

GENERAL ELECTIONS IN GUYANA, 1953-1983: A STUDY IN THE SUBVERSION OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION [THE DECLINE OF A NATION]*

by

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1. Introduction and Comments on the Approach of "Economism"

The emphasis of this article will be centered on the subversion of general elections and the destruction of the independence and impartiality of the electoral machinery in Guyana, primarily between 1957-1983, resulting in the inhibition of peaceful political change and the denial of the fundamental right to representative and responsible government. It will encompass discussions on the 1955 period, the switch to Proportional Representation (P.R.) in 1964, the infamous Referendum of 1978 and the implications of subverted electoral processes on opposition political parties as well as the Guyanese body politic as a whole. It will also attempt to establish that although Universal Adult Suffrage was for the first time introduced in Guyana in 1953, general elections, notably from 1957 to the present can be described as being systematically subverted and prevented from producing rational political changes and an orderly succession of government.

It will further seek to establish that dysfunctions are to be found rooted not independently in elections as a process *per se* but either in the type of political participation so far encouraged and channelled into it, or in the multiple ways through which its independence and impartiality may be eroded. Political participation, through elections, if improperly directed, for example, if stimulated by racist propaganda creates a stress on elections preventing it from being used as a rational mechanism aimed at offering solutions to political issues and conflict. In other cases elections may be prevented from generating solutions and a peaceful and orderly succession of government once there occurs a direct subversion or destruction of the necessary conditions that constitute, "Free Elections".

Elections are independent mechanisms for affecting political change and continuity in a **peaceful sense**. How much they succeed depend on how properly they are utilised. To criticise elections as an independently dysfunctional and inadequate process is largely incorrect. What appears to be more appropriate is an assessment of features externally induced into elections, or surrounding it, which are initially responsible for its subversion or incapacity to offer solutions.

*Political participation, despite ideological controversies, relates not only to the question of ensuring that political leaders and political parties are subject to accountability and control or to ensuring that leaders and parties represent the interest of the majority, but importantly what criteria should determine who or which policies should dominantly influence the exercise of state power. In this regard general elections (and the multi-party system) as the axis of political participation knows no substitute.

W. J. M. Mackenzie (1964: 13-14) has pointed out, that although this is not a supreme end, elections are devices which are :

of the highest value because no one has invented a better political contrivance for securing in large societies two conditions necessary for the maintenance of government. First, elections can create a sentiment of popular consent and participation in public affairs . . . secondly, elections can provide for orderly succession in government by the peaceful transfer of authority.

An approach that attempts questioning the relevance of elections to so called "developing countries," (the latter term is misleading since it presumes that these countries are developing) is what may be loosely termed as "economism." In short this approach which includes theorists from both the left and right ideological spectrum stresses the urgent need for socio-economic transformation as implicitly exerting a miniaturizing or postponement effect on civil and political rights, the implication being that the latter should be shelved at least for the time being, including elections whose game of 'in' and 'out' may exert an adverse effect on political stability, provide a source for the wastage of public funds and produce unnecessary political competition which may serve to slow down the "development" process. The latter situation of political stability being seen as the necessary prerequisite for economic development. This strand of argument is commonly used in Chile, Argentina (under military rule) and in a variety of other right wing dictatorships. Similarly, so called "socialist regimes," have attempted to use inane forms of reasoning such as general elections being part and parcel of a historically outmoded "Bourgeois Democracy" and therefore, that new processes and institutions expressive of "Socialist Democracy have to be created. We are contending that although elections is not all there is to democracy or meaningful political participation, in these so called "socialist" regimes, institutions and processes which tend to limit the political power of the party executives and serve to bring their action under popular control and scrutiny are often the first to be abolished under the excuse of creating a wider and deeper "Socialist Democracy."

Also, in the Caribbean it is not an uncommon practise for some academics to argue that elections are incapable of inaugurating the deep-seated structural transformation required in the region. The victory of the PNM in Trinidad and Tobago's last general election evoked criticisms of that sort. Such criticisms whether they may be true or not, however, highlight what may be termed a crisis of "academic ambivalence" if not "academic hypocrisy" in the Caribbean. For instance it constitutes no less than a hypocritical attitude to denounce general elections as an inadequate institution or process in Trinidad and Tobago, while at the same time deploring its absence in Chile or its total subversion in Guyana. If we must support or reject elections, then that support or rejection must be consistent and universal. The practise of "academic hypocrisy" is not unique or unknown in the Caribbean. The people of this region are also aware of the practice of ideological hypocrisy by way of which theorists/ politicians may constantly glorify Soviet democracy and Marxism/ Leninism, yet whenever they choose to migrate, always opt in favour of advanced capitalism in North

America; they do not even consider what contributions they can possibly make to the Nicaraguan or Grenadian experiences.

If socialism is to be the "cure all" for the many ills in the Caribbean, then for such a socialism to be of a democratic content it must be conferred upon approval by the Caribbean masses. If socialism is to be institutionalised to deal with deep-seated structural problems of the region it must be legitimised by and through the Caribbean masses. If such a requirement is not met not only does imposed "socialism" destroy the real content of democracy but also such a situation would tend to highlight that Caribbean academics themselves demonstrate a preference for technocratic and arbitrarily imposed solutions that lack democratic participation from below as opposed to minority technocratic or vanguard thinking from above.

With reference to what we have termed the approval of "economism" Harold Lutchman (1978:3) has observed :

quite significantly what has occurred in many developing countries is a tendency to elevate social and economic rights to the same level of the more normally emphasised political and civil rights. Concern with this particular matter has been represented as supplying one of the main motivations for change in constitutional and political forms. . . . In this respect it has been argued that to the extent that existing arrangements fail to emphasise this matter they are both deficient and inadequate.

In Guyana, the ruling P.N.C. (People's National Congress) Party has since 1969 been pointing its arguments increasingly in the direction of economism. At a ceremony held at the National Park, January 18th, 1981, the P.N.C. in dealing with basic human rights, again decreased the significance of political and civil rights by pointing out that basic human rights are economic rights. The questionable aspect lies not only in separating political rights for human rights in general but also whether economic rights are inseparable from civil and political rights; i.e., whether the maintenance and continuity of civil and political rights are not indispensable prerequisites for the realisation of basic economic objectives. That is without political democracy there can be no development or at least no rational form of development. The P.N.C. administration has also been pointing out that elections are not all and that "meet the people" tours by political leaders may constitute a more effective machinery in terms of crystallising and expanding democracy. One would not dispute that features such as "meet the people tours" can indeed crystallize democracy at a deeper level and in itself serve as a complementary machinery to elections, but in the case of the P.N.C. what needs to be questioned is the extent to which "meet the people tours" have degenerated into a form of political and electoral gimmick in order to create a facade of democratic participation.

Harold Lutchman (1978:32) has also pointed out that :

the argument of politicians that if they are to transform society and achieve rapid economic development, it is necessary that they have near complete control over the institutions of the state, and requesting citizens to endure sacrifices in terms of their civil and political rights in particular is not always

convincing. Nor is the related plea that as custodians of the interest of the masses they need to be trusted. There is a total danger of power being abused even where those in control claim to be from and representative of the masses. Further, the requested sacrifice may not necessarily be accompanied by the requisite social and economic change and development. The problem is compounded where doubts surround the functioning of basic institutions such as those designed to measure and register popular choices and wishes.

Judith Hart, an ex-British M.P., in delivering a lecture at Turkeyen Hall during the 1970s and in expressing an authoritarian view emphasized the category of economic rights and situated civil and political rights in a reduced position. The often proposed implication that "developing countries" must wait until they are developed before they can think about political and civil rights is untenable because not only does it remove all normative aspects that overarch, govern and determine the morality of human beings, for example aspects such as justice, equality and so on, but it is a gross insult to the peoples of the Third World by insinuating that they are incapable in their government of combining political and civil rights with development approaches and needs. Further, the experiences of the Third World are explicitly revealing that there is an isomorphic connection between democracy and development. For instance, a population that is denied not only the determination of the nature of the exercise of political power but also the satisfaction of its most basic human needs such as the right to food, shelter, etc., can never constitute or provide the necessary human resource base required for any sort of economic transformation.

A common fallacy has been to excuse numerous minority "left" and right wing dictatorships in the Third World on grounds of an "historic inevitability." What we need to separate is the extent to which right and "left" wing dictatorships are the products of minority groups/ classes and the extent to which the genuine representatives of the majority are being systematically denied the opportunity of ever ascending to political power. The occurrence of social revolutions with mass participation implies that the pervasive absence of democracy in the Third World cannot be rationalised on grounds of some supposed "historic inevitability;" revolutions become an inevitability when and where democracy does not exist. The absence of democracy in the Third World means that it is consciously being denied just as equally as the real representative of democracy and of the majority are being calculatedly harassed into residing in foreign countries. The major dilemma which defines the present conjuncture of the Third World relates to the fact that in numerous instances "governments" are not the products or representatives of the majority, they constitute no less than authoritarian impositions and the argument of "economic expediency" or "exigencies of socio-economic transformation" is a shallow and untenable one which can only lead to an accelerated reproduction of poverty and destruction.

The proposal that elections or restraints on executive power are irrelevant or tends to inhibit the required rate of economic performance where socio-economic development is urgently needed, is not only questionable at this stage,

but can be seen as being increasingly supportive of dictatorships and minority forms of class rule.

Where free and fair elections are consciously being denied the common result has always been the expansion of human and social misery. Such situations can only serve to demonstrate the impact that democracy, legitimacy and consent exert on production and economic growth, and the inverse relation that exists between illegitimacy and repression. Their implications are much more damaging for racially plural societies where basic divisions can be easily exacerbated and visibly pointed out.

Pointing towards the need for "development" and unearthing weak justifications to dispense with elections also overlooks the consequences of political power when arbitrarily exercised and its ripple effects on crucial institutions such as the news media in general, the judiciary, the police force, to name but a few institutions which can stand defenceless and open to subversion for partisan usage when any government confers on itself (particularly in an illegal context) the messianic task of "saving the nation" subject to the removal of controlling mechanisms and devices crucial to limiting and restraining the exercise of political power.

Some of the devices of so called "bourgeois democracy" are not so obsolete as some would like to have us believe. In fact, they constitute some of the best known mechanisms, **if properly used**, for keeping political power within the grasp of popular control and recall. If anything at all many political leaders and minority groups that express a dislike towards what they label "bourgeois democracy" after their rise to political power, do so precisely because such a democracy is often too broad to cover, protect or guarantee their narrow, monopolistic and authoritarian conception and usage of political power. Such a situation also expresses their deep seated lack of confidence in the ability and capacity of the masses to consciously fashion a democratic form of political and economic reality on their own behalf.

The need for political power to be controlled by the majority, therefore, is a crucial and pervasive problem confronting every existing society and which cannot simply be dismissed as relevant to one type of political system and not relevant to another type, because if democracy is subverted under advanced Capitalism, it does not exist in Eastern Europe nor are its prospects extremely attractive in the Third World. In addition, the application of the Marxist/Leninist model and its central thesis of the role of the "revolutionary vanguard party" and conspirational leadership seems not to have made any contribution to the question of expanding and entrenching democracy. Indeed it has more than anything else managed to further distance and separate the question of democracy from majority control and to engender a connection between political authoritarianism and vanguardism.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF ELECTIONS IN GUYANA AND THE PRESENT POLITICAL CONJUNCTURE.

(Guyanese politics has traditionally been dominated over the decades by two political parties, the People's National Congress (PNC) and the People's

Progressive Party (PPP). The P.N.C. is constituted predominantly of Afro-Guyanese and the P.P.P. is constituted predominantly of Indo-Guyanese. Both parties are well sunk in racial basis of support and can only exist in that particular mould.)

Electoral participation in Guyana can be separated into several periods; Limited Suffrage before the 1953 period, Universal Adult Suffrage and the Constituency System between 1953-1961 and Proportional Representation (PR) from 1964 onwards.

For analytic purposes however, our analysis will commence from 1953, using as its presumption the 1953 General Elections, based for the first time on universal adult suffrage as enacted by the Waddington Constitution of 1953. This was the only election so far in the history of Guyana in which there existed a substantial level of political participation in a more meaningful and less subverted context comparable to subsequent elections in the post 1958 period.

General elections in 1957, 1961 and 1964 witnessed a subversion of political participation through the direct propagation of race consciousness as the primary means to acquire political power as an end in itself by both the P.N.C. and the P.P.P. General elections in 1968, 1973 and 1980 witnessed a subversion of electoral participation through a systematic deliberate and conscious attempt by the P.N.C. leadership aimed at destroying the elections machinery and the conditions that conduce to its impartial basis of operations, combined with the ever-pervasive attempt to subtly play on racist emotions by both parties (P.P.P. and P.N.C.).

As will be noted, the periodisation of subversion of elections and political participation does not correspond to the original periodisation of elections on the basis of pre-1953, 1953-1961 and 1964 to the present but instead uses 1953 as a basis, 1957-1964, and 1968 to 1983. The reason is obvious since the major aspect of electoral subversion did not correspond directly to the date of changes of the electoral system. For instance, although P.R. was introduced in 1964, the basis of subversion in the 1964 elections can be found rooted in elevated race consciousness and to a certain extent in international conditions.

Also supportive of the above argument is the fact that a direct subversion of elections through the usage of proxy voting, overseas voting, anti-democratic legislation, etc., (the major and most critical form of subverting elections in Guyana) commenced during the holding of the second elections under the system of Proportional Representation, that is in 1968.

Since the introduction of universal adult suffrage in 1953 seven (7) general elections have so far been held viz, 1953, 1957, 1961, 1964, 1968, 1973, 1980 and one referendum in 1978. As far as internal party disputes over elections were concerned, all with the exception of the 1953 elections have proven to be highly controversial issues. The reason for the 1953 elections being least controversial lies in the coalition character of the P.P.P., the absence of other relatively

organised political parties, and the then broad nationalistic appeal of the P.P.P. All elections subsequently held after 1953 have so far served not to moderate, but in fact to amplify political conflict and tensions.

The course of the seventies, saw the emergence of what may be described as a brief but pointed form of working class consciousness and the full blossoming of the P.N.C. into a repressive state capitalist regime. It was largely the response to the emergence of a complete internal ruling class in Guyana and the decadent racial basis of politics in terms of expanding socio-economic problems in Guyana that partially prompted the emergence of the Working Peoples Alliance (W.P.A.) in the early 1970s. The W.P.A. represented for the first time a significant counter to the parochial P.P.P./ P.N.C. politics and the impasse they have so far levelled on the Guyanese political situation since 1955.

However, with the rise of the phenomenon of ideological confusion in Guyana in the latter half of the 1970s by way of which the P.N.C. effectively confused socialism with state capitalism, wrecked the national economy, evoked an opportunistic policy of "critical support" from the pro-Moscow P.P.P. and estranged the masses of Guyanese from both political democracy and the right to economic existence. In general, the Stalinisation of Marxist/Leninist thoughts by the P.P.P. and the Marxist/Leninist positions of the W.P.A. led to a situation of left wing ideological saturation. For the majority, the P.N.C., P.P.P. and even the W.P.A., became growingly seen as parties of the left and especially so since important parts of the Caribbean media tend to project Guyana as socialist. Amidst the prevailing national crisis the majority cannot see a political alternative and therefore, cannot be actively mobilised by any of the three major political parties because ideologically they appear to be one and the same. The result has been an erosion of working class consciousness and combativity, the rise of **political apathy**, and the large scale exodus of the Guyanese people. The multiple Marxist/ Leninist vanguard parties that now exist in this land and their various perceptions as to what socialism is all about or how it should be achieved, have already proven to be damaging to the interests of the nation. As local political parties chose to be guided by a political/ ideological insensitivity, the existence of an extremely high emigration rate more than suggests that Guyanese prefer the emigration alternative rather than deciding upon the issue of what brand of vanguard party or socialism they really want.

III. ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN 1953

The broad based People's Progressive Party (P.P.P.) of 1953 which evolved from the Political Affairs Committee (P.A.C.) of 1947,¹ allowed for a political focus on the requisite need for internal reconstruction after centuries of Dutch and British Colonialism. However, although the P.P.P. of the early fifties represented a progressive nationalist movement yet it contained the untrammelled discords of colonial society; a problem which it never adequately or successfully dealt with, and which served to split the movement officially in 1955 on racial

lines. The split of 1955 gave birth to the P.N.C.; the Afro-Guyanese faction of the P.P.P.

The electoral turnout at the 1953 general elections (before the split of 1955) stood at 74%. The P.P.P. won in terms of percentage votes, 51%, and other contestants 49%.²

If Ralph Premdass is correct in contending that the decision of the Political Affairs Committee (P.A.C.) in selecting Burnham into the P.P.P.'s leadership structure was aimed at countering the 1947 racial voting pattern which that party had perceived in the last elections (1947), then it is rather unfortunate that Premdass and other subsequent theorists should have interpreted this as the "golden age of race unity." From all indications it represented a tactical approach to the upcoming 1953 elections and was basically an attempted electoral strategy at the top, not a concrete solution at the bottom. It was a party approach to garner both Indian and African support at the poll. David De Caires and Miles Fitzpatrick (1966:40) support this view by contending "for instance, the appointment of Forbes Burnham as Chairman owed something to the fact that the early P.P.P. relied on a **dual charisma** to organise the cities and the country-side." The implication of such a statement is quite obvious because in Guyana it is distinctly known that the rural areas are comprised mainly of Indo-Guyanese whereas the urban areas are comprised mainly of Afro-Guyanese.

Further, this compromise which enabled the P.P.P. to take office under the 1953 Constitution "was an expedient based on sharing office not an agreement of a political programme of action." (De Caires and Fitzpatrick 1955:40). The *New World Journal* (March 1963 : 5) again confirms this view by stressing the P.P.P. leadership concentrated on driving the imperial power out rather than on a constructive programme aimed at holding the movement together." Similarly, Harold Lutchman (1970 : 221) stated :

to some observers it was by no means a unified party but merely a coalition between the two major race groups . . . consequently, although it represented a remarkable achievement it was likely to separate under stress.

The weakness of the 1953 movement is perhaps nowhere more properly documented than in *New World's* (1963:6-7) candid statement :

the fact is that the P.P.P. of 1953 has never been of the homogenous unit, but a coalition, it had come together to spearhead the fired attack on the imperial power . . . nothing had to be stated too precisely. Every man in the street knew after four hundred and fifty years of (new world colonialism) who the enemy was and what had to be done. The leaders had no real problem in bringing the disparate sections together. But following from the colonial condition itself the unintegrated nature of the movement (due to economic specialisation, imperial population policy and differential acculturation) was a naked fact which did not have to be stated. Everyone knew it was a coalition. The coalition represented an advance along the road to unity, it was not a unity.

As far as 1953 was concerned, there is a tendency to over-aggrandise class consciousness and race unity in this phase. Firstly, election statistics of 1953 suggest that a more cautious interpretation should be used. Secondly, it was an electoral strategy directed from the leadership level towards the masses. Newman (1964:81) referred to the lack of organic unity in the Negro/ Indian coalition in the P.P.P.; a position which is supported by several observers of political events in the fifties. Thirdly, the leadership level had no programmatic approach towards socio-economic reconstruction although this was one of their main argument on the need to win the then forthcoming 1953 general elections. Finally, in the 1953 instance, support may not have been based on a distinct form of class consciousness, in many instances and particularly at the leadership levels it appeared to have been generated simply by a tendency of acquisition aimed at replacing the whites who were occupying the more remunerative and prestigious occupational positions in a colonial society.

For 1953, the whole point as it relates to political participation in general, is that the level of participation at that point in time was not one of organic unity, neither was it unlimited, but it represented a sufficient amount for nation building under what was then considered an appropriate leadership strategy but which shortly after degenerated into naked self-centred struggles at the leadership level. The failure of the latter to give mature and sensible guidance retarded the development of the former which was then at that point, in a most formative stage. The suspension of the 1953 Constitution and the 1955 split reversed such formative developments in terms of a broad (multi-racial political participation) aimed at national objectives, and thereafter directed political participation into a quagmire of political consequences initially induced by colonial rule, and from which political participation had only partially lifted its head above the 1950-1953 period.

The New World Quarterly, (1964) states that in 1955 there was no split. The split was already there. De Caires and Fitzpatrick (1966:40) similarly argued "the very nature of the colonial society and the cultural values derived from the distorted racial hegemony imposed by European imperialism infused mass activity with potential racial conflict from the start."

The 1955 split established or created nothing new, it merely proved that the threads which were being used to sew up the discords of a racially plural colonial society in 1953, were too thin and too inadequate to constitute the necessary form of solid political approach and strategy concomitant with nation building, decolonisation and socio-economic transformation and development.

The focus of this study since directed at the subversion of elections in Guyana will not exhaustively concern itself with a documentation of the split. Suffice it to point out that in addition to being centred on a struggle for power and a lack of proper race unity,³ there also existed an inability to understand the full implications of the intensive dimensions of international politics in a Western hemispheric context that was distinctly anti-Marxist in nature. This

is so, particularly when it is borne in mind that the Cuban Revolution occurred six years later.

IV. GENERAL ELECTIONS 1957, 1961 AND 1964 AND THE MOVEMENT TO PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION (1964)

Following the split of the PPP on racial lines in 1955, general elections from 1957 and onwards, became increasingly hinged on contending parties mobilising themselves on racial bases for electoral support. Henceforth, political participation in general assumed limited directions in the sense that it abandoned the nationalist approach of 1953. Political participation which implies a form of control over economic administration, development orientation, and the conscious need for structural reforms within the economy became subsumed under the desire for having governments in closer proximity with "skin colour"; a form of voting instigated and amplified by the form of elections propaganda employed.

According to the *New World Quarterly* (1963), the fact that representative leaders were locked in rivalry over power and strategy was not all. What was of importance was that such rivalry halted progress towards social and economic reforms; "they have induced both factions of the popular movement to embrace elements which are instinctively (but not irrevocably) committed to the maintenance of the status quo."

As such race voting precludes and did not lead to the political integration of the society as a whole. The need for development and the conscious recognition for decolonisation within a constitutional framework became reversed when confronted with the direction that racial politics determined. It should be noted, however, that this paper does not attempt to dispute the fact that race may be a dependent variable.⁴ Nor does it propose the view that such a situation (racism) may remain in that given state permanently over a period of time without changing, or in the final analysis that race and racism may not be identical with a specific manner in which resources and benefits are appropriated and distributed. Fundamentally, what is being stressed is that once political participation in a given context, for example, elections, has been mobilised basically in racial sentiments then it introduces a status quo form of politics detrimental to integration and the resolvment of basic social and economic problems.

Any perusal of election statistics on Guyana in 1957, 1961 and 1964 would indicate that elections as a form of political participation reflected voting patterns based on race. For example in 1957, votes cast in favour of the P.P.P. and P.N.C. respectively were 47.6% and 39.4% while at the same time East Indians and Africans respectively constituted 47.7% and 32.8% of the total population. This represents a radical reversal from the so called "golden age of race unity" of 1953 and tends to pose serious implications for any such assumption. 1957, 1961 and 1964 did not represent any deviation in Guyanese voting patterns. If there was, it could only have been the 1953 election.

Newman (1964 : 85) stated in relation to the 1957 elections : "the overt position of the two factions in the 1957 elections has both been sternly against racial issues, but in the grass roots campaign these issues became important on both sides". Lutchman (1978 : 9) supports this point by contending "in so far as Guyana is concerned it is generally agreed that the greatest single factor which has influenced the nature of its politics and administration is race".

In a reaction against this traditional P.P.P./P.N.C. politics the Working Peoples Alliance (restated in Lutchman 1978 : 7) described this feature as bipolar politics, inferring a creeping sense of cultism, and a politics which largely reflects the existence of two major ethnic communities.

Cheddi Jagan's contention, however, that increased racism was essentially the product of imperialist assault, is in fact an oversimplification of the depth and influence of racism in the Guyanese political community. Such an approach to racism as adopted by Jagan would be difficult if not impossible to explain the reality surrounding the withdrawal of leftist elements from the P.P.P. even after the split with the Burnhamite faction in 1955, for example, Moses Bhagwan, Eusi Kwayana, Brindley Benn, etc.

In Guyana, although foreign involvement was evident against the P.P.P. government *vis a vis* the race riots of 1964 and so on, Jagan's interpretation of this, strictly in the international (imperialist) context, was only partially corrected by Burnham, 1970 : XXVII, the leader of the P.N.C., when he stated that :

it was not a struggle for independence and national liberation against the forces of imperialism, it was a brutal cowardly, self-destructive war in which Guyanese were deliberately encouraged to destroy one another and the imperialist were forgotten.

J. E. Greene (1974) refers to the growing "Indian-ness" of the P.P.P. and the growing "African-ness" of the P.N.C. from 1957 onwards. And that :

despite the ideological basis of the P.P.P. it increasingly failed to escape the racial stigma of being a party for the Indians . . . the growing Indian-ness of Jagan's party became more obvious between 1961-1964 with the resignations from the party of some of the non-Indians who held top positions. Among those were Bunny Mann, Rudy Luck, Fred Bowman, George Robertson and Lionel Jeffrey. (J. E. Greene 1974 : 20-21).

Jagan's interpretation which expands the external factor and de-emphasises the internal, and particularly his description of party departees as being either "right opportunists" or "left deviationists", seems inadequate as far as their explanatory values are concerned.

Greene's analysis of Guyana for all of its empirical documentations consistently points to a racial cleavage in political voting patterns and the support of parties based almost exclusively on racist tendencies. Since 1957, allegiance in the Guyanese political system can be seen as greater to respective race group-

ings (the dimensions of this problem are much more deep-seated in the rural areas) than to the nation as a whole.

THE MOVEMENT TO PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION 1964

In 1964 the electoral system was changed from the Constituency type to that of Proportional Representation (P.R.) Obviously the 1957 and 1961 elections had in fact demonstrated an anomaly between percentage of votes obtained and seats allocated in the legislature, and especially so from the P.N.C.'s view point. According to the Duncan Sandy's report (Restated in Greene 1974 : 22):

the wide disparity between votes and seats which this system has consistently produced in British Guiana has not unnaturally engendered a sense of frustration and grievance among the opposition parties which together polled a majority of the votes in the last elections (1961).

In his work **"Constitutional Change and Development in Guyana"**, Lutchman (1978 : 9) cited P.R. as being introduced to give a more proper linkage between political legitimacy and the representation which race groups enjoyed. A significant reason complementary to the previous argument for the introduction of P.R. was the "international factor" but a proper perusal would reveal that this itself was not the sole reason.

Admittedly, the P.P.P.'s pronouncements on Marxism/Leninism caused both British and American authorities extreme discomfort and basically contributed to: the suspension of the 1953 constitution, aid curtailment, total embargo on all economic trade with "socialist" countries, slanting of electoral boundaries, United States support for anti-government forces against 'kaldorian fiscalism, etc'. Arthur Schlessinger's statement (Restated in Jagan 1972 : 378) that "an independent British Guiana under Burnham would cause us fewer problems than an independent British Guiana under Jagan" is also revealing in this respect. De Caires and Fitzpatrick (1966) approach the problem with a more inclusive and appropriate overview.

The terms of hemispheric policy in so far as they applied to Guyana were very simple. Jagan must go — the revival of the Venezuelan Border dispute, the 1962 disturbances, the 1963 strike, the stiffened resistance of the opposition parties and the final success of the P.R. campaign were all either wholly or partly, manifestations of the execution of this policy. And yet, it is all too easy to attribute the course of internal events to imperial interference alone. This is only half of the picture, for if imperial ventures, were successful this was because the internal situation was ripe for them.

The People's National Congress (Burnham 1970:XXII) was not hesitant in pointing out that the 1961 elections had confirmed that "the majority of the popular vote had gone against Jagan with the P.N.C. and U.F. together polling 57.3 per cent of votes cast but obtaining only fifteen seats in the thirty-five seat Legislature."

In this respect New World (1963:83) pointed out :

it must be noted that in 1951, 1957 and 1961 the P.P.P. emerges each time victorious, but the very necessities of victory create as well as illustrate a change in the nature of the party from a mass movement in 1963, to a militant (and basically sectional) minority in 1967 and 1961 to a dominant and repressive minority in 1962 using external allies (British forces) to maintain not a national programme but administrative power.

It is, nevertheless, ironical that the P.P.P.'s leadership 'commitment' to communism which so significantly contributed to its downfall should have come under closer scrutiny after its, in part, self-generated demise. For instance, Fitzpatrick and De Caires (1966) sees the Jagan of the 1950's to 1964 as a vague socialist. Others question the contradiction between his ideological stance and his practical commitment to British Constitutionalism in such an unswerving manner. Also, one can point generally to his lack of political strategy, tactics and diplomacy in dealing with hemispheric powers, his over-simplified interpretation of Guyanese political and social conflicts as being directed and determined basically by the contemporary activities of imperialism while at the same time overlooking internal discords created by centuries of colonialism, his general ineptitude in assessing British political reactions and his over-indulgence in Marxism/Leninism at the rhetorical level.

As Newman (1964 : 84) appropriately puts it when analysing the 1961 Budget controversy :

the budget was not unrealistic, irrelevant or communistic, state control of most of the primary schools, mild exchange control and capital gains taxation; all features of conservative western societies, were with the aid of a largely irresponsible press seen as portents of imminent communism, this misinterpretation was helped by the excessive class war content of the speeches of some of the ministers. (Emphasis added).

Despite the movement to P.R., the nature of the political participation in the elections of 1964 remained basically at a racial level. The P.P.P. gained 46% votes, the P.N.C., 41% and the U.F. 12%. Subsequently, a coalition government was formed between the P.N.C. and the U.F. thus ousting the P.P.P. from office. The change in the nature of the electoral system to that of P.R. did not therefore, bring about a qualitative change in the existing nature of the racist dimensions of political participation. The problem was merely rotated, a government was changed but the persistence of the problem was inevitable.

According to Lutchman (1972) political participation supportive of the P.N.C./U.F. coalition government was perceived to be forthcoming from areas such as the civil service, urban areas, etc. And according to Greene (1974) political participation of a dissenting nature, immediately after 1964, was seen as forthcoming from the sugar zones and rural/agricultural areas in general.

This explains why orthodox P.P.P./P.N.C. conflict of the 1960's and 1970's was inevitably rooted on industrial bases and why the P.N.C. normally perceive strike action by the Sugar Workers Union — G.A.W.U. (which is affiliated to the P.P.P.) as being "politically motivated." This classification has

now been extended into other industrial sectors as a result of the P.N.C.s lost of several of its former political strongholds, for example, the Bauxite communities.

A severe consequence of this type of politics perpetrated by competing political parties is that policies are not the fundamental criteria. A government's performance over the past years becomes insignificant on polling day. This is supported by the New World group (1983 : 8) :

for example, eminently sane fiscal and monetary reforms have been made to appear as authoritarian measures and have provoked emotional responses rather than demonstrably more efficient set of proposals.

One observer (Restated in Greene 1974 : 23) at the 1964 elections stated :

the heavy poll 198 percent turn out is no more than a search for racial unity by groupings one against the other, where there is a series of fear and where elections divide racially and politically, there I maintain the elections cannot be called fair.

Predictably patterns of political participation of such a distorted nature can only lead to a strengthening of the forces of disintegration, and to a maintenance and perpetuation of status quo politics, as the course of the 1970's and early 1980's has more than thoroughly revealed.

V. GENERAL ELECTIONS, 1968, 1973 AND 1980

From the 1968 elections (although patterns of race voting was still prevalent) the appalling development was discerned where for the first time a party (the P.N.C.) ably supported by its coalition partner, the U.F., began using legislation in order to "legally" subvert the electoral process and to emasculate the Elections Commission, in order to illegally retain political power. It represented for the first time an attempt to produce that type of elections result which elections as a process of selecting government could not have produced in Guyana under either P.R. or the constituency system. For the first time a party began manufacturing its own elections results.

The P.N.C./U.F. coalition disintegrated in October 1968. The 1968 general elections was the first held in post independent Guyana (Independence was conferred in 1966) and proved to be the first in a set of general elections, massively questionable in terms of their legality and representative nature. The 1968 elections results represented a drastic departure from the elections statistics and results of 1957, 1961 and 1964.

In 1967 and 1968 the P.N.C./U.F. coalition initiated two controversial pieces of legislation. These were the National Registration Act 1967 and the Representation of Peoples Modification Act 1968⁷. . .

TABLE 1:

1968 GENERAL ELECTIONS: ELECTORAL RESULTS

Parties	Votes obtained (Overseas Votes Excluded)	%	Seats Obtained	% Overseas Votes Gained
P.P.P.	112,988	40.9	22	2.7
P.N.C.	139,910	50.7	27	94.3
U.F.	22,109	8.0	4	2.8
G.U.M.P.	877	—	—	—

TABLE 2:

Parties	Votes obtained (Overseas Votes Included)	%	Seats Obtained
P.P.P.	113,991	36.49	19
P.N.C.	174,439	55.8	30
U.F.	23,162	7.4	4

Real gains in P.N.C. majority terms with respect to overseas votes equal six seats.

SOURCE: Tables 2 and 3 compiled from J. Jagan. *Army Intervention in the 1973 Elections in Guyana*; P.P.P. Propaganda Committee *Rigged Election in Guyana* and G. E. Butler, *Report on the National Assembly General Election 1968*.

In *Petrie vs Attorney General (Guyana)*⁸ the plaintiffs challenged the constitutionality of the acts since they allowed for the removal of the general direction and supervision of the Elections Commission over the conduct of elections and the subsequent placement of such over-riding authority in the hands of persons other than the Elections Commission. Further, that the electoral roll had been compiled from a National Registration Exercise and that this had contravened the prescription that such an Electoral Roll must be compiled under the jurisdiction, supervision and authority of the Elections Commission and not from secondary sources.

The plaintiffs also brought under question, the balloting by non-residents as introduced by the acts and the extended use of proxy voting. In this respect

the plaintiffs sought an interlocutory injunction restraining the Chief Elections Officer from holding elections under the jurisdiction of the two acts under question; and an interlocutory order directing the Elections Commission to assert its constitutionally stipulated function in accordance with article 69 of the 1966 Constitution which infuses the Elections Commission with a general supervisory function over the administrative conduct of elections and registration of electors. The case was subsequently "procedurally frustrated" on the ground of legal technicality.⁹

The 1968 general election was therefore, conducted under the conditions whereby the Elections Commission had not prepared the electoral roll together with the inclusion of extensive overseas voting, extended proxy voting and the growing fear of an emasculated Elections Commission.

According to the P.P.P. (P.P.P. Propaganda Committee 1978 : 30) the P.N.C. was convinced that the system of P.R. could not give it an overall victory especially since it had abandoned its coalition partner, the U.F. and decided to effectively by-pass the constitutionally established Elections Commission. The national registration exercise was also allegedly done behind "barbed wires."

It was further contended (P.P.P. Propaganda Committee 1978 : 31) that the electoral list was padded with fictitious names as well as with the names of the dead and under-aged. And also that between 1952 to 1964 whereas the voters roll had increased by 18% over an eleven years period, between 1964 — 1968, for a four years period, the electoral roll had increased by 24%.

The P.P.P. Propaganda Committee (1978 : 32-35) pointed out that the overseas vote was highly questionable and was exposed by the Granada Television (U.K.) in its documentaries "The Trail of the Vanishing Votes" and "The Making of a Prime Minister." J. E. Greene (1974 : 36) outlined that with respect to overseas voting by Guyanese in England :

from the preliminary registration list of 43,000 names, given sampling errors of 3 percent, the pollsters concluded that not more than 10,000 people on the overseas register were genuine eligible voters i.e., less than quarter of the registered voters.

Greene (1974) further pointed out that the proxy system of voting was totally anomalous, since one person could have been appointed to vote for five persons. Also, of an officially listed proxy figure of 19,287, 30,000 proxy votes were actually cast (P.P.P. Propaganda Committee 1978 : 36) :

With regards to the Elections Commission and its duties under article 63 of the 1966 Constitution, it is important to quote what the then P.N.C. representative on the Elections Commission said on June 30th, 1967 :

The national register could not be the electoral roll. The compilation of the electoral roll was a matter of the Commission. . . . 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 the electors for the purpose of the Constitution.¹⁰

The irregularities of the 1968 elections have been adequately documented by other writers.¹¹ Nevertheless, the 1968 results revealed a situation which was essentially the creation of the P.N.C.; the creation of its majority vote in parliament, if not by the electorate, then by its own imagination and designs.

Admittedly, for the 1957 and 1964 elections the basic method of holding on to political power was largely executed through a basis of stimulating electoral support on the grounds of racism by both parties, the P.N.C. and P.P.P. But from 1968 and onwards although the question of racism still remained high on the agenda, holding on to political power by the P.N.C. became an obsession, particularly since they intended to pull the balance of power away from the U.F. The new method which was now being employed by the P.N.C. was that of a direct attack on the elections machinery itself; an attempt to clothe electoral subversion with legality. This constituted an attempt to force the Guyanese people into believing that they had chosen a government, which in reality they never did. During the 1970s the P.N.C. also began couching its legality behind ideological forms. For instance in 1970 they declared themselves to be Co-operative Socialists. In 1974/75 they declared themselves to be Marxist/Leninists.

GENERAL ELECTIONS 1973

Even before the actual conduct of the 1973 elections the P.N.C. was already projecting and claiming a two thirds electoral support and victory. The elections' results corresponded to such a claim in an almost unbelievable manner.

TABLE 3 :

1973 GENERAL ELECTIONS : ELECTORAL RESULTS

Parties	Votes	%	Seats
P.N.C.	244,403	70.15	37
P.P.P.	92,368	25.51	14
U.F./L.P.	—	—	2
P.D.M.	—	—	

SOURCE : J. Jagan : *Army Intervention in The 1973 Elections in Guyana.*

Overseas voting revealed that the P.N.C. obtained 98.34% of such votes cast; the equivalent of four seats, compared to their 1968 overseas support of 94.35%. Postal votes accounted for 12% of the total votes cast, from out of which the P.N.C. obtained 99.9%.

The P.N.C. was accused by the local political parties, the local and international media and various sources, internal and external, for indulging in extensive electoral malpractices in order to remain in power. These malpractices were seen as including, padded voters list; fraudulent local proxy and overseas votes, the tampering of ballot boxes; interference with opposition publications; deletion of genuine voters from the electoral list; a highly emasculated Elections Commission, intimidation of workers in the state sector; eviction of polling agents from polling stations; continuation of the usage of the 1967 National Registration exercise as the basis for the 1973 electoral roll; control of the entire electoral machinery by P.N.C. members; recycling of voters; breaking up of opposition political meetings and the new additional dimension of army intervention and hijacking of ballot boxes. All of these allegations have already been fully documented and properly substantiated.¹³

Ric Mentus, editor of the Sunday Graphic was dismissed for questioning the credibility of the 1973 elections. In a column captioned "The Mind Boggles" (Graphic, July 22, 1973) he stated :

the whole nation is perplexed over the double standards being applied to the election procedure and results . . . The mind boggles at the enormity of the task and the Guyanese after the election is sadder and a bit more fearful of the future.

Arising out of the 1973 elections, the P.N.C. had further demonstrated its position in relation to the question of power as being one based on the subversion of a democratic process in order to maintain itself in office with power being viewed as an end in itself; the means used justifying that end. Lutchman (1978 : 8) has appropriately pointed out that :

the evidence would also appear to be clear that the ruling elite in developing countries tend to have a long term perspective of power. They are therefore, not happy with the games of ins and outs.

By the end of 1973 it was fully recognised that the electoral machinery was emasculated. Also, it was recognised that the P.N.C. manufactured its own elections results, and was using the mass media in a cultistic sense. These taken together with a strongly developed police/military apparatus, a two-thirds controlled legislature, a tampered with judiciary, an aggressive tendency towards the opposition and an increasingly paranoid perception aimed at harassing those challenging its illegal and unconstitutional monopoly over political power, resulted in all opposition groups and the majority of Guyanese recognising that elections as a machinery for changing government, was in Guyana, no more than an exercise in futility.

For the 1980 general elections, the position of the opposition had fully reversed itself. It was not one of participating in elections in order to immediately remove the P.N.C. from office, it was basically a question of whether contesting or boycotting the elections would prove an effective part of an immediate strategy aimed at discrediting the P.N.C. and exposing its illegitimacy.

The degeneration of elections into a P.N.C. public relations exercise essentially meant that whereas the P.N.C. was using elections to show the international community how popular and democratic it was and is, the people of this country are still faced with the problem of removing an unpopular and undemocratic regime without the use of elections. W. J. M. MacKenzie (1964 : 147) has argued that :

if follows that in political selection the voter should be free from certain forms of explicit compulsion. The most obvious freedoms are that his vote should not be influenced by intimidation or by bribery. That is to say he should not be penalised or rewarded for his vote as an individual apart from his share in his public consequence.

In countries with major state sectors and "Vanguard Parties" it is necessary that one recognise the influence of such a party in making an explicit connection between what party a worker votes for and the implications of his voting decision, *vis-a-vis*, its effects on retrenchment or promotion. Such a strategy in Guyana of using elections to create a facade of democracy, is not unlike or vastly different from developments in other one party states. For those authoritarian regimes which attempt to disband institutions that limit and preclude the arbitrary exercise of state power, it is not ironical to abide with elections, a so called aspect of "bourgeois democracy," because such elections create a constitutional facade. This fact reveals that those in control of state power are aware of their own illegitimacy and of the need to make themselves appear as though they have been elected by their oppressed populace.

GENERAL ELECTIONS 1980

For the opposition, the purpose of the 1980 general elections, was basically reduced to a question of strategy. For the P.N.C., the 1980 election was to be used as tool to prove to the international community in particular, how popular and democratic it was. By this time, however, the question of state power was firmly being sealed by the P.N.C. and on behalf of the P.N.C. with the phoney Referendum of 1978 and the promulgation of the new "Socialist" constitution under which the general elections of 1980 were to be held. In effect, the 1980 general election also aimed at clothing the new Constitution and its proposed Executive President with an air of constitutionality and legality.

It should be pointed out that between 1973 and 1980 the P.N.C. had increased at the ideological levels its stated commitment to "socialism" which included nationalisation of Bauxite companies, Bookers Sugar and associated holdings, etc. The policy of free education and so on were all acts apparently concomitant with this ideological position. But they were also executed under the newly promulgated doctrine of the "paramountcy of the party" which in effect reduced Government to being an executive arm of the P.N.C. This constituted no theoretical breach with the "Stalinist" line similarly being used by several "socialist" countries. The relevant questions, however, reside in two areas which need to be taken into consideration.

Firstly : wherein lies the legitimacy of the P.N.C. party to speak on behalf of the masses of this country? (This is an important question in deciding whether democracy or dictatorship is being constructed). Secondly, it is dangerous to equate nationalisation as instructive of socialism once no qualitative or fundamental change takes place within the production relations and in particular, in the nature of appropriation surrounding the labour productivity of the working class. Of crucial importance also is the question — what is the nature, origin and intention of the class that has declared itself to be in the act of building socialism? Any state can call itself socialist and become the repository of the major means of production, what is questionable is whether or not state power is controlled by the working class. As Walter Rodney pointed out in November 1977 (**Caribbean Contact**) :

in spite of nationalisation and the establishment of co-operatives, in spite of free education and aid to African liberation movements, the Guyana Government's defence of illegitimate and minority state power becomes more mindless and brazen with each passing day.

In 1978 a Referendum was held in Guyana. The Referendum of 1978 evoked a common strategy from opposition parties which proved disastrous to the public image of the P.N.C. by revealing no more than a 10-15% support for that party. It was a year in which popular opposition to the government reached unprecedented levels, and carried itself well into 1979.

The rise of popular opposition against the government, the concerted action by militant trade unions, a growing sense of political participation of the masses at public meetings and their growing disenchantment with the P.N.C.'s mishandling of the economy, evoked from the government a series of repressive measures ranging from the Criminal Law Bill of 1980, the National Security Act of 1978, a more apparent usage of the courts as a party punishment apparatus, breaking up of public meetings and the physical breaking up of strikes, etc.

In 1980, the assassination of Walter Rodney, a popular co-leader of the W.P.A., produced a major setback to political struggles. Another set-back which confronted the opposition was their growing disintegration on the question of the then upcoming 1980 elections.¹⁴ For the 1980 elections the position which all the opposition forces were aware of was that elections could not remove the P.N.C. from office. The question was how to properly utilise the 1980 elections in order to further discredit the P.N.C. — by participating or by boycotting? The problem for the P.N.C. was not one of the W.P.A., P.P.P., V.L.D., or U.F. coming to power through the ballot. The P.N.C.'s dilemma was one of trying to make rigging look like elections so that a massive poll turnout (irrespective of which party was being supported) could be seen as corresponding to an overwhelming electoral turnout, which they had predicted, in order to realise their advertised landslide victory. This was what elections had degenerated to in Guyana. For the P.N.C. it had become a public relations affairs designed to cloak illegitimacy; for the opposition forces it had become a means of further discrediting the P.N.C. government. On both sides of the spectrum, it was impossible for anyone to deny that elections had lost its democratic purpose.

Predictably, the P.N.C. gained a 77% victory at the 1980 "general elections," allocating to themselves 41 seats, to the P.P.P. — 10 seats and to the U.F. — 2 seats. Not surprisingly the P.N.C. had predicted at a party meeting held at the entrance of Festival City, Georgetown, a 97% poll turnout and a 75% victory for itself.¹⁵ At the same time, the P.N.C.'s parliamentary candidates and theoreticians were implying that the Guyanese people should not concern themselves too much with political aspects but to look more closely at the "development approach" which the party was using. Others pointed to a corresponding set of untenable justifications such as "building bridges," "days of peace," etc.¹⁶

Significantly, the P.N.C. pointed out that elections were not the basic issue, and that even "meet the people tours" were more comprehensive than elections. Correspondingly, they had also pointed out that Human Rights were basic economic rights, and that elections and implicitly representative government and so forth were therefore, only secondary civil rights. In 1980, the P.N.C.'s position was clear cut, not only had they determined their elections target, but they were also beginning to see elections as secondary and not really needed as a result of their "constant overwhelming support at the polls." Unfortunately however, the position of the opposition forces was far from being so clearly demarcated.

The P.P.P. and U.F. had decided to contest the 1980 elections on the grounds that: "whether the opposition forces boycott or contest the elections, the P.N.C. would, because of its control and manipulation of the elections machinery fraudulently continue in government." Nevertheless, said Jagan (leader of the P.P.P.): "the P.P.P. believed that it must utilise every forum without exception and every institution, however corrupt, to expose the minority regime." (*Catholic Standard* 9-4-1980). If as such parliament was still an active forum to fight the minority P.N.C. regime, Jagan quite contradictorily continued, "the P.P.P. would decide when the time came whether it would accept the seats offered to it after the polls by the P.N.C." (*Catholic Standard* 9-11-80). The U.F. party also advocated similar arguments. Obviously, both the P.P.P. and U.F. were contributing towards the P.N.C.'s statistical dilemma of resolving electoral turnout with the magnitude of rigging already conceived of by the P.N.C.

The P.P.P.'s position was least convincing. For instance, in the *Sunday Mirror* 2-11-80, the party's position for contesting the elections was as follows: "it is necessary to contest the elections as a safe-guard for future struggle." The latter argument is a most vague one, and again in the *Sunday Mirror* 30-11-80, participation was advocated based on blocking a one party state. What the P.P.P. did not tell its reading public was that Guyana was already a *de facto* one party state. Again when the P.P.P. stated that it was confident of victory based on its large crowd support during the 1980 elections campaign, one is left to wonder whether the P.P.P. does not read its own publications to realise that political change through the ballot is impossible under the present P.N.C. administration.

In the **Sunday Mirror** 21-12-80 the P.P.P.'s contention that there was a "resounding victory for the P.P.P." especially in the rural areas, gives the impression that the P.P.P. was using racist variables to gauge political support. At one stage the P.P.P.'s participation was based on exposing fraud (**Catholic Standard** 9-11-80) according to the **Mirror** 21-12-80. The implication is that its participation was hinged on actually expecting to win the elections. In 1978 the P.P.P. declared (Restated in P.P.P. Propaganda Committee 1975) that :

since 1968 the P.P.P. has carried out national and international struggles to focus attention on the rigging of elections in Guyana in 1968 and 1973, the P.P.P. stood virtually alone. New forces joined the struggle against the Referendum in 1978. (emphasis added).

Here, the P.P.P.'s thinking is clear, based on the implications of the above statement, it attempts to unchallengingly reserve for itself leadership of the various opposition forces, even if it is not the most fit, efficient or popular party to do so. If it cannot constitute the Government then, regardless of the costs, it must lead the Opposition.

The V.L.D.'s, and more specifically, the W.P.A.'s decision to boycott the 1980 elections was based on several reasons. Among these were : the success of the 1978 Referendum boycott, the recognition that the "new people's constitution" was illegal; that subsequent participation would have therefore meant conferring legality and legitimacy on that constitution and the general elections; that "the main conditions which opposition parties had fought for in order to secure free and fair elections had not been met and that, therefore, the December 15 elections fixed by the P.N.C. offers no advance in the struggle of the Guyanese masses to freely choose their own government; and, that it would be a mistake for the opposition parties to repeat the errors of 1973 by knowingly entering into fraudulent election." (**Catholic Standard** 9-11-80). Some of the main conditions which were advocated by the opposition parties but which were not guaranteed or provided by the P.N.C. were as follows : an independent Elections Commission, preparation of a new electoral roll under the supervision of the Elections Commission, abolition of overseas and postal voting, severe restrictions on proxy voting, counting of ballots at place of polling, right of opposition agents to accompany ballot boxes, etc. (**Catholic Standard** 9-11-80).

In a press statement the V.L.D. outlined :

in announcing the election data on 28-10-80 the leader of the P.N.C. made no pretensions of conceding any of the demands which all the opposition parties and other interested groups had been making since 1973 and which our own party, the W.P.A. and the P.P.P. had repeated in a joint statement as recently as on August 22, 1980. It is therefore, a matter of deep disappointment that the P.P.P. has decided to contest the rigged elections which the P.N.C. had already predicted it will win with a majority of more than two-thirds. The V.L.D. contends that participation by any group under the present circumstances can save only to legitimise a *de facto* one-party state. The last Parliament demonstrated crudely that the opposition were regarded as court jesters. (**Catholic Standard** 9-11-80).

To date, in 1983, some of the major differences among these parties arising from disputes over questions on liberation strategies, ideological issues, minimum programmes etc, have not yet been resolved. If the P.N.C. has worked the economy, it nevertheless, is still quite clear on the issue of how to retain political power. It seems doubtful, however, whether the opposition parties, taken as a whole, have clear perceptions and common positions on any issue beyond that of rejection and condemnation of the ruling regime.

Whereas, the P.N.C. claimed that the results of the 1980 election had proven that the "people have decisively spoken", all of the internal opposition parties and various groupings unhesitatingly rejected the elections results. The Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA) stated :

the elections are a result unacceptable as an expression of the will of the people and cannot be claimed by the Government as a basis for its authority... The catalogue of irregularities surrounding the December 15 elections rendered that exercise a mockery of the principle of free and fair elections. (Catholic Standard 11-1-81).

An International Team of Observers headed by Lord Avesbury said with regards 1980 election "they were a clumsily managed and blatant fraud designed to perpetuate rule of the People's National Congress" and that it "had confirmed the worst fear of the Guyanese people." (*Mirror* 28-12-80).

The Barbados *Nation* described the elections as farcical, horrific and fraudulent, and as "an ugly display of political rape."¹⁷ The U.K. *Telegraph* concluded that "today's events in Guyana are hardly a surprise."¹⁸ The Caribbean Conference of Churches representative on the Observer Team called for the "expulsion of Guyana from Caricom."¹⁹ The Canadian Communist Party called it "a fraud from beginning to end."²⁰ The U.S.A. published in its State Department report that "little faith can be placed in the results which were announced due to numerous irregularities in the conduct of the elections."²¹ The outpour of condemnations on the P.N.C. conducted elections indeed cannot be restated here and especially so for the condemnations that originated from the international community, and yet it was towards this community (international) that the P.N.C. was basically trying to exhibit its democratic and legal content.

VI: CONCLUSION :

DILEMMAS OF THE PRESENT POLITICAL CONJUNCTURE AND THE DECLINE OF A NATION

1. Importantly, the new 1980 Socialist Constitution promulgated on the basis of the phoney Referendum guarantees the right to political parties (but subject to respect of national sovereignty and democracy) as well as the right to periodic elections, and so on. On paper these rights exist. However, the present regime has effectively developed the means whereby the substance of these rights and their corresponding processes of enforcement have been adequately subverted.

2. W. J. M. Mackenzie (1964 : 14) has advocated several conditions for free elections : (a) an independent judiciary — to interpret electoral law; (b) a developed system of political parties; i.e., seeking support in terms of alternative programmes, policies, etc., rather than exploiting racial or other physical distinctions; (c) an acceptance of the electoral machinery as a viable process for change, the subversion of which, not only wrecks the electoral process, but also closes the door to peaceful change. For Guyana, a, b, and c, are notably absent and is recognised by several political parties as a proper prescription. However, these parties do not occupy state and a variety of disputes together with their growing ideological estrangement from the majority render them least likely of doing so in the foreseeable future.

3. The subversion of elections in Guyana, together with the total effects of the present economic crisis raging in this country, had in recent times led to a series of "all party talks" aimed at creating a broad all party front. The P.P.P. proposed that the ideological orientation of this "all party front" should be socialist and anti-imperialist, the latter being defined solely in terms of U.S. imperialism. Other parties have, however, tended to see the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet hand in Polish repression, etc., as not in any way dissimilar to U.S. imperialism. The subsequently demonstrated inability of the effective emergence of an "all party front" as a result of an absence of compromise on ideological issues against existing authoritarian rule means that the absence of compromise on "national front government" by these Parties is no more than optimistic rhetoric, if they themselves and not the P.N.C., are the major obstacles to a united opposition front.

4. Not only is there the failure of the emergence of a broad "all party front" but there is also the common and pervasive bickering, disputes, etc., among the opposition political parties presently excluded from state power. In the meantime, the ruling P.N.C. regime has not failed to capitalise on such an opportunity. They have often indicated that an inefficient, confused and incompetent opposition can only result in creating a government of similar strain should they ascend to political power.

5. If the P.N.C. uses racism and repression as tactics to remain in power, should any other political party, excluded from state power, resort to racism and demonstrate a capacity for misunderstanding the need for broad ideological compromises with other political parties equally involved in the struggle against authoritarian rule, then not only will such a party begin to become anachronistic, but it will also be contributing to both the retarding of liberation struggles as well as the consolidation of state power within the hands of existing authoritarian and repressive rule. In such a context, although (in particular) the P.P.P. does not control state power it nevertheless has contributed to the staying power of the present regime, if not visibly through racism, then at least through its demonstrated and known capacity for a deep seated pro-Sovietism which it attempts to superimpose over all other opposition parties.

6. The Marxist aspect of class analysis must recognise some of the peculiarities of Guyanese politics created as a result of deep-seated racism. For the greater part of the past thirty years Guyanese politics has tended to be significantly influenced and stimulated by racist thinking. This becomes a crucial factor in determining political views, issues, reactions and so on. However, to lump all political matters under the label of party and race politics introduces the danger of failing to identify the manner in which the top levels of the present P.N.C. administration have basically fused themselves into privileged positions, through control of over 80% of the national economy, or the extent to which through implicit ownership by virtue of nationalisation and the monopoly exerted over the appropriation and distribution of surplus originating from production, have placed sections of the ruling P.N.C. into a closer proximity with the Marxist ruling class perspective, i.e., their transformation into the class type of a state bourgeoisie. In essence, whereas Guyana can be defined in terms of state capitalism, and whereas the dominant ruling class, that is, the state bourgeoisie is comprised of the leading P.N.C. elements (derived from the top political executives and the managers/directors of Corporations who function in the role of capital) in this system not only does the working class have to confront their exploiters and repressors (the state bourgeoisie) but they also have to combat the problems of the impact of racist divisiveness on the working class movement and insensitive patterns of political leadership.

7. Any form of post liberation reconstruction in Guyana must take note of the racist problems inherent in Guyanese Society. Working class struggles that are multi-racial, cannot of themselves remove the problem of racism in this plural Guyanese Society. Paul Singh (1983 : 7) correctly argues that :

Guyanese Socialists cannot escape the necessity of giving as much emphasis to depluralisation as they do to egalitarianism, for the Guyanese Marxist revolt is a revolt against the privilege of both race and class.

8. The P.N.C. regime in Guyana has over the years used a variety of means in order to retain power illegally. One of its methods has been the subversion of the electoral process and electoral machinery. Our concern has been to document and analyse this particular method and its associated consequences. Other methods, among others, include : (a) the dictatorial theory of the "Paramountcy of the Party" which sets the P.N.C. as the highest authority in the land with government being seen merely as its executive arm, the military and paramilitary as its security arm, the news media as its public relations arm, etc.; (b) ideological vacillation aimed at making more promises to the working class and at deliberately confusing itself (P.N.C.) ideologically with other political parties. For instance, in 1974/75 the P.N.C. declared itself Marxist/Leninist and subsequently evoked a policy of "critical support" (but support nevertheless) from the P.P.P.; (c) nationalisation of over 80% of the "Commanding Heights" of the economy aimed at giving itself (P.N.C.) an economic base in order to both fund itself as a political regime as well as to establish more restrictive controls over the workforce; (d) control over the educational system from Nursery to University; (e) to outright repression such as the breaking up of

strikes and political meetings, dismissal of "political elements" in the work force, harassment of active opposition political figures and so on.

9. Despite the closure of elections as a means of achieving peaceful political change in the country, the opposition political parties in 1983 constitute a totally chaotic political spectrum. One can reasonably argue that the ruling P.N.C. has been and is in power for such an extended period not only because of its own designs but also because of the mistakes and confusion that characterise the opposition parties. Because of default in the ranks of the opposition the P.N.C. finds it much easier to rule in Guyana. If economic degeneracy and political repression are two major defining characteristics of Guyana, the existence of ideological confusion and inefficient political leadership can easily be added as a third and fourth.

10. As a result of ideological confusion not only have the lines of demarcation between state capitalism, Stalinism and democratic socialism outside of the restrictions of the vanguard party thesis been removed, but also for the Guyanese people, the multiplicity of apparent vanguard parties (non-P.N.C.) offers little hope or political alternatives. The result has been pervasive political apathy and a large scale exodus of Guyanese to foreign countries. One does not necessarily have to point out that political apathy and the exodus of the Guyanese people are also two major defining characteristics of this country.

11. The disarming of the combativity of the Guyanese working class is a complex issue which cannot be made reducible simply to the activities of the ruling regime. Such an issue can only be understood within the broad complexities defining the present political conjuncture.

12. Free and fair elections under the present P.N.C. regime is not only a dim prospect, but equally tragic is that the entire political spectrum in Guyana, including the opposition forces, presents itself as one of the most chaotic and confused configuration in the Caribbean. The tragedy is that all of the major opposition political parties are still persisting with, or are finding it difficult to abandon or mitigate their Marxist/Leninist vanguard party solutions in a depressed and indeed repressive political and economic conjuncture where the ruling regime has already clearly brought out the restrictiveness and decadence of vanguardism. In addition the mood, circumstances and experiences of the majority tend to expand their belief that any post liberation solution founded within the Leninist vanguard party tradition of subscriptionism expressed in terms of conspiratorial leadership or subjective voluntarism²² can lay claim to neither that of pre-eminence or as being derived from mass consensus.

* This article was written before the downfall of the Grenadian Revolution.

NOTES

1. See Ralph Premdas — **The Emergence of the First Mass Based Multi-Racial Party in Guyana**. Mimeo, University of Guyana 1972.
2. See J. E. Greene — **Race vs Politics in Guyana**. Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, Mona 1974.
3. For a good discussion on this aspect see Newman — **B.G. Problems of Cohesion in an Immigrant Society**. Oxford University Press, London 1964.
4. See Perry Mars — "Class Conflict and Ethnic Polarisation in Guyana" in **Selected Issues in Guyanese Politics**. Vol. 1, University of Guyana, Georgetown 1976.
5. See Robin Cohen "Class in Africa, Some Analytic Perspectives." **Social Register** 1972.
6. J. E. Greene *op. cit.* pp. 1-47.
7. See **Report on the National Assembly General Elections 1968**, pp. 67-90; J. Jagan, **Army Intervention in the 1973 Elections in Guyana**. p. 10; J. E. Greene *op. cit.* pp. 26-27 and P.P.P.'s Propoganda Committee. **Rigged Elections in Guyana**. pp. 30-41.
8. **Report on the National Assembly General Elections 1966**, pp. 67-90.
9. A Significant Problem in Guyana After the 1966 period (and under the conditions of the 1966 Constitution which set the Constitution as the supreme law of the land) has been the generalised failure of the Judiciary largely through its own lack of courage to impose the supremacy of the Constitution and to discourage the arbitrary exercise of power by the Political Executives. This lack of judicial courage and boldness after 1966 has by no small measure contributed to the total lack of respect with which the P.N.C. regime now hold the Judiciary.
10. Minutes of the Meeting of the Elections Commission, June 1967 cited in P.P.P. Propoganda Committee *op cit.* p. 40.
11. See works cited in note 7 with the exception of the first.
12. J. Jagan *op. cit.* p. 43.
13. See works cited in note 7.
14. See **Guyana Chronicle** Dec. 13, 1980 and No. 30, 1980.
15. **New Nation** 30.11.80.
16. Alan Fenty — 16 Years of Paramountcy, in **Guyana Chronicle** Dec. 13, 1980.
17. **Mirror** 28.12.80.
18. **Ibid.**
19. **Ibid.**
20. **Mirror** 1.2.81
21. **Catholic Standard** 22.2.81.
22. For an in depth discussion on theoretical issues of this nature refer to John Molyneux **Marxism and the Party**, particularly Chapter (4) on "Rose Luxemburg's alternative view", pp. 96-116.