Chapter IX

In Office but Not in Power

> If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favour freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground . . . Power concedes nothing without a demand . . .It never did and it never will
>
> Frederick Douglass

If the years of the suspended constitution, 1953 to 1957, were a period of colonial dictatorship, the years 1957 to 1964 were the period of the People's Progressive Party in office but not in power. The first four of these years were tantamount to a coalition of the People's Progressive Party and the Colonial Office; towards the end of this first term I was dubbed Chief Minister. Then in 1961 after we were re-elected, my title changed to Premier under "internal self-government". But real power to govern, to carry out our programme fully, was withheld from us throughout.

The government was deemed PPP, but in fact real power remained in the hands of the Governor; constitutionally, we were merely his advisers. With him in the Executive Council were 3 other Englishmen who held the most important portfolios. Apart from their support, he also had the right to appoint if necessary additional ministers — 1 *ex officio* and 1 nominated to counter the influence of the 5 elected ministers. In this way, the constitution-makers had ensured that the Governor would not have any serious trouble in the policy-making body.

Entitled to appoint 11 members to the Legislative Council, the Governor decided to nominate only 6. Two whom he insisted upon were Rupert Tello and Rahman Gajraj, who had

served the interim government faithfully. The 4 others, Martin Fredericks, H. J. M. Hubbard, Anthony Tasker and R. E. Davis, were selected after consultation with me. The bauxite interests, unlike sugar, I was made to understand, declined to appoint a nominee; they preferred to work behind the scenes.

The formation of the government after the 1957 election did not pose any serious problem. There was no ultimatum as in 1953. Nor was there any disagreement in the party's leadership as to those who should become ministers. It was agreed unanimously that the 5 ministers should be B. H. Benn, Ram Karran, Edward Beharry, my wife and myself; I became Minister of Trade and Industry.

The constitutional limitations under which we worked became apparent on the appointment of an economic adviser. I wanted someone who was preferably a socialist and had experience in planning, especially in poor "underdeveloped" countries. My nominee, the French economist, Professor Charles Bettelheim, was rejected by the Governor; he had been recommended to me by Professor Mahalanobis who headed the famous Statistical Institute in India, was consultant to the Indian Planning Board and had composed the draft frame of India's second Five-year Plan. I had invited Mahalanobis, Thomas Balogh, Gunnar Myrdal, whom I had met separately in the summer of 1958 in London, but none was free at that time.

On the economic front, particularly in relation to a Hungarian glass factory, a rice-bran oil factory from the German Democratic Republic, and a Cuban loan, Colonial Office restrictions clearly demonstrated our limited status.

After the Ministry of Trade and Industry had carried out detailed studies and had examined competitive bids from Hungary, West Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, it decided to establish a government-owned glass factory from Hungary with a West German component.

From the time I made the proposal in 1960 for the purchase of the glass plant, one objection after another was raised. At first the view was expressed in the Executive Council that the factory would be uneconomical. Because of this division of

opinion, Mr. Emerson, the industrial consultant of the U.S. International Cooperation Administration was asked to give his views. He considered that the factory would be uneconomical, but sensing my deep dissatisfaction, suggested that if we wished, he would invite a U.S. glass consultant from South Korea. The consultant confirmed our view and declared that he had advised Bookers after the war to buy a glass factory, but it had not been purchased then because of Britain's grave dollar crisis. However, he said that in his experience, the West German automatic bottling component was not as efficient as U.K. and U.S. machinery of the same type. As a result, technical advice was sought from the United Nations, where the matter was shelved. No definitive answer came and when we stated that we were prepared to buy a British automatic bottling plant as a component for the Hungarian glass factory, we were told that credits could not be arranged and that the British glass factory manager who had been available at one time had now left for another assignment!

Later, when we attempted to make the purchase directly, we found that neither of the two local banks was prepared to give a guarantee to the Hungarian company. (We did not then have our own Central Bank which could have given the guarantee.) These obstructive tactics were adopted because the factory was to be government-owned and Hungarian in origin. We were apparently committing two sins.

We negotiated for a rice-bran oil factory from the German Democratic Republic but this also did not materialize, no doubt for the same reasons. The management of the government-owned Rice Development Company (RDC) and the Industrial Officers of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, after examining quotations, had decided that the offer from the G.D.R. was the most favourable. The Germans were later prepared to waive even the government guarantee which they had at first requested. The factory was to be owned by the RDC and was to form part of the company's undertaking at Mahaicony-Abary. The Commonwealth Development Corporation, to whom the RDC owed a government-guaranteed loan of $5 million, raised objections. The contract was finally

signed in 1964, but the project was abandoned by the coalition government.

We faced similar obstructions with regard to an offer of economic aid by the Cuban government. After discussions between me and Dr. Ernesto (Che) Guevara in 1960 and 1961, the Cuban government agreed to lend us in equipment and material — cement, steel, generators, etc. — the equivalent of the external cost of a $32 million hydroelectric project at Malali Falls and also a loan of U.S. $5 million to establish a government-owned timber and wood-pulp project. The Cuban government wanted long grain wood-pulp from our timbers to combine with short-grain Cuban bagasse (sugarcane waste) for paper making.

The loans were offered on very generous terms — a rate of interest of 2 per cent and repayment in the form of wood-pulp and other timber products. But since aid fell within the orbit of foreign affairs, the offer had to be referred to the Colonial Office. No doubt, the Colonial Office consulted the Foreign Office which then consulted the U.S. State Department. I was finally told that a great deal more work had to be done to find out if the project would be economically feasible!

Actually, to secure outside assistance, these steps had been taken after it had become clear that the British government had decided not to assist us. Having failed to defeat us with divide-and-rule methods, terror and manipulated elections, it had embarked on an economic "squeeze-play" to oust us.

Our first major tussle with the Colonial Office occurred in the summer of 1958, in London. My ministerial colleagues and I felt that the 5-year development plan (1956-60) was inadequate and would not solve the gravest problem affecting the country's unemployment. According to an ILO Survey in 1956, 18 per cent of the labour force was unemployed and 9 per cent underemployed. Crime and juvenile delinquency were also on the increase.

We urged the enlargement of the plan to provide more work, and it's reshaping to place greater emphasis on agriculture and industry so as to lay the basis for diversification and self-sustaining growth. We advocated the replacement of the

$91 million, with a new $200 million, 5-year development plan. But the Colonial Secretary, using delaying tactics, decided we must come back in a year with detailed plans.

We were really angry at this evasion. I told Lennox-Boyd, the Colonial Secretary, that the British government was mormally bound to implement the rural electrification scheme and the construction of the East Coast road and the Georgetown Hospital, which had been highly publicized and on which large sums of money had already been expended for investigational work. In reply the British government said that it would find it difficult to allocate additional funds to Guiana.

We then contacted officials of the Swiss Bank in London, who were prepared to offer us a loan of between £6 million and £8 million with the proviso that the British government should guarantee the loan. However, this the British government was not prepared to do; it claimed that the only loans it could guarantee were those of the World Bank. We thereupon proposed that we should immediately make a direct approach to the World Bank and the U.S. government. Again delaying tactics were adopted; we were advised to go home and make a proper application, but we decided to remain in London and work out a preliminary application to the Bank. Having done this, we flew off to Washington for talks.

In the U.S. capital, I was given the "glad-hand" treatment by officials of the various U.S. aid agencies, but nothing tangible materialized.

At the World Bank headquarters, after outlining the existing 5-year plan, we requested assistance for the plan itself and particularly for financing the takeover of the Demerara Electric Company and the construction of the $32 million hydroelectric scheme at Malali. The Bank officials nodded politely and finally said that they would like to send one of their economists to review the situation at first hand. No doubt, this position resulted after consultation with the British government. Much later, the World Bank made a small loan of U.S. $2 million, but specified its use was not for industrialization but for agriculture, forestry and fisheries!

My next bout with the Colonial Office was in London a year

later in the summer of 1959, when I led another delegation to settle the details of a new development plan. Our discussions centred around the report of Kenneth Berrill, a Cambridge University economist, in which little provision had been made for industrialization, and elaborate statistics had been given to show that the country could not afford a development programme bigger than $110 million. Berrill argued that the Guiana government, basing itself on heavy overseas borrowing at a high interest rate of 6 per cent, would find itself, with a larger plan, in serious financial difficulties in the future; that if our idea of a $200 million plan was adopted, Guiana's debt charges by 1970 would be about 31 per cent of its revenues.

We challenged Berrill's assumptions on the grounds that in his projection he had underestimated revenues and overestimated debt charges. I suggested that revenues would be increased and expenditure reduced, since development was likely to accelerate, particularly after independence; and loans in the future were likely to be available at lower rates of interest than 6 per cent, as was proved later when the British Labour government agreed in 1965 to grant interest-free loans for Commonwealth development.

We urged also that since Berrill's major argument for a limited programme was based on a future heavy debt burden, the British government should give us more grants and lower the rate of interest on loans. We referred to the Surinam 10-year development plan which was to be financed by the Dutch government with a generous grant of one-third of the cost of the plan and a loan under very favourable conditions. As regards a lower rate of interest, we proposed that the British government should follow the example of the Soviet government which, during the very week we were in London, had offered to Egypt a substantial loan of 700 million old roubles at 2.5 per cent interest, for the building of the Aswan High Dam. The Colonial Office replied that we were already at that time in receipt of a generous proportion of Colonial Development and Welfare grants and that the 6 per cent rate of interest on Treasury loans was fixed by Parliament and could not be varied for Guiana alone.

The refusal of the British government to change the $110 million D-plan forced us to impose taxation. We needed money to help finance a bigger programme for the solution of the unemployment problem; to meet the claimant demands for increased wages and salaries; and to make up a shortfall in revenues due to a serious drought in 1958 which affected sugar and rice production, and a recession which cut bauxite exports.

On the budget proposals, we agreed with the Governor and the officials on an excise tax on beer and a protective duty of three cents per pound on imported potatoes to protect local ground provisions. However, we were not prepared to tax only the consumers. We insisted that the wealthy producers should also make their contribution and proposed the reintroduction of three taxes — sugar production, acreage and distillery — which had been abolished in 1951. Because the Governor expressed serious reservations I read an excerpt from a speech made in the Legislative Council by Frank McDavid, Colonial Treasurer, who then indicated that if economic conditions necessitated it, the taxes could be reintroduced. This proved so much to the point that Sir Patrick Renison turned scarlet in the face; at one point, he lost his temper and blurted out: "Damn McDavid!" Finally, forced to concede, he agreed and the measures went through.

The beer tax generated a well-organized "axe-the-tax" campaign by Peter d'Aguiar, Managing Director of Bank Breweries Limited. Claiming that the excise tax of half a cent per bottle of beer was a breach of faith and would ruin the industry, he launched a countrywide signature campaign with demonstrations in Georgetown, and singled out for attack Frank Essex, the English Financial Secretary. Eventually I intervened as d'Aguiar made it appear that the elected members in the Legislative Council were not in favour of the tax. I pointed out that far from being ruined, the company would continue to make enormous profits. Finally, the "axe-the-tax" campaign petered out after the budget was passed. And as I had predicted, apart from the tax and the huge sums paid to the firm of d'Aguiar Brothers Limited as sole distributors for Bank Breweries, the company shared out huge dividends — 25 per cent

in 1959, 45 per cent in 1960, 40 per cent in 1961 and 1962, 50 per cent in 1963, and 60 per cent in 1964.

Our political opponents also resorted to hitting below the belt. They twisted out of context a statement I made and incited the workers with the slogan — "not a cent more." Actually the Gorsuch Commission had proposed in April 1959, an increase in the minimum wage from $2.52 per day to $2.70 for unskilled workers, no increase for middle-grade civil servants, and substantial increases for the super-scale grades. Realizing that the workers were experiencing difficulties on a small wage, we agreed to increase the recommended daily wage of $2.70 to $2.75; we would have liked to increase this still further if funds had been available. With regard to the salaries of civil servants, we could not agree to increasing the salaries of those in the top brackets only. I made it clear at a meeting that I would not give a cent more to them without considering the other categories of civil servants. Unfortunately, what I said then was distorted; in the press and in public speeches, the opposition slanted what I said to indicate that I was against the workers and would not give a cent more to them.

However, in spite of the difficulties and limitations under which we worked, our overall record was impressive and a sound basis was laid for real development in the future. A comprehensive scheme of investigation and surveys was undertaken. Some of the projects which were completed or started or were under active consideration included: the Georgetown bar siltation and erosion study; the soil survey; the survey of the Canje Reservoir Scheme; the aerial magnetometer and geophysical survey; the hydroelectric power survey; the forest inventory survey; the telecommunications and transport survey; the mineral oil survey; the timber industries complex survey; the aluminium smelter survey; the fisheries survey.

The total cost of these projects, which provided the basic information for planning development, was in the vicinity of U.S. $6 million. If aid did not come from the United States or from the United Kingdom in the quantity we had hoped for, it came generously from the United Nations. They also gave assistance amounting to $600,000 up to the end of 1964 for

work in health and preventive medicine and for the training of administrative and technical personnel in public administration, transport and communications, social services, co-operative development, agriculture, forestry, mining and water resources.

The assistance received resulted chiefly from my personal contacts with UN officials. Sympathy for us led to Guiana receiving more assistance per head of population than any other country in the world — these officials understood the problems of poor "underdeveloped" countries far better than many of the governments which they served.

One industrial project which we succeeded in completing was the purchase and expansion of the Demerara Electric Company. Although we succeeded in getting this scheme financed by a British and Canadian consortium of four companies which provided $18 million for the purchase price and for additional plant and equipment, I was not happy about the purchase price; the yardstick used was market valuation. I wanted to take into consideration not only market value but also historical costs, since this company with an original investment of only $½ million had made fantastic profits, equivalent in recent years to over $½ million per year, after taxes. To take over under the exacting conditions of a high price of $5 million to be paid in five years at the extremely high interest rate of 7 per cent went against my socialist grain. The Company officials decided to strike a hard bargain because they knew that we were under tremendous political pressure — there had been continuous blackouts in the city of Georgetown and the company sat tight and refused to make improvements. In the end, I agreed to those exorbitant conditions only because the undertaking, according to the government's consultants in London, would make, even after the not-so-profitable rural electrification scheme, a net profit of $60 million in 20 years.

With the nationalization of the Demerara Electric Company, we ended the city blackouts which had been a source of much irritation and dissatisfaction, and made provision for a power base for industrial development. The plant was to be expanded and later supplemented by hydroelectricity to provide power not only for domestic use throughout the country, but

also for industrial purposes. To facilitate industrialization, we embarked on the establishment of an Industrial Estate at Ruimveldt, in spite of initial hindrances. The Demerara Company, which cultivated the land under sugar, wanted not only adequate notice but an exorbitant price; finally we were forced to pay a price of $12, 000 per acre!

Since we were generally obstructed in our industrialization programme, we decided to concentrate on agriculture, the other productive sector. We felt that this was the fastest way to provide direct and indirect employment for the rapidly increasing population.

The situation in agriculture which we inherited was one of intense land hunger and inadequate water control. In 1958, a serious drought hit the country, as a result the quantities of rice specified in the contract with the West Indian Islands could not be shipped. And only about one-third of the available fertile coastal land was under cultivation; the remainder could be cultivated only if adequate drainage and irrigation were provided. We thus took in hand the Black Bush Polder Scheme and the Tapakuma Scheme. In the meantime, an engineering design was worked out for the one-quarter million acre Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary scheme, while UN officials undertook a detailed soil and engineering survey of the Greater Canje Project.

About 90,000 acres of drained and undrained Crown Land were also made available to large numbers of farmers — 11,500 acres to Cooperative Land Producers Societies, 25,000 acres to settlers on the government land settlement schemes, and the remainder to individual farmers. As a result, production materially increased — rice production jumped from 137,000 to 275,000 tons from 1957 to 1964.

At the Mon Repos Agricultural Station, we began research and experimentation with new crops, with the object of diversifying agriculture. An Agricultural School at Mon Repos was later established to train not only instructors but also working farmers.

In the field of trade we made contacts with Venezuela, Puerto Rico and other countries in the West. But little material-

ized from this. Our biggest breakthrough was securing the Cuban market for all our surplus rice. From the Cuban government, we secured a price of nearly two cents per pound higher than that then obtained from the British West Indian Islands. This deal permitted the rapid expansion of the rice industry and resulted in relative prosperity and stability throughout the country.

At the same time, we amended, in 1960, the Rice Marketing Board Ordinance, to place control of the Board in the hands of rice producers. Previously, the Board had 8 producer members and 8 government nominees. Under the new law, the producers had a majority of 11 out of 16 members, and the chairman was elected by the Board.

It was in the field of labour and health that we made our greatest gains, with my wife heading the Ministry of Labour, Health and Housing.

With UN assistance, a scheme was launched to wipe out malaria in the Interior by the use of medicated salt and intensive spraying. From 1959 a mass campaign was carried out for the eradication of filaria. Children throughout the country were inoculated in a countrywide anti-polio campaign. An anti-typhoid scheme was launched. A system of pure water was spread throughout the countryside with many overhead tanks, new wells and 31 miles of new pipelines. Fourteen of the 24 planned health centres were completed and cottage hospitals were built at several points. Twenty-one new maternity and child welfare clinics were established in the riverain areas. All these were to lay the basis for free medical care and the non-payment of fees to government medical officers.

Housing was expanded in town and country, and the *logies* in the sugar estates virtually eliminated. The Rent Restriction Ordinance, formerly confined to the urban areas, was extended to the whole country to give protection to those who rent either houses or land for house-building.

In the field of labour, by means of wage councils and advisory committees, wages and conditions of work were improved for workers in quarries, groceries, hardware stores, dry goods stores, drugstores, rural cinemas and the garment industry.

Watchmen and shop clerks enjoyed better hours and working conditions. The Shops Ordinance passed in 1958 restricted the weekly hours of work of a shop assistant to 40¾ instead of 47, as had been the case before.

Annual holiday with pay were prescribed for clerks, domestics and chauffeurs, and for workers in the timber, sawmill, bakery, garment, printing and stone-crushing industries. Amendments to the Workmen's Compensation Law gave protection for the first time to domestic servants and increased benefits and protection to all workers. Not only were the rates of compensation improved, but also "workmen" under the Ordinance was redefined to include persons in receipt of remuneration not exceeding $2,700 per annum in place of the $1,200 per annum, the previous figure. The Ordinance also provided that where a lump-sum payment of compensation was paid to workmen or their families as a result of permanent incapacity or death, any amount paid periodically during the illness would not be deducted from the lump-sum payment.

Other significant legislation which we enacted included the Land Registry Ordinance of 1959 which provided for a new system of land registration under which the sale, loan and mortgage of land would be effected expeditiously and cheaply. The Land Bonds Ordinance, 1959, provided that land which was not beneficially occupied could be compulsorily acquired for a land settlement scheme with compensation payable by the issue of government land bonds.

We also enacted legislation to enable the government to assume control and management of 51 primary schools which were under denominational church control. These schools had been built by the government and only recently extended at government expense, but were placed under church control. Their takeover created serious controversy and generated a great deal of opposition to us from the Christian Social Council, mouthpiece of the Christian denominations.

Our greatest impact in the field of education was made during our next term of office (1961-64) under the leadership of the able and dynamic Senator C. V. Nunes, Minister of Education and Community Development. Technical education,

teacher training, and secondary educational facilities were greatly expanded. The University of Guiana was set up in September 1963 to provide higher education inside the country for a large number of students who before could not afford to go abroad. Many primary schools were converted into all-age schools providing free secondary education to children up to the level of the General Certificate of Education. Government secondary schools increased from 2 to 10; the number of secondary school scholarships increased from 12 in 1952 to more than 200 in 1963 and scholars were given preference in entry to the best high schools: Queen's College and Bishop's High School. The number of teachers who received teacher training increased from 30 per year to 150, and we planned that by 1970 every teacher in public primary schools would have received training.

On the constitutional front, realizing that there could be only limited social and economic gains without a change in our status, we embarked early on a campaign for cabinet status and independence. In June 1958, the Legislative Council passed unanimously the following resolution:

RESOLVED, that this Honourable Council affirming its belief in the principle of the basic right of peoples to Governments of their own choice as enunciated in the Atlantic Charter, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and the Washington Declaration signed on February 1st 1956, by the Rt. Honourable Anthony Eden, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom government and Dwight Eisenhower, President of the United States of America, requests Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies to receive a representative delegation chosen by and from the Council to discuss:

(I) constitutional reform with a view to the granting to British Guiana of the status of a fully self-governing territory within the Commonwealth; and

(II) the working out of an agreement between the British Guiana Government and the United Kingdom Government for a transitional period whereby the United Kingdom Government would exercise control over defence and give guidance in foreign relations other than trade and commerce.

After this, we exhorted the British government to grant us cabinet status which had in the meantime been conferred upon Trinidad and Jamaica; the Chief Minister had replaced the Governor as head of the Executive Council.

The British government resorted to delaying tactics by appointing a Constitution Committee made up of all the nominated and elected members of the Legislative Council.

The PPP members advocated a constitutional status in accordance with the resolution passed in June 1958 with a fully elected unicameral legislature and voting at the age of 18 under the system of first-past-the-post. Burnham and his supporters advocated internal self-government only, a bicameral legislature and elections under the system of proportional representation (PR) with the voting age at 21. The PR proposal was initiated by nominated member Anthony Tasker, at that time one of the principal figures, and later the head of Bookers in Guiana.

After nearly eight months, the committee issued its report in May 1959. The majority of the members proposed that Guiana should be an independent state within the Commonwealth with the Queen as sovereign, represented by a Governor and a Cabinet and a parliamentary system of government. It recommended that internal security, including control of the police, should be the responsibility of a minister and that responsibility for defence and external affairs, export trade and commerce, should be vested for a transitional period only in a Defence and External Affairs Council, the members of which would be appointed in equal proportions by the Governor and the Prime Minister. The Governor should preside over the Council but he should not have a casting vote, and in the event of a deadlock, a member of the Commonwealth, to be agreed upon by the Governor and the Prime Minister, should be empowered to mediate. The legislature should be unicameral and the electoral system should be a block-vote modification of the first-pass-the-post system, two members being elected for each constituency and each elector having two votes. The committee also recommended, on my initiative, a Fundamental Rights Section which was to embrace the freedoms as set out in the 30 Articles of the UN Declaration of

Human Rights.

The Constitutional Conference was finally held in London at Lancaster House on March 7, 1960. In my speech, I pointed out that "Independence is a necessity not only because it is a right. It is above all desirable, because it is the only guarantee of the necessary dynamism which is so vital to rapid economic growth and development."

In his public declaration, Burnham said: "Those for whom I can speak with authority and definiteness expect the minimum that will come from this conference will be full internal self-government for British Guiana and the acceptance of the principle of independence for our country." However, during the course of the private discussions, Burnham's minimum demand became his maximum. All that he was interested in was internal self-government; his demand for independence was hedged in with the reservation that Guiana would attain independence as a unit within an independent West Indies Federation. Our view on this question was that an independent Guiana would not be precluded from joining the Federation should it desire to do so at any subsequent time.

Considerable controversy arose as to whether the legislature should be unicameral or bicameral, and whether the electoral system should be first-pass-the-post or proportional representation. Iain Macleod, Secretary of State for the Colonies, eventually suggested a compromise — to combine a nominated upper house with a lower house elected by simple majorities in single member constituencies on the basis of universal adult suffrage. We accepted his suggestion on condition that the upper house was not in any way to thwart the wishes of the elected representatives in the lower house.

In the end it was agreed that the upper house should be composed of 13 nominated members, of whom 8 would be appointed by the majority party, 3 by the minority groups and 2 by the Governor.

On the question of reduction of the voting age, from 21 to 18, Macleod supported Burnham and said he did not think that the trend towards lowering the voting age to 18 was as widespread as had been suggested. He felt that for the new

constitution the age should be left at 21 years, but it was entirely open to the legislature to consider this proposal and to make recommendations. It is to be noted that when Burnham headed the PPP delegation before the Waddington Constitution Commission in 1953, our memorandum to the Commission on the question of the reduction of the voting age to 18 stated the following:

We favour the reduction of the qualifying age from 21 to 18. There is no rational justification for the use of 21 as the minimum voting age. If a would-be voter at 18 is not exercising his mind about the Government of his country, there is no certainty that he will do so by the time that he attains the age of 21. On the other hand, if whilst still at school, while his faculties are keen, he realizes that at 18 he will have to assume this civic duty, it is more likely that he will prepare himself for the task. The Government has tacitly accepted 18 as the age of discretion, by making it the minimum age for entering the Civil Service. Further, if a person becomes liable to conscription at 18, he should also be liable to exercise his vote at that age. If he is intelligent enough to know what he is fighting for, he is intelligent enough to choose his Government.

As regards the constitutional status of the country it was decided that only internal self-government powers were to be conferred; the Governor would still control defence and external affairs.

We stated our dissatisfaction that independence was withheld in a reservation signed by myself and the other members of the PPP delegation. As set out in Appendix B of the *Report of the British Guiana Constitutional Conference* (Cmd. 998) 1960, we said:

We are far from satisfied with the result of this Conference. We came here with a mandate for independence. We are going back still as Colonials with a Crown Colony status . . . We hold ourselves free at all times to take all constitutional measures to achieve independence as quickly as possible.

On the political front, there were significant developments. I was forced to ask the Governor to remove Edward Beharry as Minister of Natural Resources. In our tussle with the Governor on the tax measures affecting the sugar industry, Beharry had opposed us. Later it was announced that Beharry's company had obtained a contract as the exclusive distributor on the East Coast of Demerara for Bristol cigarettes manufactured by the Demerara Tobacco Company Limited, a subsidiary of the British-American Tobacco Company. This removal from the ministry caused the defection of one of our legislators, Fred Bowman.

The opposition, however, was strengthened outside the legislature. Soon after the 1957 general election, Burnham joined with the United Democratic Party to form the People's National Congress (PNC); Sydney King also joined and became the PNC's general secretary. He brought to the new party the African farmers and workers who supported him on the East Coast of Demerara and thus helped to polarize party politics along racial lines. With these mergers Burnham became the chief spokesman of the conservative and African racist elements. The National Labour Front, practically defunct, continued in name only under the leadership of Cecil Gray; its place was taken by the United Force.

It was against this background that we faced the 1961 general election for the greatest prize of all — independence.