sides had presented their concluding arguments, the jury retired to consider their verdict. After deliberating for over seven hours, they arrived at their verdict shortly before midnight. They acquitted Ignatius Charlie, Anaclito Alicia, Handel Singh, Francis James, Charles Davis, Damian Phillips, and Brenton Singh. However, they failed to agree on a verdict in respect of Colin Melville, Aldwyn Singh, and Patrick Melville. The judge ordered a retrial for these three, but shortly after, the Director of Public Prosecutions dropped all charges against them.

Note: * *Leopoldo Talyhardat, Vice-Consul for Venezuela in Guyana, was expelled from Guyana on 1 May 1967 after the Government claimed that he was involved in a clandestine meeting two weeks earlier with Amerindians at Kabakaburi in the Pomeroon.*

Chapter 8

The Fraudulent Local Government Elections in 1970

From the time the PNC-UF coalition government came to power in December 1964, the new administration under the premiership of Forbes Burnham made regular promises that local government elections under universal adult suffrage would be held. However, the government constantly postponed the holding of such polls, and it was evident that the delay was motivated by three main reasons: (1) the fear of massive defeat after the complete failure of its tailored policies and as a result the disaffection of its supporters, and especially the solid continuing support for the PPP; (2) the objection of the British sugar plantation owners who would have had to pay increased rates due to the reorganisation of the local government areas (hence the elections only in those parts of the country which were not owned by the sugar companies); and (3) adverse international publicity similar to that received after the December 1968 general elections which saw electoral fraud being employed on a grand scale, and through which the PNC took full control of the government.

Following the rigged December 1968 elections which drew no condemnation from the US government, Prime Minister Burnham announced that local government elections to choose councillors for local village, district and town councils would soon be held. It was apparent that the PNC aimed at applying the same electoral practices employed for the general elections—electoral practices which, in any case, received the encouragement of the US government.

Preparations for these polls began during 1969 when the National Assembly enacted two pieces of legislation which set out the regulations

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relating to the forthcoming elections. Initially, the government announced that elections would be held on that date in six registration districts, but it finally decided on only five—Greater Georgetown, New Amsterdam, Bartica, Leguan, and Sheet Anchor/Cumberland. These elections were later fixed for 29 June 1970; elections for other areas were expected to be held in December.

When the date of the elections was finally announced, there was some scepticism among many PPP supporters who expressed reluctance to vote because they were sure that there would be a repeat of the 1968 experience, and they felt that the results of the local government elections had already been decided by the PNC. However, there was some optimism among the PPP supporters in Leguan and Sheet Anchor/Cumberland that since these were PPP strongholds their party would be able to score victories there.

New electoral regulations

In its propaganda build-up towards these elections, the PNC government claimed that the new councils would be better able to administer the affairs of the local districts. But the main objective of the PNC government in holding the local government elections was to try to convince the international community that it was winning support from Guyanese—as evidenced by its “victory” in December 1968—and that it was making inroads into the strongholds of the PPP. However, the PNC could not convince the people of Guyana that it was popular since the great majority were still very bitter over the fraud perpetrated in 1968.

In the 1968 general election, which also saw the introduction of overseas votes, more than 19,000 of the roughly 300,000 votes were cast by proxy. The rigged results gave the PNC more than 90 percent of these proxy votes as well as more than 90 percent of the overseas votes. As would be seen, proxy voting was on an even larger scale in the 1970 local government elections, and this was allowed by new enacted regulations which allowed returning officers to use their “discretion” to permit proxy voting for “persons for whom it is likely to be impracticable or seriously inconvenient, by reason of the nature of their occupation, service, or employment, or for other good cause, to go in person to the polling place at which they are entitled to vote.”

In addition, the PNC government amended the law to permit one person to cast proxy votes for up to three other persons, in addition to voting on his/her own behalf. This provided a loophole for the PNC to perpetuate fraud through the use of multiple proxies, since on the day of the elections, more than 90 percent of the proxy votes were cast by PNC activists.

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The opposition political parties were also placed at a serious disadvantage since the list of persons authorised to vote by proxy was not published. For the 1968 general elections, the regulations specified that this list should have been published four days before polling day, but this was never done; this specification was removed from the laws governing the local government elections, thus freeing the government from making one available. Clearly, this law was changed to allow the perpetuation of electoral fraud.

Compiling the electoral list

For the June 1970 elections, the PNC government compiled the voters' list from the national registration list which was prepared for the 1968 general elections. A shady registration firm, recruited from the United States in 1967 by the PNC-UF coalition government, carried out the compulsory registration of all Guyanese 14 years old and over, at a time when there was no law for compulsory registration. The National Registration Act (NRA) was not passed until much later in 1968.

It is from this registration list that the names of persons 21 years old and over, registered under the NRA, were extracted for the electoral roll used in 1968 and in the local government elections of June 1970. The government ignored the Elections Commission, which in any case was shorn of its powers to revise or compile a new voters' list. Mainly because of this, the PPP and UF representatives resigned from the Commission which subsequently functioned with only two members—the Chairman and a representative of the ruling PNC.

The five areas

For the June 1970 elections, the government enlarging the urban municipalities of Georgetown and New Amsterdam by absorbing suburban areas which had grown in size in recent years. But at the same time, it reduced the physical boundaries and the size of the electorate in the three other areas where elections were to be held. Instead of holding elections in the Essequibo Islands district, which had a total of 6,690 registered voters, elections were prepared for only the island of Leguan which had 3,013 voters. And rather than having elections for the Mazaruni-Potaro district, which had 9,701 registered, the poll was prepared only for that district's main settlement, Bartica, which had 2,943 voters. The same situation existed for the Eastern Berbice registration district; instead of holding elections for the entire district, the government prepared the elections for only a section of it—the combined neighbouring villages of Sheet Anchor and Cumberland. While

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the entire registration district had about 8,000 voters on roll, Sheet Anchor and Cumberland had 3,306 for the local government poll.

The PNC was expected to win easily in Georgetown, New Amsterdam and Bartica, which were its strongholds. On the other hand, Leguan and Sheet Anchor/Cumberland were overwhelmingly supportive of the PPP. However, by deliberately reducing the size of the electoral areas in those two registration districts, the PNC apparently was hoping to improve its chances in those two localities and to wrest political control from the PPP.

The June 1970 elections were conducted under the system of proportional representation and were even more comprehensively rigged than the 1968 general elections. The rigging was done mainly in three ways: by padding the electoral lists, by abusing the system of proxy voting, and by tampering with ballot-boxes. In addition, intimidation of voters by the PNC was openly evident.

Padding the electoral list

The PNC, in preparing the electoral roll, overdid itself by padding it and removing many genuine voters. And to prevent the PNC from losing even one of its valuable "votes," objection to the fictitious names was made expensive and difficult, and efforts to remove them were frustrated by the PNC-hand-picked election officials. Even real live voters, especially the elderly and ailing, were intimidated into signing proxy forms allowing supporters of the PNC to vote for them. Those whose names were omitted from the electoral register had little hope of voting since they had to furnish legal documentary proof of their existence, since physical presence apparently, in the eyes of the election officials, did not amount to legal existence.

At a press conference on 6 June, PPP executive member Ranji Chandisingh stated:

In New Amsterdam, the PPP lodged 175 objections. Of these only 3 were allowed. The electoral registrars demanded documentary proof as evidence. In all cases documents could not be produced for obvious reasons. Out of 19 persons we had claimed dead, only two were allowed by the registrar.

Letters, which have been sent out to persons objected to, are now returning from the Post Office. The Post Office claims that the persons cannot be reached, as indeed, they cannot, because they do not exist. 79 letters were received from the Post Office on June 4th. The information was as follows: deceased 15; addresses removed 43; out of the country 14; cannot be found 5; insufficiently addressed 2. These are all for New Amsterdam. So the postal authorities have confirmed that 15 out of the 19 dead persons are really dead.

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Chandisingh further pointed out that at Sheet Anchor/Cumberland, another method was used. Struck off the list were persons who did not appear at the sittings where the objections were to have been held, since they were never summoned to these hearings. And out of 51 objections made by the PPP to fictitious names and dead people in the area, only 6 were allowed.

Only after the closing date of claims and objections, many genuine persons finally realised that their names were objected to before and that they were struck off the list. And in the veil of secrecy the PNC held over the electoral process, the list of objections was not made available by the registrars to the opposition parties or to the general public. On the publication of the new supplementary list, lines were drawn through names of many persons.

The padding of the list with non-existent persons was reflected on the electoral roll which increased suspiciously by 15.25 percent from September 1969 to April 1970, especially since the rate of increase of the population was only 3 percent annually. This large increase was noted particularly in the Berbice area.

Padding undoubtedly was a significant factor in the rigging process. Using the already heavily padded 1968 electoral list, a preliminary list for the entire country published a few weeks before the June local government elections clearly included the names of non-existent persons. This list in some cases showed an increase in the number of voters of as much as 27 percent in some areas, while increases of 19, 18 and 17 percent in many were common. Only large-scale “immigration” into these areas—and there was none—could account for such massive increases.

As occurred during the 1968 general elections, some individual addresses were given as the residence of large numbers of persons. For instance, 81 persons were registered at one address in North Georgetown. In Bartica, 48 people were listed at one address, but a check by PPP scrutineers accounted for only 16. Checks on the multiple names at these individual addresses accounted for only a few of them, no doubt because the majority were those of fictitious persons.

Intimidation by the PNC

In open acts of intimidation, many PPP candidates in Leguan and Sheet Anchor/Cumberland were offered jobs and other bribes to denounce the PPP and support the PNC. However, they were all PPP candidates for the Sheet Anchor/Cumberland area, a PPP stronghold, and the condition was that they should relinquish their candidacies. With regard to these acts of intimidation, PPP leader Dr. Cheddi Jagan stated on 12 June 1970:

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In the Sheet Anchor/Cumberland area, the PNC is using foul means to prevent the PPP from winning a majority of seats. We have already referred to many irregular and corrupt practices in the compilation and revision of the voter's list. Now the Government and security police are coercing candidates of the PPP to withdraw, and in one case to join the PNC's list.

The PNC is using the government machinery to bribe and intimidate to give a false impression of their electoral strength. Candidates have been forced to withdraw by threats of losing their jobs, denial of passports, and victimisation of themselves and their relatives.

We had always warned that with the assumption of power by the PNC, Guyana was heading towards fascism. The local government elections now being held are demonstrating clearly the extent to which the PNC will go to retain power. We therefore call on the Guyanese people to join us in resisting the abrogation of the constitution and the denial of civil liberties and in defeating the PNC monster.

Despite all of these irregularities, the private national media in Guyana remained silent and refused to raise their voices against the trampling of democracy by the PNC. It was only the *Mirror*, the pro-PPP newspaper, which exposed the illegalities and irregularities that were taking place.

Proxy voting

A sizeable proportion of the fraud was conducted through the proxy votes. The extent of the proxy voting was such that of the total of just over 65,000 votes in the five areas, well over 10,800 were cast by proxy, a much greater proportion than for the 1968 general elections.

In Georgetown, widely regarded as a PNC stronghold, the ruling party faced a problem early on polling day because people were not turning up to the polling places to vote. The PNC did not want to be embarrassed by a low turn-out so it sent its activists to hand out "proxy" forms—authority to vote for others—to Afro-Guyanese whom they believed would support the governing party. These forms had earlier been signed in blank by returning officers, i.e., without either the name of the voter or his proxy entered in the appropriate places. This illegal practice was exposed when some persons handed in the "proxy" forms to PPP officials at Freedom House, the party headquarters. These persons said that they had been completed in their presence by the PNC activists who had invited them to exercise the proxies. And in breach of the law, many PNC offices where these proxies were issued were located within 200 yards of polling places.

Because proxies were exercised for persons who never gave authority to anyone, many PPP supporters arrived at the polling place only to be told by the presiding officer that others had already voted for them. In one significant case, a PPP candidate for a Georgetown Council seat

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found that someone had already voted for him, even though he never signed any proxy form.

The highest percentage (37 percent) of proxy voting occurred at Bartica. Here, many dead, under-age and non-resident persons voted by proxy. When the presiding officer asked the PPP agent who had challenged a proxy voter how he knew that the person was dead, the reply was: "Because I attended her funeral."

At Bartica, too, a large number of PPP supporters found that proxy votes had been cast very early in their names, without their consent. Coincidentally, the PPP polling agents were refused entry into the two polling places at 6.00 a.m. after their documents of official authorisation were taken from them by the presiding officers. They were eventually allowed entry after 8.00 a.m. after a period of heavy proxy voting had already occurred; they, therefore, could not observe the voting during the period that had elapsed.

In Sheet Anchor/Cumberland, proxy voting reached 30 percent of the voter turnout. While the PNC were able to bribe many people to obtain proxy votes in this area, numerous PPP supporters discovered that others had voted for them by proxy even though they had given no authority for this to be done. In addition, the non-resident vote here, as in Leguan, was also high.

Tampering with ballot boxes

But to further ensure "victory" for the PNC, tampering with the ballot boxes at the end of the polling exercise featured prominently in Georgetown, Leguan, and Sheet Anchor/Cumberland, and probably also in Bartica and New Amsterdam.

At Queen's College, the counting centre in Georgetown, PPP and UF representatives were prevented by PNC supporters to observe the ballot counting for a lengthy period.

At this counting centre, a ballot box from one area, (Kitty, Division 2), when opened and counted, contained only 310 votes. But the ballot paper counterfoils showed that 410 persons actually voted! In another Georgetown division, 437 votes were cast, but only 407 ballots were found in the box. At another area, La Penitence-Lodge, 416 votes were cast at the polling place, but when the box was opened, it had 573 ballots, 157 more than it should have contained!

These situations occurred because of deliberate tampering with the ballot boxes. Some boxes had broken seals, and there were also physical signs that others were opened from the bottom.

Just before the polls closed, returning officers at some polling places, contrary to the regulations, informed PNC activists about the numbers of votes cast. This information was done brazenly in the presence of PPP

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and UF agents who were monitoring the elections. Armed with this information, PNC activists undoubtedly prepared substitute boxes filled with mostly PNC ballots—boxes which were to be switched with genuine boxes during the shipment from the polling places to the counting centres. In all likelihood, some mistakes were made such as the shortage for the Kitty ballot box, or a surplus as in La Penitence-Lodge.

To prevent transparency in the process, and contrary to guarantees given by the Chief Elections Officer and the Elections Commission, returning officers as well as PNC activists prevented PPP polling agents from travelling on the vehicles which transported the ballot boxes from the polling places to the counting centres. As a result of this deliberate act of irregularity, they could not keep a physical watch on the boxes during the period they left the polling places to the time counting began. This also allowed PNC activists who had total control of the boxes to freely switch or stuff them with fictitious ballots.

The ballot boxes in Leguan were not taken immediately to the counting centre on the island. Instead, they were transported to a guest house occupied by PNC activists, and remained there for more than two hours before they were finally taken to the counting centre nearby. During this period, PPP agents or candidates were prevented by the police from entering the guest house compound.

The rigged results

The following table shows the results of the elections. The first five columns of figures came from official sources. The figures for proxies cast were compiled from information furnished by PPP polling agents at the various polling places. The tally of 10,849 proxy votes might probably be on the low side since PPP polling agents were prevented from entering some polling places for a period on the morning of the elections.

Registration area	Total Voters	Votes cast	PNC	PPP	UF	Proxy votes	% Proxy
Greater Georgetown	95,537	51,301	43,297	5,586	2,113	7,004	13.7
New Amsterdam	8,133	6,509	5,064	1,182	265	1,611	10.1
Sheet-Anchor /Cumberland*	3,306	2,653	2,045	525	-	800	30.2
Bartica	2,943	2,120	1,628	308	151	775	37.0
Leguan	3,013	2,583	1,814	732	31	659	21.6
[TOTAL]	113,932	65,166	53,848	8,333	2,560	10,849	

*Ratepayers Group polled 74 votes

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Leguan and Sheet Anchor/Cumberland were districts of immense PPP strength, but when the counting was finished, the most bizarre results were announced.

In Sheet Anchor/Cumberland, the PNC government declared that the PPP had polled only 525 votes, whereas the PNC got 2,045. The UF did not contest here, but a "Ratepayers Group" acquired 74 votes.

In the 1964 and 1968 general elections, also under proportional representation, the figures were 5,331 and 5,806 respectively for the PPP, while the PNC obtained **only** 1,405 and 1,590 respectively, from a much larger area and larger electorate.

In 1968, for the entire Essequibo Islands district, of which Leguan formed only a part, the PNC secured only 1,623 votes and the PPP 4,221 out of a total electorate of 6,690. But only eighteen months later, in the June 1970 elections for Leguan **alone**, the PNC "won" with 1,814 votes out of an electorate 2,583! In this area of immense PPP support, that party "polled" only 732 votes! In the 1968 elections, the PPP had easily won more than 90 percent of the island's votes.

Significantly, the "results" showed the UF acquiring only 31 votes even though 50 voters sponsored its list of candidates.

Strong condemnation of the electoral fraud, locally and internationally, followed the announcement of the "results". Undoubtedly, the PNC improved on its rigging skills developed for the general elections one and a half years before. And as usual, officials of the police and the civil service, politically partisan towards the PNC, were not hesitant at all in aiding the cover-up of the electoral atrocities. For instance, when the PPP, on the conclusion of the elections, requested the Chief Elections Officer to provide data on the number of proxy votes that were cast in the five areas, he replied that based on the electoral regulations, he was not required to provide this information.

As a result of this outright rigging by the PNC, the PPP boycotted the rest of the local government elections held in December 1970. The PNC thus was able, through its blatant rigging process, to take full control of all the local authorities in the country.

The Protocol of Port of Spain

Chapter 9

The Protocol of Port of Spain

Guyana constitutionally became a Republic on 23 February 1970 and there was much pomp and ceremony to inaugurate and celebrate the occasion. However, the celebrations which commenced a few days before Republic Day were momentarily interrupted when the Venezuelan army attacked a Guyana military outpost at Eteringbang near to Ankoko Island on 21 February. Guyana protested very strongly to the Venezuelan attack and shortly after informed the UN Security Council about it.

But a new twist in the situation occurred on 25 February when the commanding officer of the Venezuelan detachment on Ankoko, Captain Luis Calatrava Sifontes, personally apologised to Lieutenant Keith Dyer, the officer-in-charge of the GDF troops at Eteringbang for the bombardment. Captain Sifontes said he was absent from Ankoko when his troops opened fire and immediately on his return he ordered all firing to cease. He claimed that the firing would not have taken place had he been present and expressed the hope that the incident could be forgotten.

Mixed Commission meetings

The Mixed Commission, meanwhile, had held a session in Buenos Aires, Argentina, during December 1969. It then held its final working session in Kingston, Jamaica, from 13 to 16 February 1970. At this meeting it was agreed that the Commission would meet again to prepare its Final Report to be submitted to the Governments of Guyana, Venezuela and Great Britain.

Two such meetings were held—one in April and the other in May.

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Finally on 18 June 1970, the Final Report was signed and submitted to the respective Governments.

The Final Report admitted that the Mixed Commission had failed to find any satisfactory solutions for the practical settlement of the border issue. Venezuela's position in the various meetings was that the issue of "nullity" was not an issue with which the Mixed Commission should concern itself, and was more interested to know how much land Guyana was prepared to cede. And when Guyana declined to proceed in that way, Venezuela then sought to circumvent argument about its contention of nullity by putting forward proposals for the "joint development" of the area it claimed.

But these "joint development" proposals were unacceptable to Guyana.

Official meetings

After the Eteringbang incidents and the end of the Mixed Commission, it was clear that some form of dialogue was necessary between the Guyana and Venezuela to explore all possibilities in order to bring about better relations between the two countries, and to provide a basis for effecting a final solution to the controversy arising out of Venezuela's claim to Guyanese territory.

At the final working session of the Mixed Commission which was held in Jamaica in February 1970, it was agreed to postpone for three months, i.e., until 16 May 1970, the date on which the Final Report would be signed and submitted to the Governments of Guyana, Venezuela and Great Britain.

The rationale behind the postponement was to allow for a longer period of time during which an agreement could be reached as regards the method to be pursued for finding a solution to the problem in accordance with Article IV of the Geneva Agreement.

The members of the Mixed Commission accordingly met in Caracas on 14 May 1970 but agreement was not reached on the text of the Final Report. A draft text proposed by Guyana was rejected by Venezuela which, on the other hand, had not prepared its own draft for Guyana's consideration.

With the aim of bringing about better relations between the two countries, and to provide a basis for effecting a final solution to the controversy, officials from both Governments met on a number of occasions between March and June 1970 to attempt to find a basis for settling within reasonable limits, all outstanding difficulties. Six official level meetings were held between the two Governments, with the final one convening in Georgetown on 3 June 1970.

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New proposals for a solution

(a) Neutral observer presence – proposal by Guyana

At the official level meetings it was also decided to suspend the search for a solution under a moratorium arrangement during which programmes of economic cooperation would be discussed and implemented where possible. The events at Eteringbang in February 1970 coupled with Guyana's unabated fears of possible Venezuelan military intervention had moved the Government of Guyana to insist that Venezuela's acceptance of a neutral observer presence was an essential condition to its acceptance of any proposals for economic cooperation. The Guyana officials were at pains to explain that their Government's proposal for a neutral observer presence did not necessarily mean the existence of a permanent physical presence on the border but rather that there should be agreement on the need for such team which would visit the border area at agreed intervals and which would be on call should any incidents occur along the border. The added advantage of having such a team would be that any hostility on the frontier would be immediately investigated, such investigation serving to localise the area of conflict and prevent its escalation to the point of frustrating the moratorium and the programmes of economic cooperation.

Despite these assurances, Venezuela rejected this proposal for a neutral observer presence.

(b) Arbitration – proposal by Venezuela

In an attempt to break the ensued deadlock, the Government of Venezuela proposed that the issue of Venezuela's claim to western Essequibo should be settled by arbitration under the principle of *ex aequo et bono* [according to what is right and good]. Under this proposal, the arbitrators would be given full scope to determine their own terms of reference as practised under customary international law relating to arbitral proceedings. It was further contended that should the Government of Guyana agree to this proposal, Venezuela would regard the existence of the controversy with Guyana as having been settled and in this regard would formally undertake at the June 1970 meeting of OAS Foreign Ministers to propose and support the entry of Guyana into the hemispheric organisation.

(c) Recourse to the ICJ – counter-proposal by Guyana

However, Guyana saw little merit in recourse to a second arbitral tribunal since Venezuela was discrediting the work of the previous

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arbitral tribunal of 1899. Guyana further indicated that the very objections which the Venezuela was raising with respect to the 1899 arbitral tribunal might conceivably be equally raised with respect to any subsequent arbitral tribunal. In such circumstances, Guyana counter-proposed that recourse to the International Court of Justice would be a more practical and definitive means of resolving the issue. A formal proposal for a reference to the International Court of Justice was therefore made by the Government of Guyana at a meeting of officials on 10 May 1970 in Georgetown on the basis that the Court should decide whether the existing boundary between Guyana and Venezuela as demarcated pursuant to the Arbitral Award of 1899 was binding on both parties.

The Government of Venezuela rejected this counter-proposal.

Mediation by Dr. Eric Williams

With no forward movement in the negotiation clearly visible, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Eric Williams, became involved in the process by mediating with both parties towards reaching an agreement. Williams was encouraged to involve himself in this exercise by the United States government which wanted both Guyana and Venezuela, to which it was very close politically, to reach a mutual agreement on the border issue. Most likely, the US view on the border issue was made known to both countries by the Prime Minister.

Eventually, the deadlock was broken when Guyana declared that it was prepared to accept a straight moratorium arrangement without any programme of economic cooperation and without a neutral observer presence. Guyana insisted, however, that the duration of such a moratorium must be long enough to allow for the creation of a climate of improved relations between the two countries.

The Government of Venezuela accepted this proposal, and the last three meetings at official level were concerned with hammering out the details of this agreed arrangement. These discussions although frank, open and free from bitterness and hostility, were characterised by a great deal of tough hard bargaining on both sides and the effort appeared to be producing significant rewards.

Negotiations for a Protocol to the Geneva Agreement

By June 1970, provisional agreement was reached on the terms of a Protocol to the Geneva Agreement. This proposed Protocol provided for a moratorium of twelve (12) years, renewable for successive periods of twelve years or, by subsequent agreement of the Governments, for periods of not less than five (5) years. It provided for unilateral

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termination at the end of the initial period (or at the end of any of the subsequent renewal periods) but stipulated that such termination automatically revived the operation of Article IV of the Geneva Agreement. It was also agreed that termination for any cause whatsoever—and this referred to a premature termination of the moratorium as opposed to the end of any agreed period—would also revive Article IV of the Geneva Agreement.

The terms of the agreed Protocol spelled out the decision that no claims shall be made by either Government on the territorial sovereignty of the other and recognised that the promotion of a constructive climate of friendship and goodwill was essential to the success of the moratorium.

This draft Protocol was arrived at on the basis of a common understanding at official level as to the precise meaning of some of its more significant articles with respect to the further prosecution of the claim by Venezuela during the period of the moratorium. It was jointly understood for example that Venezuela would not attempt to discourage investment in the Essequibo Region nor will she continue to publish and issue maps designed to show territory in Guyana as being under claim by or as a part of Venezuela unless such maps bore a date prior to the date of the Protocol.

With regard to the maps and other documents published by Venezuela showing western Essequibo as Venezuelan territory, the officials on both sides actually drafted a joint agreement relating to this issue. The draft agreement stated:

Note of Understandings reached during negotiations on the Protocol of Port-of-Spain as recorded in identical form by each Government.

The Minister of External Relations of Venezuela, in the name of the President of the Republic, stated to the Minister of State for External Affairs of Guyana the intention of the Government of Venezuela not to proceed, during the remainder of the current constitutional period, with the publication of official maps dated after the date of the Protocol or with the publication of postage stamps or other representations or writings which have reference to the claim, by way of demonstration of its good will in the execution of the provisions of the Protocol.

The Government of Venezuela would value the word of the President of the Republic being considered sufficient by the Government of Guyana.

The Minister of State of Guyana accepted the undertaking given in the name of the President of the Republic of Venezuela and expressed the hope that, in conformity with the spirit of the Protocol, the undertaking would be continued beyond the end of the current constitutional period by the then appropriate authorities of Venezuela.

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Guyana's Minister of State for External Affairs Shridath Ramphal was a strong advocate of the proposed Protocol which was he felt was being arranged to last at least for 12 years but at the same time designed to encourage its perpetual renewal.

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The work of the officials, who had meetings in Tobago, Georgetown and Caracas, prepared the ground for discussions between Ramphal and the Venezuelan Foreign Affairs Minister, Dr. Aristides Calvani, on 16-18 June 1970 in Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad and Tobago. Eric Williams, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, played an important role in arranging this meeting and in getting both Venezuela and Guyana to reach agreement on the final text of the Protocol.

The proposed agreement relating to the publication of maps and postage stamps by Venezuela was never signed. At the end of the meeting, after the submission of the Final Report of the Mixed Commission, the protocol, known as the Protocol of Port of Spain, was signed by Ramphal and Calvani on the morning of 18 June 1970. Sir Roland Hunte, the British High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago, also signed the Protocol on behalf of his government.

The Protocol provided for a minimum period during which Venezuela undertook not to assert any claim to sovereignty over the Essequibo region of Guyana, and for Guyana to assert no claim to Venezuelan territory. The initial period of the Protocol was for twelve years and was automatically renewable. However, it could be terminated by either side at certain stated intervals; but it had a guaranteed minimum life of twelve years.

The Protocol did not replace the Geneva Agreement of 1966, but merely suspended it. But if either side, after a minimum period of twelve years should withdraw from the agreement, the Geneva Agreement would be automatically revived and all the procedures provided in that agreement would be available again to both countries.

Later that afternoon in Georgetown, Guyana's Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham explained the terms of the protocol to the National Assembly. He declared:

The Protocol, of course, will not transform our relations overnight. Much patient effort will be needed to overtake five years of strained relations and to secure that harmony which the Protocol now makes possible. . . The conclusion of the Protocol and the arrangements associated with it represent a new period of mutual respect accompanied by a patient search for understanding. These principles must guide us in the years ahead. If they do, the Protocol thus will have served well, not only Guyana and Venezuela, but the Hemisphere itself—and there can be no reason why the regime of peace

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which the Protocol establishes should ever end.

On the other hand, the opposition PPP was not so optimistic. Two days after the Protocol of Port of Spain was signed, the party, in condemning the government for signing the Protocol, stated that the agreement would permit the continued Venezuelan occupation of the Guyanese part of Ankoko Island.

The party added that the Guyana government acted in a cowardly manner by refusing to bring Venezuela's aggression to the UN Security Council despite the bold statements to cede of "not an inch of territory" and "not a blade of grass." The PPP also called on the government "to pursue the steps outlined in the Geneva Agreement to settle the issue once and for all, and put an end to this period of marking time."

Ratification of the Protocol by Guyana

Despite these sharp criticisms, a motion to ratify the Protocol was presented to the Guyanese National Assembly by the Guyana Government on 22 June 1970. The main spokesman for the Government was the Minister of State, Shridath Ramphal who, in the course of his speech, outlined the main positive goal of the agreement Protocol as providing a guaranteed period of twelve years during which Venezuela "may not assert a claim to Guyana's territory."

Strong criticisms came from the PPP members who voted against the motion which was carried by the PNC majority.

Nevertheless, the PPP continued to express its opposition to the Protocol. The party made further criticisms at its sixteenth congress held at Anna Regina, Essequibo, on 5-6 September 1970. In its General Council report presented by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the party stated:

The Venezuelan border claim and the way it has been handled by the Guyana government once again puts the stamp of national betrayal on the PNC leaders. The Protocol of Port of Spain which merely shelved the matter for twelve years was dictated by the US government to its puppets in both Guyana and Venezuela. The Guyana government meekly and speedily bowed to this dictation without consulting the Opposition or the Guyanese people as a whole. The Venezuelan claim is held as a threat to any progressive, national democratic government that attempts to break with imperialism. The PPP repudiates the Port of Spain Protocol and condemns the PNC government for its betrayal of the nation.

Despite the speedy ratification of the Protocol by Guyana, this was not the case in Venezuela where it was never presented to the Venezuelan Congress. There existed some speculation that certain sections of both the Venezuelan government (the COPEI coalition) and the main

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opposition force, the Acción Democrática (AD) had some reservations about the Protocol, and these differences of opinions prevented the then COPEI Government from presenting it to the Congress for final ratification.

Chapter 10

The Rigged Elections in 1973

National Registration

On 6 March 1973, the PNC Government announced that there would be a national registration of all Guyanese who would be 14 years and over on September 30, 1973. It also stated that out of this registration process, the electoral list would be compiled for the general elections to be held later in the year.

Both the parliamentary opposition parties (PPP and UF) protested that the period of two hours each day, during 15-21 March, was inadequate for the registration of citizens in Guyana. The period allowed for overseas registration (15-31 March) was even more insufficient since the opposition parties did not have enough time to alert their supporters abroad. And to deliberately place obstacles in the way of these parties, the Government did not state the location of the registration centres in foreign countries.

The PNC Government ignored all protests and appeals for more time and proceeded with the registration and preparation of the electoral lists. For this task, as happened in 1968, it again resorted to placing partisan officials in complete charge of the registration and election machinery. The actual registration in Guyana was conducted in a deliberate manner to frustrate opposition supporters. During the national registration period, gross irregularities occurred in the registration of youths—heavy registration in PNC areas of strength and low registration in PPP areas.

Among the strategies applied in areas where the PNC had little support were the absence or non-attendance of the registration officers

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and delays in dealing with each registrant. Persons who failed to be registered meant that they would not be on the electoral lists and could not vote in the elections due for that year.

Efforts by way of motions in the National Assembly to ensure that the registration exercise was operated democratically also failed. One motion on 25 April calling for the annulment of the registration regulations was simply ignored

On the same day the Government announced the plan for national registration, the PPP had tabled a motion in the National Assembly calling for the vote to be given to 18-year-olds. However, the PNC Government refused to debate the motion. This refusal and the deliberate actions to frustrate registration of young opposition supporters drew this statement from the PPP in March 1973:

It would seem that the exercise has been carried out so as to permit mainly PNC youths to be registered. After this was accomplished and a preponderance of the PNC youths clearly established, the government will most likely reduce the voting age to 18. It will then put on the pose of being progressive. . .

This was exactly what eventually happened. In May, the PNC introduced a constitutional motion in the National Assembly to reduce the voting age from 21 to 18, a principle the PPP supported. But because the PNC Government refused to address the problems regarding registration of opposition supporters, the PPP refused to support the motion which was defeated since it failed to obtain the two-thirds majority to amend the constitution.

The PNC, thus blocked, then began to use the postal vote illegally—forging some 20,000 postal vote applications. Some of the postal votes were subsequently used in the general election to cast votes for dead and non-existent voters. The others were also used to defraud legitimate voters who were denied their right to cast their votes on election day. Despite the failure of the constitutional motion, the PNC regime deliberately proceeded to flout the constitution by putting 18-year-olds on the electoral lists.

Shortly after the date of the election was announced, a number of Guyanese teenagers resident in Trinidad were sent their ballot papers by post from the office of Guyana's resident representative. When this was exposed by the PPP, the Chief Elections Officer said it was a "mistake."

Opposition parties' meetings with Elections Commission

The PPP and two other opposition parties—the Liberator Party (LP) which was a coalition of a new party of that name with the older UF, and the People's Democratic Movement (PDM) led by the former Minister of

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Home Affairs in the PNC government, Llewellyn John—were naturally very much concerned over the irregularities in the registration exercise and also in the administration of the forthcoming election. As a result, they held several joint and separate meetings with the Elections Commission requesting it to exercise its functions of “general direction and supervision over the registration of electors and the administrative conduct of the elections.” The parties asked the chairman of the Commission, Sir Donald Jackson, to take action to ensure impartiality, fairness and compliance with the provisions of the constitution.

Fearing tampering of the boxes, the opposition parties, while fighting against all forms of electoral fraud, concentrated on the security of the ballot boxes. They were particularly anxious to ensure that party representatives should be allowed to affix fool-proof seals around the ballot boxes at the close of the poll, and that these representatives would be allowed to accompany the ballot boxes to the official counting places and to keep them in sight at all times until counting commenced. They reminded Jackson, who had been chairman also during the 1968 election, of instances of the electoral fraud that took place on that occasion.

Jackson informed the opposition representatives that the Commission had no power to take any of the actions requested; he said he had sought unsuccessfully to obtain guidelines setting out the powers which he had felt it necessary for the Commission to have. He added that the Commission had no control over the preparation of the electoral lists and said he himself had requested a copy.

Regarding requests for opposition representatives to affix fool-proof seals on ballot boxes and to accompany them to the counting centre, Jackson said he would transmit those proposals to the Minister of Home Affairs. The Minister, who was a PNC candidate in the elections, replied that it was impossible, because of unavailable space, to allow polling agents of political parties to accompany the ballot boxes.

Since the security of the ballot boxes was crucial to free and fair elections, the three opposition parties then proposed to the Elections Commission that one polling agent representing them should be chosen to accompany each ballot box. They stated in a letter to Jackson: “We feel that the Commission would agree to this proposal to ensure the secrecy of the ballot since its implementation is in no way contrary to any existing law or regulation.” Jackson never replied.

At another meeting Jackson had with the PPP, the Chairman of the Commission gave the Party’s representatives a set of electoral lists which, he claimed, contained the names of 18-year-olds. He explained that the district electoral officers were in the process of removing the names of 18-year-olds from the list. After this meeting, the other opposition political parties were also provided with similar lists.

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A final attempt to ensure free and fair elections ended with the rejection by the High Court of an injunction, filed by the opposition parties, to prevent overseas and postal voting. And during the final meeting of the National Assembly, the PPP tabled a “last-minute” motion to annul postal voting, but the Speaker refused to allow any debate on it.

Worsening economic and political situation

The general elections were eventually fixed for 16 July 1973, a period when Guyana was experiencing a worsening economic situation. Growing disenchantment by former PNC supporters and rising resentment from the rest of the population were accelerated because of the startling rise in unemployment, now estimated to be 30 to 35 percent, the rising cost of living and the decline in the economic position of the small farmers brought on by government’s neglect and victimisation because of their support for the PPP.

There were also widespread political and racial discrimination, and erosion of civil liberties, including denial of passports, police harassment and searches without warrants and restrictions on press freedom.

But what caused the greatest alarm was the PNC’s pre-election declaration that it would secure a two-thirds majority of the seats. This immediately caused a strong feeling of fear of further abuse of power among the population, including PNC supporters. This was revealed in house to house canvassing by the PPP in Georgetown, generally regarded as a stronghold of the PNC, where large numbers of voters stated firmly that they did not intend to vote.

To justify its two-thirds “victory”, the PNC embarked on an extensive pre-election propaganda campaign claiming that the PPP had lost support and had become irrelevant.

Election Day

Election day itself was peaceful with a heavy turnout in the rural areas where the PPP enjoyed massive support. The Georgetown area did not see this enthusiasm; the 8 electoral districts in the capital showed the lowest turnout of voters—about 20 percent lower than in the countryside.

There were a few incidents in which PPP polling agents were refused entry into polling places by the election officers who were mainly partisan PNC supporters. Also, hundreds of PPP supporters who waited hours in queues to vote were turned away by the presiding officers who told them that they had already voted by post or proxy. These persons protested that they never applied to vote by proxy or post and that they did not receive any postal ballots.

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Then late in the afternoon, many young PNC supporters without identification cards and who whose names were not on the list as voters were permitted to vote despite objections from the PPP polling agents As a result more votes were cast in some polling centres than electors on the list.

But despite all of this, the unpopular PNC realised by mid-afternoon that even the massive use of the proxy, overseas, and postal voting was no guarantee for its return to power. It then instituted its back-up plan—to deploy the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) soldiers to take control of the ballot boxes to ensure a PNC two-thirds majority.

When voting closed at 6 p.m., the majority of the PPP polling agents were not permitted to affix their seals on the ballot boxes by the presiding officers. And almost immediately, many of the polling agents of the opposition parties were forced out of the polling stations at gun point by policemen and GDF soldiers while others were not allowed to observe the sealing of the ballot boxes by the presiding officers. In addition, the GDF soldiers and armed police forcibly prevented opposition polling agents to follow behind the vehicles transporting the ballot boxes. Only in Georgetown were opposition agents allowed to accompany the ballot boxes to the national counting centre at the Government Technical Institute.

Seeing the sudden movements of GDF vehicles at the polling centres, large numbers of people turned near to the polling centres in the areas of PPP strength and looked on in dismay as the GDF soldiers commandeered the ballot boxes. In anger, they protested noisily the action of the solders and immediately expressed fears that the votes would be rigged. At No. 63 Village on the Corentyne, the soldiers opened fire on the crowd and many persons, killing 45-year-old Parmanand Bholanauth and wounding several others.

Jagan Ramessar, a 17-year old youth was seriously wounded during the shooting, but instead of taking him to hospital, the police and GDF soldiers transported him to the No. 51 Police Station where they refused to provide him with medical attention. He died there after he was further physically brutalised by the police and soldiers. Bholanauth and Ramessar soon after became popularly known as the “Ballot-box martyrs.”

The rigging activities

Members of the GDF took control of the ballot boxes in all polling centres outside of Georgetown and, contrary to the election regulations, transported them to their headquarters in Thomas Lands, Georgetown where they were kept overnight, and in some cases for more than 36 hours. There PNC operatives worked throughout that period to switch

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previously prepared ballot boxes with votes supporting the PNC or to empty the official ballot boxes and stuff them with fresh fraudulently marked ballots overwhelmingly in favour of the PNC.

The pattern of fraud emerged almost immediately after the poll ended. Ballot boxes for the Vreed-en-Hoop district crossed the Demerara River at 10 p.m. on 16 July, arriving in Georgetown some 15 minutes later. But the boxes did not arrive at the counting centre until five and a half hours later! And then some of the keys for the ballot boxes could not be found.

The boxes for Corentyne East did not arrive at the counting centre until 5.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 17 July, twenty-three and a half hours after the close of poll. Here again, keys for many boxes were also missing while some boxes were not sealed.

Ballot boxes from the East Coast Demerara electoral districts were finally delivered to the counting centre by GDF soldiers at 1.30 p.m. on 17 July, eighteen and a half hours after the polls closed.

The boxes from the North-West District, which were transported by aeroplane, arrived 47 hours after the close of poll. Six ballot box keys were missing and when these boxes were broken open, twenty-one wads of ballot papers, some wrapped with rubber bands and others bound with paper clips were found inside. All were marked for the PNC. Two counting agents objected strongly drawing the returning officer's attention to this unusual occurrence. They were immediately told that if they continued to protest the police would be called to eject them! This was how the PNC gave itself a 550 per cent increase over its 1968 votes in that district.

At the Canals Polder Electoral District, where the PPP had won in all the elections from 1953 to 1968, its votes went down four times and those of the PNC doubled. The PPP polling agent at one of the polling centres had objected during the voting exercise that the ballot-papers were being officially stamped on the **inside** instead of the outside. He was so concerned, fearing that the ballots would be declared invalid, that he made written notes that the ballots were being stamped on the inside. He also recorded the names of voters inside the station as well as the police constable who was on duty. In addition, as evidence of the fact, he obtained the signatures of the polling agents for all the parties, including the PNC, that this event had in fact taken place.

When the counting took place much later, the PPP counting agent, equipped with the document, kept an eye out for the particular box, No. 300. When it was counted, all 511 ballots were stamped on the **outside** and every single ballot was marked for the PNC!

The pattern was the same throughout. Ballot boxes, on arrival at the counting centre from the GDF headquarters were found to be inadequately sealed, or not at all. Keys were missing or mixed up and

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there were numerous cases where the number of votes counted did not tally with the number cast. The mixed-up and missing keys for the ballot boxes apparently occurred when the keys were taken out of their sealed envelopes and used to open the ballot boxes during the rigging exercise, and then placed in the wrong envelopes afterwards.

During the counting process, at which representatives of the opposition parties were present, numerous irregularities were observed. In many cases, the ballots in the boxes did not correspond with the figures stated on the returns by the presiding officers. A large number of boxes had unsealed, exposed slots while others did not carry the seals of the opposition parties' polling agents.

There was also obvious fraud with the postal voting. One box containing the postal ballots for an East Demerara district did not have the seal of the Chief Election Officer or any other person connected with the election. The box contained more envelopes with ballots than should have been placed in it. Five of the envelopes contained not only the ballots as required by law but also the declaration of identity which was not signed by anyone. It meant therefore that postal ballots were marked by persons claiming to be the voters who were not identified.

The law dealing with postal voting required the Chief Election Officer or his assistants to ensure that the declaration of identity—which was not to be enclosed in the same envelope with the ballot—be signed before a postal ballot was cast. Undoubtedly, from what took place, the law dealing with postal voting was not observed in the sending out and the casting of postal ballots.

The overseas votes were also massively manipulated. In view of the wide exposé of the padding of the overseas lists, the Government drastically reduced the number of names on the overseas list from 68,597 in 1968 to 34,801 in 1973. But even this list was rigged as proven by Granada Television of the United Kingdom which, in its investigative reporting, showed that there were over 8,000 bogus names on the list. The final “results” gave the PNC 98 percent of the overseas votes!

The “results”

The final count gave the PNC its two-thirds majority. So angry were the voters that there were countrywide demonstrations and protests. The security forces continued their harassment of PPP supporters as they did even before the elections and more than 400 persons were arrested. To further counter such protests, the PNC soon after re-enacted the preventative detention law.

The result of the fraudulent election officially gave the ruling PNC 37 seats, PPP 14 seats, Liberator Party (LP) 2, and People's Democratic Movement (PDM), no seat, in the 53 Member National Assembly. The

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PNC obtained 243,803 votes or 70.1 percent of the votes cast; the PPP 92,374 votes or 26.5 percent; the LP 9,580 votes or 2.75 percent; and the PDM 2,053 votes or 0.6 percent. There were 1,766 spoilt votes.

All three opposition parties rejected these figures and in a joint statement declared that the election had been rigged. The PPP and the LP, the two opposition parties which had been allocated seats, stated that in protest they would not take up their seats in Parliament. But two United Force members on the LP list rejected the party's decision and, declaring that they were UF representatives, decided to take up the two seats. One of the two, Marcellus Fielden-Singh, officially declaring himself as a "UF Member of Parliament," was soon after appointed Leader of the Opposition. Guyana thus became unique in having parliamentary representatives from a political party that never contested an election.

Chapter 11

The PNC Regime's Shifting Ideological Positions in the 1970s

When the PNC-UF coalition government took over in Guyana in late December 1964, it was natural for it to develop a very close, friendly relation with the US. After all, it was the US which helped to manoeuvre the PPP out of government and heavily backed the PNC and the UF in their destabilisation activities from 1962 to 1964 and provided them with material assistance during the election campaign. The relations were so strong that the US Government which knew of the PNC plan to rig the 1968 election failed to raise any objection to this anti-democratic scheme aimed at preventing the return of the PPP to power.

But from, mid-1971, this chummy relationship began to change. This came about after the PNC government bowed to local political pressure and decided to nationalise the Canadian-owned Demerara Bauxite Company (DEMBA) instead of having "meaningful participation" in the bauxite industry.

In the Cold War era, this act of nationalisation was seen as a move to the left, and was regarded by the Americans as a direct blow against capitalist ideology. The PNC government had announced that it would also move to nationalise the America-owned bauxite company, Reynolds Metal Company's Guyana Mines Limited. Immediately, the US applied pressure by having its representative on the World Bank abstain in a vote on a \$10.8 million sea-defence loan to Guyana.

The screws were further tightened after this nationalisation when US aid was drastically reduced. Compared to the favourable 1967-71 period, loans were cut by 40 percent to G\$6 million per year in the period

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1972-76 while grants were just G\$356,000 per year in 1972-73.

It must also be noted that in 1969 Guyana received over 50 percent of USAID's commitments to the entire Caribbean and 94.3 per cent of those to the English-speaking Caribbean. However, by 1971, Guyana's share of USAID's commitments had fallen to 3.2 per cent of the total for the Caribbean as a whole and 5.6 percent of the total for the English-speaking Caribbean.

In the DEMBA nationalisation negotiations, the Canadians applied some pressures, and were able to win higher compensation terms than the PNC had first offered. These were changed from US\$100 million to US\$107 million; from no interest to 6 percent, less 1.5 percent withholding tax; from a repayment period of 40 years and over to 20 years.

Through US pressures, Philipp Bros., the subsidiary of the giant Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa, was appointed as sales agent for the new state-owned Guyana Bauxite Company. Further pressures forced the government to defer the nationalisation of the American-owned Guyana Mines Limited until the end of 1975.

As part of the concessions squeezed out from the Guyana government, the US and Canadian banks, headed by Chase Manhattan Bank, provided working capital to the state-owned Guyana Bauxite Company.

In 1972, Guyana, along with Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados, established diplomatic relations with Cuba. At the same time, it cut diplomatic relations with Israel and voted in favour of a UN resolution denouncing Zionism as racism. And through internal and external pressures, it allowed Cuban planes bound for Angola to pass through Guyana.

Immediately, the US administration applied diplomatic pressure which was in keeping with US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's threats that the US would take firm action against those states which voted in the UN against its interests. This pressure was felt very strongly when the British-owned Booker's sugar company was about to be nationalised in May 1976. As result of strong PPP pressure, the government offered the Booker company a compensation of one Guyana dollar. But immediately faced with economic pressure from the US, the government, without consulting with the opposition, somersaulted from its original position and agreed to pay US\$102 million at 6 percent interest in 20 years!

Earlier, in July 1973, the PNC had outrageously rigged the general election to give itself a two-thirds majority. This action was just winked at by the US Government since it still felt that Burnham's action kept at bay the "communist" Cheddi Jagan for whom it still nurtured a pathological dislike and fear.

The PNC Regime's Shifting Ideological Positions in the 1970s

However, not too long after, Burnham and the PNC suddenly claimed they were “Marxist-Leninists” and began an expansion of relations with socialist countries, which set the stage for confrontation with the US government. At the same time, the “new” socialist ideological cloak the PNC wore enabled it to win “critical support” from the PPP in August 1975, an act which apparently further caused consternation in US circles.

The relationship with the US took a dive in October 1976 when a terrorist bomb blew up a Cuban plane in which 73 persons, including 11 Guyanese, were killed. Only a few weeks before there was a bomb explosion in the Guyana Consular Office in Port-of Spain, Trinidad, and this was blamed on “anti-communist” terrorists.

At a public rally in Georgetown to condemn the terrorist attack on the Cuban plane, Prime Minister Forbes Burnham accused the CIA of involvement. The US State Department immediately responded by calling him “a bald-faced liar,” and withdrew the US Charge d’Affaires from Georgetown.

This badly deteriorated state of affairs caused great worry within the Burnham administration and efforts were made to mend the fences. By this time, the government had established strong relations with socialist countries and more and more Guyana was earning a reputation in US circles as a possible bridgehead for socialist expansionism in the Caribbean and South America. In an attempt to allay such fears, government leaders made a number of trips to Washington to meet with senior State Department officials.

Apparently, some patching-up occurred and in June 1977, US Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Terrence Todman, in a statement before the Sub-Committee on Inter-American Affairs of the House International Relations Committee, declared:

Guyana is seeking a different path to social and economic development, one with which we have no quarrel and which we have no reason to fear. Despite its different political philosophy, and our differences of the past, Guyana looks to us for understanding and co-operation. By co-operating with Guyana we can emphasise once again our readiness to respect different ways of political and social development.

Todman also pointed out that Guyana can eventually attain the kind of economic viability which can contribute to the region as a whole and allow it to assist its Caribbean neighbours in their development as well.

But the US was also concerned over the anti-imperialist trend in Guyana, and viable economic aid was only possible if this trend was slowed down or halted altogether.

Shortly after Todman’s statement, there were visible signs that the PNC government was buckling under US “imperialist” pressure and was shifting ideologically back to the right. It announced that it was shelving

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the nationalisation of foreign banks and insurance companies which had been planned for the end of 1976. At the same time, it said it was opening “the door” to private foreign investment while announcing that the period required a temporary shift to selected capitalist strategies of development.

In July 1977, a director of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private investment arm of the World Bank, visited Guyana. After discussions with Guyanese businessmen about seven projects covering agriculture, agro-industries, manufacturing, forestry and logging, he stated that “private enterprise is alive and well in Guyana.”

While ties were strengthened with the British, Canadian and US military, Guyana re-established close diplomatic contacts with the US government through visits of Foreign Minister Fred Wills and Finance Minister Frank Hope.

The government also moved Guyana into the ambit of the US-controlled International Monetary Fund (IMF) as part of its policy to solving the existing financial crisis. As a “solution” the IMF recommended the reduction of essential subsidies which imposed further burdens on the Guyanese working people. The government also devalued the Guyana currency in relation to US currency by changing the rate from US\$1 equivalent to G\$2.55 instead of G\$2.00—a devaluation of about 25 percent.

No doubt, these “pressures” forced the PNC in 1977 to break off unity talks with the PPP. These discussions had commenced not too long after the PPP had announced its “critical support” for the government. However, the PNC broke off the talks and re-commenced its harassment of PPP supporters. The PPP felt that the PNC’s action was keeping in line with Kissinger’s warning about incorporating socialist parties into established pro-western governments.

Imperialism backed the PNC

The PNC regime’s move to the right won political and economic support from imperialism. In March 1977, the conservative Senator Daniel Moynihan listed Guyana among the six nations (India, Sri Lanka, Guyana, Barbados, Jamaica and Gambia) which “have been able to change their governments through free elections.” This statement was made despite the full knowledge of the US government that the PNC blatantly rigged the 1968 and 1973 elections.

And despite the violation of democratic freedoms and fundamental rights in Guyana during the 1970s, the US saw no problem concerning human rights in Guyana. At the end of a short visit to Guyana in June 1977, US Under Secretary of State, Philip C. Habib, stated as regards human rights: “This is not, in our view, a problem in Guyana.”

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The US also took a new position regarding loans to Guyana. Previously problematical under the "leftist" PNC regime, loans became rather easy to obtain in 1977 when the regime was shifting to the "right." A G\$2.5 million loan application made to the US since 1973 was suddenly approved in July 1976. Minister of Finance Frank Hope stated the loan application had been put in cold storage because of "a difference of views." He added that there had been a "closing of the gap in views" when the new Carter administration took over and this had led to the successful conclusion of the agreement.

Then on July 26, 1977, the *Guyana Chronicle* reported that Mr. Peter Kolar, director of USAID, handed over a cheque for G\$500,000 to the Ministry of Finance for the 4-lane lower East Coast highway. He explained that in the past USAID made disbursements to the Government only after work was done, but "because of the present economic situation in Guyana, we have decided to change the system and make advances."

The British government also stepped up its loans to the PNC regime. It authorised the offer of a \$44 million development loan to the Guyana government in June 1977. Frank Dunnill, leader of the visiting British project mission to Guyana said that Guyana was a country with great potential, and that Guyana government's "Feed, Clothe and House" programme was very much in keeping with the British government's policy.

All these efforts by the imperialist countries to shore up the anti-democratic PNC government were ultimately aimed at keeping the PPP at bay. This was made clear by Nelson Rockefeller who in the report of the special Mission he headed in Latin America in 1976, stated:

Guyana is not a politically stable nation. Its political sphere reflects both the strength of a Communist Party and the depth of racial tension. A communist victory would completely change Guyana's foreign policy. It is therefore of crucial concern to the United States and other nations of the Western Hemisphere as well as Great Britain. . . Brazil in particular has indicated its concern in this area.

The US also saw the containment of leftist movements in terms of its own security. The *Guyana Chronicle* of 2 July 1977 reported that Terrence Todman outlined how this US policy relates to the Caribbean region:

We used to see Caribbean mainly in security terms. Our interventions there were often largely motivated by security considerations, and we sometimes referred to the Caribbean as "our lake. We still have security interests in the Caribbean. It is our "third border". . . But we no longer see the Caribbean in quite the same stark military security context that we once viewed it. Rather, our security concerns in the Caribbean are increasingly

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political in nature. . .

Clearly, the Guyana government in the last half of the 1970s was being rewarded in order to keep it in the camp of capitalism. It was obviously because of this that the western powers, through blatant hypocrisy, continued to pretend that the PNC regime was practising democracy and that it had an unblemished record in the area of human rights.

Chapter 12

The PNC's Nationalisation Policy in the 1970s

Even before Guyana became independent in May 1966, the PNC as a political party, and later as a party in government opposed nationalisation as an economic policy. One of the main reasons for this was its pro-imperialist policy and its opposition to the pro-socialist PPP which consistently promoted the nationalisation of the “commanding heights of the economy.” However, by 1970, after the PNC had seized control of the Government through rigged elections in December 1968, its leader Prime Minister Forbes Burnham began his advocacy of “cooperative socialism” and the promotion of “meaningful participation” of the government in the main areas of the economy.

After Guyana became a co-operative republic in 1970, one of the first policy measures the PNC government adopted was to “own and control” the country’s national resources by means of nationalisation. It decided, in the first instance, to take control of the bauxite industry.

Up to that period there were two foreign-owned bauxite mining companies based in Guyana. These were the Demerara Bauxite Company (DEMBA) with mines and processing plants at Mackenzie and Ituni on the Demerara River, and the American-owned Reynolds Guyana Mines Ltd. operating at Kwakwani on the Berbice River. DEMBA, the larger company, was owned by ALCAN (of Canada), a subsidiary of the American bauxite giant, ALCOA.

In the early 1970s, Guyana was producing metal grade bauxite, calcined bauxite and alumina, and it was the world’s fourth largest bauxite producer supplying roughly 90 percent the world’s calcined

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bauxite. As an important foreign exchange earner for the country, the bauxite industry accounted for about 20 percent of the country's GNP and about 40 percent of foreign exchange earnings.

In various public speeches after the promulgation of the Republic on 23 February 1970, Burnham continued to emphasise "ownership and control" of Guyana's natural resources by Guyanese. And in speaking about "meaningful participation" in the "commanding heights of the economy" he gave indications that the government was aiming at having a share in the foreign-owned bauxite and sugar industries. In a radio broadcast on the first anniversary of the Republic, Burnham complained that Guyana over the last fifty years had received less than 3 percent of the profits accruing from the exploitation the country's bauxite. Shortly after, on 1 March 1971, the Guyana parliament by a majority vote of 48 to 3 passed the Bauxite Nationalisation Act. The PPP gave full support to this measure in keeping with its socialist policies.

However, Burnham was not too interested in total nationalisation, and despite the passing of this Act, he continued to tout the policy of "meaningful participation in bauxite" and "majority participation." This was the position the PNC government took in talks with representatives of ALCAN, the Canadian owners of DEMBA when it suggested "majority participation." The ALCAN representatives were not in favour of this, and counter-offered "equal partnership." But due to intense political pressure from the PPP, academic groups and sections of the trade union movement, the government refused to accept this offer and almost immediately it began discussing full compensation terms for the take-over of the company.

After agreement was reached, DEMBA was nationalised on July 15, 1971, and renamed the Guyana Bauxite Company (GUYBAU). According to the terms of the nationalisation, the government agreed to pay ALCAN a sum of G\$107 million (US\$53.5 million) over a period of no more than 20 years with interest at 6 percent subject to withholding tax.

Actually, the compensation terms initially agreed to were much lower, but a result of imperialist counter-pressures, they were revised upwards—from G\$100 million to G\$107 million; from no interest to 6 percent, less 1.5 percent withholding tax; and from a repayment period of 40 years and over to 20 years.

To provide working capital for the new state-owned entity, the government borrowed US\$8 million from Chase Manhattan Bank of the United States.

Burnham announced around the same period that his government would next take over the US-owned Reynolds Guyana Mines Limited. But to intimidate the government from moving in this direction, the US representative abstained in a World Bank vote on a G\$10.8 loan application from Guyana.

The PNC's Nationalisation Policy in the 1970s

After 1971, US aid was substantially reduced. Loans to Guyana had averaged G\$10.4 per year in the period 1967-71 and grants of G\$1.7 per year in the period 1965-71. But after the nationalisation of DEMBA, economic pressure was exerted, and loans fell to G\$6.2 per year in the period 1972-76 and grants to a mere G\$356,000 per year in 1972-73.

The PPP, which supported the nationalisation of DEMBA, felt that the nation was betrayed by the agreement, and stated that the compensation would be higher than what the government stated. It pointed out that the compensation would actually cost the Guyanese people G\$160 million over the repayment period of 20 years. The nation also was burdened with the US\$8 million borrowed from Chase Manhattan Bank, the Party said. It was obvious from this statement that while PPP was in favour of nationalisation, it did not agree with the compensation form of it applied by the PNC administration.

It was clear that the nationalisation of DEMBA did not follow the socialist form, and ALCAN was certainly pleased with the deal. The new bauxite company, GUYBAU, immediately signed a contract with the South African-based Philipp Brothers to be its marketing agent for bauxite on the world market. Philipp Brothers was closely tied up with the apartheid regime in South Africa and was also a subsidiary of the multi-national giant, the Anglo-American Corporation.

With DEMBA in the bag, the PNC, claiming it was applying its policy of cooperative socialism, continued on a series of nationalisations. In 1972, the government took over Guyana Timbers Ltd., and on the following year it appropriated all idle lands owned by the sugar companies for housing and agriculture.

By 1975, the PNC was bragging that it was the "Marxist-Leninist vanguard party," that it had "paramountcy over the Government" and that its nationalisation policy was part of its strategy to build socialism in Guyana. Burnham even branded the PPP as a group of "Mensheviks" who were out to undermine the Guyanese "revolution."

On New Year's Day 1975, with the blessing of the US government and after generous compensation terms were offered by Guyana, the Reynolds Guyana Mines Ltd. in Berbice was nationalised and renamed BERMINE. Then on 26 May 1975, the sugar operation of the British-owned Jessel Holdings was taken over. These were followed on 1 January 1976 by the nationalisation of the British-owned Sproston, an engineering and ship-building firm.

Some special deals were worked out with the sugar companies. In the case of Jessel Holdings, that company owned two sugar factories, about 2,000 acres of sugar-cane fields, 63 percent of the shares of Diamond Liquors Ltd. and 20 percent of the shares of Demerara Sugar Terminals Ltd. The purchase agreement of May 26, 1975, stated that the Government would pay G\$15 million for the local assets of this British

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company, of which G\$5 million would be paid in cash. The remaining G\$10 million would be paid over a period of 10 years with an interest rate of 8.5 percent subject to withholding tax of 25 percent. According to the PPP, the total compensation costs would actually amount G\$25 million.

By the beginning of 1976, most Guyanese were convinced that the multi-corporation giant, Booker McConnell, which owned most of the sugar estates, along with numerous other businesses, would soon be taken over by the government. The company was responsible for over 40 per cent of Guyana's sugar exports and about 25 per cent of the GDP. But according to Burnham, in a speech in 22 February 1976, the company brought no new capital into Guyana since 1966. Nationalisation talks began early in the year, and the company was finally taken over on 26 May.

Bookers' assets in Guyana were estimated at G\$102.5. During the nationalisation negotiations, the Government under opposition pressure offered compensation of \$1. Immediately, a "destabilisation" campaign was launched, no doubt to force the Government to retreat from this position. In the end the latter agreed to pay \$102 million at 6 percent interest in 20 years!

This compensation deal was heavily attacked by the PPP and the newly formed Working People's Alliance (WPA), both of which showed that the final pay-back terms were over-generous and would further add to the exploitation of the Guyanese people. Burnham retorted by describing the PPP and WPA as "political morons."

The entire sugar industry was soon after reorganised under the supervision of the State-owned Guyana Sugar Corporation (GUYSUCO). The large department store, formerly owned by Bookers, became known as Guyana Stores.

With this large nationalisation completed, almost all foreign-owned companies were now controlled by the government, except Berger Paints and Cable and Wireless with which some agreements for take-over were reached by the following year. No moves were made to take over the foreign owned banks and insurance companies.

At first, most of the nationalised companies produced profits, but around late 1977, inertia stepped in, and a downturn occurred. Part of the problem was the fact that Burnham made political appointments to the management of these companies and experienced managers were pushed out or left on their own accord. In addition to mismanagement, an over-heavy bureaucracy as a result of the "job-for-the-boys" policy, wasteful spending and corruption, the oil crisis of the late 1970s, and foreign exchange problems also played their part in reducing profits.

The PNC encouraged the growth of a parasitic-bureaucratic elite who grew rich by bleeding out the profits from the nationalised companies. What it did was to encourage its leading members to establish

The PNC's Nationalisation Policy in the 1970s

“cooperatives” which were then given lucrative contracts to supply goods and services to these companies. In many cases, these goods and services were sub-standard resulting in time wasting and lower production. Further, with nationalisation, there was no workers’ participation and control in management and decision-making.

By 1977—just a year after nationalisation—GUYSUCO ran up a loss of G\$15.6 million, while GUYBAU’s income drastically decreased from G\$33.3 million in 1977 to G\$24.1 million two years later. In the case of the bauxite operations, this problem of decreasing income and losses would continue to occur year after year.

Chapter 13

The Failure of the “Feed, Clothe and House the Nation” Plan

As Guyana’s Prime Minister Forbes Burnham and his People’s National Congress (PNC) moved to implement their brand of “cooperative socialism,” they introduced a new development plan in 1972 with the grand objective to “feed, house and clothe the nation by 1976.” Burnham apparently believed that his nationalisation policy which was being implemented at that period would help accrue the revenues needed to finance this “FCH” plan. But he failed to understand that most of the agricultural producers—the Indo-Guyanese—were also PPP supporters whose democratic right to elect a government he had had taken away by rigging elections in 1968 and subsequently in 1973 as well. And with his studied policy of discriminating against these very people who were involved in production of agricultural commodities, the FCH plan was doomed to failure from the beginning.

The FCH plan

The new development plan was unveiled on 8 May 1973 by Dr. Kenneth King, the Minister of Economic Development. It was laced with slogans and spoke about “moulding the society” which must be “self-reliant”, eventually to become “egalitarian” under “cooperative socialism.” It announced hypocritically that “the people as a whole” would be involved “in the formulation of national policies and in making decisions, which implement those policies.” Brazenly, it added that economic power would be placed in the hands of all Guyanese.

The Failure of the FCH Plan

According to Dr. King, this development plan would “create employment opportunities,” generate “equal distribution of incomes” and spur “equitable geographic distribution of economic activities.” Its main objective, however, would be “feeding, clothing and housing ourselves.” Spending on the plan would amount to G\$ 1,150 million* over the five-year period ending in 1976.

Immediately, PNC and government leaders began a propaganda blitz to highlight this FCH programme. The country was flooded with posters, pamphlets and booklets promoting speeches by Burnham and his Ministers on “feeding, clothing and housing the nation by 1976.” All Government policy was directed towards this goal, and even the curriculum in schools was re-written to ensure that all learning activities maintained this goal as their overall objective.

Failure to “house the nation”

But when 1976 ended, this national goal was not achieved. In the area of housing, for example, the plan called for the building of 65,000 “housing units” at a cost of G\$250 million. In King’s own words, the targets were specified, thus: “As is well-known the target that we have set is 65,000 housing units. We have already built 5,000 of these in 1972, and our plan is to increase the tempo of building activity to 8,000 in 1973; 13,000 in 1974; 17,000 in 1975; and 22,000 in 1976.”

From its inception, this housing plan was sharply criticised by the opposition PPP who raised questions about how it would be financed, considering that the government had announced that it would seek funding from multilateral agencies. Actually, the PNC administration was unable to garner any such funding, and the whole housing plan was a colossal failure. Burnham himself was forced to admit this fact in his “address to the nation” on 14 December, 1976 when he declared: “We promised to house the nation. . . We have not done so. . . Our statistics show, however, . . that we have built 33,000 units. The rest of the nation is still to be housed.”

However, Burnham’s statistics were badly flawed. Using the government’s own statistics, the PPP showed that only 1,061 units were built in 1972; 1,128 in 1973; 1,037 in 1974; and 941 in 1975. This gave a grand total of 4,167 or only 6.5 percent of the target set in the FCH plan. And even this small amount was concentrated in Georgetown or in rural Afro-Guyanese communities from which the PNC drew political support.

In his address, Burnham gave excuses why the housing programme failed. He noted, *inter alia*, that (1) investment funds, initially pegged at G\$250 million, had to be increased to G\$1,500 million; (2) inflation between 1970 and 1976 had affected building costs; (3) prices for materials skyrocketed; (4) there was a shortage of cement; (5) there were

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not enough skilled workmen; (6) floods and heavy rainfall affected construction, sugar and rice production; and (7) sugar prices, fell on the world-market, thus drastically reducing revenues from foreign earnings.

But even while the Burnham administration was falling far short of the targets, it maintained a propaganda front that feeding, clothing and housing the nation would be achieved by the end of 1976. The vast majority of Guyanese knew that this was a pipe-dream but, despite this, Burnham and his cohorts continued to delude themselves that everything was going well.

Failure to “clothe the nation”

The PNC’s “clothing” programme was also a total flop. This involved cultivating cotton at Kimba, in the intermediate savannahs, and processing it into cotton fabric at the textile factory built by the Chinese government in Ruimveldt, Georgetown. The cotton, cultivated mainly by members of the National Service, was short in both quantity and quality to meet the requirements of the factory; as a result, raw cotton had to be imported from the United States to keep it running. Even so, the quality of cloth produced was not of very good standard, and the quantities were grossly insufficient to meet the needs of the population. Thus, fabrics continued to be imported, but because of import restrictions imposed by the government, these as well as clothing became expensive commodities. Inflation and a virtual wage freeze during that period also drastically reduced the ability of most Guyanese to purchase clothing.

Failure to “feed the nation” – PNC anti-agriculture policies

“Feeding the nation” was even a greater disaster. Much of the resources needed for housing and clothing the nation depended on the expanded production of agricultural commodities locally so that there would be a greater volume of exports to ensure more foreign exchange earnings. As an agricultural based economy, it was essential that, in particular, rice, sugar and other food crops as well as meat and fish production should also show improvements. But all of this did not happen because of political and economic policies directed against the food producers, who, in the majority, were political supporters of the opposition PPP.

With respect to the sugar industry, the PNC, after imposing a levy in 1974 on the large profits from export sales, finally nationalised it in 1976. But by politicising its management, and applying political pressures on the sugar workers, almost all PPP supporters, production fell. Similar problems also afflicted the nationalised bauxite industry. And since world market prices for both sugar and bauxite were declining, there was

The Failure of the FCH Plan

not very much increased revenue from these two major export industries to apply towards the FCH plan.

Attacking the rice farmers

The PNC's political pressures on food producers had their genesis from the time that party took control of the government after the December 1964 elections. Since 1965 there was a systematic destruction of Guyana's food potential as a result of the anti-agricultural policies pursued by the PNC-UF coalition (1965-68) and the successor PNC regime (after 1968).

The first anti-agricultural blow was felt by the rice industry. The sale of rice to Cuba was stopped in 1965 while an anti-producer Rice Marketing Board (RMB) was organised with the rice producers' majority being replaced by persons with virtually no interest and experience in rice production. Further, the Connell Rice and Sugar Company of the USA was contracted as the exclusive agency to sell surplus rice on the world market at a retainer's fee of \$258,000 plus a one percent commission. These two actions were among the factors responsible for the losses of \$7 million suffered by the RMB in 1965-1966. The lack of confidence in the anti-democratic RMB and the PNC-UF coalition deteriorated further in October 1966 when the purchase price of rice and paddy was reduced.

This decrease in prices occurred at a time when production costs were rising chiefly on account of rising costs of labour, machinery, fuel, fertilisers and other inputs. Around the same period, too, the government withdrew concessions such as duty-free gasoline, and cheap fertilisers from the farmers. The PNC also ordered all rice must be sold to the government which purchased it at a low price and then re-sold the rice on the world market at a high price, but refusing to pass down some of these profits to the rice farmers.

All of these attacks on the rice industry took place when there was a world wide demand for rice, but rice farmers were given no encouragement to meet these demands. Actually, rice production declined in 1965 and continued on this downward slide for the next decade.

Because of the decline in the rice industry, there were periodic shortages of this commodity to consumers locally. Further, Guyana's ability to meet the demands of foreign markets became questionable, and exports to Jamaica and Trinidad decreased sharply.

A significant reason for the lack of confidence by rice farmers was the withdrawal of state recognition of the Rice Producers' Association (RPA) as the organisation representing the interest of rice farmers. On the other hand, the PNC appointed its hand-picked supporters to the so-called Rice

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Action Committees which were given the official status as “representatives” of rice producers. The PNC also applied the same anti-democratic formula in the areas of milk production and peasant cane farming.

No emphasis on drainage and irrigation

Another aspect of the PNC anti-agricultural policy was its shifting of the emphasis on infrastructural development from drainage and irrigation, to roads, sea defence, airports and public buildings. Allocations for drainage and irrigation were actually reduced from 30 percent in the PPP Development Plan (1960-64) to 17 percent in the PNC Development Plan (1966-72). But only one-third of the money was actually spent on water control; the rest was diverted to unproductive infrastructure.

Drainage and irrigation schemes were sacrificed for two reasons. Firstly, the United States government was not very keen in promoting the development of agriculture in Guyana. In the 1965-1970 period, the United States had a large surplus of food and had even inaugurated a soil bank scheme (i.e., payment of farmers to keep agricultural land out of production). Agricultural development would, therefore, have made Guyana a competitor in food exports, and so the USA injected loans to the PNC Government with the condition that they be used for unproductive infrastructure.

Secondly, the non-agricultural infrastructural projects generally employed mainly Afro-Guyanese who in the great majority were PNC supporters. Also, as stated earlier, the PNC applied a studied policy of political discrimination against PPP supporters with the result that it provided scanty assistance to them.

Decline in food production

All sections of agricultural food production therefore suffered decreases throughout the decade of the 1970s. Even some of the food items that Guyana previously exported had to be imported at times. For instance, in 1976, the target year when Guyana was supposed to have enough food to feed itself, the Government imported 2,000 bags of black-eye peas from the USA, despite massive publicity of large scale production of this commodity at Kimbia on the Berbice River. That same year, too, the Government imported 20,000 bags of rice dust (*bhusi*) from the United States to keep the stock-feed industry going!

This situation continued into the 1980s as well. To the shame of the Guyanese people, the nation was forced in 1982 to import cooking oil from St. Vincent which before 1970 bought cooking oil and copra from

The Failure of the FCH Plan

Guyana. And no longer was Guyana able to export plantains, cabbages and pumpkins to the Eastern Caribbean since production of these commodities also slumped.

Food production had declined so greatly by 1976 that consumption of food items per head of the population had dropped drastically to seriously affect the nutritional level of the young children and the population as a whole. The government's policy of banning essential imported food items compounded this situation. According to a report of the Guyana Consumers Association, in 1976 poultry production amounted to 8 ounces a week per head of the population; eggs were 1 egg per person every 8 days; fish, 14 ounces per person per week; beef, 4 ounces per person per week; and ground provisions, 5 pounds per person per month.

By the end of that year, the Ministry of Agriculture also reported that ground provisions output was 9 million pounds below the target set by the Government; vegetables were 2 million pounds below the target; pulses and nuts, 6 million pounds below; coconuts 5 million pounds below; and fruits 14 million pounds below the target.

Actually, food production under the Burnham administration never recovered. The removal of the subsidy on stock-feed in 1977 led to less production of poultry meat; and the rapid increase of cattle rustling, among other factors, threw the beef industry in a tailspin. By 1982, six years after the FCH plan collapsed, the production of beef was only 3.5 pounds per person per year!

Milk production also reached its lowest level during the same "FCH" period. Since 1967, the milk pasteurisation plant in Georgetown was unable to meet the needs of the people of the city, and because of insufficient supplies it had to be closed down on a number of occasions. And with the restriction of milk imports, the shortage of milk resulted in severe malnutrition especially among children. The shortage of milk has also caused its price to sky-rocket.

Fish and shrimp also become more expensive for the consumers. Although it was the small fishermen who supplied most of the fish to the local population, the fees for their licences were raised while they had to pay exorbitant prices for essential supplies such as ice and fishing gear.

With respect to farmers' earnings, until 1972, rice and milk prices paid to farmers were lower than those paid in 1964. Crop bonuses were taken away and the authorities did very little to stamp out praedial larceny.

From time to time, the PNC Government granted small price increases to farmers for their produce. However, these increases were almost immediately negated by subsequent increases in agricultural inputs which made production more costly.

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Little emphasis on agriculture

Agricultural areas suffered from administrative neglect. There were few access roads in the farming districts and during the rainy season farmers found great difficulty in removing their harvest from the field. The local authorities themselves paid scant attention to maintenance work such as repairing *kokers*, bridges and dams, and clearing canals. Even the once vibrant land development schemes like Black Bush Polder and Tapakuma fell into a state of disrepair.

Transportation of farmers' produce especially from the riverine areas and the Rupununi received no attention. As a result, peanuts, cashew nuts and beef production dropped drastically since those products could not reach Georgetown to be sold.

To produce food in large quantities, farmers needed land, but despite most of the land being owned by the state, genuine farmers faced great problems in obtaining land for farming purpose. Since 1965 much of the land allocated for farming was shared out to PNC supporters, many of whom were not farmers. This resulted in agricultural land remaining idle and, therefore, unproductive.

On the other hand, there were instances of areas of land cultivated by genuine farmers being seized by the government and handed to PNC supporters who, after a short period, stopped cultivating crops on them. This practice of seizing land from genuine farmers was put into practice at Non Pariel in East Demerara, Black Bush Polder in the Corentyne district, and Onverwagt in West Berbice.

Failed agricultural projects

It was only after the FCH plan was announced that PNC apparently realised that food production would be the solution of the numerous economic ills affecting Guyana. It commenced setting up some agricultural projects on which it placed its political supporters as cultivators.

But many of these agricultural projects were illusionary and improperly planned with the result that most of them turned out as huge failures despite the millions of dollars spent on them. Projects like Global Agri on the Berbice River and Butenabu on the Mahaicony River failed miserably. A palm oil project at Wauna in the North West District also flopped, and a corn project organised by the Caribbean Food Corporation with the blessing of Caricom died a quiet death. A failed potato project at Kato in the heart of the interior also greatly embarrassed the PNC administration. It was no wonder that the "feeding the nation" aspect of the FCH plan collapsed.

The Failure of the FCH Plan

As a result of the PNC anti-agricultural policy since it led the government from 1965, almost every food commodity was in short supply in 1976. Generally every food item not produced locally was banned, although these items could be obtained at the black market at exorbitant prices.

But even in the sale of food, the PNC applied tight political and racial control. Through the state-run External Trade Bureau, it handled all imports which it then redistributed to PNC-organised “cooperatives” known as Knowledge Sharing Institutes strategically located in predominantly Afro-Guyanese areas. These retail outlets sold preferentially to persons who produced PNC membership cards and they acted to squeeze the small rural mainly Indian-owned groceries out of business.

No democracy

The PNC could never motivate Guyanese farmers to produce more, since that party itself had created the problems for agriculture and food production. Obviously, as an agriculture-based economy, Guyana needed to expand production in agricultural commodities for the export market in order that revenues would be available for financing projects aimed at feeding, housing and clothing the population. However, by taking away the people’s democratic rights as evidenced in the 1968 and 1973 rigged elections, and also by denying them economic incentives, the PNC alienated the food producers from the mainstream of political and economic power. The continued rejection of democratic principles by the PNC during the period of the FCH plan, and even after, only helped to perpetuate further crises in food production and housing, among other sectors in Guyana. Burnham and the PNC, not being practitioners of democracy, could not understand why production and initiatives suffered when people had their democratic rights taken away from them. The entire nation, even their rank and file political supporters, had to suffer as a result of this denial of basic freedoms.

Note: **In the period 1972-76, one Guyana dollar was equivalent to US\$0.50.]*

Chapter 14

Guyana-Suriname border issue: From the 1960s to the 1990s

Suriname's claim to New River Triangle

In June 1962, the Dutch Government made their first official claim to ownership of the New River Triangle while conceding to Britain that the *thalweg* of the Corentyne River formed the boundary between Suriname and British Guiana. This claim to Guyana's territory was, of course, unacceptable to the British but with the anticipated granting of independence to Guyana the Dutch redoubled their efforts to have the boundary settled on their terms. However, a conference arranged for 1962 between the Dutch and British Governments, (colonial rulers of Guyana and Suriname), to further discuss the issue failed to make any progress.

Significantly, this claim by Suriname to Guyana's New River Triangle coincided with the renewal of the Venezuelan claim to Guyana's territory west of the Essequibo River.

From then, the Suriname Government seized every opportunity to assert its claim to the New River Triangle. That Government set up an advisory commission and by decree unilaterally changed the name of the New River to that of the "Upper Corentyne" on maps of Suriname and showing the Triangle as part of Suriname.

In 1964, while the wharf at Springlands on the Guyana side of the Corentyne was undergoing repairs, Suriname again attempted to claim rights in the area. It decreed that all users of the river for certain purposes should not do so unless they held valid licences from the

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Nickerie (Suriname) authorities. This issue was discussed between Guyana's Prime Minister Forbes Burnham and Suriname's Minister-President Johann Pengel when they held informal discussions in January 1966. They had hoped to convene conference before Guyana's Independence in May 1966, but this did not materialise.

As the date for Guyana's independence drew near, Pengel intensified these efforts and in April 1966 stated that "in view of the forthcoming independence of British Guiana, the Suriname Government wishes the British to make it clear when sovereignty is transferred that the frontier is disputed."

In April 1966, at his request, the Dutch Foreign Minister, Dr. Joseph Luns, discussed the claim with Lord Walston, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and in the presence of Sir Lionel Luckhoo, the Guyana representative to that meeting. Luns said that "Suriname had shown great restraint in not exercising acts of sovereignty in the New River Triangle," and this view was endorsed by Dr. Einaar, Minister Plenipotentiary of Suriname in The Hague, who was also present. In response, Lord Walston stated that "on the New River Triangle Her Majesty's Government maintain very firmly their sovereignty over the territory of British Guiana as defined by its present frontier."

One month later Guyana became independent having as its sovereignty and boundaries those which Britain had exercised undisturbed for over a century.

Suriname survey team ejected from Guyana

One month after Guyana became independent, officials of Suriname and Guyana met in London to discuss the Surinamese claim. There was a free and frank exchange of views, and the Dutch offered to host a follow-up meeting in The Hague. That meeting never occurred, but early in the following year, Pengel visited Guyana and held discussions with Burnham on various matters, including the border issue.

In an effort to assert its claim, the Suriname Government in December 1967 sent a land survey party into the New River Triangle. They were confronted by members of the Guyana Police Force who asked the team to leave. The Suriname authorities immediately protested the action as a grave breach of their sovereignty and asked the Dutch Government through their Ambassador in London to request Sir Lionel Luckhoo, Guyana's High Commissioner, to provide a clarification at the earliest possible time. In reply, Luckhoo informed the Dutch Ambassador that no permission had been granted to the Government of Suriname to carry out any survey in the area and, therefore, its presence was illegal and a violation of Guyana's territorial integrity. In the circumstances,

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Luckhoo explained, the Guyana police had acted with commendable restraint.

Following this incident, an understanding was reached between the Governments of Guyana and Suriname that the latter would refrain from encroaching on Guyana's territory.

In February 1968, the Guyana's Minister of State, Shridath Ramphal, addressing an audience in New Amsterdam, responded firmly to Surinamese statements on their claim:

By every token of history, custom, usage, prescription and recognition, indeed by every relevant criterion of international law, Guyana's title to the New River Triangle is unassailable. It cannot now be competent for the Netherlands to raise a claim to the area when over the years they have acknowledged the Kutari as the boundary in the Notes and letters of their diplomats, in the speeches of their Ministers in their own Parliament, in their proposals for the conclusion of a Boundary Treaty, in their concurrence in the fixing of the common international boundary between Guyana, Suriname and Brazil, and in the absence of any exercise of jurisdiction over the area.

GDF ejected Surinamese military from New River Triangle

Throughout 1968, neither the Dutch nor the Surinamese showed any interest in holding talks on the border issue. On 14 September 14, 1968, Burnham wrote to Pengel expressing Guyana's desire to discuss fully the settlement of all issues between the two countries but he received no reply.

But while Guyana was showing interest in discussing the border issue, Suriname was carrying out a clandestine occupation of the New River triangle in clear breach of the understanding arrived at in 1967. On 19 August 1969, a Guyana Defence Force (GDF) patrol found an unauthorised camp and a partially completed airstrip west of the Corentyne River in the New River triangle area. As the Guyanese soldiers moved into the camp-site, a number of uniformed Surinamese opened fire on them. But the Guyanese soldiers repelled the Surinamese who abandoned the camp and fled in the direction of the Suriname border.

The camp built by Suriname's armed forces on Guyana's territory was constructed as a military installation. It had underground bunkers especially constructed to protect against shell and mortar attacks and was equipped with towers and machine-gun emplacements. Maps left by the Surinamese revealed a plan to occupy the entire New River area with a series of military camps, with the camp serving as a base and supply headquarters. Judging from the personal effects and accommodation facilities left at the camp, it was estimated that there were between 50 to 55 men occupying it. They left behind a Caterpillar bulldozer, a jeep, an

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electric power plant, a mechanical water pump, power driven hand saws, a large refrigerator and well-stocked kitchens.

Two days later, Prime Minister Burnham informed the Guyana National Assembly that strong protests were sent to the Governments of The Netherlands and Suriname. He also announced that the GDF would remain in the New River triangle to prevent any further incursions. In concluding his statement he said:

There can be no doubt that the New River Triangle is part of the territory of Guyana and has been in our possession from time immemorial. This Government is pledged to maintain traditional friendly relations with our neighbours, including Suriname, and at the same time, our country's territorial integrity.

Shortly after, the GDF established a permanent military outpost, named Camp Jaguar, in the New River triangle. Around the same period, Guyana opened a Consulate General in Paramaribo.

The situation became more cordial the following year during which Burnham and the new Prime Minister of Suriname Jules Sedney met in Port-of-Spain, Georgetown and Paramaribo. Much of their discussions related to follow-up action after the New Triangle area incident. They also agreed on the establishment of the Guyana-Suriname commission responsible for improving co-operation in economic, social and cultural areas. Relations continued to show improvements even though from time to time Guyana complained to the Surinamese authorities over the manner in which they treated Guyanese arrested in their territory.

More tensions

Suriname became independent in November 1975 and Guyana immediately established diplomatic relations with the new sovereign nation. For a while a state of friendliness existed. But the situation took a downward turn in 1978 when tensions rose in the two countries' capitals over Guyana's action to implement the provisions of the Guyana Maritime Act on fishing in its territorial waters and exclusive economic zone. One Suriname-owned trawler and six other foreign trawlers based in Suriname were arrested in Guyana's waters and impounded. Suriname immediately retaliated by refusing to grant licences to Guyanese fishermen, loggers and floating-shops operating in Suriname.

Surinamese police also detained 10 Guyanese balata bleeders who were surveying balata-producing trees along the Corentyne River. While they were later released, their equipment was not returned.

As a result of these incidents, Guyana's Foreign Minister Rashleigh Jackson held discussions with his Suriname counterpart to resolve these problems.

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Cooperation

The following year saw a turn towards cooperation when Burnham and Suriname's Prime Minister Henck Aaron held three meetings in Barbados, Georgetown and Paramaribo. At these meetings they reached agreements in the fields of economic and technical cooperation, and decided that ministers of both countries would meet to deal with specific aspects of bilateral cooperation. They also signed two agreements—one on fishery and another on cultural and scientific co-operation—and examined proposals for the operation of a jointly owned car-ferry service on the Corentyne River.

For the next few years, the situation remained low-key with the disagreements relating mainly to the arrest of Guyanese fishing boats and their crews on the Corentyne River. In most cases, diplomatic intervention by Guyana led the release of the fishermen and their vessels.

Oil concessions unopposed by Suriname

Meanwhile, Guyana had been granting oil exploration concessions to foreign companies within the maritime boundaries it claimed. One of these companies, Royal Dutch Shell carried out drilling in 1974 without any protest from Suriname. Then in 1981, another company, Seagull-Dennison, licensed by Guyana carried out test drilling in the same area without any Surinamese protest. Another company, LASMO Oil in 1989 carried out seismic surveys in the area without any opposition.

On the other hand, Guyana protested when International Petroleum Exploration Ltd. in 1989 expressed interest in obtaining an offshore licence to conduct exploration in the area claimed by Guyana. In the end no agreement was reached between the Suriname Government and this company.

Memorandum of Understanding

A new development in bilateral relations developed in 1989 when Suriname's President Ramsaywak Shankar paid a state visit to Guyana. He and Desmond Hoyte, now President of Guyana, agreed to establish National Border Commissions and the Guyana-Suriname Council aimed at improving cooperation in various sectors. They also discussed measures to activate a trade agreement signed between the two countries some time before. Later that year, Hoyte paid an official return visit to Suriname, and as a result of discussions, the two Presidents agreed on a trade mission from Suriname to visit Guyana.

With respect to the maritime boundary between the two countries, both presidents agreed that pending settlement of the border question,

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the authorities responsible for petroleum development in both countries should agree that the area of the north eastern and north western seaward boundaries, that is, the disputed maritime area, could be jointly utilised by the two countries. This agreement reached by both Presidents developed into the Memorandum of Understanding of 1991 which was subsequently confirmed in the Agreed Minutes prepared by the two Foreign Ministers, Rashleigh Jackson of Guyana and Edwin Sedoc of Suriname.

The Memorandum of Understanding was agreed upon in February 1991 by the two countries and signed by Dr. Cedric Grant, Ambassador and Special Adviser to the President of Guyana, and Dr. John Kolader, Ambassador of Suriname to Guyana. It provided for the exploitation of petroleum resources in the "Area of Overlap" for the benefit of both countries pending a resolution of the maritime border dispute. However, this agreement was never ratified by the Surinamese Parliament.

With the new PPP-Civic Government taking power in October 1992, there was an uninterrupted flow in bilateral relations. During a state visit to Suriname in 1994 by President Cheddi Jagan, the two Governments agreed that the meetings of the National Border Commissions and the Guyana-Suriname Cooperation Council, which had earlier been established, would be resuscitated to facilitate timely consultations and to establish a basis for resolution of the dispute. But in spite of several initiatives from Guyana, the meetings of the Commissions were not held.

Relations continued to improve and Guyana firmly supported in 1995 the entry of Suriname as a full member of Caricom.

Chapter 15

The Offer of Critical Support by the PPP

After the rigged 1973 elections, the political, economic and social situation in Guyana continued to further deteriorate. The PNC regime slogans never became reality. For example, the promise that “the small man will become the real man” under its cooperative socialism fizzled out, and the ambitious plan to “feed, clothe and house the nation by 1976” failed miserably. Progress was seriously hampered when the \$1,150 million development plan for 1972-76, which had been introduced for the election in 1973, was also set aside in 1974. All of these factors bred dissatisfaction and worsened the political, economic and situation in the subsequent years.

Worsening political and economic situation after 1973

Faced with poor working conditions, workers in various industries and services launched a series of protests, mainly in the form of strikes. The result was that in 1974, there were 571,000 more man-days lost on account of strikes than in 1973. The industrial situation further worsened in 1975 when inflation and high taxation resulted in longer strikes causing a considerable increase in man-days lost.

Economic pressures mounted when the government, in its 1974 budget, imposed a record-breaking \$19 million taxation on the population. For that year, too, a sugar levy which had been introduced was expected to yield \$30 million, but in fact it yielded \$131 million—a huge windfall to the government—but which was not used to improve the

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social and economic conditions of the people. In 1976, this levy yielded almost \$250 million! Sugar workers across the country protested this huge levy on the grounds that it robbed the workers of their fair share of profits under the profit-sharing scheme established since 1968. In addition, it provided the sugar producers with an excuse to pay the sugar workers less than half the wages and salaries sugar workers in the English-speaking Caribbean territories were earning.

The GAWU strike for recognition

Faced with this situation, the Guyana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) called a strike in the sugar industry in 1975. The strike had a three-fold objective: to remove the sugar levy; to fight for better wages and improved working conditions; and to demand official recognition for the union to be the bargaining agent for sugar workers. At that time, the Man Power Citizens' Association (MPCA), widely regarded as a "company union," was the recognised union whose call to the striking workers to return to work went totally unheeded. The MPCA itself was heavily backed by the PNC.

The sugar workers maintained their strike for seven weeks during the "spring" crop and then again for six weeks in the "autumn" crop. They made tremendous sacrifices but they received support in food and finance from workers and farmers all over Guyana. In the end, after a loss of nearly \$150 million in foreign exchange and \$50 million in revenue, the government was forced to order a poll among sugar workers to choose the union to represent them in the industry. This was a big victory for the workers since the government had stubbornly refused to apply this measure for many years.

In the poll which was held at the end of December 1975, the sugar workers voted overwhelmingly for the GAWU giving it 98 percent of the votes cast. This poll, in which 83 percent of the workers turned out to vote, demonstrated three facts: first, that the GAWU had the confidence of the majority of sugar workers, as it had always asserted; second, the PNC's claim that it had made inroads into PPP strongholds (especially the sugar estates) was spurious—a claim based on the 71 percent votes which it took at the 1973 general elections with the help of the army; and third, it clearly exposed the fact that the PNC rigged the 1973 elections since the PNC-backed union could not obtain more than 2 percent of the sugar workers' votes.

More workers' protests

Meanwhile, at the Guyana Bauxite Company, the most important feature of nationalisation was the replacement of the expatriate Canadian

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and American managerial group by an administrative PNC elite. The non-compromising position taken by this new elite forced confrontation with the bauxite workers. The number of man-hours lost by strikes increased from 21,609 in 1972 to 34,348 in 1974. A rebel workers' movement which had been suppressed in 1971 with force—including tear-gassing of workers on strike on May Day and the arrest of 26 of the strike leaders—resurrected itself again in 1975. This rebel movement which demanded democracy and improved working conditions attempted to win executive posts at the Mine Workers Union elections, but the PNC, using its political machinery, applied harassment and intimidation, and rigged the union elections in favour of its loyalists in the union.

Other categories of workers including civil servants and timber and waterfront workers were also seriously affected by escalating prices, increasing transportation costs, and the government's refusal to make automatic wage readjustments to cope with the increased cost of living. The result was that these workers showed their dissatisfaction by unauthorised strikes and go-slows.

In the rural areas, farmers suffered from loss of crops due to floods and the government's unsympathetic attitude generally. Farmers were not allowed to voice their discontent by peaceful demonstrations. Their truly representative organisations such as the Rice Producers Association (RPA) were by-passed for unrepresentative and bureaucratically-run bodies, affiliated to or associated with the PNC. These bodies, such as the Rice Action Committee, which displaced the RPA, misused the farmers' money, and coercive methods were employed by the PNC to force the farmers to join and support them.

Cooperation among opposition forces

Ideological matters also took centre stage during the period. From 1974, the governing PNC began to propagate the idea that it was a socialist party based on the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. At the same time, it also publicised that it was "cooperative socialist," a situation which the PPP, also an established Marxist-Leninist party, said was causing ideological confusion among the masses. The PPP also pointed out that despite the socialist sloganeering of the PNC, the regime was still propagating reactionary and utopian ideas through its "cooperative socialism."

Faced with an anti-democratic PNC regime, the opposition political groups began to work in a closer alliance. In late 1974, the PPP established relations with the Working People's Alliance (WPA) which had been constituted by four small groups—Ratoon, African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa (ASCRIA); Indian Political Revolution Associates (IPRA); and Working People's Vanguard Party

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(WPVP). Up to the July 1973 general elections these groups had a hostile attitude to the PPP categorising it as revisionist and non-revolutionary.

In 1970, Eusi Kwayana of ASCRIA had broken away from the PNC and had brought two ministers before the Ombudsman on charges of corruption. Later in 1972, Moses Bhagwan's IPRA was formed on the basis that Indians needed a revolutionary organisation. Starting from the premise that the PPP and the PNC were the same, non-revolutionary and reactionary racial blocs, ASCRIA and IPRA declared that they would work in close cooperation but separately at the beginning to forge later a revolutionary alliance of Indian and Africans—IPRA working among the Indians and ASCRIA among the Africans. However, this objective was never achieved since the Indian, most of whom supported the PPP, paid no heed to IPRA. At the same time ASCRIA was widely regarded as an Afro-Guyanese cultural organisation but it made no significant political inroads among the Africans, most of whom gave political support to the PNC.

Three main factors caused these groups to change their political stance towards the PPP. Firstly, lacking mass support, the Ratoon Group despite its revolutionary utterances, could not take any positive action after the attempted assassination in September 1971 one of its members, university lecturer Dr. Joshua Ramsammy who was also head of a group known as Movement Against Oppression.

Second, there was disillusionment with Maoist China over its relations with the PNC. All these small groups had more or less a Maoist orientation and were worried about China's praise of the PNC government which they neither regarded as socialist or anti-imperialist.

And thirdly, the refusal by the Board of Governors of the University of Guyana to confirm the appointment of Dr. Walter Rodney, as head of the History Department led to an invitation by ASCRIA to the PPP to take part in joint protest meetings. The PNC attempts to break up these meetings which attracted huge crowds.

Actually, the PPP, through its youth arm, the Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO), was already participating in protest demonstrations to support Rodney. Also, some form of cooperation between ASCRIA and PPP had already started when they jointly organised their supporters to squat on Booker's land for house lots.

Obviously, the PNC saw this new development as one which could lead to the creation of a broad united front linking together not only the different ethnic groups, but also the workers, farmers and intelligentsia.

PNC's leftward shift and PPP's critical support

While the joint opposition activities were taking place, contradictions deepened within the two wings of the PNC leadership—the petty-

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bourgeois and the radical-intelligentsia sections—and also between the leadership and its working class members and supporters.

Subsequently, the PNC regime began to take an anti-imperialist direction which taking a progressive role in the non-aligned movement; establishing trade and diplomatic relations with the socialist countries; participating in the Latin American Economic System (SELA); and breaking diplomatic relations with Israel.

The regime further condemned Zionism as racism, came out in active support of UN resolutions on the Middle East and the cause of the Palestinian people, supported after some vacillation the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and nationalised the trans-national monopoly, Booker Bros, McConnell and Co., Ltd.

The 1974-75 period also saw an intensification of the Venezuelan claim to Guyanese territory in Essequibo accompanied by reports of intermittent Venezuelan and Brazilian military manoeuvres in the border regions. In consideration of the PNC's anti-imperialist moves and in anticipation of destabilisation attempts, attacks, and even counter-revolutionary intervention by the reactionary forces, the PPP at its 25th anniversary conference in August 1975 at Annandale changed its post-1973 general election political line of "non-cooperation and civil resistance" to "critical support." The Party stated that it was its patriotic duty in the national interest and that it wanted all Guyanese to know that in defending national interests, the PPP would always be at the front.

In a report to the conference, PPP leader Dr. Cheddi Jagan stated that "critical support" did not mean that the PPP was joining with the PNC and supporting the government completely.

He declared:

It means giving support for any progressive measure, opposing any reactionary moves and criticising all shortcomings. Above all, it means giving a firm message to imperialism and its lackeys that we will not tolerate any meddling in our domestic affairs, that despite the differences between the PPP and the government, we are prepared to unite our forces with the PNC forces to fight against intervention so as to safeguard our national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Clearly, the United States was not happy about these new anti-imperialist positions taken by the PNC. Even though it felt betrayed, it was not prepared to give up the PNC and support the PPP. The United States continued to see the PPP as a communist party, despite the PNC's proclamation that it was "Marxist-Leninist." The PPP was still regarded as a powerful enemy. This was made clear [*See Chapter 11*] by Nelson Rockefeller, who in the report of the special Mission he headed in Latin America in 1975, stated:

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Guyana is not a politically stable nation. Its political sphere reflects both the strength of a Communist Party and the depth of racial tension. A communist victory would completely change Guyana's foreign policy. It is therefore of crucial concern to the United States and other nations of the Western Hemisphere as well as Great Britain. . . Brazil in particular has indicated its concern in this area.

The Brazilian “threat”

The PPP offer of “critical support” was also meant to show that it intended to display its patriotic duty to stand in defence of the nation's territorial integrity, and to struggle against any pro-imperialist destabilising forces threatening the country's territorial integrity. During this period the PNC regime gave great publicity to information that Brazilian military forces were being built up on Guyana's border to the south and were therefore posing a real threat to Guyana. Such incessant “information” in the hugely state-controlled media created genuine fears in Guyana that Brazil—then strongly anti-communist and pro-American—would have staged a military intervention on Guyana's southern border with the main intention of forcing the PNC to reverse its then pro-socialist tendency and to follow again the capitalist path of development.

Two scenarios were developed as a result of the propagation of the so-called Brazil threat. One view was that pro-imperialist forces in Brazil were trying to influence the PNC to refuse “critical support” from the Marxist-Leninist PPP.

The other view was those who were frightening Guyanese about a Brazilian invasion were trying to create a crisis situation to force the PPP to show greater sympathy and even open support for the PNC regime. This was what the PNC regime wanted.

Significantly, inside the PPP the deputy General Secretary of the PPP, Ranji Chandisingh, exaggerated the so-called Brazil threat and tried to pressure the party leadership to give unilateral support, instead of “critical support” to the PNC. He did so shortly after he returned from a visit in early 1976 to Cuba where he held consultations with the leadership of the Cuban Government.

At that time there also existed very close relations between the Cuban and the Guyana Governments and most likely Chandisingh was convinced by the Cubans that the PPP, as a party having strong links of friendship with the Cuban Communist Party, should render unilateral support to the PNC Government. But after Chandisingh failed to get the PPP to support his stand, he, soon after, resigned from the party and joined the PNC.

In reality, there was no serious evidence that Brazil was expanding the strength of its border outposts, even though there were some minor reports in the Brazilian press that this was being done. However, these

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reports were so insignificant that they could not be classified as a “threat” as was being purported by the PNC regime in Guyana.

Views of PPP critics

As happened in the early 1950s and 1960s, the PPP on announcing their new political position was faced with vicious campaign of slander to spread confusion. The rightist forces, particularly the Indian petty-bourgeois professionals, landlords and capitalists, launched their campaign on a slogan of “PPP sell-out.” Fearing socialism, they claimed that with “critical support” for the PNC, Guyana would become “communist” and a “second Cuba.” Some of them used racial and religious incitement, and even called for partition of the country.

At the racial level, they also claimed that the PPP was aware that the government was discriminating against Indians, reducing them to second class citizens and was using National Service to destroy the “Indian race and culture.” Despite all this, they said, the Party was giving support to the government.

The PPP responded saying that such accusation was a deliberate distortion. In its report to its 19th Congress in August 1976, it stated:

Critical support does not mean joining the PNC or giving unconditional support to the government. It means unity and struggle—unity in defence of our independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity; struggle against shortcomings and wrongdoings; for the well being, rights and liberties of the working people; for the removal of all obstacles to national unity, such as discrimination and victimisation, and the creation of the economic, political, ideological, social and cultural pre-requisites for the building of socialism.

The PPP added that it was also fully aware of denial of rights, the vicious practice of political and racial discrimination and the various forms it takes—employment and promotion, land allocation, credit, relief, etc.—and would never stop fighting against them.

As regards compulsory National Service, the Party showed that it was the first to launch an attack against it in 1973. The PPP stated then that it saw National Service as a vehicle to distort the political history of Guyana aimed at brainwashing the youth that the PPP was anti-national and anti-patriotic and had fought against independence, and that the PNC was the only true patriotic and revolutionary party.

The PPP also stated that it opposed compulsory National Service for women who could make their contribution to national development in various ways. The Party indicated that such contribution did not have to be in interior camps since “this offends particularly the mores and customs of the Indian community.”

The Offer of Critical Support by the PPP

“Critical support” also faced opposition from some “Marxists” inside and outside the PPP. These critics were divided into two categories. One group said that the PNC was not socialist and attacked the PPP for being revisionist, for taking orders from Moscow and Cuba, and for disarming the people by offering “critical support” to the government. The second group insisted that the PPP was not Marxist and that the PNC was the only genuine party of socialism. This latter group included leading members of the PPP such as Ranji Chandisingh, Vincent Teekah, Halim Majeed and some of their supporters who, after launching bitter attacks on the PPP for not giving full support to the PNC, defected singly or in small groups over a six-month period and joined the ruling party.

Rejection of “critical support” by the PNC

The PNC’s response to the PPP’s new line was typical. It attempted at first to make cheap political propaganda by suggesting that the PPP was weakening and was trying to find a way to get on the PNC bandwagon. Subsequently, it began to complain that “critical support” was not support, but only criticism.

Obviously, the PNC could not understand how the PPP could take a patriotic stand, without conditions, in defence of national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. It was clear, too, that the PNC preferred the PPP to cease criticising and struggling against policies which were detrimental to the political, economic and social development of Guyana.

The PPP’s did not withdraw its offer of critical support, but the PNC never openly embraced it. Leaders of the PNC from time to time continued to state that the PPP’s policy was more critical than supportive. PNC leader Forbes Burnham obviously wanted total support for his government’s policies, but after failing to obtain this from the PPP, he described the Party as reactionary “Mensheviks” in opposition to PNC “Bolsheviks” or true socialists.

Faced with this situation, the PPP continued to expand cooperation with the various opposition groups in struggling against repressive policies of the PNC regime. While the Party also concentrated its efforts on the fight for free and fair elections and the restoration of democracy in Guyana, from time to time it also threw out feelers to the PNC in the effort to initiate discussions on reaching a political situation aimed at establishing national unity.

Meanwhile, the PNC continued to propagate itself as the vanguard of the working class and constantly referred to the government as socialist. Speaking on 13 July 1976 at the “Think in” organised by the Clerical and Commercial Workers Union, Desmond Hoyte, then the Minister of Economic Development, declared:

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Guyana has, by overwhelming national consensus, opted for the socialist system. It has a Government rooted in the working class; whose authority' springs from the working class; whose commitment is to the working-class. It has a Government which is implacably anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist. It has a Government which is socialist.

This assertion had certainly no basis in fact since it was totally untrue that the government's authority "springs from the working class." The army intervention in the fraudulent 1973 elections, by which the PNC stole the people's votes and gave itself a two-thirds majority, was still too fresh in the minds of Guyanese to swallow Hoyte's claim.

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Chapter 16

The Arnold Rampersaud Trials

After the PNC rigged itself a two-thirds majority in the July 1973 Guyana elections, it consolidated its power by applying repressive measures on the PPP, which continued to actively protest the rape of democracy in the country. Human rights were routinely trampled by the PNC regime which used all instruments of the state in the acts of repression. This period of PNC rule saw one of the most publicised political trials, when a PPP member, Arnold Rampersaud, was placed on a trumped up charge of murder.

The toll gate shooting

It all began on 18 July 1974. At around 10.00 that evening, when electric lights were already switched off in the area, gunshots rang out at the No. 62 Village toll station on the Corentyne. Police Constable James Henry, a guard at the facility, was shot dead by the roadside after he exchanged fire with one or more unknown persons. His companion, a rural constable, Joachim Francis who received minor injuries was at the time resting in the toll booth.

Moments later, a car driven by Government Medical Officer Dr. Fyzul Sattaur drove up from the south-eastern side of the toll station going towards New Amsterdam to the north-west. Immediately, Francis ran out screaming that unknown persons had shot at them. Dr. Sattaur sped off to the No. 51 Police Station, about three miles westwards, where he made a report and soon after three policemen arrived and removed the body of their dead colleague to the Springlands Hospital. Francis, who

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was wounded on the middle toe of his left foot, was taken first to the Springlands Hospital and then later to the New Amsterdam Hospital. In his first statement to the police, he said that due to the darkness he had not seen the attackers but they had fled in the direction **east** of the public road. He added that no other vehicle passed the toll station before Dr. Sattaur drove up.

Meanwhile, a police tracker dog brought to the scene the next morning sniffed along a path **west** of the toll station.

Anti-PPP repression

Within hours of the shooting, the police set up a special investigation unit headed by Superintendent Fitzroy Duff, who was well known in the area—a PPP stronghold—for harassing the Party's supporters. In the hunt for clues, the unit searched the homes, dug up yards, ripped open ceilings and mattresses, and seized membership cards and literature of PPP members. Cars belonging to PPP members in the area were also seized and impounded by the police. It was clear that in the eyes of the government and its police force, the murder was a political act linked to the PPP.

The police detained and questioned many persons, and two of them, Ramjeet Mohan, a gas station worker, and Ramkarran Singh, brother of Arnold Rampersaud, were initially accused of involvement in the murder.

On 20 July 1974, the police arrested 35-year old PPP activist Arnold Rampersaud, a taxi-driver and father of five children, at the Springlands Police Station when he took food for his detained brother. After he gave a statement to the police, he was released but later that afternoon he was re-arrested.

That same night Duff arrested a watchman, Kawall Rampersaud, (no relation of Arnold), and subsequently wrote out a statement in which Kawall Rampersaud claimed he saw Arnold Rampersaud's car at the toll station on the night of the shooting. (Kawall Rampersaud, at the first trial, vehemently denied he had ever made or signed such a statement). The watchman was at the time on that dark night at a location one mile away from the toll station.

Armed with this fictitious statement, the police again interviewed Francis who said he knew Rampersaud, a resident of No. 59 Village, Corentyne. But this time he claimed that he heard sounds as if a vehicle drove off just after the gunshots but he did not look to see since he was lying face down on the floor.

Unable to gather any substantial evidence, police during the next week carried out a wave of repression in the area, arresting and detaining numerous PPP supporters. One person who had only returned from

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Moscow one week after the shooting after completing a study course was also detained and grilled about his studies and not about the murder.

The political motive behind this repression became even clearer when the “special investigation unit” raided and ransacked Freedom House, the PPP headquarters in Georgetown and the PPP office in New Amsterdam, and searched the premises of leading PPP activists for “arms and ammunition.” Freedom House was searched for nearly ten hours and in the process the police took away confidential PPP files and books on Cuba and Vietnam.

The home of PPP leader Dr. Cheddi Jagan was also searched and he was taken to police headquarters and questioned for having part of an abandoned pistol which the police had returned to him earlier after his firearm licence was taken away. He was later charged with illegal possession of a firearm.

And leading PPP member, Moses Nagamootoo who was brutally beaten up by PNC thugs in the presence of police officers just days before the toll gate shooting, was charged with “illegal possession of a firearm,” but the case was dismissed in the magistrate court after the police failed to produce the alleged weapon.

Moving the trial venue

Meanwhile, the police continued to hold Arnold Rampersaud, first at the Springlands Police Station, then at the New Amsterdam Police Station and later at the Eve Leary Police Compound in Georgetown. He was prevented from meeting with his family and his lawyers for two weeks. Finally, on 1 August 1974 his wife, Dilrajie, filed a *habeas corpus* writ directed to the Commissioner of Police, Henry Fraser, to produce her husband. But before the matter came to the court, Rampersaud was finally charged with murder on 3 August and remanded to the Georgetown prison.

Two preliminary inquiries were held into the murder charge against Rampersaud. The first began at the Whim Magistrate Court in Berbice during October 1974 but was aborted due to the death of the presiding magistrate Jairam. The second was held before Magistrate Rai at the same venue and at its conclusion on 18 April 1975, Rampersaud was indicted to stand trial for the murder of police constable James Henry at the next sitting of the Berbice Supreme Court in June 1975.

The case was listed on several occasions for trial at the Berbice High Court, but it was never heard. Rampersaud eventually petitioned the High Court on 23 August 1975 seeking an early trial. In the hearing before Justice Aubrey Bishop, the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), George Jackman, gave the assurance the trial would commence in New Amsterdam, Berbice on 8 November 1975.

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But then on 27 October 1975, the state filed a petition to change the venue for the trial from New Amsterdam to Georgetown. On 1 November, before Justice Lindsay Collins, Senior Counsel Rex McKay, for the DPP, argued that the State would not have a fair hearing in Berbice since the shooting was a protest against toll fees on the Corentyne highway. He claimed that jurors in Berbice, because of their support for the PPP, had already made up their minds against the State.

Senior Counsel B. O. Adams, for Rampersaud, counter-argued that the police had never established a motive that the killing was a protest over toll fees. (Toll fees were implemented in 1972 and there were some protests against them by residents in the area at that time). He said the murder could have been the result of a triangular love affair of other personal reasons. He added that the State could not claim that the people of Berbice were against the toll fees since in the 1973 general elections, the ruling party (PNC) boasted it made a “break-through” in the county where it “won” a huge majority of the votes.

The first trial

Nevertheless, Justice Collins agreed with the State’s argument and the trial began before Justice Claude Massiah and a mixed jury in Georgetown on 8 November. Rex McKay, retained by the State to prosecute its case, explained that the case was purely circumstantial and that there was no direct evidence that the accused conspired with other to commit murder. He then presented 25 witnesses who were all policemen or ex-policemen.

However, all of their evidence was disproved in cross examination and by defence witnesses. It was during this time that it was revealed that the star witness Francis had made three different statements to the police. But a motion by the defence to have the police to make available all of Francis’ statements was unsuccessful after the judge ruled against it.

The judge refused to accept the no-case submissions by the defence. The matter was put to the jury, but after deliberating for 11 hours, it could not agree on a verdict, and a new trial was ordered.

At the end of this first trial, a broad-based Arnold Rampersaud Defence Committee was formed, and soon a world-wide campaign began to win his freedom. This committee, made up of representatives of opposition political parties, trade unions, religious and professional groups, claimed that Rampersaud was a political prisoner and was being prosecuted for his political beliefs. The committee’s campaign, which included public meetings, vigils and picketing exercises, helped to stir up public opinion with a wide cross section of people demanding a fair trial.

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However, the case had already drawn sharp political lines with the PNC-controlled media openly pronouncing on Rampersaud's guilt and linking the murder of the policeman to part of a general PPP plot to undermine the government. As a result, PNC supporters publicly supported State's arguments on the case.

Second trial

The second trial came up before Chief Justice Harold Bollers on 8 March 1977. International interest in the case by this time had grown and the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers and the Cab Section of the General Transport and Workers Union of the United Kingdom sent their representative, solicitor John Bowden, to observe the trial.

The prosecution, led by McKay, presented an almost identical case as was done in the first trial, but this time the presiding judge ruled that conflicting statements made by Francis, the rural constable, should be made available to the defence which included Adams and Senior Counsel Ashton Chase and also Maurice Bishop of Grenada. In one of these statements made long after Rampersaud was charged for murder, Francis claimed that he saw the accused in his car passing by the toll station just before the shooting!

This trial was affected by seven adjournments, one of which lasted for one week, after Bollers objected to the vigil and picketing exercise outside the court building by the Arnold Rampersaud Defence Committee. Another occurred because of the disappearance of photographic negatives held by the prosecution.

After a no-case submission by the defence was rejected, Bollers decided to send the case to the jury. Adams addressed the jury for two and a half hours during which Bollers interrupted him ten times. After the final interruption, he decided not to proceed with his statement.

In his closing address for the prosecution, McKay for the first time raised the manslaughter issue, by urging the jury to find the defendant guilty of manslaughter if they could not find him guilty of murder.

On 21 April the jury deliberated for nine hours. When they came out at 5.35 p.m. the following exchange took place:

Registrar to foreman: "Have you, members of the jury, arrived at a verdict both in respect of the offence of murder and manslaughter?"

Foreman: "No."

The jury was sent back to consider the evidence and upon returning at 8.45 pm. this exchange took place:

Registrar to foreman: "Mr. Foreman, have you been able to arrive at a verdict in respect to the offences of murder and manslaughter?"

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Foreman: “No.”

At this point Adams requested the judge to ask the jury separately what was the verdict first for murder and then for manslaughter. But Bollers bluntly refused. The jury could therefore not agree on a verdict and a third trial was then ordered for June 1977.

Constitutional motion

At the end of this second trial, the defence team filed a constitutional motion on 29 April 1977 against the Attorney General and the DPP seeking a declaration that Rampersaud’s right to a fair trial was contravened by Chief Justice Bollers’ refusal to allow the jury to be first asked if they had arrived at a verdict on murder before being asked about a verdict on manslaughter.

The motion argued that Rampersaud was not afforded a fair hearing and requested that the High Court should make an order releasing Rampersaud from prison either unconditionally or on bail.

In an affidavit in support of the motion, Rampersaud contended that the jury had arrived at a verdict of not guilty of murder, but were divided on manslaughter. He stated that the findings of the jury were communicated to Bollers before he directed that the question put to the jury in the manner asked by the Registrar. Rampersaud said the Chief Justice, by so doing, committed a specific illegality of a grave and fundamental nature in so directing his Registrar.

Hearing of this motion took place on 13-14 July, 1977 before Justice C. Fung-a-Fatt who eventually ruled against it. It was expected that the third trial would have commenced around the same period, but this did not occur. Subsequently, after the defence filed a motion for an early trial, it was agreed that Justice George Pompey would commence hearing on 17 November 1977.

The third trial

Meantime, the Arnold Rampersaud Defence Committee, by internationally publicising the injustice meted out to the political prisoner, was able to get Amnesty International to send its representative, Professor David Weisbrondt of the University of Minnesota, to observe the third trial. Also returning to observe the trial from England was John Bowden on behalf of the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers and the Cab Section of the General Transport and Workers Union.

The Caribbean Legal Aid Company also sent the Trinidadian lawyer, Sash Permanand who joined the defence team headed by B.O. Adams,

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and including Ashton Chase, Doodnauth Singh, Stanley Persaud and Ayube McDoom.

Rex McKay, for the prosecution, again argued that there was a political motive behind the murder and insisting that Rampersaud along with unknown men killed the policeman to protest against the toll fees on the Corentyne highway. As in the previous trials, he said his case was based on circumstantial evidence since no one had seen the actual shooting. He again asked the jury to consider the alternative count of manslaughter saying that the shooting might have been only aimed at terrorising the toll station guards and not to kill anyone. McKay presented his witnesses, as he did in the previous trials, but all of them, particularly the star witness Francis, contradicted themselves during cross examination by the defence and questioning by the judge.

On the other hand, the defence maintained that the case was one of murder and nothing else, a position also taken by Justice Pompey during his summing up. On 7 December 1977, Adams, on behalf of the defence, submitted that the State had not made out a case against the accused, saying that he was a victim of a conspiracy because he was a member of the PPP.

The judge disagreed with the no-case submissions and called for a defence. Arnold Rampersaud took the stand and in a moving statement outlined the history of his case. He stated he was imprisoned for almost 1,250 days which was equivalent to serving eight years in prison if all remissions were taken into account. He was innocent of the framed-up charge, he insisted.

On 12 December, Adams summed up the case in a five-hour address in which he exposed the frame-up charge against the accused. He said while the defence would not condone the shooting of a policeman, it condemned attempts to convict the accused on fabricated evidence. He pointed out that the prosecution failed to present evidence that the accused plotted with unknown men to commit murder. He also showed that no evidence was presented that the accused took part in any anti-toll demonstrations.

There was some comical drama when McKay interrupted Adams' address by alleging that people were picketing outside the court building and, as such, were committing contempt of the court. He demanded that Judge Pompey should take action against such disturbance. The judge complied and he immediately adjourned the trial threatening to halt it if there was any picketing. The marshal of the court was sent to investigate, (but he returned soon after to report that there was no picketing outside, whereupon the judge resumed the trial.

Following Adams, McKay in his closing address tried his best to rationalise the evidence of his witnesses. He urged the jury to convict

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Rampersaud saying it was the duty of the state not to support anarchy, as promoted by the accused.

On the afternoon of 13 December, Judge Pompey began his summing up. He stated: "This is a case of murder or nothing. Manslaughter does not arise." His address continued on the following day and a large crowd filled the court, the corridors and the yard outside. The judge explained that the star witness Francis had contradicted himself and that there was no direct evidence against the accused.

Freedom

The jury retired and at 5.35 p.m. returned with a unanimous verdict of not guilty. Immediately, there was great jubilation outside the courtroom, and soon after Rampersaud was given a hero's welcome at Freedom House, the PPP headquarters. There he declared: "Prison has not broken my love for my Party." Speaking about the support he received while in prison, he stated, "When a man knows he is innocent, he never breaks down knowing he has his brothers and sisters solidly behind him."

Later, in a letter to his supporters at home and abroad, he wrote:

Your support gave me strength personally to endure the hardships and pressures of my period of incarceration and the three gruelling trials.... Your recognition of my innocence and that I was the object of a frame-up for my political views and my close association with the People's Progressive Party gave me strength and also added greatly to the work of the Defence Committee and the legal defence team that represented me.

It was obvious that the broad-based Arnold Rampersaud Defence Committee played a significant role in exposing locally and internationally the frame-up and carrying the fight against injustice. In wrapping up the work of the Committee, its secretary Janet Jagan wrote on 23 January 1978:

The frame-up of Arnold Rampersaud had not been fool-proof. The conspiracy crumbled not on its own. It crumbled under the weight of the legal battle waged by the defence and by the tremendous pressures of local and international solidarity. It crumbled because the Guyanese people were prepared to reject this violation of human rights. . .

The Arnold Rampersaud Defence Committee is indeed grateful for the solidarity given to us and appreciates all the fine and militant work carried out on Arnold's behalf to ensure that there was one political prisoner less in the world, and one more victory for freedom and national liberation. Together we have won an important battle for justice and human rights.

Chapter 17

The PPP Proposal for a National Patriotic Front

In August 1975, the socialist People's Progressive Party (PPP) changed its political line from "non-cooperation and civil resistance" to "critical support" for the ruling People's National Congress (PNC) regime. This, it declared, was because the PNC regime had shifted its policies from pro-imperialist to anti-imperialist. The PPP, in the face of some criticisms mainly from pro-Indian groups, insisted that its new line was correct and that this became clear in early 1976. For instance, on the eve of the nationalisation of the Bookers empire, the British conglomerate, a strong political campaign was launched against Guyana particularly in the United States and Brazil. The Brazilian press wrote about disorder in Georgetown and that White and Amerindian people were being molested in the streets. The American print media also wrote about the presence of Cuban and Chinese troops in Guyana concentrated in the interior on the borders of Brazil and Venezuela.

No doubt, this propaganda campaign was aimed at influencing the PNC administration either to abandon its plans for nationalising Bookers or to enable the monopoly to obtain more favourable compensation terms than the one dollar which the government offered. This campaign produced some results since Bookers was finally given compensation of more than \$100 million for its nationalisation.

PPP-PNC talks

The PPP's decision to end its boycott of the rigged Parliament and its

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support for nationalisation eventually led to formal talks between the PPP and the PNC with the intention of “critical support” leading to a political solution. However, the PNC was not too much interested in a political solution and often voiced the view that the PPP’s “critical support” was “more critical than supportive.” At the very beginning the PPP stated that the talks should deal with the political situation comprehensively. But the PNC had limited objectives and its approach was narrow and based on self-interest and it wanted to deal with issues one at a time.

Faced with such a situation, the talks eventually collapsed on 3 December 1976. At the meeting that afternoon, the PNC leader and Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham, demanded that the PPP must retract an editorial in the *Mirror* of 28 November, headlined “Guns Instead of Bread.” The PPP had opposed the mini-budget in October 1976 which placed further burdens on the people. These included nearly \$15 million for military, paramilitary and security forces, cuts in the subsidy of poultry feed which had caused the price of chicken and eggs to rise. There were also suggestions of further cuts in subsidies in 1977. It was after the PPP refused to retract the editorial that Burnham immediately decided to discontinue the discussions.

By trying to force the Party to retract the editorial, the PNC was hoping to pressure the PPP not to oppose the cuts in subsidies in the forthcoming 1977 budget. As a result of public agitation supported by the PPP, when that budget was finally presented all the subsidies were not removed.

But even before Burnham jettisoned the talks, no agreement was reached on matters which were being discussed. These included the local government elections, People’s Militia, National Service, discrimination, and appointment of PPP representatives to the Public Service Commission and the Police Service Commission.

The PNC, however, put a different slant on why the talks collapsed claiming that the PPP was more interested in sharing power than in finding solutions for national unity. Immediately after the talks collapsed, the Chairman of the PNC, Cammie Ramsaroop, stated:

We made it clear . . . that we were at all times willing to work out a basis for cooperation but not to subvert the electoral process by handing over in this way to the PPP the task of governing the nation. From the talks it was clear that the PPP was more interested in sharing power, than in showing a genuine concern for national unity. (*Guyana Chronicle*, 25 July 1977)

Commenting on Ramsaroop’s allegation, the PPP responded that it was indeed strange that the PNC which intensively rigged elections in 1968 and 1973 should talk about subverting the electoral process.

The PPP Proposal for a National Patriotic Front

The National Patriotic Front proposal

Despite the political road-blocks against democracy and national unity, the PPP was still determined to engage the PNC in finding a solution to the political and economic problems affecting Guyana. The PPP felt that since the two Parties commanded the support of the vast majority of the Guyanese people, they had to be involved together to find acceptable solutions to the existing problems.

The idea to work on a plan for a political solution in the form of a national front government was initially raised by PPP leader Dr. Cheddi Jagan in the Party's Central Committee. The proposal was thoroughly discussed at meetings of the Central Committee on 6 and 19 June 1977, and then afterwards at regional conferences of members of the Party. A decision to launch the proposal was finally taken at a meeting of the Central Committee on 7 August 1977.

The decision was then made public by Dr. Jagan two days later at a press conference held at Freedom House, the headquarters of the PPP.

In its proposal titled *For a National Patriotic Front Government*, the PPP declared that a political solution based on the creation of a National Patriotic Front and a National Patriotic Front Government was a dire necessity. It stated that the proposed National Patriotic Front and National Patriotic Front Government must include all parties and groups which are progressive, anti-imperialist and wish to see Guyana take a socialist-oriented or non-capitalist path of development. Such a front should bring about a revolutionary alliance of the working class, the peasant farmers, the revolutionary intellectuals and the progressive businessmen and middle strata. It would exclude all reactionary, pro-imperialist, racist parties or groups. The PPP added:

A national Government must be based on democracy—political, economic and social. At the political level, there should be full exercise of democratic freedoms and free and fair elections for the central, regional and district governments. At the economic level, there should be workers' control with the fullest involvement of the workers in management, and decision-making. At the social level, the people must have the right not only to form associations—trade union, cultural, religious, sports, etc.—but also to have due recognition and respect.

In keeping with the realities of Guyana, it is necessary to devise a system where “winner does not take all” and the two major parties and their allies are involved in the process of governing.

The Constitution should provide for an executive President, a Prime Minister and a National Assembly elected every five years. To ensure that elections are free and fair, new voters' lists should be compiled by house to house enumeration under the impartial supervision of representatives of the ruling and opposition parties; proxy, postal and overseas voting should be abolished; and ballots should be counted at the place of poll.

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The President shall be elected by the people as in the United States and France or by the members of the National Assembly. He shall have the right to send messages and proposals to, and to address, the National Assembly, and to exercise the right of veto. The National Assembly will have the right to override the veto by a two-thirds majority vote, after which the measure would automatically become law.

The Prime Minister will be drawn from the party or parties which have majority support in the National Assembly. He will preside over a Cabinet or Council of Ministers drawn from each party (which is revolutionary and agrees to a socialist-oriented programme) in proportion to its strength in the National Assembly.

Whichever party wins the election should not oppose the candidature for the Presidency from the other major party.

At the local level, district councils should be directly elected and be based on small historically evolved, culturally-homogeneous communities. Regional Councils, indirectly elected through the district councils, should be given a substantial degree of autonomy. (*For a National Patriotic Front Government*, 7 August 1977)

Based on the prevailing non-democratic situation, the PPP felt that its proposal for a solution to the two-decades-old political crisis was fair and reasonable, and was confident that all patriotic Guyanese would agree that it offered way out of the existing political impasse. The Party envisaged that the main political groupings in the proposed National Patriotic Front would be itself, the PNC and the newly formed Working People's Alliance (WPA).

Rejection by the PNC

But the PNC responded negatively to the proposal at the second biennial congress held on 12-20 August 1977 when its leadership launched an attack on the PPP and totally rejected the idea of a National Patriotic Front and Government.

Burnham, in an address to the Congress, described a National Front Government as "an understanding and coalition between leaders as superficially attractive." He claimed that the PNC was the "vanguard party" and that it was the duty of that Party "to achieve unity in the socialist sense." The PNC leader, attempting to apply Soviet history to the Guyana situation, added that "if the Bolsheviks had sought unity with the Mensheviks on coalition terms the history of the Soviet Union would have been differently written."

The PNC, in its organ, the *New Nation*, on 4 September 1977, stated its position more clearly:

The real purpose behind the so-called "line of critical support" was revealed when Jagan proposed a National Front Government. The (PNC)

The PPP Proposal for a National Patriotic Front

Party has no interest in this proposal. Discussions with Jagan at the inter-party meetings proved conclusively that “critical support” was a mere ruse, a policy to obtain a share of political power. There existed no basis—and none still exists—upon which such a Government could be founded. For the (PNC) Party, the real issue is national unity. This cannot be achieved by a mere power-sharing deal by political leaders. Jagan showed no interest in promoting national cohesion on a class basis.

PPP response

In response to the PNC’s rejection of the National Patriotic Front proposal, the PPP said it was significant that the PNC formed a coalition Government (1964-1968) with the reactionary United Force to serve capitalism and imperialism, but was unwilling to enter into a Patriotic Front Government with left and democratic forces to build a socialist Guyana and to serve the interests of the working people.

The PPP also denounced the PNC for claiming the status as a vanguard party of the working class based on Marxism-Leninism since the ruling party’s “cooperative socialism” was utopian rather than scientific socialism.

The Party added:

Secondly, it is almost a sacrilege to compare the bureaucratic and petty-bourgeois nationalist PNC with the Bolsheviks (communists) both ideologically and numerically. The Bolsheviks represented the majority and were revolutionaries; the Mensheviks represented the minority and were reactionaries. The PNC’s position is not unlike that of the Mensheviks. (*PPP press statement*, 3 September 1977)

The PPP also questioned the PNC on the issue of national unity:

One cannot, on the one hand, talk about national unity and spread it in big headlines in the newspapers and radio, and, on the other hand, rig the electoral process at all levels, pass detention laws and set workers from one sector and region against those of another sector and region. The majority of people in Guyana are aware that this type of ‘national unity’ which the PNC calls for is nothing but a ruse. (*PPP press statement*, 3 September 1977)

It was clear that the PNC was not prepared to agree for the holding of free and fair elections, as set out in the PPP’s proposal, since the ruling party was totally aware that it could not win majority support. Most likely, this was the main reason why it rejected the idea of a National Front Government.

The rejection was also indicative that the right-wing within the PNC was at that period in full control of the Party. This right-wing represented the more privileged section of the ruling party which wanted to maintain

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all the privileges it was enjoying and was afraid of any measure which would curtail them.

This section of the PNC was not interested in the suffering masses enduring severe hardships under the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in Guyana. The economic crisis, then wreaking havoc in the country, was certainly affecting the great majority of the Guyanese people including the PNC's own supporters. Therefore, the PNC's rejection of the National Front proposal was a clear indication it was not interested in national unity and democracy aimed at alleviating the economic pressures on the people.

Other reaction

The National Patriotic Front proposal received a generally favourable response from rank and file Guyanese. It created some optimism that a long-awaited political solution to Guyana's problems was in the offing. But this evaporated as soon as the PNC announced its disinterest.

The WPA, with which the PPP worked together in political cooperation, welcomed the idea of a National Patriotic Front, but felt that the PNC, which had imposed itself on Guyana through rigged elections and the suppression of democracy, should not be included in it. On the other hand, the WPA declared that all political parties and groups opposed to the PNC dictatorship should form the basis of the National Patriotic Front.

But the rejection by the PNC of this effort to foster national unity was a disappointment for the PPP leadership who felt that influential members of the left wing in the PNC could have helped to formulate an agreement. But it was apparent that the leftists in the PNC were politically too weak to cause any shift towards unity with the PPP and other opposition political forces.

As 1977 drew to a close, the PNC regime stepped up its harassment against its political opponents. In September of that year, during a general strike in the sugar industry called by the Guyana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU), it hurriedly enacted legislation giving the Government the right to withdraw the basic rights of the people enshrined in both the Constitution of Guyana and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. It also reactivated Part II of the National Security Act, which gave the regime the right to detain citizens without trial, restrict their movements and institute curfews. The PPP and other opposition parties saw such repressive legislation as forms of intimidation, and feared that the PNC regime would use these new powers to arbitrarily detain trade union and political activists and leaders. This fear became a reality when numerous PPP and GAWU activists were arrested and detained on trumped-up charges and many

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heavily fined in the courts.

With this new situation confronting the anti-PNC forces, the PPP could no longer press for political cooperation with the PNC. General elections were due in 1978 and the PPP stepped up its activities to confront the new wave of political repressions while at the same time campaigning locally and internationally to win democracy for Guyana through free and fair elections.

Chapter 18

The Upper Mazaruni Hydro-Electric Project

During the 1973 election campaign, Prime Minister Forbes Burnham announced that his administration intended to develop a large hydro-electric power complex in the Upper Mazaruni River region aimed at powering an aluminium smelter to be built at Linden. At that time, Guyana was spending more than 25 percent of its Gross Domestic Product on fuel imports costing about \$500 million.

The project idea

Immediately after the massively rigged election, Burnham set about to fulfil this campaign promise. In 1974, he sought the assistance of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which provided a grant to enable a major hydro-electric survey in the country. The UNDP appointed the World Bank as the executing agency and the Montreal Engineering Company was contracted as the consulting firm. The survey included a hydro resource reconnaissance and inventory for all of Guyana, and pre-feasibility studies of a limited number of sites.

Through this survey, it was established that Guyana's total hydro-electric potential amounted to about 7,000MW spread over a number of sites, some of which were inaccessible. The Upper Mazaruni River basin, close to the border with Venezuela, with a capacity of 3000MW was identified as most suitable for development, and a full-scale feasibility study of the area was carried out in 1975.

Around the same time, the Government began to inform the Akawaio Amerindian population in the Upper Mazaruni area of the plan for the

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construction of the dam and the creation of a reservoir for the hydro-electric project. In March 1975, the captains of the seven Akawaio villages in the area were hurriedly called to Georgetown to meet with the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Hubert Jack. But due to the suddenness of the request, two of the captains could not attend. At the meeting, Jack informed the others that the villages in the locality would be flooded as part of the reservoir and that the government wanted their cooperation in the resettlement of the 4,000 residents of their communities.

However, he provided no information as to where they would be resettled. When the chiefs raised objections to this plan, Jack told them that the decision to flood their villages was final and could not be changed. He also tried to convince them that the hydro project would give the Amerindians of the area an opportunity to contribute to the development of Guyana.

According to a report of the meeting carried in London's *The Guardian* on March 21 1975, one of the captains opposed the scheme while the other four present were induced to sign a statement agreeing to the drowning of their villages. The paper stated that the captain who refused to sign was told that he would be barred from the resettlement committee that would be established.

Feasibility studies

Early in 1976, the Government established the Upper Mazaruni Development Authority to administer the installation of the Upper Mazaruni Hydro-Electric Project and the aluminium smelter at Linden.

Later that year, the Government contracted the large Swiss company, Alusuisse, to undertake a feasibility study for the construction of the modern primary aluminium smelter at Linden. At the same time, Sweco, a Swedish consulting group, was contracted with World Bank assistance to conduct a feasibility study for the establishment of the Upper Mazaruni Diversion Scheme, including the building of the dam across the river.

Both studies, completed during 1977, formed the basis for discussion between representatives of the Government of Guyana and multilateral financing agencies including the World Bank. These studies established the technical feasibility of the project with a first phase installed capacity ranging from 750MW to 1200 MW and a smelter with a capacity ranging from 140,000 to 280,000 metric tonnes of aluminium per year.

Such a smelter plant required in excess of 300MW thus providing a base load for electricity development by the hydro-electric scheme which was expected to provide the national grid with about 240MW.

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The plan

The overall plan for the development of the hydro power project involved the construction of a dam at Sand Landing on the Upper Mazaruni River which would create a 500 square kilometres reservoir, largely for regulation of flow rather than height of head. The flooded area was not expected to form a large lake but a much smaller body of water extending into fingers of existing river tributaries, widened when flooded to higher levels.

Also to be constructed was a headrace tunnel about 11 kilometres long through rock to a 4,200 metre drop in elevation leading to an underground powerhouse with accommodation for turbine generators capable of producing 750 to 1200 MW of electricity. The plan also involved running a 400kv double-circuit transmission line, about 370 kilometres long from the powerhouse to Linden where it would enter the national grid. Also to be built was a main access road with an all-weather laterite surface, 320 kilometres in length, from Itaballi, near the mouth of the Mazaruni River, to the dam site. This road was needed to transport construction materials to the site of the hydro-electricity dam and power plant.

This ambitious scheme was expected to provide primary employment for more than 6,000 persons. A new town consisting of 320 apartments was to be built at Kumarau in the Mazaruni to serve personnel operating the installation. This town would also have offices, a guest house, vocational training facilities, a school, shopping centre, church, medical clinic and recreational facilities.

Opposition from the Akawaios

With regard to the flooding resulting from the creation of the reservoir, and the displacement of approximately 4,000 persons, mainly Akawaios, the Minister of Energy in January 1976 set up a resettlement committee to work out compensation terms and proposals for the smooth transition of resettlement. The committee also had the task to explain to the local residents the rationale and the main features of the power project.

It was apparent that the local Akawaio population was very perturbed over the plan to resettle them. A few international groups championing the cause of indigenous peoples took up their concerns and gave them much publicity in the international media. One of these groups was the London based Survivor International (with offices in New York) which rendered advice to the Akawaio population as to how they should publicise their concerns and even opposition to the project.

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Thus, Survivor International warned that despite existing evidence that even minor changes can seriously affect the cultural life of the Akawaio, the Government planners did not take into account the “cultural appropriateness” of new housing for the resettled population.

The resettlement concerns were also raised in early 1977 by the captains of the Akawaio villages when they wrote to the Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham:

This land is where we belong. It is God's gift to us and has made us as we are. This land is where we are at home, we know its way: and the things that happen here are known and remembered, so that the stories the old people told are still alive here. This land is needed for those who come after us. . . . This land is the place where we know where to find all that it provides for us—food for hunting and fishing, and farms, building and tool materials, medicines. Also the spirits around us know us and are friendly and helpful. This land keeps us together within its mountains—we come to understand that we are not just a few people or separate villages, but one people belonging to a homeland. If we had to move we would be lost to those who remain in other villages. This would be a sadness to us all, like the sadness of death. Those who moved would be strangers to the people and spirits and places where they are made to go.

In response to this opposition, the government tried as much as possible to allay the fears of the local residents by explaining the economic benefits that would become available to them with the construction of the hydro-electric project.

Venezuela informed

By the end of 1977, the blue-print for the huge multi-billion dollar hydro-electric project was ready. The drawings and two copies of the feasibility studies done by Sweco were forwarded to the Venezuelan Government which, according to the Guyana Government, did not object to the establishment of the project in that area, even though a part of Venezuelan territory was expected to be flooded on the completion of the scheme. The Guyana Government anticipated, too, that Venezuela would purchase excess energy generated by the hydro-electric turbines.

The Government also submitted an application to the World Bank for financing the project. In the meantime, it had begun to implement the scheme and by 1978 more than US\$25 was already spent from its own resources for starting the construction of the access road.

During the visit of Venezuela's President Carlos Andres Perez in October 1978 to Guyana, the project was fully discussed. At his press conference on 20 October 1978 at the end of his visit, Perez expressed Venezuela's general support for the project by declaring:

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Venezuela has decided to study the possibility of linking the present and future systems of the two countries and purchasing electricity from Guyana on the completion of the hydro-project. . . We will give all we can to help develop this complex.

But according to a report published on 2 April 1981 in the London *Guardian*, while Perez was ready to offer Venezuelan financial help to the hydro-power scheme, his advisers talked him out of it at the last moment. It also claimed that the Venezuelan Government was on the point of reaching a border settlement with Guyana by which Venezuela would have renounced its claim to the Essequibo region in return for some territorial concessions. The report added that this proposal was rejected by Guyana. Subsequently, the Guyana Government denied that there were any discussions on reaching any border compromise.

Venezuela's opposition to the project

Shortly after the inauguration of Venezuelan President Luis Herrera Campins in 1979, Guyana's Minister of Energy and Mines, Hubert Jack, informed Venezuela's Foreign Minister Dr. José Alberto Velasco Zambrano in March 1979 of the progress of the project. The latter's response was that the Venezuelan Government needed time to study it.

The hydro-power project almost immediately after began to experience problems in obtaining international financial backing. Political groups in Venezuela, associated with the new Herrera Campins administration, began to oppose the establishment of the project in the area which they maintained was Venezuelan territory; and, no doubt, these objections caused international lending agencies to be hesitant in financing the project.

According to the monthly *Caribbean Contact* of December 1980, Jack had claimed the previous month that foreign organisations were seeking to influence the World Bank to cancel aid for the project. He said that one such organisation was the Survival International whose objective was to preserve the natural way of life of the indigenous Akawaio Amerindians who would be displaced on the implementation of the hydro-electric scheme. The paper also mentioned that "the Venezuelans were accused by Guyana of economic blackmail against that country."

With respect to the activities of Survival International, the *New York Times* on 18 October 1980 in an editorial, entitled "Twilight of the Primitive," praised the organisation for highlighting the cause of the indigenous peoples. The editorial also observed that the proposed project in the Mazaruni region would involve the construction of a dam on the frontier with Venezuela, and that it "would flood the home of the

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Akawaio, an unoffending tribe known for its cultural vitality. . . But since the dam would involve Guyanese pre-emption of a border area that is also claimed by Venezuela, the project may not materialize. . .”

Up to the end of 1980 the project had not commenced because of the non-availability of international funding. While Guyana was awaiting a decision from the World Bank on its funding application, the *Caribbean Contact* of April 1981 wrote that Brazil was offering political support for the construction of the Mazaruni hydro dam, thus giving recognition of Guyana’s sovereignty over Essequibo.

Burnham, now President of Guyana, visited Venezuela at the beginning of April 1981 and the issue of Venezuela’s cooperation in the implementation of the project was discussed. But events took a dramatic turn on the night of the 4 April 1981, when the Venezuelan Government issued a communiqué stating that because of “Venezuela’s claim on the Essequibo territory” it “asserted the rejection of Venezuela to the hydro-electric project of the upper Mazaruni.” The communiqué also announced that Venezuela had no intention to renew the Protocol of Port of Spain which in 1970 had placed the border issue in abeyance for an initial period of 12 years.

Burnham was very surprised by this Venezuelan action. At a press conference on 8 April 1981, he stated that it was the first time Venezuela was expressing opposition to the Upper Mazaruni Hydro-Electric Project. He said the discussions in Venezuela were generally frank, cordial and open and “we sought to examine how economic and other forms of cooperation could be carried forward especially on the question of the Upper Mazaruni Hydro-Electric Project.”

Responding to questions from reporters, Burnham said that he was not worried about obtaining international financing for the project, and added that the Guyana Government was in active discussions with would-be donors to ensure its success. He also emphasised that the project in no way violated the Protocol of Port of Spain.

Replying to a question on joint development, he said that Guyana never sought to ask Venezuela to assist in joint development of the hydro-electric project. He explained that the cooperation that was sought was in relation to the purchase by Venezuela of the excess power from the project.

Border tensions escalated

The Venezuelan communiqué and Burnham’s counter-statements obviously heated up the tensions between Guyana and Venezuela. In Caracas, the Venezuelan Foreign Affairs Minister, in re-asserting his country’s claim to Guyana’s Essequibo territory, stated on 10 April 1981: “In the specific case of the Upper Mazaruni Dam project, it should be

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made evident on the international level, that its construction, under the present conditions is unacceptable for Venezuela.”

In Guyana, opposition political parties strongly criticised Burnham on his Government's handling of the hydro-electric scheme. On 11 April 1981, the Working People's Alliance stated:

In his many admissions of April 8, under the pressure of his diplomatic failure, Mr. Burnham revealed that the Upper Mazaruni hydro-electric scheme had been planned on the assumption that Venezuela would import the excess output of the scheme. He had no contractual arrangements for this sale of electricity and Venezuela has now opposed the project as a whole. It is hard to see how such an astute politician could have based an important project on such flimsy assumptions. His continuing optimism about being able to finance the project appears misplaced, since financiers will want to know how the electrical output will be traded commercially in order to make the controversial project viable.

Apparently trying to apply some damage control, Burnham arranged meetings between himself and leaders of the two opposition parties in Parliament to discuss the deteriorating state of affairs. On 13 April 1981 he met with the leader of the United Force, Marcellus Fielden-Singh, and with Dr. Cheddi Jagan, leader of the PPP, two days after. At these meetings, Burnham gave them the background about the steps taken by the Government to obtain financial support for the project.

But the PPP, while being sceptical about the project, was also concerned over the heating up of the border tensions and the deteriorating relations with Venezuela. On 23 April 1981, the party stated:

The Guyanese people must be alert against the use by the PNC of the border issue to muster political support in the face of isolation at home and abroad, and to provide an excuse for its failure to implement the Mazaruni hydro-electric smelter project, mooted on the eve of the 1973 general election, and on which tens of millions of dollars have already been expended.

Burnham used his May Day speech the following week at the National Park in Georgetown to thousands of workers to explain the objective of the hydro-electric project. To facilitate its development, he explained that the Government was working on arrangements with the Amerindians, who were living in the area expected to be flooded after the building of the dam, on how they would be involved in the project. He added that the Amerindians would also decide where they would want to resettle.

On the resettlement issue, Dennis Abraham, an Akawaio Amerindian residing in the upper Mazaruni area, in a letter published in the *Mirror*

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on the 3 May 1981, asked the Government to name the area set aside for the resettling of the Akawaios, and claimed that no information had been provided to them. He concluded:

Now that the Upper Mazaruni Hydro-Project is linked with border disputes and territorial claims, it has caused fear of danger to the Amerindian people, particularly the Akawaios who are settled within Upper Mazaruni. It is clear that the present Government is preparing to create refugees out of 4,000 Akawaio Amerindian people from the Upper Mazaruni region.

Dr. Jagan also castigated the Burnham regime for what he regarded as the mishandling of the relations with Venezuela. At a public meeting on 9 May 1981 in Georgetown, he declared:

The PNC now wants everybody to beat their breasts and rally in support of its regime, but patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels. They also want to use the border issue to cover up their failures in the Upper Mazaruni Hydro Project. They have no conception of planning.

Meanwhile, the Guyana Government launched a diplomatic offensive by sending Ministers and diplomats to brief Caricom governments on the Venezuelan claim to Guyana's territory and the objections raised by Venezuela to the hydro-electric project.

The *Caribbean Contact* of May 1981, in a commentary, pointed to the aggressive campaign of Venezuela, and asserted that the Campins administration had already publicly warned Brazil against any cooperation with Guyana in rendering assistance in the economic development of any part of Essequibo, "clearly having in mind the forestalling of the billion-dollar hydro-power project for which the Burnham Government is still to find the necessary development capital."

Venezuela's letter to the World Bank

Venezuelan hostility to the hydro-electric project moved significantly one step further on 8 June 1981 when the Foreign Minister, José Alberto Zambrano Velasco, wrote a letter to the President of the World Bank giving the multilateral institution an ultimatum to refrain from financing the Upper Mazaruni Hydro-Electric Project. While saying that Venezuela had never recognised the arbitral award of 1899, the letter further re-asserted Venezuela's claim to Guyana's territory, and alleged that "the objective pursued by Guyana with its Upper Mazaruni project was political." It also revealed that the Venezuelan Government would recognise "no right nor legal situation which may be involved in the future by third states, international bodies or private corporations" based

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on the exercise of Guyana's sovereignty over the territory claimed by Venezuela.

The letter also attacked the World Bank insisting that it was not within the Bank's "competence" to "prejudge or adopt a position on border controversies." It reaffirmed Venezuela's position of opposition to any transaction between Guyana and the World Bank involving finance of the hydro-electric scheme. In any case, Venezuela argued, the feasibility of the project depended on the purchase of electricity by Venezuela, something which the Venezuelan Government did not intend to do. The letter added:

The construction of the dam over the Upper Mazaruni encompasses considerable works which would alter deeply and irreversibly the region and the physical milieu. Venezuela ratifies its firm opposition to have such a unilateral action of disposition taken in a territory over which it has sovereignty. . .

The opposition of Venezuela is so much firmer as it is quite clear that the political purpose pursued by Guyana with the Upper Mazaruni Project, the priority of which is far from proven and with an economic feasibility, in the denied assumption that it were ever built, which would depend on the acquisition of electric power by Venezuela, and this would never happen under any circumstance. . .

Soon after, newspaper reports indicated that the Venezuelan Government had instructed its senior functionaries in the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to oppose Guyana's applications for funds for projects such as the Upper Mazaruni Hydro-Electric Project. In response to these reports, Carl Greenidge, the economic adviser to President Burnham—according to a report in the *Guyana Chronicle* of 21 June 1981—pointed out that the importance of Venezuelan influence should not be over-rated and that its threat to pursue economic aggression against Guyana by opposing the international financing of projects in the Essequibo was not likely to have more than nuisance value. He was firm on the belief that the reported intention of Venezuela would have no effect on either future applications from or disbursements of loans to Guyana from the international banks.

The matter of Venezuela's economic aggression was regarded with grave concern within Caricom. On the 23 June 1981, Caricom delegations attending a meeting of the World Bank in Washington issued a joint statement on this economic aggression against Guyana and deplored Venezuela's most recent attempt to prevent World Bank financing for the hydro-electric project.

This support was followed by a statement issued by Caricom Foreign Ministers who met in Grenada on 30 June – 1 July 1981. The Ministers declared that Caricom states could not accept that any state had the right

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to action to frustrate the economic development of any other state, and expressed full support for Guyana's effort to develop hydro-power in the Upper Mazaruni.

Guyana's letter to the World Bank

The Venezuela letter to the World Bank was sharply attacked on 19 September 1981 when Desmond Hoyte, Guyana's Vice-President for Economic Planning and Finance, wrote a lengthy letter to the President of the institution, A. W. Clausen. Hoyte's letter rejected Venezuela's claim to Guyana's territory, and added:

It is not within the competence of the Government of Venezuela to decide on or dictate the development priorities of Guyana; nor has the Government of Guyana found any provision in the Bank's charter that requires the Bank to satisfy the Government of Venezuela about the development priorities of a member country before it participates in a project in that country. Moreover, it is manifest absurdity for the Government of Venezuela to suggest that the Bank would become involved in the financing of a project without first establishing its feasibility. Further on this point, I would merely add that the Venezuelan Foreign Minister is under a misconception when he asserts that the feasibility of the project depends on the purchase of electricity by Venezuela. This statement is completely divorced from fact. The project has been independently assessed by the World Bank, among others, as being technically and economically feasible, in circumstances which do not involve or require Venezuelan participation in any shape or form. . .

In the circumstances, the Government of Guyana interprets the communication of the 8th June, 1981, as an undisguised attempt by the Venezuelan Government to manipulate the Bank and use it as an instrument for achieving its ulterior political ends.

Suspension of the project

With Venezuela maintaining its opposition to any World Bank financing, further work on the project was suspended and hundreds of workers were laid off. In a scathing attack on Venezuela, Burnham, in a speech on 23 February 1982 to mark Guyana's republic anniversary, referred to the Venezuelan Government's "attempt to block the World Bank's sponsorship of our hydro-power project; the pontifical statement that the hydro-power project is neither suitable for, or in the interest of Guyana; her lobbying of international agencies against investment in, or sponsorship, of projects in western Essequibo; protest to nations and corporations involved or to be involved in economic ventures along with the Government of Guyana in the area; a general campaign of economic aggression; interference in the internal affairs of Guyana. . . ."

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Venezuela's objection to the hydro-electric project and its continuing claim to Guyana's Essequibo territory apparently had an effect on its application to join the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to which Guyana, as a long standing member, raised opposition. At a meeting of the NAM Bureau in New York on the 15 February 1983, Venezuela deferred its application for full membership for the time being as Guyana had not indicated its willingness to withdraw its opposition to it. Subsequently, the Venezuelan Foreign Minister wrote a letter to the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the UN—the Chairman of the Bureau—accusing Guyana of exercising “a sort of veto” to keep out Venezuela from the NAM, and also claiming that Guyana had not received any support from the Movement on the border issue.

Commenting on Venezuela's withdrawal of its application, Burnham in his Republic Day address on the 23 February 1983 pointed out that Guyana had no veto in the NAM, as Venezuela wanted others to believe. Explaining the position, he declared:

We merely tried to have Venezuela declare her adherence to certain principles of the Movement, namely, non-use of force in the furtherance or support of territorial claims, the employment of peaceful means in settling disputes and abjuring economic aggression and, therefore, the withdrawal of the objection to our Upper Mazaruni complex lodged with the President of the World Bank. . . The Venezuelan Government must know why the application was really suspended. The reason given publicly is obviously spurious. . .

The Guyana Foreign Ministry on the 26 February 1983 also rejected Venezuela's “several false and scurrilous accusations” contained in the letter, and stated that these were part and parcel of the ill-conceived propaganda techniques of the Venezuelan Government. Venezuela's claim that Guyana received no support from the Movement was dismissed as “arrant nonsense.”

Burnham expressed similar sentiments two months later on May Day 1982 when he addressed a rally at the National Park in Georgetown.

By 1984, the Guyana Government, after spending over a billion Guyana dollars on various aspects of the project, including employment costs, and failing to acquire international financing, eventually decided not to proceed any longer with it. As a result, the plan for the aluminium smelter was also shelved.

Chapter 19

The Rigged Referendum of 1978

A general election was due to be held in 1978. Parliament was expected to be prorogued on 25 July to be followed by the election not later than 25 October. Five years previously the PNC had executed wide-scale rigging which gave it a two-thirds majority in Parliament.

The Constitution (Amendment) Bill

But while Guyanese awaited an announcement of a date for the new election, Prime Minister Forbes Burnham and his PNC surprised them by moving to postpone the election. They did this by introducing on 1 April 1978 a Constitution (Amendment) Bill No. 8 of 1978 in Parliament with the aim of changing Article 73 of the Constitution. The proposed Bill sought to hold a referendum which would abolish any further referendum to change the entrenched provisions of the constitution, viz., State and its Territories, the Exercise of the President's Powers, the Composition, Sessions and Dissolution of Parliament, and the Electoral System.

The Bill also proposed that any future constitutional change would be made by two-thirds parliamentary majority which the PNC held at that time. Clearly, the overall objective was to postpone the general election due that year and to perpetuate the PNC regime in power.

Without consulting the parliamentary opposition, the PNC rushed the Bill through Parliament which approved it 10 April 1978. A subsequent procedural Bill stipulated that the referendum should be held on the 10 July 1978 on the basis of the existing voters' list. Additional

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legislation was also enacted to remove the right by citizens to appeal in the Supreme Court against the referendum results.

At the time the Bill was introduced, the entire country was experiencing an on-going collapse of electricity and water services and a shortage of essential food items. The people were more concerned about these problems and paid little attention to parliamentary activities. Even though they could do little to stop the Bill from passing, by the time they realised its implications, it had already been passed by the rigged PNC majority.

Opposition to the referendum Bill

Since the Bill intended to give the PNC full powers to change the constitution without any further involvement of the people—by having a referendum to end all future referendums—the PPP initiated efforts to unite all the opposition political parties and some trade unions and religious organisations to oppose the measure. Very quickly, these groups, with the exception of the United Force, united to form the Committee in Defence of Democracy (CDD) to coordinate national opposition to the Bill and its accompanying referendum question.

In addition to the PPP, this broad-based group included the Working People's Alliance, People's Democratic Movement, Liberator Party, Progressive Youth Organisation, Guyana Agricultural Workers Union, Rice Producers' Association, Women's Progressive Organisation, Civil Liberties Action Council, Guyana Peace Council, Organisation of Working People, Democratic Teachers' Movement, Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha and United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman.

Soon after, another anti-Bill group, the Concerned Citizens' Committee (CCC) was formed by a number of non-political professional groups. The members of this Committee were the Lawyers' Committee, Architects' Committee, Committee of Medical Practitioners, Committee of Concerned Educators, University of Guyana Staff Association, Clerical and Commercial Workers Union and the National Association of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Employees with the Guyana Council of Churches as an observer.

Both the CDD and the CCC coordinated their activities and immediately proceeded to educate the population about the nature of the Constitution (Amendment) Bill and at the same time urged its withdrawal. The Lawyers' Committee (of the CCC) prepared a paper summarising the objections to the proposed legislation. The paper explained that the Bill sought to deprive the Guyanese people of their rights to approve or disapprove any new constitution in the future, noting that the requirement of the direct approval of the people to substantial alteration was most essential for a democratic constitution. It

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emphasised that the Bill was an attempt to get the electorate to place a blank cheque on the national future in the hands of a spent Parliament.

Shortly after, the Guyana Council of Churches declared that the Bill placed too much power in the hands of any parliament and it was too great a temptation for the current or future parliaments to assume more power than was appropriate.

These fears as expressed by the Lawyers' Committee and the Guyana Council of Churches were echoed by all political and civic groups that opposed the Bill and the referendum proposal.

PNC repression of referendum opponents

The PNC Government was not prepared to accept opposition to the referendum. During the first week of July 1978, in a blatant act by the government to punish dissent, it informed the *Catholic Standard*, the weekly newspaper of the Catholic Church and a sharp critic of the Bill, that its contract with the state-owned publishing company to print the paper was terminated with immediate effect. The state company during that period controlled the importation of newsprint and refused to sell any to the *Catholic Standard* whose publishers were thus forced to print the paper in a photo-stencilled format in smaller quantities.

Other incidents aimed at clamping down on dissent occurred as the referendum date drew near. The state-owned *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper refused to accept paid advertisements by opposition political parties announcing their political meetings. As a result, the chairman of the Liberator Party, Dr. Makepeace Richmond, filed a writ in the Supreme Court against the newspaper claiming that such refusal violated the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression.

Then a peaceful picket exercise outside of the Parliament Buildings was violently attacked by thugs associated with the PNC. The leader of the Liberator Party, Dr. Ganraj Kumar, and national poet Martin Carter were severely beaten in the presence of policemen. That same afternoon, a meeting of the Committee in Defence of Democracy (CDD) at the St. George's Cathedral was violently broken up by stick-wielding thugs transported in government-owned vehicles. Several persons were injured and had to be hospitalised.

Another act of intimidation occurred when four University of Guyana students studying late in the evening on the campus were forced into a vehicle by thugs and taken to the sea-wall. There their abductors severely beat them with a metal-webbed belt before a crowd of about thirty PNC supporters. After this torture, the thugs forced them to paint pro-government slogans on the sea-wall for over an hour.

As expected, despite media publicity of these incidents and the identification of some of the thugs, no one was arrested.

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Stifling the views of opponents

On the whole, the referendum campaign was marked by the PNC supporting the proposal and all other political parties opposing it.

The government blatantly refused the anti-Bill viewpoints to be given publicity in the state-owned media which, in any case ridiculed and distorted them in various “analyses.” After their press releases were ignored by the state media, the Guyana Council of Churches and the Lawyers’ Committee attempted to have these published as paid advertisements, but these were bluntly refused by both the state-owned newspaper and radio. The Prime Minister, Hamilton Green, justified this action on the grounds that “paid advertisements were inconsistent with socialism as they gave the wealthier groups in society, an advantage the poorer ones do not enjoy.”

The weekly “Catholic Broadcast,” a radio programme of the Catholic Church, was not aired on 21 May because it contained a discussion of the referendum. Green, in offering an excuse, said that “paid advertisements would not be allowed in connection with this matter but that provision will be made in due course for full discussion by all sections of the radio and in the press.” But as expected, this never happened.

The government also refused to consider the opposition’s request to invite a team of observers from the Caribbean to witness the referendum.

In one of its numerous statements the CDD drew attention to the fact that voters had no right of appeal to the courts after the referendum. The group also noted that many public employees, including members of the Police and the Guyana Defence Forces, were forced to sign blank proxy forms on which they were not allowed to name the person who should vote for them.

Opposition to the Bill was very strong and there was no doubt that in the event of a fair vote, people would vote solidly against the PNC government’s proposal in the referendum. In a unilateral act, the government, in preparing ballots for the referendum, assigned the symbols of a house to the “Yes” vote and a mouse to the “No” vote. Opposition groups immediately condemned this as intimidating, prejudicial, and inimical to the fair and impartial conduct of the referendum. The CDD said that choosing the symbols was unfair and discriminatory, adding that “the mouse is a symbol that the average human being finds offensive.”

With the symbols decided by the government, the PNC publicised its referendum campaign by urging people to “vote for the house.”

By and large, the anti-Bill groups could only manage to have their views widely expressed in the *Mirror*, the pro-PPP newspaper which was printed five days a week. But this paper was also stifled and forced to reduce its size and circulation because the government refused to sell

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newsprint to its publishers. The PPP also held numerous public meetings throughout the country to inform the people about the expanding trend of the PNC dictatorship associated with the referendum Bill and the referendum itself. In some areas, the public PPP meetings were broken up violently by armed thugs associated with the ruling party.

The boycott

Faced with the fact that the government was organising the referendum without consulting with opposition parliamentary parties, the CDD and CCC requested a meeting with the Minister of Home Affairs, Vibert Mingo. After the Minister refused to meet with representatives of the two groups, they sent a joint letter to him setting out minimum demands considered essential for a free and fair referendum.

These demands were:

1. Final counting must be done in the polling places where the votes were cast.
2. Para-military forces must not be given access to ballot boxes before, during or after voting.
3. Agents appointed by opposition parties must (i) be permitted to examine the ballot boxes prior to voting; (ii) be present throughout voting; (iii) stay with the boxes from closure until completion of counting.
4. The boxes must be properly sealed in the presence of agents after a preliminary count.
5. Lists of proxy and postal voters must be available for inspection by recognised Opposition parties at least a week before polling day.
6. Counting must be continuous and done in the presence of the above-mentioned agents.
7. The announcement of results must be made as soon as they become available and be continuous.
8. A report on the referendum must be published within a reasonable time showing the numbers of postal, proxy and overseas votes separately.

Despite reminders, the Minister did not even reply to this letter from all the Opposition parties.

With the Minister clearly unwilling to guarantee these minimum demands, both the CDD and the CCC urged the Guyanese people to boycott the referendum. The United Force, the only opposition political party outside of the CDD, also called for a boycott.

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The electoral roll

The opposition political parties as well as the CDD and the CCC raised numerous objections over the electoral roll since they believed, with justification, that it was heavily padded. According to a population projection prepared by the United Nations Development Programme office in Guyana, the total eligible voters (above 18 years of age) was estimated at about 535,335, taking into consideration the officially registered overseas votes.

However, the official figure for the referendum was given by the government as 609,522. Interestingly, the official government figure for the total population in 1975 was 780,000. The opposition parties feared that this high electoral roll could only be arrived at by adding fictitious names to the list.

Monitoring of the poll

For the referendum, the country was divided into 38 electoral districts, which in turn were sub-divided into 1,170 polling divisions, of which 107 were located in the residences of PNC supporters. However, the PPP claimed that it could locate only 829 polling divisions.

The government certainly promoted fears that it was preparing to rig the results of the referendum. It refused to provide to the Guyanese people even the minimal assurances about the fairness and legality of the referendum exercise. It also denied permission to international observers to be present in Guyana. As a result the CCC organised a monitoring exercise outside of polling stations on the day of the referendum.

But to do this, the CCC and the organisation within the CDD had to face many stumbling blocks. Their task was made difficult by the shortness of time and the lack of information on the numbers and addresses of polling stations.

Actually, addresses of polling stations were not made public until 8 July, two days before the referendum day, and this presented the CCC with difficulties in placing external monitors and for the opposition parties to name polling agents.

Faced with these difficulties, the CCC monitors were concentrated mainly in Georgetown, and the East Coast and East Bank, Demerara. Except for two Corentyne Districts, where the CCC fielded monitors as well, the observation by this group took place mainly in a large number of areas of traditional support for the PNC. The PPP which had polling agents posted inside most of the polling stations also was able to observe first hand the conduct of the poll and the people's participation in the referendum.

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It was apparent from the early morning of 10 July that most of the voters had heeded the boycott call. There was a trickle of voters and PNC activists used motor vehicles to transport their supporters to the polling places. But even the PNC faced a rebellion from many of their own supporters who refused to participate claiming that they did not need to vote. They felt the referendum would be a walk-over victory for the government as a result of the opposition boycott.

At the polling stations, each voter was handed a ballot to chose “Yes” or “No” to the question: “Do you approve of the Constitutional (Amendment) Bill No. 8 of 1978 and published in the *Official Gazette* of May 13th, 1978?”

Referendum day showed very little activity. Most people stayed at home and commercial activity was unusually low. However, there was a heavy military presence on the streets and armed patrols in full battle dress moved about the city in single file. Polling stations in rural areas were almost deserted except when state-owned motor vehicles brought in groups of PNC supporters to vote.

Several incidents of violence occurred when opposition party politicians attempted to photograph vehicles used to recycle voters. The chairman of the Liberator Party, Dr. Makepeace Richmond, and PPP parliamentary Cyril Belgrave, were beaten by thugs and the latter had to be hospitalised.

Presiding officers at some polling station also ordered PPP polling agents to leave the buildings while others had their official credentials rejected. In some cases where these agents refused to leave, they were violently ejected by policemen and PNC activists.

Clearly, the PNC wanted to show large numbers of votes in the referendum, so panic set in an hour before the close of the poll. The activists began a frenzied transportation of PNC supporters to various polling stations where they constantly recycled their votes in the face of objections by PPP agents. But their objections were over-ruled by the presiding officers who were all activists of the PNC.

The “results”

According to the CCC, the CDD and the PPP, the heavy boycott resulted in only about 14 percent of the electorate turning out to vote. However, after a period of two days during which the government claimed the votes were counted—in the absence of opposition observers—the official results declared that 71.45 percent of the electorate voted, of which 97.7 supported the referendum proposal.

There was widespread condemnation by numerous political and non-political organisations inside and outside Guyana of the blatant rigging of

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the referendum results. All of them agreed that the PNC regime was now fully bent in building a dictatorship in Guyana.

However, the regime quickly received congratulations from a number of Caricom governments on scoring the referendum “win” for its constitutional proposal.

On 17 July, 1978, one week after the referendum, the government, using its new power amended the constitution by its two-thirds parliamentary majority to prolong the life of Parliament and thus avoided the need for a general election. Four days after, the Parliament reconstituted itself into a Constituent Assembly to draft a new “socialist” constitution for the country. There was strong opposition by the PPP and other organisations within the CCC and the CDD to this move; the PPP itself refused to participate in the work of the Constituent Assembly.

The Constituent Assembly received submissions of constitutional proposals from a number of organisations, including some which were very friendly to the PNC, but in the end it accepted only the draft presented by the PNC, much to the dismay of the Trade Union Congress which had presented comprehensive proposals.

A reconvened Parliament in 1980 then approved by two-thirds majority this PNC draft which became the new constitution of Guyana. This new constitution created the post of an executive President with almost unlimited powers and established a system of ten regional councils while drastically reducing the role of the opposition. The government then called a general election in December 1980 and promptly rigged it to increase its proportion of the vote to almost 78 percent. Arthur Chung, the titular figure-head powerless President, then resigned and Forbes Burnham was soon after sworn in as the first executive President of Guyana under this new PNC-written constitution.

Chapter 20

Mass Murder, Secret Plots and Assassinations (1978-1980)

In the early 1970s when there were intermittent military manoeuvres by Venezuela along the border with Guyana, the PNC administration of Forbes Burnham moved quietly to strategically strengthen the western border. Apparently, the regime had been thinking of using the western Essequibo, particularly the North West District, as a buffer zone to halt any military aggression from Venezuela. It, therefore, without much information revealed to the public, arranged for the American preacher, Jim Jones, and members of his cult, the People's Temple, to settle in the North West District near the Barima River from August 1974. Jim Jones' settlement, called Jonestown, located not far from Port Kaituma, was secretly given autonomy by the Guyana Government, and it became, according to the *Mirror* editorial of the 21 November 1978, "a state within a state."

The Jonestown tragedy

Leading members of the PNC government were closely associated with the People's Temple in Guyana which also publicly rendered political support to the activities organised by the ruling party. Members of the cult participated in PNC political functions and were also involved in breaking up a number of public meetings held by the PPP and other opposition groups.

On the 18 November 1978, three days before the *Mirror* editorial was written, 914 Jonestown settlers, including Jim Jones himself and a US

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Congressman, Leo Ryan, who was visiting the settlement to listen to the grievances of the cult members, perished in a shocking, bizarre murder-suicide operation. Apparently, Jones ordered the murder-suicide operation after a number of cultists decided to leave the settlement and return to the USA with Ryan. In the days that followed, GDF soldiers who were sent to Jonestown to assist in the removal of the bodies, discovered huge arsenals of highly sophisticated automatic weapons in the settlement.

According to the PPP and other opposition groups in Guyana, it was the intention of the PNC, not only to allow Jim Jones to carry out his shady deals in order to obtain strongly armed cultists to assist the regime in putting down any popular uprising, but also to use the settlement and the cult of causing Venezuela to think twice before it could invade Guyana. The reasoning behind this contention was the fact that the Jonestown settlers were in the overwhelming majority American citizens, and Venezuela would be cautious not to attack them or to occupy their settlement. In case of a Venezuelan invasion, the USA would be forced to support Guyana since American citizens would also be under attack. Venezuela itself would not want any military confrontation with the USA.

Shortly before the Jonestown murder-suicide, President Carlos Andres Perez of Venezuela in October 1978 paid a two-day visit to Guyana, at a period when relations between Guyana and Brazil were becoming more and more friendly. His itinerary included a visit to Jonestown, but this was cancelled at the last moment. No reason was given by the Guyana Government for the cancellation of Perez' visit to Jonestown, but some media reports indicated that Venezuela was against the settlement of the People's Temple in that area. An editorial in the 30 January 1979 issue of the *Mirror* also expressed a similar view when it stated: Another reason may be that Guyana did not fare so well during the last high-level meeting with Venezuelan President Perez, and failed to reach an agreement. The Jonestown affair had not made relations any better, particularly with the strong suggestions that Jonestown was set up with the consent of the Guyana Government as a buffer in the disputed territory."

In May 1979, the *Caribbean Contact* printed an extract of a lecture on the Jonestown tragedy, delivered at the University of the West Indies (UWI) Cave Hill Campus in Barbados by the UWI historian, Professor Gordon Lewis. Professor Lewis made the claim that the Jonestown commune could be seen as a deliberate attempt by the PNC regime to have the settlement act to firmly establish Guyana's ownership to the territory claimed by Venezuela, with similar motives as the Israeli's establishment of settlements on the so-called disputed West Bank of the Jordan River.

However, the PNC denied that there was any such strategy and

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maintained that the Jonestown settlers were agriculturalists intent on developing the interior. Two days after the tragedy—on the 20 November 1978—the Guyana Minister of Information, Shirley Field-Ridley, admitted at a press conference that the followers of the People's Temple subscribed to some of the objectives of the PNC. The Government, she said, had no problems with the Temple whose members had “established a reputation for themselves as being good farmers, industrious and hard working.”

A complete denial of the involvement of the PNC regime in the Jonestown affair was made by Christopher “Kit” Nascimento, the Guyana Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister, in a letter published in the *Caribbean Contact* of June 1979. The letter was actually a reply to the extract of the lecture of Professor Gordon Lewis which had been published the previous month in that newspaper. Nascimento asked in his letter if “in historical terms, a legitimate parallel might not be drawn between the settlement of the Pilgrims in Massachusetts in 1620 and the People's Temple of Guyana in 1974.”

The House of Israel

A fugitive from the US, David Hill, was given asylum in Guyana in 1972. He had fled Cleveland in 1972, while he was appealing conviction of corporate blackmail. Under a new name, Rabbi Edward Emmanuel Washington, he established a cult following of hundreds of members under a so-called religious organisation called the House of Israel. This cult, made up of Afro-Guyanese, bore striking similarities with that of Jim Jones' People's Temple. The House of Israel expressed its loyalty to the PNC and its members were involved in numerous violent acts against political opponents of the regime. Their actions included the violent breaking up of opposition public meetings, attacking anti-government demonstrations and working as strike-breakers whenever government workers went on strike for improved wages and better working conditions.

Murder of Father Darke

The year before, in May 1979, the Working People's Alliance (WPA), a small anti-PNC political pressure group, which was making inroads into the PNC Afro-Guyanese support, declared itself a political party with the primary aim of removing the PNC from power. The WPA, of which Dr. Walter Rodney, a renowned Third World scholar and historian, was recognised as leader, worked very closely with the PPP in organising the referendum boycott and in agitating against the PNC, even though it expressed tactical differences with the PPP in carrying out the struggle

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against the regime.

On the morning of July 11, 1979, the building housing the Ministry of National Development and the Office of the General Secretary of the PNC and the GUYSUCO building next to it were destroyed by fire. The government claimed that the fire was deliberately set and that the watchmen had been tied up and transported across Georgetown to a suburb on the East Coast, by men dressed in army uniforms.

Subsequently, Dr. Rodney and other leading WPA members, Bonita Harris, Kwame Apata, Maurice Odle, Omawale, Rupert Roopnaraine, Karen de Souza, Walter Rodney and Davo Nandlall, were questioned by the police and subsequently charged with arson.

On the morning of 14 July 1979, the WPA leaders charged with arson appeared at the Georgetown Magistrate Court on Brickdam to answer the charge. A WPA-organised protest demonstration was mounted outside the court and numerous press photographers were observing and snapping pictures. Among them was Father Bernard Darke, a Roman Catholic priest, who also took photos for the weekly *Catholic Standard*, was also a high school teacher at the St. Stanislaus College located just across the street from the Magistrate Court.

Fr. Darke, taking his cameras with him, had gone to the college that morning and he took some shots of the WPA demonstration outside the Magistrates' Court and returned to the college. Shortly after, the WPA leaders, after being granted bail, were transported in a police van to the Camp Street prison where the police planned to release them away from the crowds.

The WPA demonstrators marched with their pickets along Brickdam behind the van, and as they passed the college, Fr. Darke came out on the street to snap more photographs. Suddenly, as the demonstrators passed the Brickdam Police Station, they were attacked by a group of young men, carrying staves, cutlasses and knives. The assailants were all members of the House of Israel. To escape the brutal attack, the demonstrators ran in all directions with many running into yards opposite the Police Station.

As people were attacked by the House of Israel thugs, Fr. Darke took photographs of what was happening. Then three of the gang turned on him and beat him with staves. As he ran towards the street corner, one of them then stabbed him with a bayonet in the back.

Mike James, a journalist, and Jomo Yearwood, a bauxite worker, were also seriously wounded in separate attacks. Plainclothes policeman appearing on the scene fired two shots in the air to scatter the thugs and quickly made some arrests.

The police took Fr. Darke to the Georgetown Public Hospital, where he was given immediate attention. He was later transferred to the St.

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Joseph's Mercy Hospital and operated on by two surgeons to repair his damaged lung. However, at around 6:00 p.m. he died.

Subsequently, five men, all members of the House of Israel, were convicted in court for carrying dangerous weapons during their attack. However, they were given barely minimum fines. One of them, Bilal Ato, who stabbed Fr. Darke was charged with murder. His trial came up three years later and he pleaded "not guilty of murder" but "guilty of manslaughter." He was eventually sentenced by Justice Pompey to eight years in prison.

Murder of Vincent Teekah

One of the biggest cover-ups occurred when Vincent Teekah, the Minister of Education, was killed on the night of 24 October 1979. He died of a bullet wound and it was apparent that the shot was fired at very close range. Teekah was in the company of an American dentist, Dr. Oswaldene Walker, who lived in Maryland, USA, and worked at Howard University in Washington D.C. She was visiting Guyana as the private dentist for Prime Minister Burnham.

Around midnight on October 24 she arrived with the already cold body of Teekah at the St Joseph's Mercy Hospital in Teekah's car. There he was pronounced dead on arrival.

According to Dr Walker's story, two men had attacked them as Teekah was showing her the sights, and he had been shot while they parked on the East Bank Demerara roadside, just south of Georgetown. After calling for help, she reported that an Indo-Guyanese man had helped her to shift the body over from the driver's seat and he had accompanied her as she to the hospital.

Immediately after Teekah was pronounced dead, she tried unsuccessfully to contact Prime Minister Burnham by phone. She then drove the car with the corpse to the Prime Minister's residence where she stayed the night.

Early the next morning, Dr. Walker was taken to the airport by Shirley Field-Ridley, wife of Minister Hamilton Green. There she was put on the flight which left for the United States. Dr. Walker was the only known witness to the shooting, but her hasty removal from Guyana meant that she could not be questioned by the police.

According to Fr. Andrew Morrison, writing in his book *Justice*, "the police should certainly have wanted to know how a shot fired from outside the car could have entered Teekah's right hip and travelled horizontally across his body and how the body could have been cold on arrival at the hospital if it had been brought there in about fifteen minutes after the shooting."

Morrison added:

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Watchmen in the area where the shooting was supposed to have taken place reported that they heard two shots fired in rapid succession at about 11.30 p.m. that night, that a car had been parked in that area for some time and it started and moved off in great haste after the shots were fired. The hustling out of the country of the only reported witness and the silence of the police, apart from ruling out death by accident, drew widespread charges of yet another deliberate cover-up by the authorities.

The police ruled out accidental death by his own gun since the bullet that killed him was not from his personal the pistol which was found on him.

The plan to settle Cambodian refugees in Guyana

The murder-suicide of the 914 Jonestown settlers foiled any plan to use the settlement as a “buffer.” However, the PNC regime, from December 1979, again secretly arranged with organisations closely allied with US political policies, to settle members of the Hmong tribe from south-east Asia in the Waini-Yarakita district north-west of Jonestown. The fiercely anti-communist Hmong tribesmen (also called Meos), had become “refugees” from Kampuchea (Cambodia) after they joined American, and later Chinese and other anti-nationalist forces, in fighting against the patriotic forces and their Vietnamese allies who were battling against the genocidal Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea (Cambodia). Apparently, here again, the plan was for the USA to offer assistance to the Hmong tribesmen and their PNC sponsors in resisting armed Venezuelan encroachment on Guyanese territory.

Lengthy protest articles on the proposed Hmong settlement issue appeared during April 1980 in a number of leading newspapers in Britain, Canada and the USA. The *Mirror* of 18 May 1980 stated that British journalist, Greg Chamberlain, in an article under the caption “Guyana Alert on Refugees” in the British *Guardian* stated that Venezuela had warned the Guyana Government not to go ahead with the settlement plan in what Venezuela said was a disputed frontier region.

However, the Hmong settlement plan backfired after the PPP discovered and exposed the secret agreement, and public outcry caused the Government to officially abort the scheme on the 6 May 1980. In exposing the scheme, the PPP pointed to the possibility that the Hmong could also be used to assist the regime in battling any popular uprising in Guyana.

Assassination of Walter Rodney

Meanwhile, the WPA continued to face severe pressure from the PNC regime. On 18 November 1979, one of its activists Ohene Koama, was

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shot dead by the police in South Georgetown. The WPA said he was unarmed and accused the police of murder. Then three months later, on 25 February 1980, Edward Dublin, another WPA member, was shot to death by the police in Linden. The police claimed that Dublin had firearms in his possession and was shot after he resisted arrest.

This persecution against WPA leaders came to a head on the evening of 13 June 1980 when Dr. Rodney was assassinated by a bomb blast while sitting in his car with his brother Donald a few blocs from the Georgetown prison. Donald survived with minor injuries. The bomb was planted in an apparatus said to be a walkie-talkie set given to him by Gregory Smith, a sergeant in the GDF. Smith had befriended Dr. Rodney who apparently trusted him and, according to a statement by Donald Rodney, Smith had told them to test the apparatus outside the Georgetown prison. However, the Rodney brothers departed from this plan and parked their vehicle some distance away from the prison before Walter pressed the “walkie-talkie” switch which activated the hidden bomb. Interestingly, shortly after the explosion, the state-controlled radio gave a news flash that Dr. Rodney died in an explosion outside the Georgetown prison!

It was apparent that Smith was an agent of the PNC regime and had revealed the information that Dr. Rodney would “test” the equipment outside the prison. After Dr. Rodney’s assassination, the GDF stoutly denied the existence of any Sergeant Gregory Smith in its ranks, and numerous statements issued by the Ministry of Information suggested that Dr. Rodney died accidentally when a bomb he had in his possession went off prematurely. And some PNC spokespersons, still believing that the explosion occurred near to the prison, even claimed that Rodney was attempting to destroy the prison walls to allow certain prisoners to escape.

Meanwhile, Gregory Smith was flown out of Guyana in an army helicopter on 16 June 1980 and several years later he was located by journalist Rickey Singh in French Guiana where he was working with a fishing company.

More than 35,000 people joined the funeral procession along the East Coast Demerara highway to Georgetown where his body was interred.

Protests over Dr. Rodney’s assassination also came from all over the world, even from a number of governments including those of Michael Manley of Jamaica and Maurice Bishop of Grenada, as well as from the Communist Party of Cuba. Many statements from international bodies and even governments implicated the PNC in the assassination, but to these accusations, the ruling party issued strong denials of any responsibility.

Chapter 21

The Elusive Search for Political Unity (1975-1982)

In the immediate post 1975 period, little progress was achieved in attaining formal unity between the PPP and other political forces. The PNC had rejected the PPP's call in 1976 for the formation of a National Patriotic Front government, but later that year it initiated discussions with the PPP to discuss the idea and other issues of political cooperation. During these talks the PNC gave tentative support to a type of "Fatherland Front" like that operating at the time in Bulgaria, but later dropped the idea.

The failed PNC-PPP talks

While the talks were continuing, there were some hopes that a national government of the PNC and PPP would have been formed. However, the PNC-PPP talks collapsed in December 1976 after the PPP, through the *Mirror*, criticised the government's removal of subsidies which placed added pressures on the standard of living of the people.

The PPP believed that two main factors influenced the PNC to discontinue discussions on the formation of a National Patriotic Front government: firstly, pressures from imperialist quarters forced the PNC administration to agree to increase the compensation payments to Bookers McConnell Company for the nationalisation of the firm's sugar estates instead of the \$1 (one dollar) that was initially agreed; secondly, the PPP's opposition to the PNC's decision to put the burden of the economic crisis on the backs of the people, beginning with the removal of

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subsidies. On the other hand, the PNC charged that the PPP was only interested in a share in the government to save itself.

The PNC subsequently postponed the elections in 1978, held a massively rigged referendum aimed at changing the constitution, and then crudely rigged the national and regional elections in 1980.

Efforts to unite opposition groups

In the struggle against the anti-democratic PNC regime, the PPP, as the main opposition Party, also made efforts to unite all the opposition groups to take a common position. In these efforts, many difficulties were encountered, most hinging on matters of ideology. The PPP was Marxist-Leninist while the other parties, all very small, ranged from the far right to the far left in ideological orientation.

The small opposition parties included the Working People's Vanguard Party (WPVP) which was formed by Brindley Benn and a few individuals who resigned from the PPP in 1968. This party developed close links with the Indian Political Revolutionary Associates (IPRA), a group formed in 1972 by ex-PPP member Moses Bhagwan and some others who had also switched their support from the PPP.

The WPVP, with a Maoist orientation, later linked with the Ratoon Group, (also a leftist Maoist radical organisation with many of its members among the academics at the University of Guyana), IPRA, the leftist urban-based Movement Against Oppression (MAO) headed by university professor Dr. Joshua Ramsammy, and Eusi Kwayana's African Society for Cultural Relations with Independent Africa (ASCRIA) to form the Working People's Alliance (WPA) in 1974.

But in 1976, the WPVP turned full ideological circle, seceded from the WPA, and joined up with the rightist Liberator Party (LP), (led by Ganraj Kumar), and the People's Democratic Movement (PDM), (led by ex-PNC minister Llewellyn John), to form the Vanguard for Liberation and Democracy (VLD), which expressed strong support for a right-wing capitalist ideology. Clearly, the differences in ideology led to differences in tactics and strategy and, as a result, the opposition parties could not develop a common platform for unity to combat the PNC.

In early 1978, the PPP attempted to bring together all democratic, progressive and revolutionary forces in a National Patriotic Front. The Party emphasised that this would not be a "left" front and that its programme would be in line with the stage of historical socio-economic and political development in Guyana.

With particular reference to the right of centre parties, the PPP explained that there was a clear distinction between monopoly foreign capital and local capital, emphasised that there was a definite place for the private sector, and illustrated the historical role played by small

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businessmen and patriotic capitalists in the building of just democratic societies in the socialist countries.

Establishment of the CDD

However, the LP, WPVP and the PDM refused to participate in the discussions. But later in the year, they joined with the PPP and the other opposition parties—except the UF which refused to join—and civil society organisations, including religious bodies, to form the broad-based Committee in Defence of Democracy (CDD) to campaign against the referendum aimed at postponing general elections and changing the constitution.

Problems within the CDD

Despite this show of anti-PNC unity in opposing the referendum, the ideological differences caused some in-fighting within the CDD. For instance, the LP made use of this popular platform to spread anti-socialist and anti-communist ideas. It attacked land reform and “the land to the tiller” slogan of the PNC, and it also castigated socialism claiming that it had failed in Guyana. The PPP objected to this propagandising but the LP retaliated by insisting that the PPP could not on the CDD platform speak in favour of land reform while saying that what had failed in Guyana was not socialism but Burnhamism.

In addition, the small rightist parties (LP, WPVP and PDM) took advantage of the popular CDD platform to express their individual political and ideological positions and even openly attacked the PPP, despite that party’s leading role in opposing the referendum.

In particular, the LP’s sharp expression of ideological differences within the CDD undermined the emphasis of opposition to the referendum. During subsequent public meetings held by the CDD, the LP distributed leaflets viciously attacking socialism and the socialist states and claimed that the communist and workers parties in Cuba, the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union were propping up the PNC.

On the other hand, the leftist parties (the PPP and WPA) and allied groupings, took a more principled position by highlighting their opposition to the PNC regime and the referendum rather than their ideological differences with their rightist partners in the CDD.

This attempt in 1978 at unity failed to stop the referendum. Nevertheless, the call by the CDD for citizens to boycott the referendum was successful. And even though the boycott was mainly passive, it succeeded in isolating the PNC regime and exposed its rigging techniques both locally and internationally.

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Attempts to reach PPP-WPA unity

Attempts to reach unity between the PPP and the WPA were also not successful. The PPP claimed that efforts failed because of misconceptions some WPA leaders had about the PPP which led to attacks on the latter; the WPA's links with ex-PPP members who continuously slandered the party; and the tendency of the WPA to make accommodations with rightist groupings and its inconsistency in defending leftist positions.

Ironically, the leaders of the Indian-based IPRA and the African-based ASCRIA, two main affiliate groups within the WPA, also saw the PPP and the PNC as two racial blocs, and both groups in 1972 had stated that their objective was to destroy both of these major parties. This view of the PPP and the PNC was as late as November 1981 expressed by Eusi Kwayana, the head of ASCRIA and also co-leader of the WPA, in an article in the *Caribbean Contact*. Referring to the PPP split in 1955 and subsequent political events, Kwayana stated:

Since that date (1955) the behaviour of the two main parties resulting from the split—the PPP, led by Cheddi Jagan, and the PNC led by Forbes Burnham—has been largely determined by racial defensiveness. This has largely remained the case, regardless of the slogans the parties inscribed on their banners.

The Ratoon group and the WPVP, affiliates of the WPA, had also attacked the PPP for taking part in the 1968 and 1973 elections. They deemed the PPP's participation in the elections as non-revolutionary, claiming that such action was aimed at propping up the PNC government.

Despite such attacks, the PPP took a conciliatory attitude towards the WPA. The two parties engaged in dialogue and the PPP rendered various forms of assistance to the WPA—which included the loan of public address systems for use at public meetings—particularly after Dr. Walter Rodney's return to Guyana in 1974.

But relations cooled in the mid-1975-mid-1976 period after the WPA's affiliate, the WPVP, openly accused the PPP of "sell-out" over its policy of "critical support" for the PNC regime. Nevertheless, the PPP invited the WPA to re-start discussions but these did not occur until August 1977, soon after which the WPVP seceded from the WPA.

During 1978, the PPP and WPA engaged in intensive discussions. The WPA expressed support for the PPP's idea of "winner-does-not-take-all-politics" and for the formation of a National Patriotic Front and Government. But the WPA opposed the inclusion of the PNC, and felt that in addition to the inclusion of other political parties, social groups should also be members of the front for which the party advocated a rotating chairmanship.

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Early in the talks, the PPP presented its draft programme and later the WPA later presented its own programme, "Towards a Revolutionary Socialist Guyana", which stated that the party was "guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism with a socialist goal."

The WPA's programme proposed a National Assembly of 50 members, but it was weighted to the right by giving disproportionate representation to the small rightist parties, although in its programme it had stated that "the struggle to overthrow the present regime must be situated within an anti-imperialist and socialist focus." However, it was prepared to accede to the VLD programme which was to the right of that of the PNC.

In spite of the WPA's shaky ideological stance, the two parties continued their unity discussions and later held two meetings at grass roots level at Buxton-Annandale and Grove. But further meetings of these types were postponed at the request of the WPA. Meantime, both parties continued work on a draft statement, "Declaration of Principles for a National Patriotic Front Government," to include ideas pertaining to democracy, anti-imperialism and socialism.

The Compass Group

The PPP-WPA had apparently made significant progress in their discussions when a new organisation known as the "Compass Group" appeared on the scene. This group was launched in April 1979 when it issued a "Statement of Purpose" and a "Members' List" which were sent to Prime Minister Burnham and Opposition Leader Dr. Cheddi Jagan. In its statement, the group declared that it did not see itself as a political party and would remain independent of any existing political organisation.

The group felt that given the unsettled political and economic situation in the country, its members had "the constitutional right to meet, debate or publish views on the national concerns." The statement added: "The group would consider any attempt to employ sanctions, restrictions or penalties of any kind to any of the group members, on account of their membership in the group or their contribution to its work, as being an infringement of that right."

Significantly, it called for the formation of a broad-based Government of National Reconstruction, "neither left nor right" and with "no ideology."

The publication of the statement in mid-April 1979 caused some panic in the PNC. This was most likely because the Compass Group included five senior public service executives, two leading trade unionists, the Bishop of the Anglican Church, journalists, lawyers and businessmen. All of them were prominent individuals, mainly drawn

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from the petty-bourgeois and other middle strata in the Guyanese society.

The senior public service executives included Patterson Thompson, Chairman of the state-owned bauxite company, Bauxite Industrial Development Corporation (BIDCO), and Pat Carmichael, Chairman of the Guyana National Engineering Corporation. Both Thompson and Carmichael were heavily pressed by Burnham to withdraw from the group. After they faced continuing threats from Prime Minister Burnham and top leaders of the PNC, they eventually emigrated to Barbados.

The remaining members of Compass later invited the PNC, PPP, WPA, and LP to meet with them to discuss the political and economic situation in the country. The PNC refused, but the opposition parties met with them on separate occasions. The WPA and LP soon after expressed their willingness to embrace the political position laid out by Compass, but the PPP made it clear that it could not form a joint opposition with any party or group that would not subscribe to democracy, socialist orientation and anti-imperialism.

Collapse of PPP-WPA talks

It was shortly after these meetings in mid-1979 that the WPA began to move closer to the Compass Group. When it seemed to the general public that cooperation in building PPP-WPA unity was progressing steadily, the WPA in mid-1979 abandoned the unity talks and suddenly decided to adopt the political programme of the Compass Group. As a result of this change in the WPA's position, the joint PPP-WPA statement remained uncompleted and was never issued.

The PPP immediately warned the WPA leaders about their tactics and strategy and the dangers of petty bourgeois impatience and of the dangers of capitulation to rightist forces. The PPP pointed out that the "neither left nor right" position of the Compass Group meant in fact a rightist government, that "no ideology" meant capitalist ideology. The party explained that while the rightist forces were frontally attacking socialism and claiming that it was irrelevant to Guyana, the WPA was tailing them. According to the PPP, the attitude of the WPA was that since one section of the people did not want to hear about socialism, then it was no longer an issue worth championing.

The Compass Group itself drew little support from the masses and even from the middle class from which its members were drawn, and it soon dropped out from the political scene.

Thus, PPP relations with the WPA became strained and there was little contact between them for almost a year. It was during this time, too, that there were renewed contacts between the PNC aimed at reaching a

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political solution in Guyana, but the subsequent discussions did not proceed very far.

Actually, the PPP felt that the PNC was not interested in a unity government based on an agreed democratic, anti-imperialist and socialist-oriented programme. In such a situation, the PPP felt that to enter into any arrangement with the PNC, which was still bent on continuing its anti-democratic policies, would amount to a betrayal of the people's vital interests and was tantamount to political suicide.

Renewed efforts

Although strained relations continued between the PPP and WPA, there was some collaboration in mid-1979 during the strike of bauxite workers who defied the PNC-controlled union leadership. They bauxite workers were supported by the sugar workers and a section of the urban workers, and both the PPP and WPA organised solidarity, food supplies and other resources for those on strike.

After the assassination of Dr. Rodney, formal discussions resumed in mid-1980, with the VLD included, but on the eve of the December 1980 elections, relations worsened. At the last meeting with the WPA and VLD before the elections, the PPP suggested that in the interest of future cooperation, the three parties should issue a joint statement indicating that there were genuine differences in tactics regarding the participation in elections, but the common commitment remained the removal of the PNC. The PPP also warned them about the danger of the alternative course for them to attack the PPP as was done in the past. Unfortunately, this advice was not heeded, and both parties launched stinging attacks on the PPP for its socialist policies and its decision to participate in the parliamentary struggle by contesting the elections.

During the election campaign, the PPP not only attacked the PNC but also explained the differences between itself and the other opposition parties in tactics and strategy. But despite the differences with the WPA, the PPP continued to work for unity. Nevertheless, the WPA and VLD maintained their attacks on the PPP for advocating the parliamentary struggle. In its defence, the PPP stated that its position about parliamentary struggles was consistent with Marxist-Leninist practice—that it must wage the struggle on all fronts without exception so long as there was no existing revolutionary situation in the country.

In its analysis of the difficulties in reaching a political agreement with the WPA, the PPP felt that this was due to the fact that the WPA grew out of a coalition of at first four—later three—groups with different ideological orientations—Black and Indian cultural nationalism, Maoism, New Leftism, and Marxism as distinct from Marxism-Leninism. Further, its international links were mainly with Maoist, neo-Trotskyite and Black

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cultural nationalist groups and parties. Consequently, according to the PPP, this led to divergences in the political line within the WPA.

Chapter 22

The 135-Day Sugar Industry Strike

On Tuesday, 23 August 1977, the PPP-backed Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU), the union representing field workers on the sugar estates, called out its members on a strike after the state-owned Guyana Sugar Corporation (GUYSUCO) refused to agree on a demand for profit-sharing to the workers for the years 1974, 1975 and 1976. The overwhelming majority of more than 21,000 field workers on all the sugar estates immediately heeded the call to strike. Within a few days, all production activity on the sugar estates, including the manufacture of sugar in the factories, came to a halt.

The issue had its origin in the imposition of the sugar levy in 1974 when the industry was owned by foreign companies. The union since then had insisted that the levy should have been applied only on income remaining to the sugar producers after the workers had received their share of the profits based on the collective agreement on profit-sharing.

The strike ultimatum

This issue continued to boil after the sugar industry was nationalised, and GAWU continued to raise it during many meetings with the management of the state-owned GUYSUCO. However, the sugar company felt that the union did not have a case, and after a further rejection of its demands, GAWU on 20 August 1977, by letter, issued a 72-hour ultimatum for an impending strike. The union also served the strike ultimatum on Prime Minister Forbes Burnham.

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In its ultimatum, GAWU stated that it was calling the strike because “the workers have not yet received profit-sharing for the years 1975 and 1976 and were short paid their profit share for 1974.” The union quantified the benefit owed to sugar workers as G\$215 million (US\$85 million) and claimed this amount from GUYSUCO.

It advanced the argument that if the Parliament had not imposed an export levy on sugar in 1974 to deploy into the public revenues of Guyana part of the unusually high prices enjoyed by sugar on the world market in 1974 and 1975, the former foreign owners would have made “super profits” and, consequently, there would have been a greater amount of benefits available to sugar workers by way of profit-sharing. The union pointed out that the sugar levy imposed by the government on the industry since 1974 skimmed off the high profits, putting the collection into the state coffers without any settlement of the workers’ outstanding claims for their annual bonus payments.

It was apparent that the government was expecting a strike due to this situation and had plans to counter such action. At its congress in early August 1977, it had passed a resolution “that an Industrial Court be set up by government to revise the labour laws concerning workers and that penalties be devised for dealing with industrial malpractices, particularly those perpetrated by trade unions. In this context government should authorise the formation of another union in the sugar industry as a means of allowing sugar workers the opportunity of benefiting from a trade union along socialist lines.”

The first reaction of the umbrella TUC, of which GAWU was the largest member, was to request the union to suspend its strike action for 24 hours to permit efforts at conciliation, but GAWU ignored this request since it felt that GUYSUCO had no desire at that time to negotiate the profit sharing issue.

The decision to strike apparently surprised both of GAWU’s industrial allies such as the National Association of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Employees (NAACIE), the union representing office employees in the sugar industry, the University of Guyana Workers Union (UGWU) and the Clerical and Commercial Workers Union (CCWU), since they were not fully consulted or alerted about the impending industrial action. The Working People’s Alliance (WPA), regarded then as an ally of the PPP, was also taken by surprise. However, this faulty oversight was remedied as GAWU subsequently consulted and updated them on the strike activities on a regular basis.

Within the first few days, genuine efforts were made to end to the strike. NAACIE called a meeting of the three unions active in the industry—itself, the GAWU and the Guyana Headmen’s Union (representing the sugar boilers and factory workers)—as well as the CCWU and the UGWU,

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and the meeting urged the TUC to intervene to end the strike “on the basis of a just settlement of the sugar workers’ grievances.”

Reaction from the government

The first response of the PNC government was to immediately label the strike as political claiming that it was a response to the PNC’s outright rejection of the PPP’s proposal earlier that month for a National Patriotic Front. The government presented the view that the PPP was stung by the rejection and was using the strike to flex its political muscle and launched stinging attacks on the opposition party. It immediately began a propaganda blitz, using the state-controlled radio and newspapers to agitate against the PPP on an openly racist basis by telling the public that the PPP and GAWU wanted “all the money in the treasury” for the sugar workers, overwhelmingly Indo-Guyanese, at the expense of the rest of the population. The radio propaganda, totally one-sided, included personal abuse on Dr. Cheddi Jagan and those who defended GAWU, including Dr. Walter Rodney whose party, the WPA, had declared strong support for the demands of the sugar workers and their union.

In its criticism of GAWU’s demands, the government said that by the union’s opposition to the sugar levy, the strike was not directed against GUYSUCO or against any matter over which the state corporation had control, but that it was a challenge the right of the Parliament to pass legislation and, inferentially, to coerce the government and the Parliament. In addition, it claimed that the collective labour agreement procedures were not followed and that the strike was used as a “first resort.” It pointed out, too, that the demand for \$215 million as the workers’ share of the profits was twice the amount agreed as compensation to the foreign owners for the nationalisation of the sugar industry.

Repressive bills

The government then moved swiftly to put pressure on protest actions by the sugar workers. Just a week following the strike call, a meeting of the National Assembly was hastily summoned to pass two bills [Summary Jurisdiction (Appeals) (Amendment) Bill and another to reactivate Part II of the National Security Act] aimed at arming itself with additional repressive powers.

The haste with which the government brought two repressive bills before the National Assembly on September 1, 1977 was indeed alarming, since it suspended the standing rules, and rushed them through all stages, negating the rights of opposition members to have time to

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consider and examine then in detail. The bills were quickly passed by the PNC's two-thirds majority earned through the widespread rigging of the elections in 1973.

The result was that the two pieces of legislation gave the government the right to cancel the basic rights of the people enshrined in both the constitution of Guyana and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Although the government claimed that the Summary Jurisdiction (Appeals) (Amendment) Bill was for the purpose of preventing hardened criminals from abusing the use of the right of appeal to stay out of prison, it was quite clear that an entirely different motive was intended. Magistrates were given the discretion to deny bail after the lodgement of an appeal by the convicted person, a power which they did not have before.

The bill was sinister in character and was used to cover up repressive acts against striking workers and their leaders, by giving the window dressing of legality. By preventing persons sentenced to imprisonment from being free after an appeal is lodged, many were picked up and given crude "justice" in the lower courts. Although there were provisions for bail, it was unrealistic to expect that this would have been given under the circumstances of wholesale arrests, in efforts to break the strike.

The purpose of reactivating Part II of the National Security Act, which gave the government the right to detain without trial, restrict the movements of citizens and institute curfews, was mainly for the purpose of intimidation.

TUC intervention

As the strike continued, the regular congress of the TUC, on 22 September, 1977, named a committee headed by Ashton Chase of NAACIE, ex-Labour Minister Winslow Carrington and Kenneth Denny (both strong PNC members), as well as Cheddi Jagan and Ram Karran of the GAWU, to draft a resolution on the issue. The proposed resolution which received overwhelming support from the delegates, urged the GAWU to call off the strike on the basis that generally accepted and agreed terms of resumption should include the removal of scabs employed during the strike and an interim payment to the sugar workers. It also authorised the TUC to intervene in the situation with the government.

The TUC negotiators first approached GUYSUCO but the employer stubbornly refused to dismiss the scabs, one of the main demands of the TUC. The negotiators then appealed to the Minister of Labour, Hamilton Green, but he refused to intervene, claiming that the strike was "political."

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Faced with this uncompromising situation, the TUC sent a strong statement to the Minister of Labour. It said: "The workers never anticipated that they would witness . . . a nationalised industry . . . in a much stronger position than the industry had been under capitalist ownership, to show resistance to the acceptance of traditional terms of resumption and be allowed to remain steadfast . . . while the country's economy suffers enormously." The statement added that this would lead to "frustration, lack of commitment and indifference on the part of workers stemming from the fear that if they go on strike, strike-breakers would be recruited and offered permanent employment. Such development would adversely affect the general economy of the country."

Unfortunately, the TUC failed to follow up further and no real action was taken by the TUC on any of the main issues. There was a widespread belief at this time that the leaders of the TUC, many of whom were also leading PNC members, were pressured by their party and the government into back-peddling on the matter. No doubt, this was the reason it did release to the public its statement to the Minister of Labour and refused to allow the GAWU to discuss the strike on the TUC radio programme broadcast on the state-owned radio.

These negative actions by the TUC caused alarm and frustration among the unions supportive of the GAWU and the strike expanded further when NAACIE called a two-week solidarity strike on 21 November 1977.

The sugar levy

It is necessary here to give the background of the sugar levy which became a main issue during the strike. The Sugar Levy Act was passed in Parliament by the government in July 1974. Under the Act the following levies were imposed on the sugar industry, then largely owned by two expatriate firms, Booker McConnell and Jessell Securities Limited:

- (i) 55 per cent of the proceeds in excess of \$359.00 per ton;
- (ii) 70 per cent of the proceeds in excess of \$521.00 per ton;
- (iii) 85 per cent on the proceeds in excess of \$625.00 per ton.

The government's rationale in imposing this levy was to offset the high costs of imported oil after December 1973. During the period 1973 to 1976, the cost of oil imports to Guyana rose astronomically from \$48 million to \$138 million. The sugar industry, a large consumer of oil, found that the price had tripled. The effect was the same in every other industry and prices of other essential imported inputs increased drastically.

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Fortunately for Guyana, during the years 1974 and 1975, sugar enjoyed very high prices on the world market. The government, therefore, decided that since the nation was faced with a very high oil import bill, it would take advantage of the favourable conditions existing with sugar to offset the cost of imported oil. The government argued that if it had not taken this step, most of the profits from the sugar industry would have been shipped abroad; and the nation as a whole would have suffered as a result the high-oil-prices.

As the strike prolonged, the government agreed that if the levy had not been imposed on the industry, the sugar workers would have been able to share in larger profits, but posited that the ultimate consideration was whether it was more important for sugar to contribute to the well-being of the entire nation, including the sugar workers, or merely enlarge the money available to sugar workers over a short term period.

It also explained that if the contribution to revenue via the sugar levy were removed for the fiscal year 1974 and 1975 the government's current budget would have been in deficit by \$40.5 million and \$62.0 million respectively because of the escalation of oil prices. In 1976, when the price of sugar fell, sugar's contribution to current revenue in the form of the levy dipped to 16.6 percent, but it still remained a vital source of government revenue.

The government also pointed out that sugar was of critical importance to the country's economy and was contributing about 20 percent of the GDP and was projected to yield 30 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings for 1977.

The government's counter-argument

In countering GAWU's demands, the government noted that any claim with respect to the periods 1974, 1975 and up to 25 May, 1976 could not legally be made against GUYSUCO which became a legal entity only on 26 May, 1976; and which was not the successor in title to the former foreign owners. Claims relating to these periods, it said, were legally enforceable only against the former foreign owners.

The government, however, agreed that the only period which had any relevance to GUYSUCO was its claim relating to period 26th May, 1976 to 31st December, 1976. But it asserted that profits earned during this period did not reach the level to permit the profit-sharing formula to be applied.

And to further deny the union any satisfaction, the government continued to insist that the strike was motivated by political rather than industrial considerations, and as such was not prepared to participate in any discussions.

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Opponents of the strike

As the strike gathered momentum and garnered increasing local and international support, the government in its attempt to ridicule the sugar workers' struggle, encouraged the pro-PNC leaders of various trade unions and other organisations politically connected to the PNC to condemn GAWU's action. The Guyana Labour Union, whose president was also PNC leader and Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, was the first to do so. This union represented the waterfront workers who were engaged in loading sugar on to ships for export.

Others included the Guyana Public Service Union, which represented all categories of classified government employees, many of whom were pressured into "volunteering" on the sugar estates. The Guyana Teachers' Association also opposed the strike and raised no objection to the Ministry of Education for coercing many teachers to also "volunteer" for cane-cutting duties at weekends. And adding his voice was Harry Lall, the former president of GAWU, who in 1976 resigned from the union and also from the PPP to join the PNC. He condemned the strike and criticised the demand for G\$215 million as being "impossible."

Harassment and the use of scabs

The strike was marked by widespread police harassment. More than 130 activists of GAWU and the PPP were arrested on flimsy excuses and most of them were charged for intimidation.

Incidents of police harassment were numerous. One striker, Lokie Narine of Blairmont, was charged for "public terror." After five weeks in prison, he was put on bail for \$10,000. In many cases bail has been excessive, from \$5,000 to \$12,000 for simple offences. In West Berbice, Mansaran Persaud and S. Sakichand were arrested and, after being held for 36 hours, each was placed on bail of \$1,000 (cash) or \$2,000 (transport) and ordered to report once every week to the police station even though they were not charged with any offence.

In West Demerara, one cane-scale representative, Goolgar, was arrested four times. A GAWU field secretary, Jeewan Persaud, was arrested, held for 24 hours, released and re-arrested as soon as he exited the police station.

Two workers on strike, Amernauth and S. Prem of Blairmont, on charge of intimidation, were granted bail at \$5,000 (each) or \$10,000 (transport) on the condition that they give a verbal assurance to the magistrate that they would return to work.

A GAWU motor car was impounded at New Amsterdam police station on three occasions within six weeks, two times for "fitness," and the third on October 13, for suspicion of having stolen parts. These

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actions were of sheer malice since the police was fully aware that it was being used by the Honorary President of GAWU and Leader of the PPP, Dr. Cheddi Jagan.

And a van-load of food contributed by PPP supporters for striking workers in West Demerara was seized by the police. Three separate quantities of foodstuffs for workers on strike were also seized in New Amsterdam and East Berbice as well as 39 bags of rice at Enmore.

The PNC regime also flooded the country with outrageous pamphlets insinuating that serious fires at the Burma Rice Mill, Guyana Timbers and Guyana Rice Board, as well as for the burning of sugar cane fields were the work of GAWU and the PPP.

These allegations evidently formed the basis of the punitive action the government had in mind. It was, therefore, convenient for it to declare that the strike was political so as to embark on total counter-mobilisation.

It recruited more than 6,000 scabs to take the places of the striking sugar workers. Most of them were unemployed Afro-Guyanese and they were transported by trucks to the estates every day. They included youth hardly of working age—many of them even below the age of fourteen—and large numbers of unemployed women. Trade unions loyal to the PNC also encouraged their members to volunteer to cut sugar cane on the estates. At the same time, many state entities such as various Ministries coerced civil servants and teachers to “volunteer” their services at weekend. The army and other military and semi-military units, as well as the pro-PNC House of Israel religious cult were also deployed to the cane-fields. The country was flooded with the propaganda that these “volunteers” were carrying out their “patriotic duty” to save the sugar crop valued at “\$146 million.”

But not only Afro-Guyanese were recruited. It was apparent that the PNC was able to influence some Indo-Guyanese on the sugar estates to accept jobs as cane cutters. While the striking workers remained at home, many unemployed young men, relatives and friends of those on strike, accepted the readily available jobs in the cane fields. No doubt, this act of strike-breaking from inside the sugar estate communities, to a certain extent, undermined GAWU’s efforts to maintain pressure on GUYSUCO.

However, the use of scab labour to cut sugar cane had a damaging result on production. Most of these new workers and “volunteers,” who had no knowledge of the art of cane cutting, severely damaged the young shoots (*ratoons*) which propagated a new growth of the crop. This proved to have a detrimental effect on subsequent production of sugar in 1978.

The PNC government also continued, throughout the period of the strike, a massive propaganda campaign against GAWU and the PPP, as well as on the WPA and other organisations supporting the sugar workers’ demands. It also refused permission to the union, the PPP and

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the WPA to hold public meeting in various parts of the country to effectively counter the PNC's anti-worker propaganda.

The WPA, to its credit, helped to nurture solidarity for the sugar workers among the bauxite workers in Linden and elsewhere outside the sugar belt. And, despite the propaganda peddled by the PNC, most Guyanese viewed the strike as an industrial dispute and the sugar workers not only won wide moral support but were also viewed as the vanguard fighters against the PNC dictatorship.

International support for GAWU

As the sugar workers held their ground, even in the face of severe police harassment and victimisation, they won widespread international solidarity for their cause, and by the end of October, the Oilfield Workers Union of Trinidad implemented an embargo on petroleum shipments to Guyana. Since this action reduced supplies from Trinidad, the government was forced to request the Venezuelan oil workers' union, PEDEPETROL, to refrain from similar action in case additional supplies of petroleum were needed from Venezuela. Further solidarity was received from dockworkers in Great Britain who refused unload ships transporting sugar from Guyana. The Caribbean Council of Churches also announced its support for the strike and made a contribution to the strike fund.

GAWU complaints to ILO

In September 1977, GAWU complained to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) that the repressive action on sugar workers by the government amounted to the trampling on trade union rights in the country. The union complained about the imposition of the two hurriedly enacted repressive laws, the arrest and detention of striking workers, the hiring of thousands of scabs, the unemployment of children, racial incitement through the state media, and the deployment of the army as part of the strike breaking apparatus. Further, the union complained about the curtailment of the distribution of food supplies to groceries in sugar estate areas, thus forcing sugar workers to purchase food items such as flour, cooking oil, split peas and other essential food commodities from government or PNC-controlled shops and cooperatives located in areas outside the sugar estates. It must be noted that during this period, the government centrally controlled food imports and their distribution to sales outlets and groceries throughout the country.

In a response to these charges, the government in a letter to the ILO on 17 October 1977 denied these accusations. Rationalising the

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imposition of the new repressive laws to curb lawlessness during the strike, it stated:

When the PPP sensed that the strike call was likely to be ineffective, it introduced into the sugar belt a large number of thugs who began threatening, assaulting and otherwise intimidating peaceful workers who wanted to exercise their legal right to work. Moreover, the families of those workers were subjected to intimidation; their homes were stoned; and in some instances attempts to burn the homes of these workers were made. Additionally, malicious burning of young sugar-canes, the property of the people of Guyana, became frequent; and canes belonging to small peasant farmers and cooperative societies were wantonly destroyed by arson, thus bringing severe hardships and even financial ruin to many poor hard-working farmers. Other acts of sabotage were attempted against sugar factories, machinery, vehicles, and other property owned by the people of Guyana. The leadership of the PPP and union added fuel to this dangerous situation by wild incitements to violence. The situation, if allowed to remain unchecked, was in danger of degenerating into complete lawlessness.

On the charge of racialism, the government blamed GAWU and the PPP for instigating it, and preposterously claimed that “over 50 percent of the citizens who have volunteered to reap the sugar harvest **without pay** and save the country from total bankruptcy are citizens of Indian origin.”

The government also deemed “as absolutely false the allegation that it has recruited youths under 14 years of age to cut cane,” and insisted that “the law does not permit the employment of children who are under the age of 14 years.”

It also glibly denied any complicity in directing the distribution of essential food supplies away from sugar estate areas, insisting that “the vast majority of distribution outlets is in private ownership, particularly those in the country areas which embrace the sugar belt.”

On the deployment of soldiers to cut cane, the government said it could not “sit idly by and allow the employment security of workers and the economy in general to be put in jeopardy by reckless politically-inspired action.” It declared that only 370 soldiers were deployed to work side by side with sugar workers who refused to go on strike. It also made the unfounded claim that out of the industry labour force of 21,981 workers, 10,550 workers did not go on strike.

And on the issue of hiring scabs, the government gave this explanation:

The charge that the Government has been recruiting scabs is completely unfounded. The facts are that many workers never went on strike at all; many who had been convinced that the strike is irresponsible have returned to work and GUYSUCO has been recruiting workers in the normal way

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according to the traditional practice in the Industry at harvesting time. Historically, the average additional recruitment during this period amounts to 4,189. This recruitment takes the regular labour force to 26,000. This year the industry, in the usual way, has employed 6,132 additional workers. Of this number, 5084 have traditionally in the past worked in the Industry, in the usual way. Thus, there are only 1,048 workers who can in any proper sense be considered “new” workers. The employment of this additional number will, in no way, jeopardise the jobs of the striking workers or of any other workers in the Sugar Industry for two reasons: (i) because of the steady decline in the agricultural labour force, the Industry has always had difficulty in maintaining a sufficiently large labour force; and (ii) GUYSUCO is now no longer merely involved in sugar but has been expanding and diversifying its agricultural activities, a fact which has been well publicised in the news media many months ago. GUYSUCO has assured the TUC that there is work for all. That GUYSUCO has been guilty of no impropriety and no breach of industrial practices in this respect has been conceded by the TUC.

End of the strike

The strike, which lasted 135 days, ended on 5 January 1978 when GAWU announced that it was calling it off. The union did not win any concessions, but with the TUC leadership vacillating and unwilling to confront the government on the industrial issues, it could no longer continue the action. It praised the militancy of the sugar workers saying that in their struggle against GUYSUCO and the government they “came out with their heads held high and seven feet tall.” The statement added:

Conscious of its responsibilities and faced with a heartless and ruthless regime on the one hand and a divided labour movement unwilling to take positive action on the other, GAWU considers that the continuation of the strike will not be in the interest of the workers and the nation. It is therefore ordering a resumption of work under protest and without prejudice to the stand taken by the TUC and GAWU on the issue of scabs. Notwithstanding the weakness of the labour movement, GAWU expects that the TUC will continue to pursue representations on the issues involved in the strike as agreed upon at its annual conference, and assures of its continued militant support of the principled support position of the TUC conference on the question of scabbing.

The strike certainly exposed the weakness of the TUC in taking strong principled positions on behalf of the workers. No doubt, this was due to the strong PNC influence on the leadership which caused it not to firmly press for the removal of the scabs, despite its strong position on this issue in September 1977. As a result, the regime not only retained the scabs at the end of the strike, but also honoured them. The state-owned weekly newspaper, *Citizen*, of August 25, 1978 reported:

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The curtain came down last night on the history-making distribution of certificates to volunteers who had armed themselves with cutlasses to defend the economy during the 135-days sugar strike last year. . . Agriculture Minister Gavin Kennard referred to the volunteers as “heroes of the socialist revolution in Guyana” and expressed the hope that by their example and leadership they would motivate all citizens in this battle for the economic survival of our beloved country.

Nevertheless, the main long-term effect of the strike was the formation of an alliance of four unions—the GAWU, CCWU, the NAACIE and the UGWU as a “progressive opposition” grouping within the TUC. They eventually jointly carried out public campaigns against anti-working class measures adopted by the government and against the TUC to address many of these in a serious manner.

Chapter 23

The Pattern of Political Repression by the PNC Regime

With the PNC firmly in control of the government after Guyana achieved independence, it immediately began to implement a studied strategy to repress the political opposition. Even its coalition partner, the UF, was on many occasions kept out of the decision-making and some leading members of that party were even cajoled by PNC leader Forbes Burnham to cross over to the PNC.

Ever since the coalition government was set up after the December 1964 elections, Burnham continued to claim that it was the PPP that stoked violence during the eighty-day strike in 1963 over the Labour Relations Bill and during the six-month strike, called by the PPP-backed Guyana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) in 1964 to demand recognition as the representative of sugar workers. [Since the mid-1990s, documents released by the US Government revealed the collusion of the CIA, the PNC, the UF and the TUC in propagating strife during 1962-1964 to destabilise and overthrow the PPP government].

To repress the PPP, which formed the opposition after December 1964, PPP members, detained without any charges by the British authorities in 1964, continued to remain in prison, and more of them were detained on the grounds that they were planning terrorism against the new government.

In the face of stiff local and international opposition to the detention of the PPP members, the coalition government decided to “legalise” the holding of the political prisoners by passing the National Security Act in 1966 shortly after the country became independent of British rule. This

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law was very repressive, and it gave the government authority to suspend the right of *habeas corpus* and to restrict and detain any Guyanese without trial for an indefinite period.

National Security Act

Shortly after the rigged July 1973 elections, the regime re-enacted the National Security Act which added further restrictive measures. These provided for preventive detention and restriction of movement of persons, control of firearms and ammunition, powers of search without warrants, and increased police powers. Furthermore, the government armed itself with authority to make regulations—in situations deemed as “periods of war, threatened subversion and other emergency”—which were even more despotic than before. Among these were provisions for “censorship and the control and suppression of publications, writings, maps, plans, photographs, communications and means of communication,” and confiscation of property.

The penalties provided were extremely harsh. One section of the Act stated that

any person who, without lawful authority, the burden of proof of which shall lie upon him, purchases, acquires or has in his possession any firearm, ammunition or explosive shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or to both such fine and imprisonment and, on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for life.

Another sub-section stated that

any person who is proved to have had in his possession or under his control anything whatsoever in or on which is found any firearm, ammunition or explosive shall, until the contrary is proved, be deemed to have been in possession of such firearm, ammunition or explosive.

Under this draconian regulation, the accused was thus presumed to be guilty until he could prove himself innocent.

There was also the odious provision of guilt by association. Another part of the Act stipulated:

Any person who consorts with or is found in the company of another who, without lawful authority, has in his possession any firearm, ammunition or explosive in circumstances which raise a reasonable presumption that he intends or is about to act or has recently acted with such other person in a manner prejudicial to public order or public safety, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable . . .

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This repressive law encouraged regular police harassment and intimidation of opposition leaders and activists and numerous persons were arbitrarily arrested and detained especially after the rigged local government elections of 1970, the rigged general elections of 1973, 1980 and 1985, and the fraudulent referendum of 1978.

In the light of all this, the PNC also subverted the army, police and judiciary to crush political opponents. Police harassment became common-place and thugs associated with the PNC and its youth arm, the Young Socialist Movement (YSM) with impunity and in full view of the police, violently broke up public meetings organised by opposition political parties. Under these conditions, freedom of assembly was merely nominal.

The National Security Act was finally repealed in September 1991 at the time when Guyana was preparing for general elections.

Repression against rice farmers

From the time it assumed power, the PNC also moved to destroy the PPP's long-standing support among the rice farmers who had benefited substantially during the period of the PPP government from 1957 to 1964. Among the benefits of that period were amendments to the Rice Farmers (Security of Tenure) Act, huge land reform projects, better drainage and irrigation, introduction of new strains of seed which improved yield, better marketing and prices, official recognition of the Rice Producers Association (RPA), re-organisation of the Rice Marketing Board (RMB), and a general improvement in the standard of living of rice farmers and their families.

Burnham's coalition government immediately reversed the PPP's policy and implemented a barefaced strategy of discrimination against rice farmers. It reduced the prices paid to farmers, removed all subsidies on products associated with rice production such as fertilisers and fuel, de-recognised the RPA and dismissed the Association's representatives from the RMB. The regime also made it a criminal offence for rice farmers to be in possession of their own rice and paddy without permits. Later the PNC established "Rice Action Committees" made up of its political supporters, and persons it selected from these groups were placed on the management of the RMB which itself was staffed with PNC supporters with little knowledge of the rice industry. The result was that rice farmers became alienated from control of their own industry. Earlier (in May 1965), when they mounted a peaceful picketing exercise outside of Parliament to oppose legislation to de-recognise the RPA and restructure the RMB, the police using dogs, tear gas and batons, brutally assaulted and seriously injured many of them.

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In a further act to discourage the rice farmers, rice exports to Cuba, which offered very high prices, were stopped. In addition, major land development schemes were neglected and drainage and irrigation suffered. As a result, land under rice cultivated declined from over 250,000 acres in 1964 to less than 90,000 acres by the late 1980s. By then, the PNC had realised the folly of its anti-rice policy and was attempting to rehabilitate the industry, but unfortunately there were not a large number of rice farmers who were willing to expand cultivation. Actually, many of the experienced rice farmers and their families, as a result of this political and economic repression, had already migrated to North America and elsewhere. Progressive agricultural communities fell into decay and many small privately-owned rice mills across the coast of Guyana were forced to close operations.

Pressures on sugar workers

The PNC also continued acts of repression against the sugar workers. From the time Burnham became Prime Minister in December 1964, he vehemently opposed a democratic poll to decide which union held majority support among the sugar workers. The union recognised by the sugar producers was the Man Power Citizens Association (MPCA), widely regarded as a “company union,” which was unabashedly politically allied to the PNC and the UF. The militant GAWU was heavily supported by the sugar workers—who were almost totally PPP supporters—and it was with this fact in consideration that Burnham felt that a poll, which the union would easily win, would give it more clout in the sugar industry and would, at the same time, be politically damaging to him and his party.

However, a long general strike in the sugar industry called by GAWU in 1975 eventually forced the government to agree to the holding of a recognition poll in the sugar industry on 31 December 1975. The results of the poll indicated that the GAWU won the support of more than 98 percent of the sugar workers in every sugar estate in the country. Significantly, the results showed that the PPP still had majority support in the sugar estate areas; the rigged elections of 1968 and 1973 had given the PNC “massive victories” in these areas, and Burnham had boasted that his party had breached these PPP strongholds.

In 1976, the sugar industry was nationalised, but the PNC regime installed a management style which was not much different from that of the Bookers and Jessel companies, the previous owners of the sugar industry. The nationalised entity also discouraged workers’ participation in management and continued to place obstacles in the way of improving the working conditions of the sugar workers. As a result, the GAWU continued to call strikes which from time to time were suppressed by harsh police action.

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Anti-labour laws

Other workers also were harassed, intimidated and forcibly repressed when they protested PNC policies. Under the Burnham administration, bauxite workers were locked up, beaten by police and tear-gassed and a few union leaders were threatened and detained for long periods. Interestingly, many of these workers and union leaders had solidly backed the PNC during the time of the PPP government and even during the periods of the rigged elections.

To keep workers in check, the PNC also enacted repressive anti-labour laws. By the Labour (Amendment) Act, 1984, the constitution of Guyana was amended to allow for wages to be compulsorily seized without payment of any compensation. It also empowered the TUC, even without being consulted by the government, to enter into enforceable collective labour agreements binding on all public sector workers, thus denying individual trade unions the right of concluding agreements on their own. The government's intention was based on the belief that it was easier to impose its will on a single body, the TUC (which was controlled by the PNC), rather than the 24 active unions, in applying wage restraint policies which were part of the IMF "conditionalities" applied on the government.

Under the Desmond Hoyte administration, another anti-labour law was derived from the Constitution (Amendment) Act of 1988 which deprived trade unions and other organisations of the right to contest in court any denial by the government to consult with them, or failure on the part of the government to involve them in the management and decision-making processes of the state.

Fortunately, these repressive laws failed to threaten the few militant unions and their leaders into submission.

Pressure on the *Mirror* and other opposition media

In November 1971, Prime Minister Forbes Burnham told parliament that his government had passed "no legislation or done anything to prevent the publication of any newspaper in this country and has no intention of doing so." But soon after that utterance, the regime in February 1972 assumed powers to control the importation of newsprint, printing equipment and materials. By issuing two special trade orders in December 1971 and February 1972, the government prohibited the importation of newsprint, book binding machinery and printing equipment, except under the authority of a licence granted by the competent government Ministry.

Because of that control, an import licence was refused the New Guyana Company Limited, publishers of the *Mirror* to import a printing

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press from the United States on which a down-payment of G\$32,000 (about US\$16,000) had been made. The PNC regime at first had granted the import licence, but soon after it issued the trade orders, the permit was withdrawn. And when the licence expired, the regime refused to renew it, thus causing the company to lose its down-payment.

And because of delays in issuing licenses for the importation of newsprint, the *Mirror* was forced to cease publication on three occasions for a period of about two months in 1972-73 and for six weeks in 1974.

The intensity of the efforts launched from time to time to suppress the *Mirror* demonstrates the degree of discomfort which the Burnham regime suffered on account of the militant stand which this newspaper adopted. Efforts to stifle this newspaper were part of a wider scheme of media control which became an integral element of the Burnham regime's plan.

On one notable occasion, the government on 8 June 1973 seized newsprint intended for use by the *Mirror*. Even before this date, the supply of newsprint had been in short supply on account of repeated restrictions placed upon the importation of adequate quantities. Repeated efforts by the New Guyana Company to import vital spares and new printing equipment also met with repeated denials. And gift newsprint from newspapers in Trinidad to the *Mirror* was not allowed to enter the country by the PNC regime. Resort to the courts by the publishers of the *Mirror* failed to win sympathy from the judges.

Another media critic of the regime, the *Catholic Standard*, the weekly newspaper of the Roman Catholic Church, also suffered the whiplash of this form of repression when the state-run Guyana National Printers Limited refused to continue to print the paper. And when the paper found another printery, it suffered from the non-availability of newsprint.

The regime also applied further harassment in the form of libel suits against the opposition media. These included libel suits against the *Catholic Standard*, *Dayclean* (organ of the WPA) and *Open Word*, a weekly stencilled political news-sheet. There were five libel suits filed against the *Catholic Standard*—one by President Forbes Burnham and four by Vice-President Desmond Hoyte.

Burnham sued the newspaper because of its claim that his decision to re-open the Venezuelan border issue was either "a blunder or treason." Hoyte sued because it published articles "alleging official pressures on insurance companies to repatriate funds invested abroad and to make the proceeds available to the government as foreign exchange." The *Catholic Standard* also alleged that the UN Development Programme had made a "political contribution" to the PNC by funding projects run by its women's section, the Women Revolutionary Social Movement (WRSB).

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Government ministers attempted to justify the newsprint restrictions and the pressures on the opposition media, particularly the *Mirror*, by claiming economic reasons for the actions. The Attorney General, Dr. Mohamed Shahabuddeen, explained that “. . . freedom of expression in any society is only available and exercisable within the economic potential of the country and by such methods as it could as a whole afford. It is for the state to allocate scarce resources to various competing sources as its judgement sees fit.” On the other hand, the Deputy Prime Minister, Dr. Ptolemy Reid, accused the *Mirror* of “wasting” newsprint and saying this would not be granted until the economic crisis was over.

Later, the PNC also attempted to rationalise its position on this “censorship” issue. Addressing the Rotary Club in June 1974, Kit Nascimento, Minister of State in the Prime Minister’s Office said:

A newspaper or broadcaster that persistently and deliberately sets out to frustrate and sabotage government’s development efforts, in my view, would have no more right to publish than a citizen to cry fire in a cinema where there is no fire.

In January 1973, the New Guyana Company sought a declaration in the High Court that the fundamental right to freedom of expression which was guaranteed by the constitution of Guyana was violated by the making of two trade orders of 1971 and 1972. Three years later, the judge, Frank Vieira, ruled in the publisher’s favour and awarded damages amounting to G\$10,650. Vieira declared in his judgement:

To get a licence for a printing press without obtaining a licence for newsprint is pointless . . . and the same applies in reverse. What it basically amounts to is this: no licence and/or printing press—no freedom of expression. This clearly, to my mind, amounts to newspaper control and not newsprint and/or printing equipment control.

But in an appeal by the government in 1976, the Court of Appeal, presided over by Justice Victor Crane, in March 1979 overturned the decision and ruled that the right to import newsprint did not form an essential part of the fundamental right of the freedom of expression. This latter decision, to an extent, endorsed the government’s action in its efforts to continue to apply pressure to destroy the *Mirror*.

From December 1977, the *Mirror* was forced to purchase newsprint from the state-owned Guyana National Newspapers Limited (GNNL). But on some weeks it was unable to obtain any on the excuse that shipment of newsprint was delayed, even though the state-owned *Guyana Chronicle* continued to be printed at its regular size and without any cutback on quantity.

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This problem forced the *Mirror* to close operations for short periods. After one of these closures, the Caribbean Publishing and Broadcasting Association, based in Trinidad, offered the newspaper 12 rolls of newsprint as a gift, but the government refused to grant an import licence. Deputy Prime Minister Reid, at a special press conference to explain the refusal, stated that his government would not allow “those foreign newspapers to present gifts here” in order to interfere with the government’s policy towards the *Mirror*.

By 1979, the *Mirror* was completely prevented from obtaining newsprint—either by purchasing from the government or from importing or even receiving any as gifts from abroad. But despite all the restrictions, the *Mirror* survived, and it was printed for a while as a weekly four-page broadsheet on expensive bond paper.

In the later years of the Desmond Hoyte administration, the newsprint restriction was finally lifted and the New Guyana Company was able to purchase larger quantities from the GNNL. As a result the *Mirror* was able to recommence the publication of its 16-page weekend and three week-day issues. However, after a while it discontinued its week-day issues to conserve on its newsprint supplies.

Party paramountcy and the repressive apparatus

As the PNC entrenched itself in power after 1973, it established a policy of “paramountcy of the party” which placed the PNC over and above all other organisations and agencies. This policy reduced Parliament and Government to a position of subservience to the PNC. Symbols of the PNC became paramount, and the PNC flag was flown on government buildings and even on the building housing the High Court of Guyana.

To enforce the doctrine of party paramountcy, the PNC regime in 1975 established an office designated as the “Office of the General Secretary of the PNC and Ministry of National Development.” Dr. Reid was in charge of this office which ensured that the PNC received state funds and logistical support to carry out its political activities. [The building housing this office was destroyed by fire in July 1979, and nine leading member of the WPA, including Dr. Walter Rodney, were accused of burning it and were charged with arson. After Rodney’s assassination, the charges were dropped against the others.]

Under party paramountcy, political repression advanced with the politicisation of the public service and the security forces. A sizeable proportion of public servants and also the security forces, especially the Guyana Defence Force, were called upon to pledge allegiance to the PNC. Some trade unions, notably the Guyana Teachers’ Association, also

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affiliated themselves as members of the ruling party, even though their members included persons who opposed the policies of the PNC.

At the same time, Burnham moved ahead to militarize the society and by 1976 one in every thirty-five persons in the population were members of the “disciplined” forces—the Guyana Defence Force, the Police Force, the paramilitary Guyana National Service (created in 1974), and the Guyana People’s Militia (established in 1976). Defence spending expanded rapidly, increasing almost 500 percent from \$8.76 million in 1973 to \$48.72 million in 1976.

This high degree of militarization had the objective of ensuring that the PNC regime remained in power while controlling the growing political opposition. As part of this studied plan, the PNC ensured that all the disciplined forces were dominated by Afro-Guyanese, the ethnic group from whom the party drew most of its support.

Under the Burnham administration, the PNC repressive apparatus also included the House of Israel, a so-called religious cult of Afro-Guyanese, founded by an Afro-American fugitive from US justice, David Hill, who called himself Rabbi Washington. This group openly supported the PNC and was used regularly by that party to break strikes and also, even in the presence of the police, to violently break up public meetings organised by opposition political groups. On 14 July 1979 its members in broad daylight brutally attacked a WPA political demonstration and murdered a Jesuit priest, Father Bernard Darke.

When Desmond Hoyte became President after Burnham’s death in August 1985, he quickly disassociated his administration with the House of Israel. Rabbi Washington was later charged with murder and received a prison sentence after he was found guilty. Without political backing, the cult lost its sting and power and soon after most of its adherents drifted away.

Despite these forms of political repression, they nevertheless could not stop the opposition forces, particularly the PPP, from continuing to resist the regime and agitate for democracy, including free and fair elections, and to condemn the despotism of the PNC. Actually, the more repressive the actions of the PNC, the more determined the opposition, led by the PPP, was able to consolidate growing support both in Guyana and in the international arena.

Chapter 24

Guyana-Venezuelan Relations (1970-1980)

The Protocol of Port of Spain placed a moratorium on discussions on the border issue for a period of at least twelve years. But this did not prevent Venezuela, during the period after 1970, to push its claim to all lands west of the Essequibo River. For instance, maps of Venezuela since 1970 began to show the area west of the Essequibo River as Venezuelan territory, shading it in diagonal stripes and labelling it as “*Zona de la Reclamación*.” Some over-eager Venezuelan cartographers did not even bother to display that label on their editions, since they regarded the territory as totally Venezuelan.

Expansion of Venezuela’s territorial claim

The Venezuelan claim to all lands west of the Essequibo River—as displayed on Venezuelan maps after 1970—became a new demand, since up to the period before 1970, a part of the Essequibo coast east of the line connecting the mouth of the Moruka River with the Cuyuni-Mazaruni junction was not claimed. Some maps published after 1975 even included the Essequibo Islands as part of Venezuela’s extreme claim.

After the signing of the Protocol, Venezuelan students continued to be taught—as they were since 1966—that all the territory west of the Essequibo River belonged to Venezuela, and that it was illegally occupied by Guyana. Venezuelan newspapers also continued to use their columns to clamour for the territory to be “returned” to Venezuela.

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PPP publicity of the border issue

In Guyana, on the other hand, the Government did very little between 1970 and 1980 to educate the Guyanese nation on the issue. However, the opposition PPP, despite limited propaganda resources, never failed to enlighten the nation of the Venezuelan unfounded claim. This fact was recognised in the May 1981 issue of the *Caribbean Contact* which stated: “The opposition PPP of Dr. Cheddi Jagan has done much in the past to expose the ‘spurious nature’ of Venezuela’s territorial claim to Guyana and also of the possible link of the claim with US interests.”

The PPP, during the first half of the 1970s, consistently maintained that because of the border claim, Guyana could be in danger of intervention from Venezuela. The party stated that this could be done to protect the PNC regime in Guyana in case of a popular uprising. However, the PPP took care to point out that possible Venezuelan intervention must be seen not only in the context of defending the PNC against popular revolt, but against the regime itself if it should move away from the political line favoured by US imperialism. This view was enunciated by Dr. Jagan in a letter to the editor of the *Sunday Graphic* on the 30 November 1971. The letter, entitled “Guyana’s Alignment with Pro-Imperialist Axis,” stated, *inter alia*:

The 5-year Geneva Agreement and the 12-year Port of Spain Protocol not only recognised the bogus border claim, but also keep it in abeyance for future use against any progressive government in Guyana. In keeping with this same policy, the Venezuelan Government sent arms to Trinidad and moved its troops to its north coast near to Trinidad during the “Black Power” revolt against the PNM regime in April 1970.

Dr. Jagan’s letter also responded to speculation published in the *Sunday Graphic* during November 1971 that Brazil—which had expressed support for Guyana’s territorial rights following the occupation the Guyanese part of Ankoko by Venezuela in 1966—would come to the aid of Guyana in case of Venezuelan armed aggression. In respect to this, he stated:

The visit of the Venezuelan Foreign Minister to the West Indies—and the announcement that Venezuela intends to fill the power vacuum in the West Indies—signify clearly that Venezuela has been assigned by US imperialism, because of her geographical proximity and political orientation, to ‘contain’ the growing revolutionary movement in the West Indies, somewhat in the same way that Brazil is assigned to help the PNC regime, not against attack from Venezuela, but from liberation forces inside Guyana. Viewed at from this position, there is no need to speculate whether help would be forthcoming to Guyana from Brazil against Venezuelan attack.

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Further, the PPP maintained during this period, as it had done before 1970, that the entire matter could be solved if the Guyana government took the issue to the United Nations Security Council and the World Court. At the UN, the party was sure that Venezuela would be condemned as an aggressor, and the USA would be put in an embarrassing situation. The PPP insisted that it was because neither Venezuela nor the USA wanted the case referred to the UN Security Council and the World Court, that the Guyana government was showing a reluctance to take the issue to these international bodies.

Other than the statements of the PPP, in Guyana very little public discussion on the border issue ever occurred, though Guyanese were generally reminded of the Venezuelan claim every time the Venezuelan press agitated in support of its country's claims. The Guyana government made formal objection to Venezuela for Guyanese territory being included as Venezuela's on maps prepared by official Venezuelan authorities, but this did not halt the zeal of the Venezuelan cartographers.

Essequibo projects opposed by Venezuela

Following reports in October 1972 that the Guyana government was planning a development programme for the Essequibo region, and had agreed to grant oil exploration rights to a West German firm, DEMITEX, the Venezuelan President, Dr. Rafael Caldera, held a press conference on 12 October 1972 and insisted that the Protocol of Port of Spain, which set a moratorium on the border issue, "does not in any way modify this country's legitimate claims to that territory." The United Press International (UPI) quoted President Caldera as saying: "Any action carried out in the territory does not alter our rights, our arguments, our aspirations. No developments taking place in the zone under dispute can alter our position or our rights over the area."

In response to President Caldera's statement, the Guyana government, made this terse statement to the press on the 14 October 1972:

Developmental activities of the Guyana government in relation to the county of Essequibo, like all development, are in exercise of Guyana's sovereign rights and in discharge of the Government's sacred duty to improve the living standard of its people after almost two centuries of colonial rule.

Opposition to the Protocol in Venezuela

On the same day of the Guyana government's statement, the Venezuelan newspaper, *El Vespertino*, reported that Senator Leonardo Montiel Ortega of the opposition party, Union Republicana Democratica

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(URD) intended to ask the Venezuelan Congress to veto the Protocol of Port of Spain since “Guyana is exercising sovereignty over the Essequibo territory. . .” The newspaper said that Ortega would ask the Congress to stop Guyana from exercising sovereignty over the Essequibo which, claimed the paper, belonged to Venezuela, but was under dispute since 1899.

Ortega claimed that Guyana had negotiated with a Canadian company to cut timber and was turning the territory into “a desert by indiscriminate farming.” He declared that “the National Congress has still not approved the Port of Spain Protocol which freezes discussions about the dispute.” He added that he would ask that the Protocol be vetoed and denounced before the international law organisations since Guyana had breached the agreement by granting rights for oil exploration and timber operations.

Although the COPEI Government never presented the Protocol to the Venezuelan Congress for official ratification, it, however, stated that it intended to honour the treaty. In 1973, a new Acción Democrática (AD) Government—which had opposed certain aspects of the Protocol when it led the opposition—came to power, but even though it expressed that it would also honour the agreement, it never officially ratified the Protocol in the Venezuelan Congress.

PNC leftist policies and the Brazilian “threat”

In Guyana, the PNC Government which had come to power on the platform of pro-imperialism and anti-communism with the aid of the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in December 1964, had begun to take certain limited progressive actions internally and externally by 1974. These actions commenced after a fraudulent general election on the 16 July 1973 in which the PNC was able to take control of a two-thirds majority in the Parliament. Charges of wholesale rigging and severe condemnation of the election and of the PNC regime were made both locally and internationally.

However, despite these attacks on the regime, it nevertheless began to make statements to the effect that it intended to institute socialist policies and that its political goal was to establish a socialist society in Guyana. A process of the nationalisation of key foreign controlled productive industries was then stepped up and the government began to establish close political links with socialist governments, including Cuba.

As a result of the ideological shift of the PNC to the left, the PPP gave “critical support” to the PNC Government during the 1975-1976 in order to encourage the ruling party to increase and hasten any progressive measure it might have thought about. The PPP warned that it intended to be critical of any short-comings on the part of the regime, and it

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proposed certain political and economic policies that the PNC regime should adopt to move the country towards socialism. As a consequence of this new policy of the PPP towards the regime, the party, which instituted a Parliamentary boycott after the 1973 election, decided to take its allocated seats in the Parliament.

The PPP offer of “critical support” was meant to show that it intended to display its patriotic duty to stand in defence of the nation’s territorial integrity, and to struggle against any pro-imperialist destabilising forces threatening the country’s sovereignty. During this period the PNC regime gave great publicity to information that the Brazilian military forces were being built up on Guyana’s border to the south and were therefore posing a real threat. Such incessant “information” in the media, which was hugely state-controlled, created genuine fears in Guyana that these elements in Brazil would have staged a military intervention on Guyana’s southern border with the main intention of forcing the PNC to reverse its then pro-socialist tendency and to follow again the path of pro-imperialism.

In reality, there was no serious evidence that Brazil was expanding the strength of its border outposts, even though there were some minor reports in the Brazilian press that this was being done. However, these reports were so insignificant that they could not be classified as a “threat” as was being purported by the regime in Guyana.

But the Guyana government, exploiting the issue that Guyana was facing threats on its borders, began the sale of National Defence Bonds ostensibly with the aim of raising money to purchase military hardware and other equipment necessary for national defence. The sale of these bonds, which could be cashed after a period of a minimum of five years, became a primary programme of the government and leading members of the PNC were given the task to induce people to purchase them. In fact, many business owners and public servants who purchased them, because they feared victimisation from the PNC regime in one form or the other, were actually coerced to do so.

Renewed friendship with Venezuela

With the “threat” against Guyana at that period coming from Brazil, the PNC regime paid more friendly attention to Venezuela and, consequently, no attempt was made by Guyana to heat up the border issue. Apparently, Venezuela, now under the Presidency of Carlos Andres Perez, tried desperately from 1974 to play down the border issue during this period. And since that country was receiving verbal attacks from imperialist quarters because of the nationalisation of its petroleum and iron industries, it was tactically willing to lend solidarity to Guyana which was also nationalising its bauxite and sugar industries at that time. By

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doing this, Venezuela intended to win the solidarity of Guyana against any destabilising forces. At the same time, Venezuela which was becoming more and more powerful through its vitalised oil wealth, was competing with Brazil for strategic power in the Caribbean area in particular, and wanted to obtain as many friends in the region as possible. The “threat” from Brazil on Guyana, therefore, was indeed a welcome boon for Venezuela.

As a result of this renewed friendly relationship, the two countries on 12 June 1974 signed a “Convention of Cultural Exchange” to enable the exchange of works of artists and sculptors and others in the artistic field.

The Venezuelan loan to Guyana

This level of cooperation expanded when the Venezuelan government offered economic assistance to Guyana which was experiencing severe economic problems as a result of the international “oil crisis.” From June 1974, Guyana’s Ambassador in Caracas Samuel Rudolph Insanally held discussions with senior officials of the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Office of the President to work out the terms of the economic assistance. As a result of these discussions, Venezuela granted a loan of US\$15 million to Guyana on 22 August 1974.

This loan agreement was arranged through an exchange of diplomatic notes between the Venezuelan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Ephraim Schacht Aristeguieta, and Insanally. By this agreement, the loan was provided as an economic contribution by the Venezuela to Guyana within the framework of the programme of assistance conceived by the United Nations to assist countries seriously affected by the prevailing economic situation brought about by the drastic rise in the price of petroleum.

The following year, on the 12 June 1975, in a story headlined “Venezuela Strengthened Ties—Experts to Work out Co-op Plan,” the *Guyana Chronicle* announced that both Governments had reached agreement for Venezuelan assistance in the economic development of Guyana.

In keeping with this policy of friendship towards Guyana, Prime Minister Burnham was invited to pay a two-day visit to Venezuela. This visit was eventually made in September 1975.

Subsequent to the granting of the US\$15 million loan, the Guyana government began repayment in instalments of US\$500,000 in August 1979.

Five payments amounting to US\$2.5 million were made up to August 1981. No additional payment was made since then.*

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Political developments in Guyana

By 1977, the PNC regime, under pressure from the IMF, had halted its nationalisation drive and it came under attack from the PPP which claimed that the PNC had stopped the pro-socialist process and was under pressure from US imperialism to reverse its policies. The PNC, on the other hand, had refused to accept the measures proposed by the PPP to hasten the move towards socialism. Subsequently, the PNC rejected the “critical support” of the PPP on the grounds that “critical support” was more critical than supportive of PNC policies.

Another proposal made in August 1977 by the PPP for the establishment of a National Patriotic Front and a National Patriotic Front government involving the PNC, the PPP and other progressive forces, in order to bring about a political solution in the country, was rejected outright by the PNC at its second Biennial Congress held in December 1977.

The PPP, in responding to the PNC decision to work alone, claimed that the ruling Party was under pressure from imperialism not to work with the PPP, and predicted that the PNC would be pressured to take an even more pro-imperialist stance. The eventual signing of an agreement with the IMF in June 1978, according to the PPP, was justification of this charge.

Friendship with Brazil restored

After the forthwith declaration of the PNC that it had no intention of working with the Marxist-Leninist PPP, the threat from Brazil abated, and friendly relations were again restored between the two countries. This renewed friendship went a stage further when on 3 July 1978 Guyana signed the Treaty of Amazonian Cooperation (popularly referred to as the Amazon Pact) with seven other South American nations, including Brazil and Venezuela. This multilateral treaty ensured cooperation of the countries sharing the Amazon basin in the development of the area. Resulting from this, Guyana and Brazil agreed to jointly construct a bridge over the Takutu River on the south-western border of Guyana with Brazil. Brazil also submitted plans for the construction of a road linking Brazil through the proposed Takutu bridge with Georgetown. In return, the Brazilians received promises from Guyana of free-port facilities at Georgetown on the completion of the road.

Jonestown, the Hmong plan, and the Mazaruni hydro project

At the time when it was improving relations with Venezuela, the PNC

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administration moved quietly to strengthen the western border. Apparently, the PNC had been thinking of using the western Essequibo, particularly the North West District, as a buffer zone to halt any military aggression from Venezuela. It, therefore, as quietly as possible, arranged for the American preacher, Jim Jones, and members of his cult, the People's Temple, to settle in the North West District near the Barima River from August 1974. Jim Jones settlement, called Jonestown, located not far from Port Kaituma, was secretly given autonomy by the Guyana Government, and it became "a state within a state." [*For a detailed account of Jonestown and its links to Guyana-Venezuela relations, see Chapter 20*].

The murder-suicide of the 914 Jonestown settlers foiled any immediate plan by the Burnham administration to use the settlement as a "buffer." However, the Guyana government, from December 1979, again secretly arranged with organisations closely allied with US political policies, to settle members of the Hmong tribe from south-east Asia in the Waini-Yarakita district north-west of Jonestown and close to the border with Venezuela. [*See Chapter 20*].

The fiercely anti-communist Hmong tribesmen had become "refugees" after they joined American, and later Chinese and other anti-nationalist forces, in fighting against the patriotic forces and their Vietnamese allies who were battling against the genocidal Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. The PPP vehemently opposed the settlement project since it believed that the Hmong could also be used to assist the PNC dictatorial regime in battling any popular uprising in Guyana. The PPP also felt that USA would render assistance to the Hmong tribesmen who would assist the PNC regime to resisting any armed Venezuelan encroachment on Guyanese territory. The public opposition to the project eventually forced the government to abort the scheme on the 6 May 1980.

Guyana-Venezuela relations were also affected by the plan by the Guyana government to build a huge multi-billion dollar hydro-electric project in the upper Mazaruni River area near to the border with Venezuela. [*For details on this project and its effects on relations between Guyana and Venezuela, see Chapter 18*]. Up to the end of 1980 the project, which was subsequently opposed by the Venezuelan government, had not commenced because of the non-availability of international funding. (By the mid-1980s, the Guyana government, after spending over one billion Guyana dollars to prepare the project site, eventually decided not to proceed with it).

*Note: * The Venezuelan government formally cancelled the debt of the remaining US\$12.5 million on 6 March 2008.*

Chapter 25

The Rigged Elections in 1980

December 15, 1980 proved to be one of the blackest days experienced by the Guyanese people. It was on this day the PNC regime, aided by the military forces, concluded its hat-trick of crudely rigged elections, thus maintaining itself in power against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the people of Guyana.

The fraudulent 1980 elections came after the PNC prepared and introduced a constitutional machinery which rapidly eroded the democratic rights of the people.

Because of heavy mismanagement and corruption within the ranks of the PNC, the country was plunged into a serious political, economic and social crisis. Consequently, the PNC knew by 1978, five years after it had rigged itself a two-thirds majority in Parliament, that it had no hope of winning any fairly conducted election; especially more so with the growing support enjoyed by the PPP, and to some extent, the WPA which was also undermining the PNC power base in the rural areas.

By this time, the PNC had become so power-drunk that it did not even entertain the proposals put forward by the PPP for the establishment of a national patriotic front government of all democratic and leftist forces in order to pull the nation out of the political and economic morass—the result of a pro-imperialist policy despite high sounding “socialist” slogans by the PNC—into which it has been rapidly sinking.

From a PNC standpoint, general elections due in 1978 had to be held back. It waited until early 1978 to announce that there was need for a new constitution, to place power in the hands of Guyanese, and to bring about a

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change to socialism. The PPP, however, pointed out that there was no need to have a new constitution, since there was nothing in the old constitution to prevent socialist legislation from being enacted.

The rigged referendum

However, the PNC regime proposed a referendum by which the electorate was asked to say that instead of referendum, a two-thirds majority in Parliament should carry out the process of changing the constitution or any part of it. The PPP, the WPA, and other political and social groups called a boycott of the referendum with the effect that only 10 to 15 percent of the electorate voted. The PNC declared results, nevertheless, claimed that 71 percent cast their votes, and of this, 98 percent supported the PNC proposal!

Armed with this new rigged power, the PNC postponed the 1978 general elections, extended the life of Parliament by 15 months, and announced the formation of a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution. Members of Parliament, representatives of religious groups and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) were included as members of the Constituent Assembly. However, the PPP refused to participate while the Guyana Council of Churches declined to send representatives. The PNC then again displayed its arrogance by designating, through Parliament, certain minority religious groupings as accredited representatives of the Christian Church. Except for the two-man rightist United Force (UF) team, the PNC controlled the entire Constituent Assembly.

Numerous memoranda were submitted to the Constituent Assembly, but when the Assembly finally concluded its work, it rejected all except the draft submitted by the PNC. Those rejected in totality included one submitted by the TUC, which, interestingly, (because its leadership was PNC-controlled), still gave unilateral support to the PNC in the 1980 elections.

The new constitution was eventually promulgated in October 1980, with PNC leader Forbes Burnham sworn in as Executive President. Shortly after, Burnham announced that elections would be held on December 15, 1980. These were to be two-fold. In addition to general elections, political parties were asked to submit candidates for regional elections to be held in each of ten designated regions. Those elected in each region were to form a "Regional Democratic Council." The elections were to be held on the basis of proportional representation; and the leader of the winning party in the general elections was to become the Executive President.

According to the new constitution, the President would not be a Member of Parliament even though he would hold sweeping and supreme powers over all constitutional agencies. Parliament itself would consist of 65 members, made up of 53 elected, one each nominated from the 10 regions,

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and two nominated from the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs. This latter body would be made up of two nominated representatives from each of the ten regions. Thus, 12 members were to be nominated, reminiscent of government in the colonial period. In addition, technocrat Ministers and technocrat Parliamentary Secretaries would also be designated Members of Parliament, but without voting rights.

Blocking the one-party state

Speculation was rife as to the reaction of the opposition parties to the forthcoming elections. The WPA decided almost immediately on a boycott. The minuscule right-wing Vanguard for Liberation and Democracy (VLD) decided likewise and both parties began a campaign urging Guyanese to boycott the polls. The WPA and VLD maintained that their boycott call was due to the PNC's refusal to meet minimum conditions for free and fair elections, as jointly demanded by the PPP, WPA and VLD. These demands, made in August 1980, included the reconstitution of the Elections Commission with the Chairman being a person of regional or international standing; the Commission must be directly responsible for all stages of the elections, including the appointing of elections officials; the abolition of overseas voting except by Guyanese who would be temporarily away on duty; ending postal voting; limitation of proxies; preliminary counting of votes in each polling district at the end of the poll; and all agents of opposition parties to accompany ballot boxes at all times.

The PPP refrained from making an immediate announcement until its membership in the various regions discussed whether or not participation in general elections was necessary at this stage of the political struggle. Clearly, it felt that a revolutionary situation had not yet arisen, and that despite its unpopularity, the PNC was in full control of the state machinery. Consequently, it was important that the PPP should participate to block the setting up of a one-party state.

On October 20, 1980 the PPP, after consulting its membership at regional conferences, eventually announced that it would participate in the elections despite the expected rigging. The PPP pointed out that its decision was based on a strict and sober appraisal of the balance of class forces in Guyana as well as the experience of revolutionary movements throughout the world. The Party explained that it believed that it must utilise every forum without exception, and every institution, however corrupt, to expose the reactionary minority PNC regime, and to raise the ideological-political consciousness of the masses so as to advance the cause of the revolution. It concluded that "the battle would be won by the people of Guyana as elsewhere, by whatever means they are forced to adopt. In this period the

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PPP finds it necessary to continue its revolutionary work outside as well as inside the central and local parliamentary arenas, to expose PNC ideological demagoguery and state bureaucratic and co-operative capitalism masquerading as socialism, and to prepare the way for the decisive battle to end, once and for all, PNC despotism and minority rule.”

In the meanwhile, the PNC had begun its campaign, using the radio and the state-owned *Chronicle* newspaper. Its campaign was centred on attacking the PPP and its leaders. Its public meetings were poorly attended and the state transportation services were commandeered to ferry people to build up crowds. On the other hand, massive crowds voluntarily turned up at PPP meetings all over Guyana and expressed publicly full confidence in its leaders. No doubt the masses welcomed the active struggle of the PPP against the PNC and rejected the boycott calls of other opposition groupings.

The campaign was, however, not without violence. PNC thugs, aided by the police, broke up some public meetings of the PPP. In one incident, supporters of the PPP who defended a meeting from the thugs were arrested by the police who then allowed the thugs to savagely beat them. These PPP supporters, including two candidates, in the elections, were then placed on trumped-up charges by the police.

Electoral powers usurped

Meanwhile, the powers of the Elections Commission were rapidly usurped, and the Chief Elections Officer, a regime appointee, published the electoral roll. Although the preliminary lists of voters were required by law to be posted up in all areas of Guyana, this deliberately was not done. In addition, the period of time allocated for claims and objections was totally inadequate, especially in view of the fact that persons who had a right to be registered as voters had no opportunity to check the lists to see if their names were in fact recorded.

As happened in the 1968 and 1973 rigged elections, large numbers of bogus names appeared, and there were many cases of multiple registration. Names of dead people were also on the list, including a number of those who perished in the murder-suicide drama at Jonestown in November 1979.

Faced with continuous demands by the PPP for the revised voters' list, the Chief Elections Officer announced that 111,500 names were removed from the preliminary list, even though that list of deletions was not given to the Party.

There was also massive bungling of the deletion process. For example, in Region 8 (Rupununi) where the preliminary list showed just over 5,000 voters, it was announced that 6,000 names were deleted! This was mathematically impossible. And in Region 10 (with the bauxite town of Linden as the main urban area) 16,000 names were deleted! After these

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deletions, 29,379 names were added to the national voters' list.

The overseas list of 47,000 names was also packed with bogus names, and the addresses were totally garbled and incomprehensible.

It was clear that it would have been physically impossible to update the elections list by deleting 111,500 names and adding 29,379 names in the two weeks between publication of the preliminary list on October 28 and the closing date for objections on November 10. The PPP was handed the preliminary list on November 7, giving it a mere three days to check 512,500 names!

At a meeting with the Elections Commission on December 10 the PPP demanded the overseas list, and lists of proxy and postal voters. The Party also called upon the acting Chairman of the Commission, Harry Bollers, to issue directions permitting polling agents of the ruling and opposition parties to accompany the ballot boxes in the vehicles transporting the said boxes to the counting centres. However, Bollers, a High Court judge, refused to accede to these requests. In regard to the last stated demand, he said that the matter was left solely in the hands of the district returning officers on whether or not they were willing to allow polling agents to accompany the boxes.

In a comment after the meeting, PPP General Secretary, Cheddi Jagan, charged that both the Elections Commission and the Chief Elections Officer were passing the buck to each other. He stated that the regime had made the Chief Elections Officer into an independent official with statutory powers, rather than having him functioning under the Elections Commission as the constitution envisaged.

Arrival of observer team

Responding to a PNC boast that anyone was free to come to Guyana to observe the elections, an international team of observers arrived in the country about a week before elections day. The team was headed by Lord Avebury of Britain who had served as an official observer in the 1978 rigged Bolivian elections. It also included Lord Chitnis, also of Britain, who served as official observer at interim elections in Zimbabwe in 1979, and that country's follow-up elections in 1980. Other members of the team included prominent personalities from the Caribbean, Canada and the United States of America.

From the moment the team arrived, its members were abused and harassed by the regime who tried to deny them access to vital information. On elections day itself, several of them, including Lord Avebury, were arrested by the Police. Notes, films and tapes were confiscated.

Polling day itself saw a massive turn-out of voters in the rural areas,

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particularly those with traditional PPP loyalties. In the urban area, particularly Georgetown and Linden, once PNC strongholds, voting was down to a trickle, since the people in those areas had already become disillusioned with the PNC.

Massive irregularities were observed throughout the day, and large numbers of eligible voters were denied the right to vote in one way or the other. Proxy voting and postal voting were heavily abused at the expense of eligible voters. Other voters were disenfranchised because of minor clerical errors in the list. Some of them were even told that they were dead!

Among other irregularities were the multiple registration of voters on different lists; deliberate stalling of the processing of votes; prevention of inspection of the ballot boxes by opposition agents; and the ejection of opposition agents from polling stations in some districts. In addition, unlisted PNC supporters were allowed to vote, while in some PPP strongholds the returning officers refused to exercise their discretion to allow unlisted persons to vote even when they had satisfactory proof of their identities. Further, it must be mentioned, many polling stations were located in the private residences of PNC activists, and in one case, of a PNC candidate; while the entire staff of the polling process were PNC activists.

Military takeover

At the close of the poll a virtual military coup occurred. A combined force of the military, police and PNC thugs, working in unison, took charge of the ballot boxes in a massive display of military might designed to defeat the will of the people and maintain the PNC in power. PPP polling agents were not allowed to accompany the ballot boxes. The PPP elections agent and counting agents, plus the PPP member on the Elections Commission, were prevented at gunpoint from entering counting stations.

In Region 4, (the largest region which includes the capital city Georgetown), it was not until 13 hours after voting ended that the PPP counting agents and those from the other opposition parties were told that they could enter the central counting station. The maximum time it would have taken for all ballot boxes of the region to reach the counting place was four hours. It was obvious that the PNC regime, unable to win at the polls, spent over 13 hours tampering with the ballot boxes and doctoring the votes. And instead of counting the people's votes, the corrupt regime counted the bogus ballots it had stuffed in the boxes.

The rigged results were a foregone conclusion. The PNC gave itself 77 per cent of the votes or 41 seats in Parliament. (It even took for itself 98 percent of the overseas votes, even though overseas Guyanese left the country to escape hardships created by the PNC)! The PPP, the real majority party, was given 19 per cent of the total, or 10 Parliamentary seats. The

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right-wing UF was given the rest and was allocated 2 seats. As a result of the rigging the PNC also seized power in all the ten regions. (The PPP had contested in 8 regions, while the UF contested in only one). The remaining 12 nominated Parliamentary seats pushed the PNC total to 53.

PPP claims success

On December 16, the day after the elections, the international team of observers issued a statement by which it condemned the electoral process, giving examples of the manner in which the elections were rigged. The statement concluded “that the worst fears expressed by the Guyanese people regarding the violation of the electoral process have been confirmed.”

The PNC gloated over its “victory” and bragged that it had decimated the PPP in its traditional strongholds. And despite the worldwide publicity of the international observers’ report that the elections were totally fraudulent, no criticisms were issued by the major western powers, including the United States and the United Kingdom. Instead, they, like the Caricom countries, sent messages of hearty congratulations to Burnham. Apparently, in the existing Cold War situation, they had no objections to rigged elections as long as they served the purpose of keeping out the “communist” PPP from power.

In a statement following the elections, the PPP, which claimed victory at the polls, urged the Guyanese masses to stride forward in confidence in 1981, and to lift their heads high in the face of adversity. The Guyanese people, the statement noted, must not even think of despairing, and must pledge themselves to struggle harder so that the dawn of people's power can draw nearer.

The PPP's decision to contest the elections was vindicated by the militant response its stand engendered among the people for free and fair elections, by confirming and strengthening the internal isolation of the PNC, and by demonstrating to the international community the unpopularity of the PNC and its fraudulent manipulation of the electoral process which would contribute to its international isolation. Significantly, the Caribbean Council of Churches, representative on the international team of observers, Dr. Ramesh Deosarran, stated that the decision of the PPP to contest the elections provided the team with an open opportunity to monitor the polls.

The struggle for democracy

The PPP, in analysing the effects of the electoral fraud, saw Guyana entering into an even more uncertain future. The Party felt that as long as the corrupt PNC regime remained in power for the benefit of its elite and its

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international backers, conditions would continue to worsen. It stated that as social conditions deteriorate, contradictions between the masses and the regime would sharpen. The unpopular PNC regime, it predicted, would resort more and more to police and army methods in solving political and industrial problems, thereby sowing the seeds of its own eventual demise.

There was a general feeling among Guyanese that the PPP won the 1980 general and regional elections by a clear majority, but that a virtual military coup took place when the army took control of the ballot boxes and ensured the PNC being returned to power. The PNC, at the same time, had its reasons for not wanting an open military dictatorship. It preferred instead to have a "parliamentary democratic" facade which, however, fooled no one as to its unrepresentative nature.

The majority of the Guyanese people were also of the firm opinion that the immediate solution to the grinding problems in Guyana, therefore, was for them to win free and fair elections and the establishment of democratic government. For this, they had to struggle for another 12 years.

Chapter 26

The Termination of the Protocol of Port of Spain

On April 2-3, 1981, Forbes Burnham, now President of Guyana, paid a state visit to Venezuela. As a build-up to this event, the Venezuelan daily, *El Nacional*, during the last week of March, published a series of articles entitled “In the vortex of the Essequibo,” aimed at stirring up national support for the Venezuelan claim to western Essequibo. At the same time, the articles unleashed a scathing attack on the political and economic policies of the PNC regime in Guyana (which was classified as the South Africa of South America). They also expressed the view that Guyanese, particularly of Indian and Amerindian descent, were discriminated against and severely oppressed.

Burnham’s visit to Caracas

No reason was given by the Guyana government for Burnham’s visit to Venezuela. However, the Venezuelan media speculated that discussions would centre on the Protocol of Port of Spain which Venezuela might not want to renew after its expiration in June 1982.

After a welcome ceremony at the airport where he was greeted by President Herrera Campins, Burnham proceeded to a wreath-laying ceremony at the Simon Bolivar monument in central Caracas where a group of noisy demonstrators, in a picketing exercise, expressed their country’s territorial claim.

The Guyana government apparently wanted to create an impression in Guyana that Burnham obtained a good reception in Venezuela. The

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Ministry of Information reported that Burnham was given an “impressive welcome” and matters relating to the border controversy were discussed by the two presidents in a very cordial atmosphere.

At a state dinner in Caracas on 2 April, replying to a speech by President Campins, Burnham, touched briefly on the border issue:

There is a difference of opinion relating to our border. However, given the fact that our two countries have displayed so eloquently on numerous occasions, a collective adhesion to the noble tenets of international law and international relations such as the peaceful settlement of dispute and non-interference in the internal affairs of states, we are also convinced that our border differences can receive dispassionate attention within an atmosphere of harmony and goodwill.

And just before his departure on 3 April, Burnham at a press conference rejected the claim by sections of the Venezuelan press that Guyana was seeking military and other support from the Cuban Government in relation to the border question. He emphasised that Guyana was not soliciting the involvement of any third party in the territorial issue since the matter was between two sovereign states which were competent to settle their problems.

Venezuela's communiqué

But the events took a dramatic turn on the night of 4 April, when the Venezuelan Government issued from Campins' Miraflores Palace a communiqué emphasising Venezuela's objection to hydro-electric project of the upper Mazaruni and asserting that it had no intention of renewing the Protocol of Port of Spain.

There was no reaction from Burnham until 8 April when he called a press conference to explain his government's position on the issue. He revealed that during his meeting with Campins both of them sought in the spirit of good neighbourliness to exchange views and discussed how they would approach the search for a solution to the differences of opinion on the border controversy. Generally, they agreed that there should be further consultations within the context of the legal instruments relating to the frontier.

Burnham said that they also examined how economic and other forms of cooperation could be implemented especially on the question of the Upper Mazaruni hydro-electric project.

The Guyanese response

By this time, sections of the Venezuelan media were already stoking up the Venezuelan claim and even calling for military occupation of the

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western Essequibo region. The hysteria this created in Guyana was amplified by sections of the PNC-controlled media claiming that Venezuela was amassing troops in the border region

Support for Guyana's territorial integrity came from numerous political and social organisations in the country. The government received immediate unilateral support from the United Force for the way in which it was dealing with the issue. However, the Working People's Alliance (WPA) declared that the matter could only be properly handled if Guyana had a legitimate, nationally-supported government to enter into negotiations with its neighbour. Emphasising that the party opposed Venezuela's claim, it added that the Burnham regime did not have the necessary moral authority to enter into negotiations for a final resolution of the border issue.

The first response by the PPP to the escalation of the border issue was a brief statement made by its leader, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, and published in the *Mirror* of 19 April 1981. Dr. Jagan expressed regret that the government never thought of consulting with the PPP before Burnham's visit to Caracas to ascertain its views and those of the majority of the Guyanese people on the issue.

Soon after at a public meeting in Georgetown, Dr. Jagan declared, "We would like this border issue to be solved, and not be left dangling like a sword of Damocles over our heads." He also called for the setting up of a "genuine representative body in Guyana to meet with a similar body in Venezuela to thresh out this problem. If an agreement is reached, then such an agreement could be lasting."

Diplomatic tensions

Meanwhile, diplomatic tensions rose to a new level when in mid-April 1981, on two occasions, Venezuela alleged that Guyanese soldiers fired shots at Venezuelan army personnel from Eteringbang, the Guyana border post near to Ankoko Island. However, the Guyana government dismissed the allegations as "totally without foundation."

These tensions increased when the 25 April issue of the daily *El Diario de Caracas* reported that the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs had given instructions to high functionaries in the international financial organisations to try to block loans which the Guyana Government had requested for the development of the Essequibo. Then on 1 May, Dr. Sadio Garavini, the Venezuelan ambassador in Georgetown, was called home for consultations, a move linked with the stiffening of Venezuela's position on the border issue.

During this period, in Venezuela top ranking military officials held discussions with President Campins after the Venezuelan National Defence and Security Council stated that the Venezuelan claim to the

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western Essequibo was “a national security issue.”

Burnham’s speech on Labour Day 1981

Labour Day, 1 May 1981, was widely used by the Guyana government to propagandise its position on the border issue. In Georgetown at the National Park, Burnham addressed a large gathering of school children and workers and devoted his entire speech on this matter. He stated that Venezuela was engaged in both physical and economic aggression against Guyana and pointed out that the Venezuelans were trying to use their “perceived influences” in international circles to block loans and grants intended to be used for the development of Essequibo. He insisted that Guyana was prepared to discuss but not prepared to yield any territory to Venezuela.

Touching on the demand by workers for a minimum wage of fourteen dollars a day, Burnham was explicit: “We can discuss the fourteen dollars; we can discuss twenty-one dollars; but right now we have to defend the Essequibo. Let us decide to unite so that we can defend the Essequibo.”

He then proceeded to ask the workers to choose “between the fourteen dollars a day and the Essequibo!” He also urged all Guyanese to join the People’s Militia to help defend Essequibo from any Venezuelan military aggression. “Let me hear no squawking about guns before butter, flour and other foods because there would be none of those without the guns,” he declared. (An organised large group of PNC supporters in the audience, at this time, chanted that they preferred Essequibo rather than the fourteen dollars a day wage increase!)

Burnham also announced that in an effort to prepare the country to defend itself from the Venezuelan “threat,” Parliament would meet during May to review the 1981 budget so as to allocate funds to meet such needs. Further, he intimated that a special meeting of parliament would be called to discuss the border controversy.

PPP comments

On 10 May, the PPP commented on Burnham’s Labour Day speech and the hysteria it was causing. The Party stated:

The PNC is escalating the verbal hostilities no doubt to give it a convenient lever to stifle the workers’ demand for wage increases. . . . The regime, true to its anti-working class colours, is not keen in paying up the fourteen dollars (a day) or to raise wages for 1980-81 to a satisfactory level. Instead it is taking steps to restructure the 1981 budget so as to make more funds available for the military apparatus. . . . In 1980, the PNC declined to pay the \$14 (per day minimum wage) and excused itself by saying that the

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hydro-project was more important. Now, in 1981, it is again excusing itself by saying that the border crisis is more important than “luxuries” . . .

When the Protocol of Port of Spain expires on June 18, 1982, the Geneva Agreement of 1966 (which the PNC-UF regime should not have signed) will apply. And this provides for a recourse to the UN for a peaceful solution. It does not automatically mean that Venezuela would go to war against Guyana on June 19, 1982 or some hours or days afterwards. Are the Guyanese people to be under the added stress of war hysteria for a whole year to come?

Diplomatic offensive

During May-June 1981, both countries launched a diplomatic offensive in the Caribbean and Latin America to brief those governments on their respective positions. While the Spanish-speaking countries preferred to remain neutral on the issue, those of Caricom were outspoken in their support for Guyana and demanded that Venezuela should withdraw its claim.

Venezuela also held a high-level meeting between Venezuela and the United States Government in Washington DC. The American representatives at the top-level talks included Vice President George Bush and Secretary of State Alexander Haig while Venezuela’s delegation was headed by Interior Minister Rafael Andres Montes De Oca and included Dr. Gonsalo Garcia Bustillos, Minister to the Presidential Secretariat and one of Venezuela’s representatives on the Guyana-Venezuela Commission appointed under the Geneva Agreement.

Reporting on the outcome of this meeting, the *Guyana Chronicle* on 31 May stated:

American sources at the United Nations Headquarters have been quoted as saying that the USA will never side with Venezuela against Guyana on the border question. Members of the Venezuelan delegation themselves have admitted that the USA is definitely neutral. According to one source, the Venezuelans have been advised by Washington that they (the Venezuelans) can lose many good friends by not abandoning their territorial claim against Guyana.

Venezuela stepped up its “aggression” when on 8 June 1981 the Venezuelan Foreign Minister José Alberto Zambrano Velasco, in a letter to the President of the World Bank, objected to the financing the Upper Mazaruni hydro-electric project by the multilateral institution. While saying that Venezuela had never recognised the arbitral award of 1899, the letter further declared Venezuela’s claim to Guyana’s territory, and alleged that “the objective pursued by Guyana with its Upper Mazaruni project was political.”

The letter also attacked the World Bank insisting that it was not

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within the Bank's "competence" to "prejudge or adopt a position on border controversies." It also reaffirmed Venezuela's opposition to any transaction between Guyana and the World Bank involving finance of the hydro-electric scheme. In any case, Venezuela argued, the feasibility of the project depended on the purchase of electricity by Venezuela, something which the Venezuelan government did not intend to do.

But in a lengthy letter to President of the World Bank on 19 September 1981, Desmond Hoyte, Guyana's Vice-President for Economic Planning and Finance, strongly denounced the Venezuelan claim and insisted that Venezuela had no right to determine what development projects should be carried out on Guyana's sovereign territory.

Hoyte added that the Venezuelan Foreign Minister was under a misconception that the feasibility of the hydro-electric project depended on the purchase of electricity by Venezuela. The project, he explained, was independently assessed by the World Bank, among others, as being technically and economically feasible, in circumstances which did not "involve or require Venezuelan participation in any shape or form."

UN and Commonwealth meetings

Matters moved in September 1981 to the UN General Assembly where both countries to forward their respective positions. Guyana's Prime Minister, Dr. Ptolemy Reid, in his address on 24 September noted that in Venezuela there were increasingly clamorous calls for a military solution to the controversy.

In a reply to Reid's speech on the same day, Dr. Zambrano, the Venezuelan Foreign Minister, outlined the Venezuelan version of the history of the border and alleged that the 1899 Award was non-existent. However, Noel Sinclair, Guyana's Permanent Representative to the UN, in exercising his right to reply to Dr. Zambrano's statement, told the UN General Assembly on 5 October 1981:

If all a state has to do to secure revision of a frontier is to allege the nullity or the non-existence of the agreement establishing that frontier, without being required to advance proof in support of that contention, then our planet would be thrown into a turbulence of ghastly and unimaginable proportions.

Guyana won further support at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference which was held in Melbourne, Australia during the first week in October 1981. President Burnham addressed the summit which, in its final communiqué stated: "Noting that the existing boundary has been laid down by an international arbitral award in 1899 and accepted by all concerned as the final settlement, they expressed support for Guyana and called for the peaceful settlement of the

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controversy in accordance with established procedures and with full respect for the sanctity of treaties.”

Venezuela’s notice to end the Protocol

On 11 December 1981, Venezuela officially gave notice of its intention not to renew the Protocol of Port of Spain beyond 18 June 1982, the date of its expiry. This was communicated in a letter from Venezuela’s Foreign Minister Dr. Zambrano to Guyana’s Foreign Minister, Rashleigh Jackson.

The British government, as a party to the Protocol, was also informed by the Venezuelan government of its decision. In a statement issued in London, the British Government expressed the hope that on the expiry of the Protocol, the Guyanese and Venezuelan Governments would pursue the procedures for arriving at a peaceful settlement provided in the Geneva Agreement, to which Great Britain remained a party.

That same day the Guyana Foreign Affairs Ministry issued a statement that it was studying the implications of the Venezuelan notice of termination in the light of the currently evolving circumstances, including statements and pronouncements emanating from Venezuela at that time. The Ministry also reaffirmed that Guyana’s policy remained firmly based on the maintenance of good neighbourly relations and the peaceful resolution of the controversy.

In a comment on the Venezuelan notice to end the Protocol, the *Guyana Chronicle* of 14 December 1981 quoted Venezuelan Ambassador to Guyana Dr. Garavini as saying that both Guyana and Venezuela failed to make constructive use of the time frame of the Protocol. The Ambassador said three basic sets of consideration influenced the Venezuelan Government to end the Protocol. These, he said, were domestic politics, which was of prime importance, the state of international relations, and the state of affairs between Guyana and Venezuela.

Dr. Garavini did not believe that his Government would be moved to exercise the military option even though there were forces in Venezuela advocating such a move. But he felt that prolongation of the matter would lead to dangerous emotionalism and nationalism on both sides and could jeopardise the prospects of settlement.

Burnham’s reaction

In an address on 25 January 1982 to the Guyana Parliament, Burnham strongly attacked Venezuela for its hostile campaigns against Guyana. Because of the military threat from Venezuela, he declared, Guyana would have to further strengthen its defence measures. This statement was made during a period when production in all sectors of the

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economy was falling rapidly. This was the period, too, when the PNC administration strengthened its ban on a large variety of imported foodstuffs, including wheat flour, a basic staple of the Guyanese population. Burnham also stated that Guyana would begin an international campaign to inform the world about the spurious nature of the Venezuelan claim.

During the debate on Burnham's address which followed a few days later, the PPP charged that it was not being consulted about the alleged deterioration in Guyana-Venezuela relations, and charged the PNC of using the border issue as a diversionary tactic to justify the imposition of more taxes on the Guyanese people.

Burnham again dealt with the border issue during a speech in Georgetown to mark the twelfth anniversary of the achievement of republican status by Guyana on 23 February 1982. After dealing with the history of the issue, he examined the current situation:

. . . Now that Venezuela has refused to permit automatic renewal of the Protocol, Guyana stand ready as provided by Article VI of the Geneva Agreement to have recourse to any one of the means of settlement provided under Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations. These include negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement — obviously by the International Court of Justice, resort to regional agencies or organisations, or other means of settlement mutually agreed by the two parties. One means set out under Article 33 of the Charter, which is closed to Guyana, is resort to the regional agency of the Organisation of American States, for by another Treaty of Washington and on the insistence of Venezuela, Guyana is not and cannot be a member of that organisation as it is at present constituted.

When I paid a state visit to Venezuela on the 2-3 April last year, I proposed to the President of Venezuela that we continue a round of discussions and negotiations with a view to a peaceful solution. Such discussions were to be at the levels of Presidents, Ministers and officials, and I invited the Venezuelan President to return my visit. Though he intimated that Venezuela proposed to exercise its right to terminate the Protocol of Port of Spain, he did not agree to the continuing of dialogue as proposed by me.

He again denounced Venezuela's economic aggression and the "repeated violations of our air space; the violation of Guyana's territorial integrity by an invasion into the Guyana portion of Ankoko Island in September 1966 and its continued illegal occupation since that time; and last but not least, her attempt to appropriate Guyana's offshore waters in July 1968."

He then announced the establishment of "defence bonds" and appealed to all Guyanese to purchase them so that funds could be accrued for the defence of the country.

The "defence bonds" scheme was subsequently launched at the

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beginning of March 1982 with the government announcing that a target of 10 million Guyana dollars was set for that month. As the scheme went into operation, there were numerous complaints that many persons were being coerced by PNC officials to purchase the bonds, and many workers in the public sector were actually ordered by their superiors to purchase them. Despite big promotional campaigns involving the President and members of the Cabinet in many parts of the country, less than half of the target was met by the end of the month.

Nevertheless, Guyanese sentiments were totally against the Venezuelan claim, and a popular song entitled “Not a Blade of Grass” became a rallying tune throughout the country. The song, recorded the year before by the calypso group, the Tradewinds, was played numerous times everyday on the radio, and it was soon regarded as Guyana’s “second” national anthem.

End of the Protocol

At midnight on 18 June 1982, the Protocol of Port of Spain finally expired. Earlier that day, Guyana’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Rashleigh Jackson confirmed Guyana’s “abiding commitment to international law” and, “while reserving its position on past and continuing Venezuelan acts, now publicly reiterates its consistent resolve to participate in good faith in the processes provided for in Article IV of the Geneva Agreement for seeking a solution to the controversy. . .”

Some four hours before its expiry of the Protocol (on the evening of 17 June), President Burnham made a nation-wide broadcast in which he dealt with the consequence of the termination. He said, *inter alia*:

You may ask what next? Simply, Guyana and Venezuela must now return to the Geneva Agreement of 1966 which requires them to identify procedures designed to settle the controversy which has so far, and unfortunately, inhibited the development of those friendly relations which should characterise dealings between neighbours. . .

From our point of view it was unfortunate that Venezuela never sought ... to establish the nullity of the Award, but rather proceeded on the unilateral assumption that the alleged nullity was a fact. . . We are, nevertheless, prepared to continue the search for a solution in the friendliest manner with our western neighbour; it is our hope that Venezuela stands ready to do likewise.

Five days later, the Venezuelan Embassy in Guyana issued a press statement explaining Venezuela’s position on the border issue now that the Protocol had expired. It explained that with the Geneva Agreement back in full force, the Venezuelan government would invite the Guyana government to fulfil its duties in accordance with that Agreement,

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choosing direct negotiations between the two parties as the means of solution of controversies mentioned in Article 33 of the United Nations Charter. The statement also emphasised that for the two parties to negotiate “a satisfactory solution for the practical settlement of the controversy” they would have to consider “not only the juridical elements involved in this issue, but also all the historical, moral, political, geographic and other aspects that could lead us to a balanced, practical, acceptable and definitively, just solution.”

The Embassy further rejected “as absurd, baseless and not serious” recent accusations of Venezuelan intention of using force to solve the controversy. Venezuela, it added, wanted to exist in peace and fraternity with Guyana and, therefore, it was in their common interest to try to understand each other better.

One year after Burnham had promised that the National Assembly would meet to discuss the border issue, this eventually materialised on 8 July 1982. At the end of the debate, a resolution mandating the National Assembly to establish a “Parliamentary Committee on the Territorial Integrity of Guyana” for the purpose of keeping under constant review developments relating to the Venezuelan claim, was passed unanimously. The resolution, while rejecting “the untenable claim by Venezuela to territory of Guyana”, also directed the government seek the support of the international community at all forums including the United Nations.

The nine-member Parliamentary Committee on the Territorial Integrity of Guyana, (five members from the PNC, three from the PPP and one from the UF), was subsequently formed on 25 August 1982.

Proposals and counter-proposals

With the Protocol of Port of Spain having been terminated, there followed an exchange of letters between the two governments as to the way forward as contemplated by the Geneva Agreement. On 1 July 1982, in a letter from Zambrano to Jackson, the Venezuelan government officially proposed to Guyana that direct negotiations should now begin between both Governments.

Jackson responded on 20 August 1982 saying that Guyana could not accept the proposal and counter-proposed the adoption of judicial settlement as the means of settlement and suggested that the matter could be handled by the International Court of Justice.

However, in a reply on 30 August, Zambrano stated that the proposal of judicial settlement was not suited to the aims and objectives of the Geneva Agreement. He complained that Guyana’s negative reply to invitation to negotiate suggested “an unwillingness to discuss or even to listen.” He again repeated his proposal of direct negotiations between the two countries.

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But in a strongly worded reply on 19 September 1982, Jackson expressed disappointment with the Venezuelan government's "summary, peremptory and seemingly irrevocable a dismissal of one of the means of peaceful settlement" contemplated by the Geneva Agreement "through its clear requirement for a selection to be made of one of the means of peaceful settlement provided for in Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations, which explicitly include both negotiation and judicial settlement."

Jackson urged the Venezuelan government to reconsider the proposal for judicial settlement claiming it was well adapted to deal with the controversy in an independent, impartial and objective manner.

By 18 September, three months after the ending of the Protocol of Port of Spain, no mutual agreement on solving the issue was arrived at by Guyana and Venezuela. As a result, both countries were now expected to refer the decision as to the means of settlement to an appropriate international organ upon which they should both agree. If an agreement was not reached on which appropriate international organ the question should be referred to, then the Secretary General of the United Nations, according to the terms of the Geneva Agreement, would eventually be requested by both parties to choose a method of peaceful settlement, as stated in Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations, i.e., judicial, negotiation, fact-finding, inquiry, arbitration, mediation, conciliation, or resort to regional agencies or UN bodies.

Eventually on 19 September, Zambrano wrote to Jackson stating that since the three-month period had elapsed during which the two sides could not reach agreement on the method of peaceful settlement that should be applied, the Venezuelan Government intended to refer the issue to the UN Secretary General and suggested that Guyana should do the same.

On the following day, the Secretary General of the UN, Javier Perez de Cuellar, stated that he was ready to use all the resources at his disposal to settle the Guyana-Venezuela controversy. He said that the problem of the two countries provided an opportunity for both the Secretary General and the Security Council to assist the countries in overcoming their differences. He added that he was in contact with both Governments to consider the ways of preventing a conflict and noted "a genuine desire on both sides to find a just and peaceful solution."

However, in a reply on 8 October to Zambrano's letter, the acting Foreign Minister of Guyana, Dr. Mohamed Shahabuddeen, noted that while Guyana held the highest respect for the UN Secretary General, he would be competent to act "in circumstances in which the two Governments have failed to agree on an appropriate international organ under the first alternative, an event which has not yet occurred." It was pointed out further that the two Governments had not yet embarked on

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any steps to reach agreement on an international organ as contemplated in the first alternative. For these reasons Guyana was of the view that the proposal of Venezuela at this stage was “premature and inadmissible.”

The letter concluded that Guyana was ready to endeavour to reach agreement with Venezuela on an international organ, and, as such, suggested that the appropriate organ would be the UN General Assembly.

Zambrano replied on 15 October 1982, expressing Venezuela’s disagreement with Guyana’s latest proposal. He added that since there was no agreement on the selection of an international organ, it was obvious that the issue should be entrusted to the Secretary General of the UN.

Referral to the UN Secretary General

Now that it was clear that the two countries could not concur on an appropriate international organ to deal with the issue, the Guyana government on 28 March 1983 agreed to refer the matter to the Secretary General of the UN who would decide on the means of settlement after consulting with both parties. In a statement expressing this sentiment, the government declared that Guyana “has every confidence in the impartiality and integrity of the Secretary General of the UN and will cooperate full with him in the execution of his task as envisaged in the Geneva Agreement.”

At the same time the statement was issued, Foreign Minister Jackson dispatched a letter to his Venezuelan counterpart in which he expressed Guyana’s agreement to refer the border issue to the UN Secretary General. Jackson also communicated this information to the UN Secretary General, Perez de Cuellar, who replied on 31 March indicating his readiness to undertake the responsibility of selecting the means of peaceful settlement to resolve the controversy.

Zambrano eventually responded to Jackson on 23 May 1983 expressing satisfaction for the acceptance by the government of Guyana our proposition to go before the UN Secretary-General as the most appropriate international body to fulfil the role envisaged by the Geneva Agreement. He was optimistic that this decision would lead to “a solution satisfactory for the practical settlement of the dispute, so it is amicably resolved in a manner acceptable to both sides. . .”

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Chapter 27

The Rigged 1985 Elections

Forbes Burnham, President of Guyana and leader of the PNC, died in August 1985 and was succeeded to those positions by Desmond Hoyte. General elections were set for 9 December 1985 and on 4 November 1985 Hoyte agreed to some long fought-for demands by the opposition parties to abolish the overseas vote and cut back on proxy voting—two of the instruments used to rig elections since 1968. In making his “concessions,” he boasted that he was cutting the ground from under the PPP which would no longer have any credible base to complain about “rigged” elections.

Impediments to free and fair elections

But it was clear that the PNC had no intention of allowing free and fair elections. New features were introduced to facilitate vote rigging. Voting by proxy and by the security forces was set aside for 3 December, six days before election day. Also, while voters were expected to vote on election day at places where they were registered, new regulations were introduced to allow voting at places other than where registration took place. This opened the way to multiple voting, especially with the PNC having full control of the election machinery.

Despite his “concessions” Hoyte stubbornly refused to agree for the counting of the votes at the polling places. There was an obvious reason for this refusal. In the elections of 1973 and 1980, the seizure of the ballots by the security forces and the secrecy of their “safekeeping” for many hours before the start of the official count had made it easy for the PNC to rig the

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election. Thus, counting of ballots at the place of poll immediately after the end of polling could not be accommodated.

This demand to ensure a fair count had been made since the rigged 1968 elections. It was included in the list of electoral reforms in a letter from People's Progressive Party (PPP) leader Dr. Cheddi Jagan of 26 February 1985 to Hoyte, who was Prime Minister at that time, and in a subsequent joint letter of 7 November 1985 to the Chairman of the Elections Commission, Sir Harry Bollers, from Dr. Jagan and Eusi Kwayana of the Working People's Alliance (WPA). Other opposition parties also made the same demand.

The joint letter also questioned the appointment of Roy Hammond as Chief Elections Officer by the Government without the knowledge of the Elections Commission. Dr. Jagan, in a separate letter to Bollers, further questioned him on the selection and appointments of Hammond and other election officers without the Elections Commission having a supervisory role in the process.

With regard to the counting at the place of poll, Hoyte, first as Prime Minister and later as President, dismissed the proposal as a "red herring and an irrelevance" and "something that is logistically difficult and unacceptable." As an excuse, he declared that such a procedure would lead to three different counts—count at place of poll, at regional level and national level—and thus cause an interminable delay in the determination of the election results.

In another letter to Bollers on 13 November 1985, Dr. Jagan requested that the ballot boxes be kept at all times from the close of polling to the end of counting in the view of the agents of the opposition parties. With this in mind, he asked for opposition polling agents to accompany the ballot boxes to the counting centres where the boxes must remain in their presence.

Dr. Jagan also asked that these directives should be given to the Chief Elections Officer and all other electoral officers and publicised in the press and radio. In addition, he asked the Chairman to request President Hoyte, in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief, to instruct the GDF and police "to permit opposition parties' polling agents to accompany ballot boxes, and counting agents and duly appointed candidates to have access to the counting centres, and particularly to all areas in which ballot boxes are and may be kept at all times, both before and during the counting of ballots."

Earlier, Major General Norman McLean, the head of the security forces, had stated that the army had a "constitutional responsibility" to protect the ballot boxes and, thus, would not stay in barracks on election day. He saw his soldiers having a "geometric loyalty" to the PNC and his "comrade leader" Hoyte.

Dr. Jagan subsequently wrote to the President on these very matters he raised with Bollers, but in a response through his political adviser, Hoyte,

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rather than dealing with the issues, accused the PPP leaders of planning violence during the election campaign period. This was obviously a PNC tactic to allow army intervention in the election and to sidetrack Dr. Jagan's proposals to the Chairman of the Elections Commission. In the end, the Elections Commission lukewarmly agreed to issue orders that polling agents could accompany ballot boxes.

Subversion of the electoral process

The ruling PNC deliberately subverted the powers of the Elections Commission. As a result, electoral authority was divided between the Government and the Commission with the Chief Elections Officer, Roy Hammond, actually taking instructions from the Minister of Home Affairs rather than the Elections Commission.

There were deliberate actions by the Government to frustrate the opposition parties. Neither the voters' lists for the security forces nor the list of proxies were ever supplied to opposition parties. This made it impossible for opposition monitors to determine whether multiple voting by members of the security forces occurred. Further, the lists of polling places for the security forces were given to opposition parties only at 3.30 p.m. on December 2, the day before polling. As a result, it was impossible to assign polling agents particularly for the hinterland areas. Nevertheless, the PPP managed to appoint polling agents for only 10 out of the 25 polling places.

A few months earlier, Jeffrey Thomas, the Minister of Home Affairs, had refused to allow opposition scrutineers to work alongside the official enumerators in the preparation of the national register. He also ordered that the birth date of persons, especially between the ages of 18 to 25, must not be placed on the preliminary list of voters. The inclusion of birth dates was intended to safeguard against the padding of the voters lists with underage persons.

The padding was concentrated this time not so much in the preliminary voters' list but in the supplementary lists, which amounted to approximately 44,000 names. The entire supplementary lists had been promised by Hammond to the PPP about a week before elections day, but they were never handed over. Supplementary lists totalling 17,000 for nine of the ten regions were given to the PPP on December 8, one day before the election. But the supplementary list for Region 4 (including Georgetown, the capital), totalling about 27,000, was not supplied. Thus, opposition parties had no opportunity to check these names for errors.

In response to protests, the Ministry of Home Affairs stated that lists only had to be displayed in such places as the Minister prescribed, and there was no obligation on anyone to send or give a copy to any political party!

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Faced with mounting criticisms, the Minister of Home Affairs denied any Governmental interference. In a reply to a group of civic bodies, he rejected their suggestion that the Commission had no real power or authority to supervise the elections as provided by the Constitution. He informed them that “under the Constitution the Commission has overriding powers over all officials concerned in the administrative conduct of the elections and can issue any directions it considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of ensuring impartiality, fairness and compliance with the Constitution or other law.”

The Minister was clearly hypocritical since in practice the powers of the Elections Commission were barefacedly usurped by the Minister himself.

The question of keeping the boxes in view up to and throughout the counting of the votes was widely regarded as the crucial test in the election (as in previous ones). At the beginning of December, the Guyana Bar Association, for instance, wrote Bollers urging him to direct presiding officers to allow polling agents to accompany the boxes to the counting centres. The Association also requested an urgent meeting with the Commission to discuss these fundamental electoral issues.

Bollers refused to meet the lawyers, but he did give a directive that polling agents of the parties should be allowed to accompany the boxes. President Hoyte and the Minister of Home Affairs also gave such an assurance.

But the opposition parties remained wary of these pronouncements since they knew the PNC could not win without tampering with the ballot boxes. They felt that if the ruling party would not agree to a count at the place of poll, it was doubtful it would ever allow opposition agents to accompany the ballot boxes to the counting centres.

The Government stubbornly refused to demonstrate fair-mindedness and continued to set up obstacles. A further example of this attitude was demonstrated when the PPP asked the Elections Commission to ensure that proper seals be placed over the slots of the ballot boxes and the holes of the padlocks, and for gummed and initialled paper to be wrapped around the boxes. But the Commission bluntly refused to give such instructions to the presiding officers. The result was that ballot boxes, at the end of the voting, were not properly sealed.

The campaign period

Despite the deliberate handicaps placed in the path of the opposition, six opposition parties decided to contest against the PNC. These parties were the PPP, WPA, Democratic Labour Movement (DLM), National Democratic Front (NDF), People's Democratic Movement (PDM) and United Force (UF).

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Large crowds attended PPP and other opposition rallies but there were no reports of these in the state-owned media. In contrast, the PNC rallies, to which the party used state-owned vehicles to ferry Government workers and their dependents from different parts of the country to make up the audience, received wide coverage in the same media.

A few days before the election, at the public request of the leading Christian Churches, the main opposition parties pledged themselves and their supporters to uphold the principles of non-violence during the elections. The PNC did not respond to the same public appeal.

Refusal to allow international observers

The 1985 election was held at a period when there was a continued decline in the overall economy and when the quality of life had further deteriorated. So upset was the TUC, which was always under the control of the PNC, that it refused to endorse support for the party as it had done since 1964. The PNC realised that it was losing even its traditional support and so it decided very early not to allow international observers and to take full control of the electoral machinery as it did in 1968, 1973 and 1980. Its planned strategy also included the ejection of polling agents and the stuffing of ballot boxes and the seizure by the military and tampering of the ballot boxes.

The PNC had been embarrassed by the findings of international observers in 1980, and it wanted to continue with its propaganda that the opposition parties were poor losers. Criticising Dr. Jagan's demands for a free and fair poll, its campaign manager Robert Corbin stated: "Jagan's action is all part of the PPP's campaign to find excuses for losing."

As a result, the Government refused to allow an international team of observers drawn from the International Commission of Jurists, the Americas Watch and the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group to visit Guyana for the elections.

The International Association of Democratic Lawyers was also prepared to send a team through its North American affiliates, the National Lawyers Guild and the National Conference of Black Lawyers of the United States. But the Government refused to grant visas to this team. The Caribbean Council of Churches was also not allowed to observe the election. Its Secretary General was vilified and the body was branded as "foreign meddlers" by the PNC.

Election day

The electoral roll stood at 399,304, including 3,256 overseas voters

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stated as students on scholarships and Government workers stationed abroad. On election day the turnout was exceedingly high in rural areas of PPP strength and lower than normal in Georgetown and other areas where the PNC drew traditional support.

Problems started very early when many presiding officers, all of whom were PNC activists, began to eject opposition polling agents from the polling stations. Armed thugs also assisted in throwing out opposition agents from many polling stations. In numerous cases, the presiding officers also refused to accept the official credentials of these polling agents who were thus refused entry to the polling stations to monitor the voting.

Most of the ejections occurred in the rural opposition strongholds, but a new feature of this election was also the forceful ejection of opposition polling agents at polling places of traditional PNC strength, particularly in the capital Georgetown, and the bauxite mining towns, Linden and Kwakwani. This became necessary as a result of a low turnout of voters in those areas; the restriction on overseas and proxy voting, and the abolition of postal voting; and the difficulty of tampering with ballot boxes in Georgetown because of the concentration of regional and international journalists, a situation which forced the armed forces to adopt a low-profile in the capital. On the other hand, the armed forces were very visible and intimidating elsewhere in man-handling voters and eventually seizing control of the ballot boxes when the polls closed.

The ejection of the polling agents more than compensated for the restricted overseas and proxy voting and the abolished postal voting. The PNC control of the electoral machinery, including election personnel, facilitated the ruling party in stuffing ballot boxes with votes for dead, emigrated, under-age and non-existent persons on the one hand, and in disenfranchising non-supporters on the other. By excluding the names from the voters' lists and for various frivolous reasons—names spelt incorrectly, wrong addresses, wrong ID numbers—thousands of voters were denied the right to vote.

It was against this background, including the ejection of opposition polling agents, that PNC gun-wielding thugs unleashed a violent attack on British journalist Anthony Jenkins and Dr. Jagan at Haslington, East Coast Demerara. Dr. Jagan had gone there to investigate why a polling agent had been ejected from the polling place and why a PPP supporter had been refused the right to vote.

The PPP leader had entered the polling station with another PPP candidate, Moses Nagamootoo, and a bodyguard. Immediately, the polling officer went to the window and shouted to some people outside that Dr. Jagan was there to cause disturbance. A group of armed men then rushed into the building, attacked Dr. Jagan, and pushed him down the stairs. The British journalist who was standing on the roadside was then set upon and

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severely beaten by the thugs. There was one policeman on duty but he did nothing to stop these assaults.

Further violations

The 1985 elections displayed the same patterns of behaviour as in 1973 and 1980. The army was out again in full battle gear, particularly in the rural areas where the PPP had massive support. PNC activists and thugs had unrestricted access to polling stations in urban areas and at some places in the countryside as well. Countless violations, which were ignored by elections officials and the police, occurred in and around the polling stations. These violations ranged from PNC activists entering polling stations and taking ballot books from the officials to be filled in by them outside the polling stations and then stuffed into the ballot boxes, to open and repeated multiple voting by PNC supporters. Objections of opposition agents were studiously ignored by the presiding officers.

And at the end of the polling, as occurred in previous PNC-controlled elections, the boxes were whisked away by fully armed GDF soldiers and supposedly taken to the counting centres where they “vanished” for many hours only to reappear full with rigged ballots in favour of the PNC.

Actually, the 1985 elections were in many ways even worse than those of 1973 and 1980. As the Government itself admitted, there was no threat, real or pretended, to their peaceful progress. As the Ministry of Information “analysis” of the elections which was distributed to Embassies and High Commissions in Guyana and to institutions abroad, but which was not otherwise distributed in Guyana, stated: “The December 1985 campaign was the most peaceful and orderly one that Guyana had witnessed for over three decades.”

In spite of the total absence of any threat to the peace—as the Government itself admitted—the PNC’s armed forces, from GDF soldiers to its street thugs, came out in full force to help perpetuate the wholesale rigging of the elections.

Opposition polling agents were generally not allowed to perform their duties and to accompany the ballot boxes. Many of them had already been physically ejected from the polling places. Some of them had their lives threatened by armed thugs in the very presence of the presiding officers and the police who did absolutely nothing to intervene. Actually, the presiding officers and police seized the written notes of many of the opposition polling agents. And at the close of the poll, some of these agents were physically assaulted by the military.

Because of the forceful ejection of many opposition polling agents from polling stations, the PPP announced at 5.00 p.m. that it was withdrawing

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from taking any further part in the elections. The WPA also made a similar announcement. Later that evening, the Ministry of Information, made this tongue-in-the-cheek comment about this decision:

The PPP's decision meant that like the WPA, that party was declining to participate in the crucial exercise of accompanying the ballot boxes to ensure (and confirm beyond the shadow of a doubt) that the ballot boxes reached the central places of count intact. The PPP thus positioned itself in advance to make allegations of fraud to explain its defeat at the polls.

But such comment was not convincing. Despite earlier assurances by Bollers, the President Minister of Home Affairs to allow opposition polling agents to accompany the ballot boxes to the counting centres at the close of the poll, presiding officers frequently refused to allow opposition polling agents to accompany the boxes. And in cases where they were allowed, the security forces holding the boxes forcibly prevented the polling agents to accompany them.

In instances where polling agents were permitted to accompany the ballot boxes, they were ejected at different points. Others were allowed to go to the counting place, but not permitted to keep the ballot boxes in sight until counting commenced. There were also similar experiences by PPP polling and counting agents and candidates in the hinterland areas.

Counting the ballots

Counting agents and candidates were kept away from the places where the boxes were stored for long hours. For example, PPP candidate Isahak Basir of Essequibo, Region 2, was told that he would not be required at the counting place until 11.30 p.m., long after the boxes had arrived at the counting place. And PPP candidate for Region 5, Navin Chandarpal, was removed at gunpoint from the Bygeval Multilateral School where boxes for that region were delivered.

Ballot boxes were also kept out of sight of opposition parties' agents and candidates for long periods before counting began. The first result for Region 2 was announced 24 hours after polling, while the other results were declared two or three days later. The long delays were, no doubt, required for tampering with the ballot boxes.

The ejection of opposition polling agents and the improper sealing of ballot boxes, prepared the way for the tampering with the ballot boxes that occurred. So barefaced was the rigging that the People's Progressive Party was given only 123 votes for Region 1, but its list of candidates and sponsors alone totalled 136! Another opposition party claimed that 220 persons with ID cards sponsored its list of candidates for Region 10, but it got only 62 votes. And the high figure of 95 percent of votes cast for the vast Northwest

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Region was another statistical impossibility.

It was not until 12 December, three days after the elections, the final results were announced. According to these results, 294,801 or 73.8 percent of the electorate turned out to cast their ballots. Not surprisingly, the PNC once again announced a massive landslide victory with 228,718 or 77.6 percent of the votes cast. The PPP was given 45,926 votes or 15.6 percent, UF 9,810 votes or 3.3 percent, the WPA 4,176 or 1.4 percent and a total of 1.1 percent for all other parties combined. These figures gave the PNC 42 seats in the National Assembly, the PPP 8, the UF 2 and the WPA 1. The PNC picked up 12 additional seats by “winning” all the regional council elections. Hoyte was also re-elected as President as a result of this “landslide.”

List of Abuses

Polling agents of opposition political parties in subsequent days presented affidavits of the electoral abuses they witnessed. These included:

1. There was voting by persons posing as someone else, and multiple voting by the same person.
2. Partiality by polling officials to PNC supporters was evident.
3. Opposition polling agents were refused or delayed access to polling stations.
4. Opposition polling agents were evicted from polls by force.
5. Some voters were wrongfully turned away from polls, ostensibly on the grounds that their identification card numbers did not match with those on the voters' list; they were told by presiding officers they had “already voted;” or their names could not be found on the list.
6. Polling agents illegally advised PNC activists of the names of voters who had not yet voted.
7. Ballots were marked outside polling places, including at PNC offices.
8. Police failed to prevent or correct violations of law.
9. Polling agents were not allowed to have voter lists or to take or keep notes.
10. PNC supporters who were not accredited were allowed in and out of polling places.
11. Fingers of many PNC supporters were not dipped in “electoral” ink to show that they voted.
12. Fingers of some PNC supporters were washed after being dipped in ink.
13. Opposition challenges to improper voters were disallowed by presiding officers at polling places.
14. Ballot boxes were taken away by GDF soldiers or PNC supporters in violation of law.

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15. The GDF and some presiding officers refused to allow opposition polling agents to accompany ballot boxes to place for counting.
16. For many hours ballot boxes were not kept in the presence of opposition parties' agents at the counting centres.
17. Ballots were not counted until as late as 48 hours after the polls closed.

Caricom support for the rigged elections

With the results announced, President Desmond Hoyte pompously declared that the elections were “above board and regular.” But this “overwhelming victory” was condemned by the opposition political parties, local civic organisations and foreign journalists.

Strong opposition to the electoral arrangements also came from the Bishops of the Catholic and Anglican churches, along with other representatives of trade unions, the Bar Association and the Guyana Human Rights Association. They expressed their disappointment over the way the elections were held and recorded that “the familiar and sordid catalogue of widespread disenfranchisement, multiple voting, ejection of polling agents, threats, intimidation, violence and collusion by police and army personnel characterised the poll. . .”

The government's response to the widespread charges of electoral fraud was to publish two glossy booklets, obviously targeted for foreign consumption, showing that the elections had been “free and fair.” These propaganda booklets were rushed into print so that President Hoyte could distribute them to Caricom leaders attending a hurriedly convened meeting in mid-December on Mustique Island to discuss the elections. These booklets, which were never circulated in Guyana, attributed almost all the criticisms of Guyanese electoral practices to “sour grapes” by Dr. Jagan, totally ignoring the criticisms by international human rights groups and those of the Anglican and Catholic Bishops and other civic bodies in Guyana. They also bragged that the PNC's victory was to a combination of opposition incompetence and PNC brilliance.

Prime Minister Eugenia Charles of Dominica had earlier condemned the elections, but apparently at the meeting she and the other leaders decided to accept Hoyte's version that the elections were free and fair. By doing so they certainly reinforced their support for the anti-democratic process imposed on the Guyanese people by the PNC through yet another rigged election.

Chapter 28

The Rush Towards Privatisation (1989-1992)

Confronted with a drastic economic crisis which saw Guyana drowning under the burden of a stifling, expanding foreign debt and a large payment of arrears, the PNC regime headed by Desmond Hoyte feared that all credit to the country would be completely cut off by the country's international donors. In this situation, Hoyte negotiated in late 1988 with the IMF which quickly arranged with the World Bank an Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) aimed at re-introducing a pro-capitalist market economy to replace the failed "cooperative socialist" programme of the past eighteen years.

The ERP

Through this programme, the government was forced to cut public spending which included curtailing funding to the state corporations, except the Guyana Electricity Corporation. Since the huge expenses in maintaining these corporations placed a serious hindrance on the economy, it became clear that the IMF—through the ERP—wanted the government to privatise them. The Hoyte administration, in dire need for an economic bail out, had no alternative but to agree to this action, which was a drastic reversal from its previous hard-line position on nationalisation.

Only four years before, Hoyte in his address to the PNC's sixth biennial congress, had sharply condemned the external pressures on the

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regime to privatise the more than 40 state-owned companies. He had emphatically stated then:

But let me make our position clear on this issue. While the People's National Congress remains in office, the bauxite industry, the sugar industry and the other strategic industries which we have nationalised in this country will **never, never, never** be denationalised. For one thing, to do this would be an admission that we are abandoning the socialist ideal, and we have no intention of doing that.

New privatisation policy

The introduction of this new policy of privatisation was announced at a time when the Hoyte administration was about to complete its term in office. General and regional elections were due to be held in 1990 and all the opposition political parties, especially the PPP, felt that the regime had no mandate at the late period of its term to dispose of state-owned assets.

But due to strong objections by the opposition, and even the ruling party itself, over the blatant errors discovered in the voters' list, the government, using its two-thirds parliamentary majority, through emergency laws, postponed the elections and extended its life by almost two years, to allow the Elections Commission to compile a new acceptable list. This extension of the period of the Hoyte administration was intended also to carry out the day to day administration of state affairs but was not intended to be used for the introduction of new policies.

However, departing from this principle, the regime used this period to begin its privatisation (or divestment) process. This action came under harsh criticism from the opposition PPP which questioned why the caretaker administration was hustling to divest state assets. The PPP also felt that by carrying out the dictates of the IMF, the PNC was hoping to win international backing for its economic policies and for its re-election in the forthcoming elections.

True to form, the PNC administration refused to consult with the opposition parties and with the private sector over the unilateral divestment of the state-owned enterprises. Local businessmen were largely kept in the dark and, in many cases, did not obtain an opportunity to bid for the purchase of some of the businesses.

PPP advice on safeguards

The PPP pointed out that privatisation itself had many complications which needed to be carefully examined. As early as 1990, the party asked the government to note the following:

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1. Some entities should never have been nationalised in the first place and thus should indeed be sold off.
2. A genuine tri-sectoral economy, as the PNC claimed it was propagating, should include a vibrant private sector competing with the state sector in a market economy.
3. Sales of state assets should be at current market prices, but with a prognostic link to future trends. Selling off a productive state asset, for example, in 1990 at strictly 1990 market prices, with no other input into the deal, was not sensible.
4. Non-productive assets should not be sold off at low cost, inclusive of outstanding taxes.
5. All state assets should be sold preferably for cash. If sold on the basis of credit, strict commercial principles must be made to apply to the transaction, including interest payable at market rates; instalments payable on schedule; adequate security in excess of 100 percent; stiff penalty clauses for default; and options for re-possession.
6. Major strategic and productive state assets could be turned into joint ventures rather than be divested outright. There was also the need for high cost capital inputs, spares, rehabilitation, new technology, managerial expertise, and capturing of overseas markets. As such, the foreign investor was best situated to bear these burdens in exchange for a share of the industry.

However, in deals made by the government (up to mid-1992), little heed was paid to these safeguards. This was clearly reflected in the sale prices, and it was obvious that the government failed to conduct a market intelligence survey (based on projected supply, demand, marketing, productivity) to determine how much a given entity would be worth in, say, 10 years hence. This would have enabled it to properly negotiate selling prices and/or other options.

At the same time, the divestment deals were not tabled in the National Assembly, and very scanty information about them was divulged to the public. The conclusion was that the deals involved some degree of irregularity, and most citizens believed that they were “give-aways.”

Privatised entities

By mid-1992, among those significant state (and semi-state) entities divested, were the following: (1) Cooperative Wholesale Complex on Regent Street; (2) Guyana National Engineering Corporation (Gyneco) complex on Water Street, formerly Sandbach Parker; (3) Guyana Timbers Ltd.; (4) National Paint Company Ltd.; (5) Guyana Fisheries

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Ltd.; (6) Guyana Rice Milling and Marketing Authority (GRMMA) complexes at Anna Regina, Ruimzigt, Black Bush Polder, and Corriverton; (7) Demerara Woods Ltd.; (8) Guyana Telecommunications Corporation; (9) Nichimo Company Ltd.; (10) Sijan Palace Ltd., (a foreign currency shop); (11) Guyana Transport Services Ltd.; (12) Guyana National Trading Corporation; (13) Quality Foods (Guyana) Ltd.; (14) Leathercraft Ltd.; and (15) Soap and Detergents Ltd. Partially divested were two others—Livestock Industry Development Company Ltd. and Guyana Stockfeeds Ltd.

Most of the above firms were sold outright, with government retaining no share in the equity. The buyers were widely known to have got unexpected bargains.

By the middle of 1992, those state assets which were listed to be sold included the following for which negotiations had already commenced or were on the verge of completion: (1) Guyana Airways Corporation; (2) Guyana Electricity Corporation; (3) National Edible Oil Company Ltd.; (4) Guyana Glassworks Ltd.; (5) Guyana National Engineering Corporation; (6) Guyana Pharmaceutical Corporation; (7) Guyana Stores Ltd.; (8) Guyana Sugar Corporation; (9) Guyana Mining Enterprise; (10) Guyana Liquor Corporation; (11) Seals and Packaging Industries Ltd.; (12) Guyana Oil Company; (13) Guyana National Printers Ltd.; (14) Sanata Textiles Ltd.; (15) Mahaica/Mahaicony Rice Development Scheme Workshop; (16) Guyana National Shipping Company Ltd.; (17) Guyana Rice Export Board; (18) National Paddy & Rice Grading Centre; and (19) Cooperative Financial Institutions (banks, mortgage, and insurance firms).

There was a general belief that some of these entities were not worth retaining and should be sold, but with preference given to local investors; while others should have a minority state share in the equity. Further, some merely needed better management to turn them around from loss makers into profit margins, and others could have become joint ventures with equity contributed by foreign investors, the state, the workers, other citizens and local entrepreneurs.

Controversial deals

1. Demerara Woods Ltd.

There were indeed some controversial privatisation deals which took place. The one that received the most publicity was the sale of Demerara Woods Ltd. Lord Beaverbrook, a former treasurer of British Conservative Party, bought the entity in February 1991 for £9.7 million. He also negotiated and obtained a 50-year lease for 1.1 million acres of rain forest. Just two months later, in April 1991, he sold his interests to

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United Dutch Company for £61 million worth of equity in that firm. The new entity was re-named Demerara Timbers Ltd. Even though up to mid-1992 Beaverbrook had not finished paying the Guyana government for Demerara Woods, he merged the enterprise into the giant United Dutch Company. This latter company took control of Demerara Timbers of which Beaverbrook remained a major shareholder.

By 1992, United Dutch valued Demerara Timbers at £74 million! The rainforest concession alone was estimated at between US\$160 million to US\$206 million.

2. Guyana Timbers Ltd.

The book value of Guyana Timbers Ltd. was stated at US\$130 million, but it was sold for only US\$23.2 million in 1991. Registration fees for its Houston operations amounting to US\$178,590 were waived, as were the duty of US\$892,900 for the property transfer, and fees of US\$555,810 for the firm's Winiperu operations—a cumulative sum of \$1.6 million.

The new firm, styled Caribbean Resources Ltd., continued operations under its new owner, the Caribbean Life Insurance Company (CLICO) of Trinidad and Tobago.

3. National Paint Company Ltd.

This efficient profit-making entity was sold in May 1991 to Stephen Giddings, an overseas-based Guyanese, for US\$1.15 million. Giddings lodged US\$200,000 as a down-payment and was given until 1993 to pay the rest at 6 percent interest, at a time when the market rate for interest on industrial loans and credit ranged from 35 to 40 percent.

Workers at the company had actually made a bid for the entity since 1989. Their bid on May 10, 1989 was US\$1.0 million, but after some hesitancy on the part of the government, they increased their offer to US\$1.2 million. This sum was equivalent to G\$150.2 million in 1991, as compared to Giddings' offer which was equivalent to G\$142.6 million.

Naturally, the workers were very peeved over this sale since their offer involved a down-payment of US\$404,000 at the signing of the agreement and subsequent payments of US\$808,000 in two equal annual instalments.

Interestingly, another bidder was a Caricom paint company, McEneaney Alstons Group, which offered US\$1.5, with the group owning 51 percent of the equity, government 24 percent and the workers 25 percent.

It should be noted that the down-payment of US\$200,000 by Giddings was less than the net value of the stock, outstanding debts owed

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to the company and other pre-payments minus payments to creditors, which meant that the government of Guyana, in real terms, actually financed the purchase of the company by the new owner!

4. GRMMA complexes

The GRMMA complexes at Black Bush Polder and Corriverton were sold off in August 1991 to the foreign firm, Curacao Investment Trust Company Ltd., for US\$3.8 million. But these companies were valued at US\$14.9 million. The same firm had earlier bought other GRMMA complexes at Ruimzigt and Wakenaam for US\$2.5 million. The value of both complexes, complete with installations and fertile lands, was US\$8.5 million.

At Anna Regina, the GRMMA complex, valued at US\$14.2 million, was sold to a St Vincent firm for US\$4.2 million and was renamed “Caricom Rice Mills Ltd.”

The sale of these complexes raised much concern among local investors. The problem was not only the sale price, but the fact that local investors who made higher bids for the entities were ignored. No reasons were given for the rejection of their higher bids.

5. Guyana Telecommunication Corporation

The Guyana Telecommunications Corporation (GTC) which was a profit-making business and net foreign exchange earner was sold off in late 1990 to Atlantic Tele-Network (ATN), based in the US Virgin islands for US\$16.5 million. The GTC was at the time suffering from bad management, but at the time of sale, it had some G\$400 million in bank “liquidity” and outstanding sums due and payable to it, and was earning a net figure of about US\$2 million to US\$4 million annually.

Based on the sales agreement, ATN acquired 80 percent of the enterprise, with the government retaining the remaining 20 percent. There was much local criticism of the government for disposing of the company for such a low price, and the PPP expressed the view that at least 20 percent of the entity should have been offered to the Guyanese private sector.

The new privatised entity, under the name Guyana Telephone & Telegraph Company Ltd. (GT&T), began operations in January 1991.

Rainforest concessions

In the headlong race to divest state resources before the October 1992 elections, the Hoyte administration began to grant forest concessions to a number of foreign firms. Guyana was actively encouraged by the IMF to

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exploit its forestry resources and encourage investment in this sector. Companies were offered incentives such as tax holidays, export allowances, and accelerated depreciation. Large foreign investors almost exclusively benefited from these concessions. The sale of Demerara Woods exemplified a case of IMF corporate welfare. The IMF cited Demerara Woods as a priority item for the state to sell despite the fact the bilateral donors and the World Bank had poured a huge amount of financial aid (including £14 million from the European Community) for the development of Demerara Woods. Furthermore, Demerara Woods' debt was underwritten by the government as part of the sale agreement. Thus, the citizens of Guyana subsidised the bargain-basement sale of a timber asset to entice foreign investment into the country.

By early 1992, Hoyte was propagating his ideas of debt for equity and debt for resources swaps. A Venezuelan company, Palmaven, was subsequently given a concession of 300,000 hectares of rainforest on the Demerara River. Then a South Korean-Malaysian consortium, Barama, was also awarded 1.6 million hectares of rainforest and it announced plans to invest US\$63 million in logging and plywood production.

Plan to privatise sugar and bauxite industries

Divestment came about largely because of the accumulated negative impact on political interference with managers, corruption, policies which needlessly antagonised labour, squandermania, budget deficits, siphoning of surpluses from profit-making entities into central coffers to prop up worthless acquisitions, poor marketing intelligence, high interest rates, punitive foreign exchange rates, and lack of accountability.

The strategic sugar and bauxite industries, for example, suffered badly as a result of years of bad management. In 1990, the British firm Booker-Tate was called in to manage the Guyana Sugar Corporation and in very quick time it performed an excellent job of turning around the industry. Then in 1992, the Australian firm, Minproc Engineers Limited (MINPROC), was hired to manage the ailing debt strapped Guyana Mining Enterprises Ltd. (Guymine) which, up to 1992, owed about US\$47 million to foreign creditors and suppliers.

But there was suspicion in opposition circles that the two foreign management firms were hired to improve the viability of GUYSUCO and Guymine in order to attract high prices when they would eventually be put up for sale.

But the planned sale of the sugar corporation ran into broad-based opposition and the government backed down from its original plan to sell the entire entity to foreigners. Very strong opposition came from the militant sugar workers who called a strike protesting the privatisation plan, and threatened to continue further work stoppages. As a result, Dr.

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Kenneth King, Senior Minister of Economic Development, who was in charge of privatisation, hurriedly met with the sugar workers' union, GAWU, and unveiled new plans on the divestment of GUYSUCO. While stating that the deadline for GUYSUCO's divestment would remain at July 1992, he said the corporation would not be completely sold off to foreigners. Local investors, sugar workers and ordinary citizens would be able to buy 40 percent of the shares, and only enough land needed to produce 250,000 tons of sugar annually will be leased to the new owners, with the remaining acreage utilised by GUYSUCO being retained by the state.

However, in his meeting with GAWU, King was unable to provide the "book value" of GUYSUCO. As such he did not know what would be the price for one share, or how much in Guyana dollars would be 40 and 60 percent of the equity. The union insisted that these vital questions should be answered before any privatisation step was taken, since it was unusual for something to be sold unless the price was known!

There were other unanswered questions connected to the divestment of GUYSUCO—a giant complex linked to the village systems, the local authorities, the drainage and irrigation systems, ingress and egress facilities to farms in the backlands, potable water supply systems, cultural and sporting facilities, etc. With regard to land ownership, these questions were raised by both the PPP and GAWU: How far was GUYSUCO as a productive enterprise protruding into state territory? Where were the demarcation lines between GUYSUCO lands and state lands? What would happen to the thousands of squatters living and farming on lands supposedly belonging to GUYSUCO? Did GUYSUCO really own these lands? Were they all surveyed? To clear up all these questions, there was the general feeling that specific legislation was needed to enable GUYSUCO's divestment to proceed.

The PPP also stated that strategic entities like the sugar and bauxite complexes needed a special approach. The party felt that putting them under efficient management was a sound idea, but any further steps leading to any form of divestment should be done after intense consultation with political parties, trade unions, the private sector and social organisations, especially those looking after the welfare of people involved in the sugar industry. The party also warned potential buyers that they ought to be aware of the importance to the national economy of the sugar and bauxite industries and should refrain from rushing headlong into any deal with the Hoyte administration at a period when it would be facing the electorate.

After June 1992, the PNC government backed down on its race towards the privatisation of GUYSUCO. While the strong opposition by sugar workers, in particular, was a vital factor in forcing this change of pace, the election campaign and its related administrative processes

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occupied the attention of the administration to a greater degree. In addition, potential buyers apparently slowed down the process since they did not want to continue negotiations with a government whose mandate was coming to an end.

Chapter 29

Guyana-Venezuela Economic Cooperation (1985-1991)

Almost immediately after Desmond Hoyte succeeded to the presidency of Guyana after the death of President Forbes Burnham on 6 August 1985, he placed attention on relations with Venezuela and the territorial controversy. While in New York to address the UN General Assembly, he met on 4 October 1985 with UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar who expressed satisfaction with the cooperation he was receiving from both Guyana and Venezuela in his attempt to find a solution to the controversy.

The Secretary General brought Hoyte up to date with some of the developments so far, including the visits of his representative, Under Secretary General Diego Cordovez, to both countries earlier in the year. He also pointed out that there was need for patience and that solutions would not occur overnight, for there were many interests to be contacted and that great thought had to be put into trying to fashion the modalities for achieving the objectives Guyana and Venezuela had given him.

Shortly after this meeting, de Cuellar mooted the idea of forming a contact group with representatives from Guyana and Venezuela and three other countries charged with the responsibility of reaching a final border settlement. However, this idea was not followed up apparently because it did not win support from the two principal parties.

At home in Guyana, the opposition political parties urged Hoyte to democratise the country's political system by implementing laws to allow for free and fair elections. However, he refused to bow to these demands, and on 9 December 1985, in general elections condemned internationally as

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totally fraudulent, Hoyte and the PNC were returned to power with nearly 74 percent of the “votes.”

Economic assistance from Venezuela

After Hoyte entrenched himself in power through this fraudulent election, his government moved to further cement relations with Venezuela which by this time were moving on a friendlier plane. Faced with a severe fuel crisis, Guyana in March 1986 started discussions with Venezuela to barter bauxite for Venezuelan oil. Very scanty information about these discussions was revealed to the Guyanese public, except the general terms of an agreement arrived at between the two countries.

By this agreement, both governments decided to undertake an economic cooperation programme, which included trade in petroleum products and bauxite, and a financial scheme for facilitating the exchange of goods and services.

The arrangement provided for the supply of petroleum products from Venezuela to satisfy Guyana's consumption needs. To this end, the Venezuelan oil company, Maraven S.A., agreed to provide these products to the Guyana National Energy Authority.

With respect to bauxite, the Bauxite Industry Development Company (BIDCO) of Guyana reached an agreement with Interamericana de Alumina C.A. (Interalumina) of Venezuela, under which Guyana would supply directly to Venezuela 100,000 tons of metallurgical-grade bauxite during 1986 and 540,000 tons in 1987.

In relation to the financial aspects, the Venezuelan Investment Fund and the Bank of Guyana negotiated a deposit agreement designed to facilitate these transactions.

PPP views

The opposition PPP, which had initiated the demand that Guyana should seek cheaper fuel supplies from Venezuela, welcomed the trade deal but criticised the secrecy of the agreement and demanded that the details should be presented to the National Assembly.

On 18 May 1986, the *Mirror*, portraying the views of the PPP, pointed out:

... Guyana in return is to provide Venezuela this year with 100,000 tons of bauxite which will not be problematic. In 1987, however, Guyana has to supply 540,000 tons of bauxite which will be most difficult. This amount has to be sent to Venezuela while the government has to meet other obligations to the socialist

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countries and North America.

The North American market is still important as it provides hard cash for parts and other inputs. Guyana cannot afford to lose that market. There are many countries, China for instance, waiting to take over Guyana's markets. And, of course, Guyana has to pay the former Canadian owners for the nationalisation of the industry.

Guyana seems not to be in any good bargaining position, given the pricing of the commodities to be exchanged. Guyana's bauxite is being bought by Venezuela at a fixed price while the price for Venezuela's fuel will depend on a formula which could fluctuate.

If the price of oil rises then the volume of oil imports will be reduced. And even if the world price of bauxite rises, Guyana cannot benefit from it according to the terms of the agreement.

More information about the terms of the agreement was given by Hoyte during an exclusive interview with the Bahamian newspaper, the *Nassau Guardian*. In the interview published on 20 June 1986, the Guyanese President, in discussing the agreements reached with Venezuela, declared:

In fact, the Venezuelans have reactivated a line of credit which we once enjoyed. Presently, the line is in the amount of US\$1.2 million, and this had enabled us to start importing some sensitive items which were in short supply, some of which are very important for our production—for example, fertilisers.

We do expect on the basis of those agreements that in October the ceiling of the line will be increased considerably. . .

Since we signed those agreements, we have, at the invitation of the Venezuelan authorities, sent a mission (a private sector mission) to Caracas to discuss the possibilities for the lines of credit—specifically for the private sector—and also for examining the possibilities of joint ventures and things like that. . .

They will be sending some people here, and we hope as a result of this on-going dialogue, we will be able to identify areas in which we can strengthen our relationship.

Hoyte's idea of joint development

On 26 May 1986, the 20th anniversary of Guyana's independence, President Hoyte announced at a political rally in Georgetown that his Government would enter into joint projects with Venezuela and Brazil. He stated that Guyana would be "pursuing a principle of aligning our resources with their resources for mutual benefit."

This announcement was clearly a rejection of the policy of the former President, Forbes Burnham, who had been consistently pressured by the World Bank to accept joint development of the Essequibo region during an intense period of the border controversy in 1981-83. However, joint

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development was now being adopted by Hoyte as the main plank of his strategy in his attempt to seek assistance from the IMF and the World Bank.

PPP leader Dr. Cheddi Jagan, on 1 June 1986, labelled this economic strategy of joint development as pro-imperialist which would create only an “illusion of prosperity in the beginning” but would not lead to “any permanent solution to the grave economic crisis facing the country.” He maintained that Guyana’s future and independence would be jeopardised, and he severely criticised the ruling PNC for rejecting the call by the PPP for a political solution in the country and for the formation of an anti-imperialist, socialist oriented course and to develop stronger relations with the socialist and non-aligned countries. He repeated the PPP’s position that Guyana could gain much with cooperation with its neighbours. But he argued that this would be of benefit if only the countries of the region “pursue an independent course and not permit foreign capital, which dominates the economies of Latin American countries, to dominate Guyana.”

Further economic agreements

The *Stabroek News*, a new privately operated Guyanese weekly newspaper which began publication in January 1987, reported on 30 January 1987 that representatives of the Guyana and Venezuela Governments were finalising arrangements under which a US\$28 million line of credit would become available to Guyana to benefit the public and private sectors equally. The paper declared that it did not know what goods and services would be available under the line of credit, but revealed that a private Venezuelan company, Grupo Kudor de Venezuela, would be assisting the Guyanese private sector to import goods from Venezuela under the line of credit, and would also promote joint ventures.

The executive vice-president of the Venezuelan company, Rafael Viamonte, in an exclusive interview with the newspaper (also on 30 January 1987) announced that his firm would also be assisting private business in Guyana “with the marketing of their products in the European and Venezuelan markets.” He was of the opinion that the Guyana Government was encouraging the private sector to become strong, and its support for joint ventures would result in the building of an adequate export market for Guyana.

Viamonte revealed that his company in June 1986 arranged for about 100,000 kilogrammes of Venezuelan tobacco to be sold to the Demerara Tobacco Company, and that further shipments were being arranged. At the same time, Grupo Kudor was promoting joint venture arrangements in the Guyanese lumber and mining sectors. He brushed aside suggestions that the Venezuelan claim to Guyana’s territory would have any adverse effect on the

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on-going negotiations, saying that both countries “have the best relationship now than they have had before.”

Hoyte’s visit to Venezuela in 1987

On Tuesday, 24 March 1987, President Hoyte began a four-day visit to Venezuela where he conferred with President Jaime Lusinchi. He also met with members of the private sector whom he asked to invest in Guyana and promised them duty free imports of capital goods and repatriation of profits.

The two Presidents discussed the border issue, and agreed that the two countries, through their Permanent Representatives at the United Nations, should suggest for the consideration of the Secretary General of the United Nations that he should select “Good Offices” as the means of settlement of the controversy. At the end of the visit, the Foreign Ministers of the two countries signed an accord by which the two neighbours would cooperate to combat drug trafficking across the border. The accord also established a Venezuela-Guyana joint commission and implemented a limited agreement to abolish visas for travel by diplomats between both countries.

In relation to Hoyte’s visit to Venezuela, the *Mirror* of 29 March 1987 commented:

There is no indication as to what aspect of the border row was discussed. The dispute is currently in the lap of UN Secretary General Dr. Javier Perez de Cuellar. The Guyanese people want this dispute settled speedily and are fed up with the protracted nature of it. Citizens of Guyana would welcome improved Guyana-Venezuela relations with full mutual respect for each other’s sovereignty. The secretive nature in which the Guyana government is treating these relations, however, is a source of deep concern.

Refusal to publicise trade agreements

During March 1987, the Guyana Government declared that it had no intention of revealing the terms of the three trade agreements signed in Caracas in 1986 with the Venezuelan oil company, (Maraven), the Interamericana de Alumina and the Venezuelan Investment Fund. In the National Assembly, Jagan in mid-June 1986 asked the Deputy Prime Minister of Planning and Development, Hasyln Parris, whether or not the government would table the agreements in the Assembly. However, it was not until mid-March 1987 that this question was formally answered by Parris who replied: “No, the Government will not make the agreement public.” Asked further to give reasons, Parris declared that the agreements were with private companies.

Dr. Jagan strongly opposed the refusal to make the agreements public and insisted that the Guyanese people had every right to know what was

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done in their name. Further, he added, the initial talks that led ultimately to the agreements with private concerns in Venezuela were on a government to government level, with the Venezuela government arranging for the trade agreements to sell Venezuelan oil to Guyana, for Guyana to supply substantial quantities of metal grade bauxite throughout 1986 and 1987, as well as a deposit agreement to facilitate the trading of oil and bauxite.

Announcement of agreements

Some further information about Hoyte's visit to Venezuela was revealed when the Government in mid-May 1987 finally tabled in Parliament three separate agreements made during his tour. They pertained to the limited abolition of visas, suppression of narcotics traffic, and mechanisms for cooperation between the two states.

The narcotics agreement would remain in force for two years, but would on the expiry of that period, stand automatically extended for an equal period unless either of the two parties should renounce it. The agreement made it binding on the two governments to adopt administrative measures to prevent all activities relating to illicit trafficking in narcotics; for an exchange of direct information on data on the internal situation with regards to trends in consumption and trafficking; as well as the training of maritime customs officials, and in the tracking down of drug traders.

The two governments would also assist each other in the prevention of drug addiction, the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts, and the apprehension and confiscation of any aircraft or vessel used for drug trafficking. To establish a regime of control over narcotics, the two countries would undertake to harmonise their respective legislation for this purpose. A mixed commission was also set up for the purpose of fulfilling these objectives.

More information was also given to the nation by the Deputy Prime Minister, Haslyn Parris who, in a special radio broadcast on 1 June 1987, announced some details of the three agreements in 1986 with Venezuela concerning oil, bauxite and trade. This was a complete turn-around in his position, for it was pertaining to these very agreements he had bluntly refused to answer in the National Assembly three months before.

Parris stated that Interalumina of Venezuela would continue to purchase from BIDCO for US dollars whatever bauxite it needed. At the same time, the Guyana National Energy Authority would buy from Maraven whatever petroleum and petroleum products it would require. The Bank of Guyana would pay in US dollars 55 percent of the cost of each shipment. The remaining 45 percent would be deposited in US dollars in the Bank of Guyana by the Venezuelan Investment Fund of Venezuela. This would be paid back to the Investment Fund—a quarter of it within six months and the

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remaining three-quarters within one year.

The 45 percent repaid to the Investment Fund would be available for the Guyanese public and private sectors to make purchases from Venezuela up to the sum of US\$15 million on a line of credit.

Up to the end of May 1987 only US\$1.9 was repaid and had already been used to purchase urea, toilet jumbo rolls and other commodities. Parris did not reveal the price being paid for bauxite on the one hand and oil on the other. He declared, however, that although more bauxite was ordered for 1987 than 1986, its value did not cover the value of oil expected to be imported.

Lusinchi's visit to Guyana

On 16-18 November 1987, President Lusinchi paid a State visit to Guyana. His delegation included Simon Alberto Consalvi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as four other members of his Cabinet. Also in the delegation were the heads of the Venezuelan state-owned petroleum and aluminium industries and executives of the private sector.

In Georgetown, Lusinchi met with the leaders of political parties represented in Guyana's National Assembly, leaders of the trade union movement, and representatives of the private sector. He also addressed a special meeting of the National Assembly, and on his first evening, he was the guest of honour at a cultural presentation staged at the National Cultural Centre.

On 17 November, the Venezuelan President visited the University of Guyana where he exchanged views with senior officials regarding linkages with Venezuelan universities. Later, he visited to the Caricom Secretariat where he held discussions with the Secretary General.

In their discussions at the Office of the President on 17 November, Hoyte and Lusinchi dealt at length with bilateral relations including the territorial controversy. They also reviewed, as they did during their meeting earlier in the year, regional and international political and economic issues and adopted common positions on a number of them.

Just before Lusinchi and his party departed for Venezuela on 18 March, a final communiqué on his visit was issued. It stated, *inter alia*:

The two Heads of State observed that relations between their countries continued to develop favourably since their meeting in Caracas in March this year. They expressed their conviction that Venezuela and Guyana will find, together through dialogue and in a constructive spirit, practical ways to consolidate their relations in all areas.

In this regard, the Presidents examined the issue of the controversy between their countries, and pointed out that the climate of friendship and understanding that exists between Guyana and Venezuela is favourable for

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dealing with this fundamental aspect of the bilateral relations with flexibility and good will. . .

They also reviewed the progress made as a result of the various discussions held and the contacts established by representatives of the public and private sectors with a view to deepening bilateral cooperation. In this respect, they expressed their satisfaction that during this visit an opportunity was afforded the members of the Venezuelan delegation to renew contacts and further exchanges with their respective Guyanese counterparts. In addition, they reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen existing arrangements and to explore new avenues of cooperation and exchange between the two countries.

In this regard, they expressed satisfaction with the manner in which the agreement on the supply of petroleum signed between Petroleos de Venezuela and the Guyana National Energy Authority is being implemented.

The two Leaders noted that the oil supply agreement and its associated financial arrangements will be extended by one year and that the competent authorities of the two countries would prepare the respective instruments.

They also decided that in matters concerning bauxite and alumina, officials of the Bauxite Industry Development Company Ltd. (BIDCO) of Guyana and of Interalumina and the Venezuelan Corporation of Guayana will promptly continue the process of consultations. These consultations will be aimed at reaching agreement on longer term arrangements.

The Presidents noted with satisfaction that the parties have also agreed to examine the possibility of the involvement of the Venezuelan Corporation of Guayana in the reactivation of the alumina plant in Guyana, including the disposition of the product.

Both Leaders agreed to strengthen the beneficial relations established between universities of the two countries, having regard to the contacts made with senior officials of the University of Guyana during this visit.

On the other hand, they agreed on the need to broaden cooperation in the field of health, through more frequent exchanges between the respective health officials, the training of specialised personnel and in the fight against tropical diseases. . .

In concluding their discussions, the two Heads of State expressed satisfaction with the steadily increasing level of cooperation between the two countries in recent years. They agreed that the momentum should be maintained and were convinced that the visit of the President of Venezuela to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana would lead to a further intensification of the economic, trade, technical and cultural cooperation between the Governments and peoples of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Republic of Venezuela. . .

Discussions relating to the appointment of McIntyre

Regular contact between the two countries at very senior levels continued. On 2 February 1989, Hoyte attended the inauguration of President Carlos Andres Perez with whom he had a brief meeting but nothing of substance was discussed. But they met again in Tobago during the Caricom mini-summit and in their conversations, the Venezuelan

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President accepted Guyana's proposal to recommence talks on the territorial controversy. He, at the same time, won Hoyte's agreement to the idea that Dr. Allister McIntyre of Grenada should serve as the "Good Officer" of the UN Secretary General. McIntyre had previously served as Secretary General of Caricom, and was at the time serving as Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies. It was apparent from Perez's conversation with Hoyte that McIntyre had already discussed his desire for the position with the Venezuelans.

Apparently, too, the UN Secretary General was not informed of the results of the Tobago meeting between Hoyte and Perez. This became clear when in September 1989, a representative of the Secretary General met with Guyana's Permanent Representative to the UN, Samuel Rudolph Insanally, and sought Guyana's view on the proposed appointment by Secretary General of McIntyre as "Good Officer". Guyana, soon after, offered no objection to his appointment.

Hoyte's visit to Venezuela in 1989

Plan for electricity interconnection

On 8 November 1989, Hoyte visited Venezuela, and he and Perez held intensive discussions in the conference room of the Venezuelan Guayana Corporation (CVG) in the eastern city of Puerto Ordaz. Hoyte was accompanied by a four-member team that included Foreign Minister Rashleigh Jackson.

The discussions began on the theme of a hydro-electric connection with Guyana from the Guri hydroelectric project. Hoyte was very excited about this prospect and noted that the time was just right for this interconnection. Perez observed that it should be simple to raise the necessary financing of about US\$100 million since it would be a binational project. After further discussions, it was agreed that a joint Guyanese-Venezuelan group would begin the preparation of a technical and economic feasibility report under political direction. Once the draft project was prepared, the search could commence for financing.

Perez's views on solving the territorial controversy

The Venezuelan leader then concentrated fully on the issue of the Venezuelan claim to Guyana. He said that both countries must "take the bull by the horns" and find a solution together. Emphasising that the problem could not be solved by the UN, he argued that a solution to the problem was absolutely essential, otherwise it would continue to bedevil the development of mutually beneficial relations. He explained that if there was no solution to

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the controversy, criticism would be levelled at Guyana *vis-a-vis* the Guri connection for making itself dependent on power from a country which maintained a claim to Guyanese territory. He reiterated that Guyana and Venezuela must solve the problem themselves and suggested the establishment of a permanent committee made up of one representative from each country. This committee would examine the issues and feed the UN with information when required. President Perez stressed the need for the kind of integrationist approach which had solved the Panama/Colombia border problem.

He then expressed some specific ideas about the points he would like included in a solution of the controversy with Guyana. First of all, he stated his preference for a global, or all encompassing, solution. Such a solution should involve the "rationalisation" of the border. Certain areas could be ceded to Venezuela by Guyana but under an agreement which would entitle both countries to share the proceeds from any resources which existed in these areas. Of much significance to him was the need to be pragmatic rather than technical in finding a solution. He felt that if discussions became bogged down in disputes over documents, there would never be a solution. It must be recognised, he explained, that the Venezuelan people felt strongly about the loss of "their territory" to the British, but he did agree that the patriotic feelings of Guyanese must be acknowledged.

Hoyte, in commenting on this presentation, remarked that the present situation was only beneficial for political scientists and lawyers looking for a subject matter for their academic theses. He affirmed that he was interested in a more practical approach to the problem, and concurred with the view expressed by Perez that the only acceptable solution must come from bilateral discussions even though a solution could be presented by the UN Secretary General. Hoyte then requested Foreign Minister Jackson to brief the meeting on the present status of the controversy from the Guyanese perspective.

Jackson gave a brief review of developments since Guyana and Venezuela had approached the UN Secretary General to indicate a preference for the mechanism of "Good Offices" to be used as a means of settlement of the controversy. In September 1989, a representative of the UN Secretary General spoke with Guyana's Permanent Representative to the UN on the proposed appointment of McIntyre as the "Good Officer". Guyana had since expressed agreement.

Perez said that Venezuela also concurred in the choice. However, because McIntyre was a Caricom national, there had been concern expressed in certain quarters in Venezuela. However, the President indicated that he, personally, had no misgivings since he felt that McIntyre was an excellent person for the task but both Guyana and Venezuela must help him work. This he explained could be done by appointing a negotiator

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from each country to work on the problem with the Foreign Ministers overseeing this process. Otherwise, he posited, the process of employing Good Offices and other means of peaceful settlement (as set out in Article 33 of the UN Charter) could last for 100 years.

He suggested the idea of adopting some time limit for discussions and once an agreement was reached it would have to be approved by all parties and ratified by the Venezuela Congress. Bearing in mind that it would be politic to have this accomplished before the end of his administration, he urged the need to act quickly.

Perez also affirmed that Venezuela could never risk a military adventure against Guyana since such action would never be countenanced by international opinion. He said that Guyana and Venezuela needed each other not only for logical bilateral reasons, but because Venezuela regarded Guyana as a key country in the peaceful and harmonious development of the region of the Guianas.

The Venezuelan leader then made a direct linkage between the settlement of the controversy and the economic development of Guyana. He expressed the view that the vicious circle generated by Guyana's chronic lack of energy must be broken and that Guyana would derive clear cut economic benefits from the settlement.

He then summarised his proposal for the settlement mechanism as follows:

- 1) Guyana and Venezuela should follow the agreed mechanism and approve the appointment by the UN Secretary General of McIntyre to perform "Good Offices". There would be much criticism of this choice in Venezuela, he said, but this was expected and normal and could be ignored.
- 2) Each country should appoint a representative. These persons would meet with all the necessary experts and work out a solution.
- 3) McIntyre would then present the solution.

Eventually, the two Presidents decided to formally announce their acceptance of McIntyre as the person to perform the role of "Good Offices" in accordance with the mandate of the Secretary General of the UN under Article IV(2) of the Geneva Agreement. In addition, Hoyte suggested that the respective Foreign Ministers should be given the responsibility of naming a representative each from Guyana and Venezuela to work out the technical aspects. Perez immediately agreed to this proposal.

The two presidents moved on to discuss matters relating to Guyana's indebtedness the Venezuelan Investment Fund, the problem of the shortfall in Guyana's bauxite supply to Interalumina, a proposal for Venezuela's assistance in providing small electric power plants to Guyana, and the prospect of establishing air links between the two countries.

On his return from Venezuela, Hoyte, at a press conference on 10

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November 1989, said that “the fact that President Perez agreed with the appointment of McIntyre shows the largeness of the man’s mind.” At the same briefing, Foreign Minister Rashleigh Jackson explained the role of the Good Officer:

I think in the first place it is necessary to distinguish between the roles of Arbitrator, Mediator and Good Officer. They are separate and distinct; one is not equivalent to the other.

Now, the role of Good Officer is a flexible and fluid one and it is up to him to propose mechanisms, to propose procedures for the parties to whom he is being a Good Officer. This can take the form of asking them what are their views about a solution. It can take the form of his studying the issue and saying, ‘I have this idea.’ There is no set pattern for the work of a Good Officer. I think that this is one of the factors that recommended this mechanism to the Secretary General to put to the two parties and encouraged the two parties to accept it.

At the UN, Ambassador Insanally conveyed the information on the agreement on McIntyre’s appointment to the UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar who stated that he was taken by surprise by the announcement of the two Presidents since he had not as yet consulted McIntyre.

Hoyte on the issue of joint development

Meanwhile, the issue of joint development continued to be discussed in the Guyanese media. The editor of the *Stabroek News*, David DeCaires and Hoyte had the following exchange during the latter’s meeting with the press on 10 November 1989 to report on his visit to Venezuela:

DeCaires: At one stage joint development was widely mooted as a possibility for solution of the border issue. . . Is it likely that will be one of the possibilities to be put before the Good Officer by our side in the talks that will ensue?

Hoyte: Well, you know I like to have my terms defined and I’m not sure what joint development means. If it means a kind of condominium, well, certainly that will not be on the cards—you know, some joint exercise of sovereignty over the Essequibo region or some thing of that kind. I don’t know whether this concept of joint development means that.

DeCaires: Do I, sir, take your remarks then to imply that joint development that involves some permanent Venezuelan presence on what is now our side of the border is not a matter for discussion or negotiation.

Hoyte: No, what I’m saying depends on what you mean. Suppose Guyana and Venezuela were to establish a joint company for the establishment of a hydro-power facility, certainly, Venezuelan personnel will be there along with Guyanese personnel just as how, let’s say, a private American company operating in this country will have . . . American managers, and so on. So there

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is nothing unusual or unacceptable in a situation like that. But what I'm saying is that there had been talk many years ago about joint development. I myself wasn't quite clear on what it meant. All I'm saying is that if it means condominium, you know well certainly that couldn't be on the cards. But we have not put any such proposal to the Venezuelans.

DeCaires: Can we rule out absolutely, sir, any possibility of concession of territory?

Hoyte: Well, at this stage I wouldn't want to close any option. I mean we don't know. You see, there have been cases where controversies have been settled, relating to territory, with what is called rectification of borders—you know, there is a swap. So I mean I don't want to take a fundamentalist position which closes any option at all. I think that would be quite wrong and it would send the wrong signals to our Venezuelan neighbours, and if they took such a position it would send the wrong signals to us. So we go into discussions with an open mind and a spirit of goodwill.

Appointment of McIntyre

At the beginning of 1990, Perez de Cuellar announced that after consultation with both Guyana and Venezuela, he had appointed Dr. Allister McIntyre, regarded as a "friend" of both countries to act on his behalf to find the means of settlement. McIntyre, shortly after, began a series of meetings in Caracas and Georgetown with representatives of the respective governments and subsequently met with the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the two countries in New York in April 1990.

Meanwhile, relations between both Governments continued to rapidly improve, and the media in both countries hardly ever made mention of the border controversy which had whipped up tension during the early 1980s.

Jackson's visit to Venezuela (1990)

On 13-16 June 1990, in response to an invitation from the Venezuelan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Reinaldo Figueredo Planchart, Guyana's Foreign Minister Rashleigh Jackson visited Venezuela. He held discussions of a political and economic nature with President Perez and also with his Venezuelan counterpart. He also met with representatives of agencies relevant to the functional cooperation between the two countries.

In their discussions, both Ministers expressed satisfaction with consultations held with Dr. Allister McIntyre. The Ministers also supported the Guri hydro-electric project for the electrical interconnection between the two countries for which a pre-feasibility study was being conducted. They also reiterated their desire to explore the possibility of obtaining finance for the project from sources including the international financial institutions.

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(During the meeting with President Perez on 13 June, Jackson stated that Guyana and Venezuela would make a joint representation to the IDB within a month's time. In response, Perez stated that he would speak with IDB President Enrique Iglesias about the matter during the week of 18 June).

Figueredo also declared Venezuela's willingness to construct a gymnasium and the School of Medicine in Georgetown, and announced that actions were already in motion to complete the projects within a short time.

Discussions were also held on trade, aviation and fisheries issues, and both Ministers indicated their governments' interest in promoting joint actions through the establishment of companies with capital from both countries. In this regard, Venezuelan participation in the firm, Demerara Woods Limited, was considered as very important.

In addition, the Ministers discussed the importance of the environment and the need to ensure that there was no obstacle to the sustainable development of the resources of both countries. Jackson took the opportunity of explaining the practical steps being taken by Guyana in promoting a programme for the sustainable development of its forest resources.

With respect to hemispheric issues, Jackson viewed in a positive light the aspiration of Venezuela to join Caricom as an observer. And in the context of the recent revision of Article 8 of the OAS Charter, and the ratification of the OAS Protocol of Cartagena, the Ministers agreed that after December 1990, Guyana would be eligible for membership of the hemispheric organisation.

Venezuela had earlier moved to cement the growing friendship with Guyana when it agreed to an amendment to the OAS Charter to allow both Guyana and Belize to become members of the Organisation. The Charter had previously stated that new applicants for membership which had border disputes with other member countries could not be members. Both countries eventually joined the OAS in January 1991.

At the meeting with President Perez, the subject of the Good Officer process was introduced by Figueredo. Perez suggested that there should be a meeting with McIntyre before his (Perez's) planned visit to Guyana later in the year, so that he could have a discussion on the border issue with Hoyte. He felt that the process was moving too slowly and emphasised that a formula must be sought so that a solution could be reached soon. In response, Jackson urged Perez to have confidence in the mechanism agreed upon whereby the Foreign Ministers of both countries had been put in charge of the implementation of the Good Officer process.

On Perez's enquiring about the political situation in Guyana in the light of the up-coming elections, Jackson assured him that elections would not be held before his visit to Guyana and expressed confidence that despite economic difficulties in the country, the PNC would be victorious.

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Visit by Perez to Guyana

In mid-June 1990, the Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Reinaldo Figueredo Planchart, visited Guyana and held discussions with Jackson and also with President Hoyte. He also took the opportunity during his two-day visit to finalise the plans for the visit of President Perez to Guyana.

President Perez arrived in Guyana for a two-day state visit on 16 August 1990 and he was accompanied by a high level delegation that included the Foreign Minister and the Minister of Works, Luis Penzini Fleury. At a state dinner held on the evening of his arrival, Perez was decorated with Guyana's highest national award, the Order of Excellence. In return, Perez decorated Hoyte with one of Venezuela's highest national awards, the Collar of the Order of the Liberator.

In their discussions, the two Presidents expressed their satisfaction with the evolution of events since the appointment of McIntyre to perform the function of Good Officer. They acknowledged that McIntyre was performing the function in a good political climate, which was in part facilitated by the varied programmes of cooperation between the two neighbours.

They also agreed that cooperation between the Guyanese and Venezuelan private sectors should be further encouraged, and decided to establish a working group to examine the possibility of setting up joint ventures. With respect to trade, they felt that a trade agreement which was being negotiated could significantly facilitate the expansion of commerce between both countries.

There was concurrence on a number of economic cooperation issues and these were announced in a join statement issued at the end of the visit on 17 August.

With regard to the proposed link between the Guri electricity network of Venezuela and the Guyana electricity system, the Presidents noted that technical work on the pre-feasibility study had been completed and that preliminary discussions with the IDB regarding financing were initiated.

In examining cooperation between their countries in the field of health, the Presidents were satisfied that the joint efforts of their two countries to eradicate malaria were proving successful and looked forward to expanded cooperation in this area.

With regard to the contracts between BIDCO and Interalumina, there was a renewed commitment on both sides to further strengthen the existing relationship between the two enterprises, and to fully honour all the commitments contained in the existing contractual arrangement.

The two Presidents also reviewed the question of the supply of petroleum products to Guyana by Venezuela and accepted that as a result of Venezuela's commitment to OPEC it would not be possible to reduce the impact of probable price increases related to such supply to Guyana. They,

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however, agreed that some alleviation of the negative effects of price increase could be facilitated by exercising as much flexibility as possible by Venezuela on the question of term and conditions of payment.

Among other matters discussed was the implementation of a programme of cooperation in fishing and fish processing including fisheries research and the exploitation of the aquaculture, land and marine resources.

In addition, they acknowledged the importance of preserving the environment but at the same time agreed that the rational exploitation of natural resources is essential for the development of both nations and committed themselves to the putting in place of programmes of sustainable development as well as joint ventures in the area of wood production.

Chapter 30

Economic Decline (1985-1991)

When President Desmond Hoyte became President in August 1985, he declared his intention to speed up “the pursuit of socialist construction” in Guyana. He re-emphasised this assertion after he reinforced his power at grossly rigged elections four months later. However, within less than a year he began to find this pursuit untenable as Guyana continued to experience a serious economic crisis, a spill-over from the Burnham administration.

Hoyte’s change in direction

Faced with a steady decline in production levels and an acute shortfall in balance of payments, Hoyte ordered a cut in public spending and made attempts to encourage foreign investment. He also curtailed all policies geared towards “cooperative socialism” in the attempt to attract investment from North America and Western Europe and also to win financial support from the multilateral financial institutions. The IMF since 1983 had curtailed all further lending to Guyana because payments on previous loans were long overdue and, in 1985, declared the country ineligible for further credit and loans.

No doubt, these IMF decisions caused Hoyte to declare during his address to the PNC’s sixth biennial congress on 19 August 1985 that “we have concluded that the standard IMF prescription is not only palpably irrelevant and useless, but also positively dangerous and counterproductive in our particular situation. We must resist with all our might

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the pressures that might be exerted to force us on to the IMF's procrustean bed."

Real GDP had declined by an average 10 percent in 1982-83 as a result of sharp contractions in the bauxite sector and decline and stagnation in most other productive sectors. Economic decline eased up in 1984, but the economy remained stagnant through 1987. With a per capita gross domestic product of only US\$500, Guyana was one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Confronted with these stark economic realities, Hoyte was forced to depart from Burnham's economic policy because he realised that "cooperative socialism" had failed. At the same time, the country was burdened with a stifling foreign debt and a large payment of arrears which the PNC regime had accumulated. The arrears by 1988 were more than US\$885 million (about four times the Guyana's annual exports), and Hoyte feared that all credit to the country would be completely cut off by international donors. In this situation, he was propelled to carry out negotiations in 1988 with the IMF which quickly arranged with the World Bank an Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) aimed at re-introducing a pro-capitalist market economy in place of the failed "cooperative socialist" programme of the past eighteen years.

The ERP

The ERP was introduced by the PNC government with a great deal of publicity. Its specific objectives for the 1989-1991 were: (a) achieving real GDP growth of 4 percent annually; (b) reducing the rate of inflation from 50 percent to 10 percent; (c) reducing the public sector deficit to 20 percent of GDP; (d) eliminating the external and internal payments arrears on the debt; (e) building a net international reserve; (f) incorporating the parallel economy into the official economy; and (g) normalising Guyana's financial relations with its foreign creditors.

The ERP was to be carried out in three phases: The "stabilisation" phase was planned for March to November 1989, the "rehabilitation" phase for 1990-1991, and "recovery and growth" for 1992 and beyond.

During the stabilisation period, the government with the support of an IMF-monitored programme undertook the following measures: (a) an initial 70 percent devaluation of the currency; (b) price increases resulting from the devaluation; (c) a 20 percent ceiling on public sector wage increase; (d) an increase of the prime interest from 14 percent to 35 percent; and (e) the reduction of all foreign exchange retention accounts to 10 percent of export proceeds with the exception of bauxite.

As part of the ERP programme to encourage economic growth, the government freed up the foreign exchange regulations. This allowed exporters, for the first time in many years, to retain part of their foreign

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currency earnings for future use. Before this change, only the Bank of Guyana could hold foreign currency. Soon after, price controls were removed on many consumer items, but they were retained for petroleum, sugar and rice. The removal of price controls was followed by the lifting of import restrictions on almost all items other than food. Individuals were also allowed to import goods without government intervention.

And to encourage private investment, the government promised a rapid approval of projects and offered incentives including tax holidays. The laws affecting mining and oil exploration were improved and tax reforms designed to promote exports and agricultural production in the private sector were enacted. The government also announced an end to its policy of nationalisation, not doubt to provide a solid assurance to foreign investors.

The parallel market

With regard to the absorption of parallel market into the legal economy, this was necessary since the parallel market was causing the government to lose tax revenues. It also boosted inflation through uncontrolled currency trading, while encouraging illegal activities.

By freeing up foreign exchange, the government began to restrict some aspects of the illegal economy. In 1989 it introduced the Foreign Currency Act which allowed licensed dealers to exchange Guyanese dollars for foreign currency at market-determined rates. A number of foreign currency exchange operations were licensed, but illegal currency traders continued their operation.

But at the same time, the government began a steady devaluation of the Guyanese dollar in order for the official exchange rate to match the market rate. Since the beginning of the ERP to 1991, exchange slid at the rate of 250 percent annually.

The Guyana dollar was also systematically devalued; the exchange rate of \$US1 in 1986 was G\$4.37; in 1987 – G\$10; 1989 – G\$33; and 1990 – G\$45. This process of devaluation was an essential feature of the ERP on the belief that it would destroy the parallel economy and also improve the country's export competitiveness.

However, as the central tool of economic management, the exchange rate policy was negatively affected by all forms of exchange management over a relative short period. These included a fixed exchange rate, "crawling peg", "currency basket" mechanism, "managed float" and "secondary foreign exchange window" (during 1985-1987) and "free floating" or "*cambio*" (in 1990). These proved to have little success.

Then in early 1991, the government adopted a floating exchange which removing the distinction between the official and the market exchange rates and by mid-year the exchange rate stabilised at G\$125. All

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of these devaluations and an accompanying wage restraint policy proved to be very harsh of the general population.

The payments arrears

Public finances worsened throughout most of the 1980s. The overall budget deficit—the difference between actual expenditures and the revenues—widened from 17 percent of recorded GDP in 1980 to 59 percent in 1985. After experiencing a short-level reduction during 1987-1988, the deficit jumped back to an estimated 55 percent of GDP in 1989. This deficit was rooted in increases in central government expenditure, increased domestic interest payments and decreased revenues due to economic decline and the shifting of many activities into the parallel economy.

The deterioration of the state enterprises also contributed to the budget deficits. Up to 1980, their combined current account surplus had partially financed the deficit. But this surplus turned into a deficit from 1981-1987 as a result of devaluations and a steady drop in production of export commodities.

The ERP sought to get rid of the internal and external payments arrears. To bridge the gap, half of the expenditures for 1989 were put aside for interest payments. In addition, the government cut public spending which included delaying salary increases and eliminating some civil service positions and ceasing funding to the state corporations, except the Guyana Electricity Corporation. Since many of these corporations were a burden on the economy, it became clear that the IMF, through the ERP, wanted the government to privatise them.

The government eventually sold 15 of the 41 government-owned (para-statal) businesses. The telephone company and assets in the timber, rice, and fishing industries also were privatised. International corporations were hired to manage the huge state sugar company, GUYSUCO, and the largest state bauxite mine, LINMINE. An American company was allowed to open a bauxite mine, and two Canadian companies were permitted to develop the largest open-pit gold mine on the South American continent.

With the new privatisation policy, the PNC regime departed significantly from its previous hard-line position on nationalisation. Only four years before, Hoyte in his address to the PNC's sixth biennial congress had emphasised very firmly:

We have seen, within recent times, a document being circulated which alleged that every conceivable problem we are facing, economic or otherwise, has stemmed from nationalisation. The inference was that we should denationalise. And it not without significance that this document surfaced at a time when a campaign was mounted externally to coerce us into accepting

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a policy of denationalisation—or privatisation, as it is called. . . But let me make our position clear on this issue. While the People's National Congress remains in office, the bauxite industry, the sugar industry and the other strategic industries which we have nationalised in this country will **never, never, never** be denationalised. For one thing, to do this would be an admission that we are abandoning the socialist ideal, and we have no intention of doing that.

Both the IMF and the World Bank were also worried about the deficit in Guyana's balance of payments. By 1986, the country was importing more goods and services from the rest of the world than it was exporting, and was experiencing serious problems in making payments to international creditors. Part of the payments was made from the reserves, including stocks of gold, but when these reserves dried up, the government found itself in no position to continue paying. Guyana thus became a bad credit risk and faced problems in acquiring even short term credits from international lenders. By 1988, the external payment arrears amounted to almost three times Guyana's GDP.

To help solve this problem, the government tried to increase exports and reduce imports. But this did not help much since production of rice, sugar and bauxite seriously declined. Exports suffered a setback in 1988-1989 and the arrears further increased in the wake of a deepening crisis in the sugar industry during that period. By the end of 1989, the economy had plummeted to such an extent that the real levels of GDP and export earnings were respectively 23 percent and 50 percent lower than in 1980.

The debt crisis

To finance the budget and the overall deficit, the Hoyte administration resorted to heavy borrowing. There was a sharp increase in commercial arrears (US\$1.2 billion in mid-1989) and the total public sector external debt reached almost US\$1.9 billion by 1989 or more than twice its level at the beginning of the 1980s. Measured by the usual indicators of debt to GDP and debt to exports, Guyana became one of the most heavily indebted developing countries in the world.

Apparently by 1989, the IMF and the World Bank were convinced that the government was committed to rebuilding the economy. As a result, these multilateral institutions organised an eight-member "Donor Support Group," led by Canada and the Bank for International Settlements, which subscribed US\$180 million to enable Guyana to repay arrears. This sum was refinanced by the World Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank and thus became another loan. However, this "bridging finance"—borrowing money not for development but to pay debts—re-established Guyana's international credit-worthiness and

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allowed the government to negotiate new international loans and reschedule other external debts.

As part of the ERP stipulations, taxation was steeply increased—almost doubling yearly for income and consumption tax. This resulted in increased current revenue from \$3.3 billion in 1989 to \$5.3 billion in 1990 and \$11.27 billion in 1991. On the other hand, the series of devaluations also led to a massive increase in debt payments, from G\$1 billion in 1989 to G\$4.9 billion in 1990 and G\$12.67 billion in 1991, which was more than the total current revenue collected.

In 1990, debt service payments and interest amounted to 140 percent and 53 percent respectively of export earnings. Guyana's foreign debt by the end of 1991 amounted to US\$2.1 billion with debt service payments amounting to 105 percent of current revenue. Further, as a result of the PNC regime's incompetence and mismanagement, the Current Account Consolidated Fund showed a huge deficit, increasing from G\$6 billion in 1989 to nearly G\$18 billion in 1991.

Earlier, the October 1989 report of the Commonwealth Advisory Group (the McIntyre Report) on Guyana's economic and social situation had emphasised that this state of affairs was "clearly unsustainable."

Results of the ERP

With this bruising crisis affecting the country, the opposition PPP constant criticised the ERP and noted that the "recovery programme" failed to give consideration to social development. The party further declared that the refusal of the PNC regime to embrace democracy was the main detrimental factor since the majority of the people had no confidence and trust in the government.

Actually, up to 1991 the ERP reforms showed little progress. Instead of stabilisation and progress, there was retrogression—a negative instead of a positive growth rate. For 1988, the GDP fell by 3 percent. A policy framework paper prepared by the government in cooperation with the World Bank and the IMF had predicted that real GDP would grow by 5 percent in 1989; instead, real GDP fell by 5 percent. Economic performance continued to decline in early 1990, and changes in government policy failed to alleviate the difficulties facing the economy: a massive foreign debt, emigration of skilled persons, and the lack of infrastructure. In that year the GDP fell by a further 3.5 percent.

However, there were some signs of improvement. Guyana had rescheduled its debt, making the country eligible for international loans and assistance, and foreign investment was becoming more visible. And as a result of both foreign investment and the sale of a number of government enterprises, Guyana's GDP showed an increase of 6.1 percent in 1991, the first increase after 15 years of decline.

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Nevertheless, by 1991, the economy had not shown much success. There was a drastic decline in the production levels of the key exports—bauxite, sugar and rice. Sugar production declined from 220,995 tons in 1987 to 129,900 tons in 1990. Rice production was 131,700 tons in 1987 but dropped to 94,000 tons in 1990. Bauxite dropped from 1,486,000 tons in 1987 to 1,321,000 tons in 1990. As a result of the decreased production Guyana could not supply sufficient bauxite to Venezuela for the existing bauxite/fuel deal.

Sugar and rice, accounting nearly 16 percent of the GDP, contributed almost half of Guyana's foreign exchange earnings while employing 40 percent of the labour force. But through mismanagement, these two industries, which were net foreign exchange earners, were experiencing a serious production crisis.

Sugar production since 1988 had fallen to such an extent that the government was forced to import supplies from Guatemala for domestic consumption. Because of this drop in production, Guyana failed to meet its export quotas for markets in the European Economic Community and the United States.

In 1990, rice production was the lowest in 14 years. The general shortfall led to loss of the lucrative markets in the Caribbean, and the country actually received a gift of rice from Italy that year to supplement the local market.

In addition, the country's underdeveloped and decaying infrastructure seriously handicapped economic development. Many of the basic facilities and services deteriorated badly during the 1980s. And no reform of Guyana's productive sectors was possible without a significant level of investment in electricity, transportation, communications, the water system, and sea defences. The entire country was also plagued with an unreliable supply of electricity and blackouts of sixteen hours per day were common.

Inflation

With regard to the high interest rate policy, this was intended not only to encourage savings but also to control the excess liquidity in the financial system, which contributed to inflationary and balance of payments pressures. In trying to curb inflation and the parallel market in currency trading, the high interest rate at the same time squeezed the local entrepreneurs, thus defeating one of the major ERP objectives—increased production for export and foreign earnings.

But the greatest obstacle to rehabilitation was the currency devaluation and wage restraint policy. The sharp devaluations from 1988, and particularly in 1991, impacted most adversely against consumers and producers. The accompanying rampant inflation

Economic Decline During 1985-1991

drastically reduced the quality of life, and by 1991 more than 60 percent of the population were living below the poverty line.

Inflation, which had generally remained within the 20 percent range after 1981, rose to 40 percent in 1988 and doubled to 80 percent in 1989. In 1991, it stood at between 110 percent and 125 percent. Prices, measured by the official Consumer Price Index (CPI) constructed on a 1970 base year, increased by 13 percent annually.

But wages and salaries lagged seriously behind inflation. Between 1981 and 1991, the Guyana currency was devalued by more than 4,333 percent while the national minimum wage rose by 508 percent.

Cost of living crisis

In 1991, workers were given a 50 percent increase in wages and salaries, raising the daily minimum wage from \$43.03 (given in 1990) to \$65.56 (or less than half a US dollar), about the lowest in Latin America and the Caribbean. This was totally inadequate to meet the cost of living and well below the \$193.77 per day demanded by the TUC in 1989 and the \$307.07 for 1991. On May Day 1991, the General Secretary of the TUC, Joseph Pollydore, stated that workers were in a state of near destitution and incapable of buying “even basic food;” that Government “has left children breadless and homes rice-less because of the inability of bread-winners to buy even minimum quantities for their families.” And TUC President, Frank Andrews attacked the government’s policy of removal of subsidies and price controls, while imposing utterly inadequate wages and salaries levels. To illustrate the effects of the harsh cost of living, workers on May Day 1991 carried placards declaring that the ERP brought them “Empty Rice Pots!”

The level of desperation of the workers’ situation can be gauged by the purchasing power at the daily minimum wage of \$64.56 in 1991. This amount could buy only about one and a half pounds beef, or six eggs, or two and a half pounds sugar. It definitely was insufficient to purchase a pound of chicken.

Noting the marked deterioration in economic and social conditions, the McIntyre Report had observed two years earlier:

But perhaps the even greater loss has been the deterioration in the physical quality of life of the population. Since 1980, average incomes have fallen by 50 percent, unemployment has doubled to 40 percent of the work force; health and educational services are minimal, and many of the best doctors, nurses and teachers have emigrated.

Interestingly, Carl Greenidge, who during the Hoyte administration held the post of Minister of Finance, alluded in his 1991 budget presentation to the fact that several economic indicators were in poor

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shape. So serious was the situation that in 1990 GDP had declined to less than US\$370 per capita. However, the leaders of the PNC government adamantly refused to admit that the causes of this decline were mismanagement, bad policies, rampant corruption and the lack of confidence by the people through the absence of democracy.

Chapter 31

The PPP-Civic Alliance

After the rigged elections in December 1985, five of the six opposition parties which contested the elections—the People’s Progressive Party (PPP), the Working People’s Alliance (WPA), the Democratic Labour Movement (DLM), People’s Democratic Movement (PDM) and National Democratic Front (NDF)—organised themselves into an alliance known as the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy (PCD).

The PCD

The PCD at first limited its activities to the struggle for free and fair elections and human rights. Later, the parties decided to transform the alliance into an electoral front, with a consensus presidential candidate, and a joint slate of candidates for the National Assembly. At the same time, the PPP proposed that the PCD should draft a political programme to present to the Guyanese people.

But it took almost two years before the parties could agree on the contents of the draft programme. The PPP, in a spirit of compromise, had agreed earlier to drop its insistence that the programme should have a socialist orientation. Unfortunately, by late 1989 agreement was not reached to publicise the programme, which the PPP preferred to be done before the general elections due in 1990, since it was necessary that all ethnic groups, classes and strata should see that their interests would be protected. However, the DLM did not agree since it felt that publication of the programme should be done only when there was an agreement on the consensus presidential candidate and the joint slate.

At the same time, there were differences on the choice of the

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consensus candidate—the DLM wanted a person outside of the five parties; the WPA at first wanted the person chosen by the parties, but later changed its position. On the other hand, the PPP was always in favour of a party person. Further, there was disagreement also on allocation for the different parties on the joint slate, and a deadlock resulted.

PPP meeting with “concerned citizens”

Around the same time, a number of business persons, professionals and trade unionists formed the Democratic Reform Movement with the aim of supporting the struggle for democratic elections. With the PCD talks at a stalemate, the group, also referring to themselves as a group of “concerned citizens,” met with the leadership of the PPP for discussions on the way forward. However, the group’s proposals were virtually the same as those of the DLM and WPA.

On the question of the consensus presidential candidate, the group suggested the person should come from outside the parties. The PPP disagreed and re-stated its position that the consensus candidate must be a party person, and proposed its leader Cheddi Jagan for this position.

The group’s response was that Jagan, being an Indo-Guyanese, was unacceptable since Afro-Guyanese who wanted change, including the police and army, would not accept him. They also claimed that Jagan was anti-business and an avowed communist and the Americans would find it difficult to support him. With these stated pre-qualifications, the group insisted that the presidential candidate must be an Afro-Guyanese.

The PPP disagreed with these views, but as its fall back position, it proposed Dr. Roger Luncheon, an Afro-Guyanese executive member of the PPP who was present at the meeting, as the consensus presidential candidate. But in an amazing and revolting response, the group rejected this proposal, declaring that Luncheon was unsuitable because he was “Black but Red,” meaning that although he was an Afro-Guyanese, he was a communist.

In other words, the Democratic Reform Movement did not want the presidential candidate to come from the PPP because of race (Cheddi Jagan was not acceptable because he was Indo-Guyanese) and ideology (Roger Luncheon was not acceptable because he was “communist.”) The group also suggested that the PPP should have a minority share in any future legislature and Cabinet.

Not surprisingly, the PPP rejected these conditions totally. The party felt that in principle, the Indo-Guyanese, the largest ethnic group in Guyana would not accept the view that an Indo-Guyanese regardless of ability, suitability and reliability, should be excluded simply because of ethnicity.

The PPP-Civic Alliance

As far as the joint slate was concerned, in all the formulas advanced by the Democratic Reform Movement, the WPA and the DLM, the PPP was to be in the minority. The party also noted that placing it in a minority position in the Cabinet and legislature was unrealistic and unacceptable. Its position was that in the interest of the nation and the people, it did not want to dominate or to be dominated in any future government.

Resumed discussions in the PCD

Soon after, the PCD resumed discussions on the questions of the presidential candidate and party allocation for the joint slate. Both the WPA and DLM argued for party equality. The WPA proposed that 50 percent of the joint list should be divided equally among the parties while the other 50 percent should be allocated to the civic bodies. But the PPP opposed this formula since it would have only twelve and a half percent of the joint slate. By this time, 1989, the PDM had pulled out from the grouping.

The DLM's proposal was that 80-90 percent of the joint list should be divided equally among the PPP, WPA, and DLM while the remaining 10-20 percent should be given to the NDF and other civic groups.

But the PPP disagreed with the concept of party equality on the ground that it was unrealistic, especially since the party had very large political support throughout the country. It referred to the organisational structures of the US Congress and the United Nations with a recognition of equality and inequality—each US state having equal (2) members in the Senate, but based on population, unequal members in the House of Representatives; the UN General Assembly having a representative from each member state, but the Security Council having only 15 members, with 5 being permanent members with a veto power. The PPP, therefore, argued that because of the size of its political support, it should have a larger proportion of nominees on the joint slate for election to the National Assembly.

PPP proposals

The PPP then proposed Cheddi Jagan as the presidential nominee, in the context of the party's submission for reduced powers for the president and a racially balanced government, which it would not dominate; 50 percent of the cabinet and 51 percent of PCD list (not 51 percent of parliament, and less than 24 seats the PPP secured at the 1964 elections).

But after the other members of the PCD rejected these proposals, the PPP made a new set of suggestions for a provisional presidential

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candidate and a provisional allocation in the joint slate in the proportion of 4-3-2-1 for the four PCD parties (PPP, WPA, DLM and NDF respectively)—an allocation which had been aired previously by one of the parties.

The PPP's argument was that the PCD parties should contest together with a joint slate, headed by the presidential candidate for the National Assembly, but separately for the regional elections; and to use the latter results for the various parties to decide on the allocation for the National Assembly and for the President and two Vice-Presidents for a collective presidency. However, this idea was not acceptable to the other parties. As a result, these discussions again ended in a stalemate without any agreement on either the consensus presidential candidate or the joint slate.

Emergence of GUARD

In the meantime, the Democratic Reform Movement, as it attracted more adherents from civic society, transformed itself to the Guyanese Action for Reform and Democracy (GUARD) in early 1990. Among its leading members were Samuel Hinds, an engineer from Linden, and Nanda Gopaul, a well-known trade unionist. Other members included Bishop Randolph George of the Anglican diocese, Andrew Morrison, a Jesuit priest and editor of the *Catholic Standard*, Mike McCormack, a human rights activist, Basil Butcher, a former test cricketer, Albert Rodrigues, a human rights activist, and Clairmont Lye, a businessman.

GUARD's aim was to encourage citizens to participate actively in the electoral process, independent of the political parties. It was purely a civic movement that stressed moral reform and it attracted many leading business persons, and religious leaders from the Christian, Hindu and Muslim faiths.

The organisation launched its first public rally in Georgetown in June 1990 and drew sizeable crowds to succeeding rallies where it urged people to demand free and fair elections. However, even though it initially stated that its intention was not to become a political movement, it quickly became politicised. In July 1990 it proposed the formation of an interim Government which was to last for two years during which time a new constitution would be drafted and adopted by a referendum to be followed by free and fair elections. GUARD said that since it was not a political movement, it would not participate in this interim Government, but it called on the populace to suggest names to serve on it.

As was expected, the ruling PNC Government was highly critical of this proposal. GUARD itself came under heavy attack from the ruling PNC which saw its association with the PCD in campaigning for free and

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fair elections as an “unholy alliance of politics and the clergy.” One public meeting held by GUARD in Albouystown (in southern Georgetown) was violently broken up in September 1990 by PNC supporters and a number of persons, including a Roman Catholic nun, were beaten and seriously injured.

New proposals in PCD

In resumed discussions within the PCD on the issue of the presidential candidate, the DLM’s suggested nominees were neither available nor acceptable. And of the three names put up by the WPA, only that of university professor Dr. Clive Thomas merited serious consideration. At that point, prominent executive members of the Guyana Manufacturers Association and GUARD expressed at a joint meeting their preference Jagan over Thomas. But at the pleas of the PPP, they were prepared to accept Thomas as the Prime Minister/Vice Presidential candidate. And since a Jagan/Thomas combination was deemed too left, DLM’s Paul Tennessee was added as Deputy Prime Ministerial candidate to give balance to the slate.

But on 13 October 1990, on the eve of a PCD meeting when it appeared that agreement would be reached on a Jagan/Thomas/Tennessee formula, GUARD at a public meeting threw a “spanner in the works” by announcing the name of Ashton Chase, a veteran trade unionist and lawyer, as its choice as presidential candidate.

Then on the day after this announcement, at the PCD meeting, the WPA, in an amazing shift, abandoned the position expected to be approved by the PCD and adopted the GUARD proposal. Thereupon, the PPP, on account of the fact that the WPA was substituting Chase for Thomas, proposed Chase instead of Thomas for the Prime Ministerial position. But, here again, the WPA raised opposition and no agreement was reached.

These developments threw the PCD in disarray with each party going its separate way due to differences on the consensus candidate formula, the joint slate formula and the joint PCD programme. The elections originally planned for December 1990 were postponed through widespread disagreement over the voters’ list and this provided additional time to the PCD to resolve the differences among the parties. However, all efforts failed and by mid-1991, the alliance which had existed for the past six years was finally disbanded.

The PPP-Civic alliance

Meanwhile, to break the deadlock just a month before the then planned December 1990 elections, Samuel Hinds, who had been selected

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at a retreat as Chairman of GUARD, was approached at the PPP's request by some of his GUARD associates, and he agreed to accept the position as Prime Ministerial candidate. This resulted in a split within GUARD, and the larger section headed by Hinds, along with individual independents, allied with the PPP and called themselves the Civic group.

But the Jagan/Hinds ticket was not acceptable to the other faction of GUARD led by Gopaul and McCormack who continued to insist that the presidential candidate must come from outside the political parties.

The PPP had always preferred a PCD electoral front and a joint slate. But since its proposals were not acceptable to the other parties, it decided to enter the elections as PPP/Civic joint slate which it viewed as balanced along ethnic and class lines.

In an announcement in November 1990, the PPP stated that if the PPP/Civic slate should win the elections, the Party was still committed, with its winner-does-not-take-all policy, to form a post-election broad-based multi-party, multi-racial, multi-class and multi-ideology government, which was necessary for economic, ethnic, cultural and security considerations. This, it said, was also in keeping with stipulations of the PCD; namely, that, if the elections were free and fair, the parties could also contest separately but form a post-election alliance government.

The PPP/Civic alliance was eventually approved by the PPP's 24th congress held in August 1991 at the Empire Cinema in Georgetown. At this congress, the PPP also announced it was re-examining its ideological position in the light of changes occurring at that period in the socialist countries. In the report of the Central Committee, party leader Cheddi Jagan stated:

For parties like ours, inspired by the ideals of a socialist society, new assessments are now necessary. . . Our embrace of Marxism-Leninism lies in our commitment to build a society free from exploitation and governed by those who produce the wealth. But we feel it is necessary to make a very studious re-examination of the numerous specific propositions on which the general theory and practice of socialism has been based. It will be necessary to review even some of the deeply entrenched previously unquestioned tenets of scientific socialist theory. . . The Guyanese people cannot be swayed by ideological labels on our party. They trust our party for its commitment to the cause of the Guyanese people. They like the PPP for the humane ideals and principles to which it is committed.

Later, during discussions on the party's programme, Jagan declared that the building of socialism was not at that period on the agenda. He explained that the party was committed to the establishment of a national democratic state which would embrace political and ideological

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pluralism, political democracy, cultural diversity, racial equality and a mixed economy.

More support for PPP/Civic

The PPP/Civic alliance, which no doubt strengthened the hand of the PPP, bred its detractors, and efforts were made to undermine it from the time it was first announced. A faction within GUARD and the *Catholic Standard*, the weekly publication of the Catholic Church, possibly for doctrinal and other reasons, constantly attacked the PPP saying that it was no different from the PNC, thus proclaiming a “curse on both houses.” Both this GUARD faction and the *Catholic Standard* also proposed the establishment of a “third force” to be formed by the remnants of GUARD itself to contest the election. The aim, no doubt, was to split the anti-dictatorial forces and to prevent the PPP/Civic slate from winning an outright majority.

To counter this, the PPP urged the Guyanese people not to repeat the mistakes made in 1964, when because of confusion created by racial, religious and anti-communist propaganda, and the creation of splinter parties, the Party, despite winning the highest proportion of votes, failed to secure the extra 5 percent of votes needed to continue in the government. The PPP warned that the same type of confusion was being created by opponents of the PPP/Civic alliance to prevent it from winning the Presidency and the majority in the National Assembly.

With the split in GUARD, the faction headed by Gopaul and McCormack in March 1992 announced it was promoting the compilation of a “Civic List” to contest elections now expected later in the year. Then on 23 May, Gopaul who headed the list, along with some other leading members of the organisation, resigned in order to contest the elections as a new party. This caused some other members who felt that GUARD should not participate in politics to abandon the organisation which eventually quietly dissolved.

Meanwhile the new party held its first delegates’ meeting at the Pegasus Hotel in Georgetown on 19 August 1992, but even then there were strong divisions within its ranks. Subsequently, many of its supporters decided to throw in their support for the PPP/Civic, and some of them eventually were incorporated in the PPP/Civic lists for the national and regional elections in October 1992.

Chapter 32

The Intensified Struggle for Electoral Reforms (1990-1992)

Ever since the PPP launched its proposals in 1977 for a National Patriotic Front, many attempts were made to unite all the anti-PNC forces committed to the on-going struggle for democracy in Guyana. A temporary alliance was formed during the period of the referendum in 1978, but it was not until after the fraudulent December 1985 elections that a longer-lasting alliance in the form of the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy (PCD) was organised by the PPP and four small opposition parties which contested the elections—the Working People’s Alliance (WPA), the Democratic Labour Movement (DLM), and the National Democratic Front (NDF), and the People’s Democratic Movement (PDM).

The PCD at first limited its activities to the struggle for free and fair elections and human rights. It not only brought unity of action to the opposition parties but stimulated other sections of the population to openly join their voices to the campaign for democracy.

Later, the alliance decided to transform itself into an electoral front with a consensus presidential candidate and a joint slate of candidates to contest elections due by March 1991. However, the parties could not agree on a consensus presidential candidate and also disagreed on the proportion each of the parties would have on the joint slate for election to the National Assembly.

After the 1985 elections, the PNC Government headed by President Desmond Hoyte immediately attempted to restructure the country’s economy which was in total shambles. He negotiated an economic

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recovery plan with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank which enabled the Government to acquire new loans in exchange for free-market reforms and the reversal of the nationalisation policies pursued up to around 1987. At the same time, Hoyte ditched his administration's "cooperative socialism" and began to embrace market-oriented policies and ideas.

Refusal by Hoyte to allow electoral reform

However, Hoyte and the PNC were not prepared to allow free and fair elections and stubbornly refused to allow electoral reforms championed by the PCD alliance. The alliance, in order to promote its demands and to garner international support, lobbied western governments, international organisations, and influential politicians in the USA, Canada, Caricom and the UK in the effort to pressure the PNC administration to implement reforms for free and fair elections. PPP leader, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, also made important visits to Washington, London, Toronto and several Caricom capitals to lobby support for electoral demands at home.

The major reforms the PCD demanded included the creation of a totally independent Elections Commission with authority over all aspects of the electoral process, the counting of ballots at polling places, restricting the military to barracks on election day, and the presence of international observers. Prior to 1990, Hoyte had persisted in rejecting the call for foreign observers by describing them as interferers and meddlers.

US pressures

In December 1989, Jagan, in a letter to US President George Bush, pleaded for the US to send a strong signal that it wanted free and fair election in Guyana. Bush had earlier expressed the hope that the 1990s would be a "decade of democracy" and in his message to Hoyte on Guyana's Republic Day on 23 February 1990, he expressed hopes that the upcoming elections would be held according to democratic norms. This message was repeated by the US State Department, and soon after eight Democratic Members of Congress and six Senators wrote separately to Secretary of State James Baker requesting that US aid to Guyana be tied to free and fair elections.

By that time, clear signals started to emerge from within bodies like the US State Department that financial assistance to Guyana was being linked to the certification of the electoral process. In this respect, the Appropriations Committee of the US House of Representatives subsequently announced in September 1990 that it had "temporarily

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withheld” about US\$600,000 of proposed economic assistance to Guyana. The objective of this action was “to press the Desmond Hoyte government in Georgetown to make substantial changes in the country’s electoral systems.”

A significant factor in the Congressional actions was the role played by Senator Edward Kennedy who reminded his colleagues of the history of rigged elections in Guyana under the PNC. In addition, the members of Congress were aware of the statement in early 1990 by Arthur Schlesinger Jr., historian and adviser to President John Kennedy, that US policy towards Guyana in the early 1960s was unjust, and that a “great injustice was done to Cheddi Jagan” during that period.

Invitation to Jimmy Carter

In the wake of far-reaching democratic changes the world over, the pro-democracy movement in Guyana started to find more sympathetic ears in very important centres in other countries. This interaction started to create its own dynamics. Foreign support encouraged local struggles and growing local struggles prompted greater pressures from foreign governments. Increased pressures from foreign aid donors also forced the Hoyte administration to make significant concessions on electoral matters.

As domestic and international pressure for these reforms built up, Hoyte agreed to some minor changes by handing back some powers to the Elections Commission to take control of the election machinery—control previously placed in the hands of the Minister of Home Affairs. Then in July 1990, he invited the Commonwealth Secretariat to send a delegation to observe the forthcoming elections. But since the PCD was not certain that the Commonwealth mission would be totally impartial since the Guyana Government was one of its members, the alliance said that the Carter Center should also be invited.

With Hoyte showing no interest in inviting the Carter Center to observe the elections, PPP leader Dr. Cheddi Jagan wrote to former US President Jimmy Carter, the chairman of the Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government, an informal non-governmental group composed of 21 leaders from throughout the Western Hemisphere, to signal its interest in observing Guyana’s elections. In July 1990, Jagan met with Dr. Robert Pastor, Executive Secretary of the Council, at the Carter Center in Atlanta and requested the Council to send observers. But Pastor informed him that the Council might agree only if it received invitations from all major parties.

In Guyana itself, pressures were mounting for the holding of free and fair elections. In July 1990, more than 8,000 PPP supporters on the Essequibo Coast carried out a march for this demand. In defiance of

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armed police sent to block them, they marched from two directions and converged at Anna Regina where they were addressed by leaders of the party. Similar PPP-organised marches followed on the Corentyne, West Berbice, Canje and West Demerara, with thousands of people marching long distances, rallying support for the party, and demonstrating their will to struggle for democracy.

Around the same time, the United States Government, which had offered to advise on providing assistance to the Elections Commission, contracted the Washington-based International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) to provide the service. A two-member team from IFES arrived in Guyana on 8 October 1990 and immediately met with officials of the Commission who requested assistance in the form of four-wheel-drive vehicles, river transport, office furniture and stationery. The service of IFES formed part of an assistance package of US\$693,000 from the US Government to the Elections Commission to help it discharge its functions of supervising the elections.

Jimmy Carter's visit to Guyana

Following Jagan's visit to Atlanta, the opposition parties sent invitations to the Council. On 27 September 1990, President Hoyte, after consultations with Jagan, also invited the Council (invariably referred to as the Carter Center) to send a delegation to Guyana. Eventually on 13-14 October 1990, Carter led a small delegation to Guyana to examine the electoral conditions and determine whether his organisation should observe the electoral process. The delegation held separate meetings with Hoyte and Jagan and also with members of the Elections Commission.

Just two days before Carter arrived, Hoyte had declared that counting of votes at the place of poll was a "logistical nightmare" and refused to give it any consideration. But after Carter's lengthy discussions with Hoyte, the Guyanese President, despite his previous adamant opposition, finally agreed to a preliminary counting of ballots at the polling places and to a new house-to-house registration of voters to replace the existing list. No doubt, Hoyte's change of position resulted from both internal and external political pressures exerted on him.

With these agreements in place, the Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government agreed to observe the forthcoming elections. And soon after, the Carter Center established an office in Georgetown to monitor preparations for the elections.

The flawed voters' list

At that period, the two biggest problems cantered on the need for a new voters' list since the current one was so much riddled with

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inaccuracies that even the PNC objected to it; and the demand by the opposition for the counting of votes at the polling station immediately after the end of the voting exercise.

With respect to the voters' list prepared by the Chief Registration Officer, Ronald Jacobs, several errors were obvious. It included numerous names of deceased persons; many persons whose names were included on lists up to April 1990 found their names were deleted; many others whose names were added in 1989 for the municipal elections found that their names did not reappear; the lot numbers of residences of large numbers of voters were omitted; and the names of voters born in the month of December were expunged from the list.

Faced with this situation, Hoyte on the evening of 12 October 1990, in a nation-wide radio broadcast, said he would not announce a date for election until a satisfactory voters' list was compiled. He agreed that the errors on the current list were too many, too serious and too pervasive. He added that the government would amend existing legislation or promulgate new ones to facilitate any corrective measures in compiling a new preliminary voters' list.

But it was apparent that some efforts were made on the part of the government to frustrate the spirit of the agreements. The bill to provide for new house-to-house registration was not presented to the National Assembly until 28 December 1990 and actual registration did not commence until 18 February 1991.

Initially, the PNC government opposed the appointment of opposition agents ("scrutineers") to observe the registration process. But after reluctantly conceding, it created numerous obstacles to prevent them from performing their duties: opposition agents would not be paid; they could not enter the premises of potential voters; an alternate to an agent in case of illness, urgent business, etc., was disallowed; and appointments and replacements of agents had to be done in Georgetown. Further, during the three-month registration exercise, there was no proper coordination between the registration officers and the opposition agents since many of the officers could not be found while others were generally uncooperative.

New Elections Commission

During the Carter mission, the discussions failed to resolve the matter regarding the impartiality of the three-member Elections Commission and particularly its Chairman, Sir Harold Bollers. The PCD consistently demanded the removal of Bollers but Hoyte firmly opposed this.

A second mission of the Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government, led by Prime Minister George Price of Belize and Dr. Robert

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Pastor, visited Guyana in March and April 1991 and addressed the question of the removal of Bollers with President Hoyte. Soon after, Hoyte announced the resignation of Bollers and agreed on the restructuring of the Elections Commission which would be expanded to include five members. The PNC and the opposition were to name two members each, while the new Chairman was to be selected by President Hoyte from a list proposed by the Leader of the Opposition. Subsequently, Rudolph Collins, a former Ambassador to Venezuela, was chosen as the new Chairman of the Elections Commission.

At its press conference at the conclusion of the mission, the team leader suggested that in order to remove any doubts, both Hoyte and the new Chairman should make it very clear that the Elections Commission was in charge of the entire election machinery.

All this time, the Commissioner of National Registration, Ronald Jacobs, assured the Council's delegation that the preliminary voters' list would be ready for distribution to all parties by 1 July. He also guaranteed that party polling agents would have complete access to polling places and that a list of all presiding officers appointed for polling stations would be reviewed by the Elections Commission. The review was necessary since the opposition parties claimed that most of the presiding officers appointed were political activists of the ruling PNC.

More problems with voters' list

Meanwhile, the PPP was very much concerned over what it termed the "foot-dragging" in the registration process. In protest, it resigned from the National Assembly and the regional Democratic Councils on 2 April 1991, particularly after it learned that the PNC regime was planning to extend its term of office beyond 2 May, the constitutional limit to its tenure in government. In the end, the regime extended its life for two additional periods of two months each, up to 30 September 1991.

The election was now expected to be held in December 1991. By May 1991, the voter registration exercise was completed but the preparation of the voters' list experienced numerous computer and administrative problems. Finally on 28 September 1991, two days before Parliament was due to come to an end, Collins announced that the list was completed. Even though it was obvious that the list was seriously flawed, Hoyte proceeded to dissolve Parliament on 30 September 1991 and announced the holding of elections within 90 days, or by 28 December 1991.

But serious objections were immediately raised over the accuracy of the preliminary voters' list. Names of dead persons were still included, thousands of names were missing while many thousands more showed no home addresses. A Guyanese civic group, the Electoral Assistance

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Bureau, also checked the list and its analysis reported a very high rate of errors.

The PCD alliance rejected the list and accused Jacobs and his team of rigging it in favour of the PNC. However, Election Commission Chairman Rudolph Collins agreed that there were errors in the list but he felt they could be corrected easily to ensure the holding of the election in December. Despite this, even Hoyte agreed that the list was defective but would go along with any decision taken by Collins.

In late October, the Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government sent a delegation to Guyana, led by former Costa Rican President Rodrigo Carazo and Dr. Robert Pastor, to assess whether existing electoral conditions would allow for a free and fair election in December 1991. After examining the situation, this delegation felt that the voters' list could not be corrected in time for a December election.

The delegation reported that "our assessment of the list is that it is seriously flawed by one-third or more. The flaws are of a magnitude beyond the capability of the names and objections process to handle in the time permitted." A computer expert in the delegation, Harry Neufeld, estimated that the 130,000 names which were left off the list could not be included by mid-November, 1991, the deadline for claims and objections.

Carter immediately wrote to Collins, stating that the political parties needed to receive a final copy of the voters' list at least three weeks before the election to determine its accuracy. Carter added that the elections should be postponed to allow enough time to correct the list; if this could not be done, he said the Council would not observe the elections. The American and British governments also urged Hoyte to postpone the elections.

Elections postponed

Nevertheless, Hoyte, after being advised by the Collins that the voters' list would be corrected in due time, announced in mid-November that elections would be held on 16 December. By this time, the PCD alliance had fallen apart over differences on a consensus presidential candidate and a common parliamentary slate. In addition, some of the smaller parties such as the WPA were not prepared for the elections and decided to boycott the process. The PPP, however, decided to participate; it had already formed an alliance with a "Civic" component and had chosen Jagan as its presidential candidate and Samuel Hinds as his running mate.

Faced with demands to postpone the elections and to clean up the voters' list, Hoyte insisted that he would proceed with the planned December elections. He immediately sent a high-powered Ministerial mission to the United States of America and Britain to champion this

The Intensified Struggle for Electoral Reforms (1990-1992)

view. But the mission was told frankly by those governments that free and fair elections could not be held with the flawed list. Meanwhile, Hoyte announced to the Guyanese people that since no state of emergency existed—and that even if one did—a reconvened Parliament could not postpone the elections.

But within a few days of Hoyte's announcement of the election date, Collins issued a new report that the final voters' list would not be ready for the December elections. As a result, Hoyte postponed the elections and recalled Parliament to enact new legislation to allow for elections to be held in 1992. Significantly, the PNC used the reconvened Parliament to also deal with a wide range of matters not limited to electoral issues.

Correcting the list

Meanwhile, the opposition political parties demanded the removal of the Chief Registration Officer, Ronald Jacobs, whom they accused of gross incompetence in the preparation of the voters' list. The PNC strongly opposed this demand, but Jacobs was eventually removed after Hoyte himself expressed dissatisfaction with the list.

With enough time now at hand, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) provided technical advisers and assistance to correct the list. In April 1992, the UNDP in conjunction with the Election Commission conducted a test to detect whether the new list was padded with names of deceased or non-existent persons. This was done by selecting a sample of names and trying to locate them. The results showed that the "not found" rate was only 4.4 percent.

The Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government again sent a delegation to Guyana on 27-31 July 1992 to examine the preparations for the elections. While the delegation found that all the major parties accepted the new voters' list, it reported that many logistical matters remained unresolved and that there were widespread suspicions that the government would never allow a free election and would somehow rig the elections in its favour—a situation which would lead to racial violence. In the light of this, the delegation publicly urged all Guyanese, including the private sector and other non-governmental actors, to assist the Elections Commission in organising a public information campaign to allay any fears among the population.

On 10 August 1992, Collins informed Hoyte that the final voters' list was completed. As a result, he dissolved Parliament on 29 August and announced that elections would be held on 5 October.

Chapter 33

The 1992 Elections: The Restoration of Democracy

Immediately after President Desmond Hoyte dissolved Parliament on 29 August 1992 and announced that elections would be held on 5 October, the various political parties began their election campaign in earnest. Nomination day was just a week after this Parliament was dissolved, and parties submitted candidate lists (and their presidential candidates) for the elections to the Elections Commission. These were the two large parties, the PNC and the PPP/Civic, as well as the smaller parties, the WPA, The United Force (TUF), the Democratic Labour Movement (DLM), People's Democratic Movement (PDM), the United Republican Party (URP), the National Republican Party (NRP), United Workers Party (UWP), Union of Guyanese International (UGI), and the National Democratic Front (NDF). The last five were very recently formed and were almost unknown in many parts of the country. The two main presidential candidates were Desmond Hoyte of the PNC and Cheddi Jagan of the PPP/Civic.

By the end of September, international observers from the Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government, led by President Carter, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES) had arrived in the country. The Council's observation team was made up of 63 persons including representatives of the Carter Center, a representative of the Organisation of American States (OAS), a group of Canadians from the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, and a British Member of Parliament.

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The international teams were assisted by a large group of Guyanese observers organised by the local Electoral Assistance Bureau. IFES, a US-based body, with support from the US Government, had since 1990 provided logistical support to the Elections Commission, including the provision of metal ballot boxes, the printing of ballot papers, the provision of computers and other election materials, and the training of technical staff of the Commission.

While preparations were being made for the elections, there were at least two instances of sabotage to the Commission's computer system managed by the UNDP. The first occurred when an improper circuit was deliberately wired into the electrical system. This resulted in severe power surges that destroyed several pieces of computer hardware. The second occurred about three weeks before the election; a generator, provided by the Canadian High Commission to provide a reliable power source for the computer system, broke down after someone poured a foreign substance into its fuel tank.

The campaign

Despite the heated political campaigns and tensions during periods of previous elections, the campaign for the October elections was generally incident-free. Huge party rallies, particularly by the two large parties, were peaceful across the country. However, the opposition parties were placed at a disadvantage by the ruling PNC which used the state-owned media throughout the period to promote the PNC campaign and to launch political attacks on the other parties, particularly the PPP/Civic. However, the opposition parties were allowed limited air time on the state-owned radio to make political broadcasts. In addition, all parties were able to run paid advertisements in the newspapers and on independent television stations.

Administrative problems

To ensure transparency in the election process, Rudolph Collins, the Chairman of the Elections Commission, made positive efforts to accommodate the media. He had requested Parliament to enact legislation to permit media access to the polling stations, but after this was refused, he was able to allow limited media access to these places. For instance, he decided that when the presidential candidates visited a polling place or went to vote the media would be allowed to cover that event but would not be allowed near the voting booths.

On 4 October, the day before the elections, political tensions were apparent. Many opposition supporters were expressing views that the PNC would steal the elections as they had done on previous occasions

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since 1968. On the other hand, many PNC supporters felt that with all the electoral reforms, to which Hoyte had agreed, their party had lost control over the election machinery and would be voted out from power.

At the same time, despite having gained some independent control over the conduct of the elections, the Elections Commission was still manned by civil servants who were mainly PNC supporters, there were accusations by the opposition parties that these persons were prejudiced against the opposition.

There was indeed a high level of administrative incompetence by the Commission's staff and this was evident on the eve of the elections. In the first place, the Commission published the list of polling stations too late. It had printed the list of locations only hours before the voting was scheduled to begin, and it did not have enough time to make copies of all the voters' lists to be packed in ballot boxes and shipped to all the polling stations. This irregularity affected communities which were both Afro-Guyanese (mainly pro-government supporters) and Indo-Guyanese (mainly PPP/Civic supporters), but nevertheless it created suspicions among both sections of the population.

Another problem that emerged—and which was very evident on elections day—was that communication between elections officials in the field and the Commission's headquarters was difficult through the lack of sufficient phone lines and very the limited knowledge of how to report the results by radio.

Election day

In most areas, voting began at 6.00 a.m. on 5 October and there were long lines, particularly in the rural areas, at most polling stations during the morning. In a few areas, voting began roughly an hour later because of the late arrival of the polling officers with the ballot papers and ballot boxes. There were also some organisational and logistical problems which also delayed the voting process in a few areas. Accredited representatives of political parties monitored the polls, and so did members of the international observer teams and the local Electoral Assistance Bureau.

The international observers noted the heavy turnout, but despite the organisational problems, the voting process in most areas was relatively trouble-free. However, international observers noted that violence, intimidation, and attempts to manipulate the process did occur, and they witnessed disturbances in Georgetown, Linden, and New Amsterdam where PNC supporters made efforts to prevent the smooth voting process.

By mid-morning, the Commission began to receive reports that large numbers of people in some polling places could not be found on the

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official lists. At approximately 10:00 a.m., several busloads of people were brought to the Commission building in Georgetown; these persons claimed they were not on the official list at their polling place and were told by the election officials to go to the Commission. Within one hour there were more than 200 people in front of the building. Apparently, the Guyana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) then broadcast a report about the crowd at the Commission, which caused more people to go there to see what was happening.

Violent attack on the Elections Commission

At around 1:00 pm, the crowd had grown to more than 1,500 rowdy persons who began to throw stones and other missiles at the windows in the building. Members of the mob shook the Commission's cast iron front gates, held back only by a handful of unarmed constables. The American Ambassador, George Jones, who had gone to the Commission to assist, was injured when his hand was cut by flying glass from a broken window.

It was obvious that the disturbances at the Commission were planned. This was borne out by the fact that people were brought to the Commission in buses and trucks, specially prearranged for this purpose. And shortly after people began to congregate on the street outside, PNC agitators moved among them and organised loud chanting.

As the GBC reporters reported the incident outside the Commission live on the radio, more people hurried there to see what was happening. The GBC initially reported that the people had come to the Commission to vote because they were told if their name was not on the list, they could vote at that location.

At the Commission itself, telephone calls were received from presiding officers at polling places outside of Georgetown that citizens reported having heard on the radio that the Commission was allowing people who were not on the list to vote. The presiding officers wanted to know if they could permit this in their respective areas.

The GBC also gave reports of many people being turned away from polling stations in Georgetown because their names were not on the list. This appeared to be occurring chiefly in areas where the PNC expected a heavy turnout. Before the Commission had a chance to check this allegation, the GBC broadcast the reports as factual.

But after checking the allegation, the Commission found that the people were going to the wrong polling place. The larger polling sites had alphabetically split voters' lists, i.e. A-M voting in one room, N-Z in another room, etc. Since such split polling places were not widely used before in Guyana, it was apparent that these people were just going to the wrong room.

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To defuse the situation, Collins broadcast a message that those who claimed they had been disenfranchised at the polls would be allowed to vote on the first floor in the Commission building after their names were checked against the master voters' list. Almost immediately, the stone throwing stopped and would-be voters lined up by the hundreds to cast ballots. By that time, every window in the building had been broken. People were still in the queue waiting to vote at the Commission building at 6:00 p.m. when the polls were due to be closed. However, the Collins extended the closing until 7:00 p.m. for every polling place in the country (except the Commission building itself, which remained open until 10:00 p.m. to prevent another outbreak of violence) to assure that all who wanted to vote would be given the opportunity. (IFES, in its final report on the elections, *Guyana Election Assistance Project – October 1990 to November 1992*, said these votes at the Commission were in fact not counted, and elections officials later determined that only 21 persons of these persons were registered voters who, in the first place, should have voted in their own residential districts.)

The lack of adequate police protection for the Commission also contributed to the violence. Collins requested additional police at 10:00 a.m. when the first busloads of people began to arrive. His request was made to the Police Commissioner, Laurie Lewis, a number of times during the day, and he was told each time that additional police were en route.

As the situation deteriorated, Collins decided to evacuate non-essential local staff, UNDP computer operators, and IFES representatives. However, he and his key staff members remained in the building.

Although there were reports of sporadic violence in a few locations, the Commission headquarters was the focus of the disturbances. Voting continued normally elsewhere. By 3:30 p.m., some of the mob outside the Commission changed their strategy and began looting stores in the business area of Georgetown and violently attacking people on the street. Riot police eventually manage to quell this disturbance but not until four persons were shot dead and more than 100 others injured.

Riot police had surrounded and protected the Elections Commission building for a brief time in the afternoon, but left as suddenly as they had arrived. By 4:30 p.m., only a handful of police were left. An army helicopter hovered over the crowd descending close to it in an unsuccessful effort to disperse it. Collins continued to demand more police protection at the Elections Commission, but despite the usual assurances by the Police Commissioner, no help came.

As darkness fell, the situation outside was still not under control. Shots continued to be heard in the neighbourhood, and there was still no significant police presence. Without police protection, the Elections

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Commission was vulnerable to attack and vandalism which threatened to close down operations.

Control re-established after Carter's intervention

Just before 8:00 p.m., President Carter went to the Elections Commission office, from where he spoke by telephone with the Police Commissioner Laurie Lewis and President Desmond Hoyte demanding that armed police be sent immediately to defend the Commission. It was only after his telephone calls that the riot police arrived on the scene. Within minutes, the mob was scattered with volleys of warning shots and barricades were erected. Almost immediately, the disturbance at the Commission ended and the technical staff returned to continue their jobs.

In a comment on this situation, IFES in its final report stated:

It seems that as the disturbance at the Commission grew, some members of the PNC saw an opportunity to disrupt the election and shed doubt on the outcome. This would explain the reluctance to provide police protection when first requested. With the outcome in doubt, it would not make any difference if the final results indicated the PPP/Civic had won the election; the PNC could claim the results should not be declared official because it would have been impossible to certify the official returns. It does not seem that all of violence was planned. It is believed that the organisers of the disturbance thought they could control the crowd and direct the activity solely at the Commission. It appears that as the situation continued, it became uncontrollable and they were no longer able to focus the attention on the Commission. The mob nearly forced its way into the Commission building, and at that point, the Chairman was prepared to evacuate the staff. They would have succeeded were it not for the presence of President Carter at the Commission building which forced the police and military to secure the area.

Closing of the polls

Immediately after the polls closed, the polling officer at each polling station, in the presence of party representatives and observers, opened the ballot box and the votes were counted and tabulated. The results were then filled on official forms which were signed by the polling officer and representatives of political parties. Where it was possible, these preliminary results were then transmitted by telephone to the Elections Commission, while others handed theirs to the regional representative of the Commission for delivery to headquarters. In addition to all of this, a copy of the results for each polling station was generally posted on the outside wall of the polling station for public viewing.

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As Guyanese tuned in to GBC to wait for the announcement of the results from various regions, the observer team from the Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government was able to use a “quick count” sample which determined before 1:00 a.m. on 6 October (just 7 hours after polls had closed) that the PPP/Civic had won the national elections by a wide margin. The quick count projected that the PPP/Civic would receive 54.8 percent of the vote and the PNC 40.8 percent. This information was communicated to the Chairman of the Elections Commission but it was not released to the public.

Declaration of results

The official results came in much slower from the Elections Commission. By daybreak of 6 October, only 19,293 votes or roughly 5 percent of the eligible votes from 61 polling places had been declared. Immediately after, the Commission refused to release further preliminary results. It was later learned that the Commission was experiencing problems in receiving the results from many polling officials who apparently did not know that they had to send their results directly to the Commission. Actually, it took several days before the all the polling officers finally reported their results.

Naturally, the halt in the announcement of results immediately created suspicions. Since many of the delays were from PNC strongholds, some sections of the population felt that the results from those areas being rigged to show massive support for the PNC. Some confusion was added to this situation by the GBC which deliberately broadcast reports that the results were indicating a PNC victory.

However, President Carter and his Council quickly stepped in to calm these fears. Early that morning he met Hoyte and Jagan separately and shared with them the results of the quick count. Hoyte acknowledged the figures but was unwilling to concede the election until he had seen the official Elections Commission’s results and the count made by his party. Jagan agreed to calm his supporters and wait for the results to be announced by the Elections Commission.

Later that day, President Carter told a press conference that while the delay in reporting returns was a source of frustration, his team had seen no evidence that the integrity of the count had been compromised. This position was also announced by the Commonwealth team at a separate press conference some time after. Carter also revealed that he had shared the quick-count results with Hoyte and Jagan, and that both had agreed to hold the information in confidence.

That evening, the Elections Commission recommenced the announcement of results. Everything was going smoothly, but some of the returns, particularly from Region 4, were not coming in. The

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Returning Officer for that region was holding back this information, and everyone was trying to locate him. These returns were not received from Region 4 until mid-morning on October 7 and once this was known, it became apparent that the PPP/Civic was going to win convincingly. By 1:00 p.m., Collins finally notified Hoyte and Jagan that it appeared the PPP/Civic was going to win the election, and made a public statement to that effect at 3:30 p.m.

President Carter later that day asked both Jagan and Hoyte to name senior representatives to begin plans for an orderly transition. Soon after, at his final press conference, he announced that his team had found that the elections were conducted freely and fairly, and that President Hoyte and Dr. Jagan had named representatives to plan for the transition. That evening, Chairman Rudolph Collins announced that with 95 percent of the ballots counted, the PPP/Civic had won the presidency with about 54 percent of the vote.

When all the votes were finally counted, the final results showed the PPP/Civic winning 162,058 or 53.4 percent of the valid votes, while the PNC received a total of 128,286 or 42.3 percent of the votes. The other parties received the following amounts: WPA – 6,068 (2 percent); TUF – 3,183 (1.2 percent); DLM – 1,557; URP – 1,343; PDM – 298; UJI – 134; NRP – 114; UWP – 77; and NDF – 68.

Out of a total electorate of 384,195, a total of 308,852 (or 81 percent) were cast of which 303,186 were valid.

Based on these results, the 53 elected seats in the Parliament were allocated thus: PPP/Civic – 28; PNC – 23; WPA -1; and TUF – 1.

The regional elections

In the regional elections which were held simultaneously, the PPP/Civic scored outright victories in Regions 2 (Pomeroon-Supenaam), 3 (Essequibo Islands-West Demerara), 5 (Mahaica-Berbice) and 6 (East Berbice-Corentyne).

The PNC also scored victories in Regions 1 (Barima-Waini), 4 (Demerara-Mahaica), 7 (Cuyuni-Mazaruni) and 10 (Upper Demerara-Berbice). In Regions 8 and 9, no party was able to win enough votes to take full control of the respective regional administrations.

In the sparsely populated Region 8 (Potaro-Siparuni), the PNC won 7 regional seats while both the PPP/Civic and the WPA obtained 4 seats each.

In a form of “power sharing,” the PPP/Civic and the WPA formed an alliance in this region to give the PPP/Civic the post of Regional Chairman and with both parties working together to form the regional administration. This support from the WPA helped the PPP/Civic to achieve a comfortable working majority in Parliament.

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A similar situation occurred in Region 9 (Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo) where both the PPP/Civic and the PNC won 5 regional seats each, while TUF obtained 4. In this case, TUF supported the PPP/Civic in acquiring the post of Regional Chairman and together formed an alliance to control the regional administration. Altogether, in the ten regions, the PPP/Civic won a total of 99 seats, the PNC 91, the WPA 8, TUF 6 and the URP 1.

With the PPP/Civic in control of six Regions, it was able to obtain and extra six “regional” seats in Parliament. The PNC, with control of four Regions acquired an additional four “regional” seats in Parliament. This brought about the following allocations: PPP/Civic - 34, PNC - 27, WPA -1 and TUF - 1.

About a month after the elections, all the elected representative of the Regions convened as the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs and the PPP/Civic with its majority of 99 members to the PNC’s 91, was able to win election of two of its representatives to fill the remaining two remaining seats in the new 65-member Parliament. This brought the PPP/Civic overall total to 36 seats.

Jagan sworn in as President

On 9 October, the leader of the PPP/Civic, Dr. Cheddi Jagan took the oath as President, thus becoming Guyana’s first freely elected Head of State. At a ceremony at State House in Georgetown witnessed by ex-president Desmond Hoyte and large numbers of PPP/Civic supporters, President Jagan said:

We went to the elections with the slogan: “Time for Change: Time to Rebuild.” We have attained the first objective of a change in government. Now, all of us together, whatever our party, political affiliation, whatever our race or ethnicity, whatever our creed, must put our shoulders to the wheel. It is time to embrace each other and work arm in arm to rebuild our beloved Guyana. . . . We must move forward together and make into reality our motto: “One People One Nation, One Destiny.”

In this exciting adventure, I expect the fullest co-operation not only of our many friendly countries and our overseas brothers and sisters, but also all progressive minded personalities and organisations: investors, experts and advisers. We do so without rancour, without recrimination, without victimisation, without in any way trying to cast blame.

In this regard I hope to develop a constructive relationship with Mr. Desmond Hoyte and the leadership of all parties in order to deepen our democratic process, and accelerate our economic development.

For the first time in 28 years Guyana experienced free and fair elections. The long struggle for the right to freely choose a government was finally won. Democracy which had been snatched away from the

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people, through a series of rigged elections in 1968, 1973, 1980 and 1985, was once again restored. Nurturing and strengthening this newly won democracy would be their challenge in the years ahead.

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