Chapter VIII

Iron Rule and Treachery

> The only question which occupies the ruling class is whether it is cheaper to coerce or to bribe.
>
> Brooks Adams

Soon after the suspension of the constitution in 1953, the British government moved quickly and launched what Emrys Hughes, British M.P., called rule by "the iron hand and the wooden head". The kid glove gave way to the mailed fist. The 4-year period (1954-1957) of marking time began.

The first problem which faced the Colonial Office was how to constitute a new government. The Governor scraped deep down in the barrel. Nominated to serve in the Interim Legislative Council were 5 of the 6 non-PPP elected members of the old legislature; 5 who had lost at the elections (4 of these had forfeited their deposits such as Sugrim Singh and Rupert Tello); other members included businessmen, civil servants and the élite, such as Rahman Gajraj, James Ramphal and Lionel Luckhoo.

The interim government was a motley collection of middle-class individuals drawn mainly from the National Democratic Party which in 1954 merged with other reactionary factions and political splinter groups to form the United Democratic Party. Support for it came also from the reconstituted Trades Union Council; the former TUC had been viciously attacked by the British government. In its White Paper that government stated:

> Three members of the PPP, Mr. Jackson (president of the Federation of Unions of Government Employees), Mr. Blackman (secretary of the Sawmill Workers' Union), and Mr. Ram Karran (a member of the House of Assembly) were at the Third Congress

of the WFTU (held in Austria) which opened on 10th October, 1953 . . . Mr. Ram Karran said at the Congress: "In this (sugar) strike movement, the organization affiliated with the so-called International Confederation of Free Trade Unions stabbed the workers in the back" (presumably because they refused to take part in a political general strike). Mr. Blackman spoke of British Guiana being hidden behind "the blood-spattered curtain of British terrorism", and said: "We will fight with as much determination even against odds as the Malayan patriots and the people of Kenya. We who have lived in slavery look with pride and admiration at the achievements of the Soviet Union. The successes of People's China and the People's Democracies in such a short space of time steel us to go forward with great courage." He appealed to the WFTU for help. Mr. Jackson was elected to the Presidium. Observers from Jamaica, St. Vincent and Trinidad attended this function, together with Mr. F. C. Smith.

That attack gave the green light to the right-wingers. Through the influence and pressure of Serafino Romualdi of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers (ORIT), the old Trades Union Council was disbanded in November 1953, as a result of the actions of those unions which were controlled by the conservative opposition — the Man-Power Citizens' Association, the Headmen's Union, the Sugar Boilers' Union, the B. G. Amalgamated Workers' League, B. G. Federation of Moulders and Mechanics, and B. G. Mine Workers' Union. The first four were under the control of the sugar planters; the B. G. Amalgamated Workers' Union and the B. G. Federation, headed by Winston Glenn, were paper organizations which had not paid their subscriptions to the TUC, and the MPCA had been disaffiliated from the TUC since 1952. The other affiliates of the TUC had not been asked to attend the meeting summoned by Gibson, past president of the TUC, and no agenda for discussion had been stated. Also some of the leading TUC officers were absent from the country.

The unconstitutional disbanding of the militant TUC had been undertaken because, in the words of the Georgetown *Daily Argosy* (August 1955): "It is essential that the influence of

the PPP over the masses of the people of the Colony must be destroyed and this cannot be done by repressive official action or even by the development programme by itself. The influence of the party can best be counteracted by a strong and free labour movement."

The new "free" TUC included an obnoxious clause which debarred membership to any union associated with or affiliated to the World Federation of Trade Unions or the Caribbean Labour Congress. An appeal by 17 unions in February 1954 to debate this clause failed.

Lionel Luckhoo and Rupert Tello played major roles in the breaking up of the old TUC. Luckhoo, a leading figure in the National Democratic Party, who did not contest the 1953 general election, was nominated to the State Council; and after the suspension of the constitution, he became a member of the Executive Council of the interim government. Tello, who had lost his deposit at the 1953 election, became general secretary of the new TUC, a post he held until 1961. He was also appointed a member of the Executive Council of the new government. In 1953, he succeeded Luckhoo as president of the MPCA; in 1955, he formed the General Workers' Union and held the post of president until 1961. He also became chairman of the Catholic employees' association, the League of Christ the Worker, in 1954. From 1954 to 1961, he was a member of the Executive Board of ICFTU, and from 1953 to 1960 a member of the Administrative Committee of CADORIT, the Caribbean arm of ORIT.

The new TUC soon shifted its course. It applied for affiliation to the ICFTU and soon came under its complete control. In 1954, the ICFTU and ORIT, with the blessings of the interim regime, organized a regional conference for the Caribbean sugar and plantation workers under the auspices of the MPCA, which became the pivot of the reconstituted TUC.

With the PPP out of the government and the old TUC dead, the government instituted a reign of terror under what amounted to a police state. The police force, which the British government claimed we had tried to subvert, was rapidly expanded and the upper ranks corrupted with rapid promotions. Expenditure

on the force doubled and almost overnight commissioned ranks increased by nearly 100 per cent.

The first act of the government was the declaration of a state of emergency and the detention of militants behind barbed wire. The Atkinson Field Air Base, built by the Americans during the war, was appropriately chosen as a detention camp. Sydney King, Rory Westmaas, Martin Carter, Ajodha Singh and Bally Lachhmansingh were the 5 PPP leaders singled out for detention without charge and without trial. Lachhmansingh's detention was a shock to all of us. If the others could be deemed "trouble-makers", he was regarded by most as a quiet, honest and devoted individual of moderate opinion and habits. Because of ill health he was soon released; the others were released after 81 days on January 12, 1954, after they had embarked on a 7-day hunger strike. They were then restricted and could not move out of the districts in which they lived; they also had to report to the police twice a week. Later in mid-1954, 9 others, including my brother Oudit, were held in detention.

The reign of terror even included the banning by the police of a film showing the arrival in India of Burnham and myself and our placing wreaths at Mahatma Gandhi's Samadhi at Rajghat, New Delhi. We had gone to India from the United Kingdom on November 21, 1953 and had made a lightning tour of the principal cities. The highlight of the visit was an address in New Delhi to an informal assembly of the members of both Houses of Parliament with the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in the chair. Wherever we went, we were warmly received, sometimes with great pomp and ceremony. There were many embarrassing moments for me, however, particularly on two questions — language and the birthplace of my grandparents. Actually, I had never taken the trouble to find out precisely from which village in India my forebears had come. All I knew was that they were from the State of Bihar. This of course was not a satisfactory answer, especially in Bihar, where I was pressed for details. The other source of my embarrassment was my inability to speak Hindi or Urdu; all I could manage were a few sentences of broken Hindi.

I left India somewhat disillusioned. Although protocol from the government was strictly correct and support from the people unreserved, somehow I had the impression that in official quarters we were in the way. The government of India seemed hesitant to give us official sponsorship. I was made to understand that India was in trouble with the United States over Pakistan and Korea and thus needed the support of the British government. Moreover, the Indian government, preoccupied with its own Communists in Kerala, Hyderabad, and elsewhere, was somewhat influenced by the British government's anti-Communist propaganda against us.

Two things about my visit to India left their imprint on me. The first was the incredible poverty in evidence everywhere, particularly in the many refugee centres in the principal cities. It was a pitiable sight to see people sleeping at night on railway platforms, ill-clad and shivering from the cold in the North. I could not help thinking what a great country India would be if all its human resources were utilized. The second was the Gandhian creed of civil disobedience and passive resistance. Everywhere we went, we were asked whether we would adopt similar methods. We found ourselves sucked in by this tidal wave demand of questions. Soon we were saying that on our return home we would also be using the same methods of resistance.

At home some of our colleagues thought that civil disobedience and passive resistance were non-revolutionary and un-Marxist. But the British government was not concerned about methods, whether they were peaceful or non-peaceful. It was out to destroy us and answered with the only language it knew — coercion, terror, bribery and treachery.

Apart from those detained, other party leaders and activists were hounded and persecuted. Their homes were constantly raided by the police. They were restricted and could not move out of their limited areas without police permission — Brindley Benn, secretary of the Pioneer Youth League and executive member of the PPP, was restricted to New Amsterdam; Ram Karran, treasurer of the party, to Bel Air; Sydney King, on his release from Georgetown, to Buxton; Janet Jagan, Chrisna

Ramsarran, Eric Huntley and others to Georgetown. Many were placed under police surveillance. Several of those restricted were forced to report daily to the police and some had to serve prison terms for failure to do so. Many went to jail for refusal to pay court fines for minor offences. Nazrudeen and Fred Bowman, charged with sedition, fortunately had their cases struck out on the brilliant submissions of D. N. Pritt, the famous English barrister.

Under the state of emergency, demonstrations and public meetings were also banned. But this applied only to us; our opponents were allowed full freedom and, through their leading members in the government, were able to hold meetings. Through the radio and Government Information Services, they were able to bombard the people with propaganda. Our leaders and key members were harassed at every turn. Even attendances at religious ceremonies were treated as political activity. Many were sent to prison allegedly for demonstrating and holding public meetings, and for committing minor breaches of the emergency regulations.

In July 1954, the anti-Communist weekly newspaper, *Clarion*, in a front-page story accused the police and the magistracy of abusing their powers. It said that the police force in the colony "appeared to have gone mad with fresh and enlarged powers granted to it by the interim government. It has let loose a campaign of naked brutality against private citizens and the magistracy abused its power by giving ample support to these police outrages. Even an army of occupation could not have been so ruthless against the population as our own policemen are." The paper concluded: "This may be because they were recruited from a class of roughnecks who a year ago, broke up political meetings. The puppet government had brought those tough guys under the police uniform and armed them with batons. They were let loose on the people."

Under the emergency regulations, trade union work was severely restricted. Here, too, there was discrimination against trade unions and leaders associated with the PPP. Permission for holding public open-air meetings was denied some trade unions and granted to others approved of by the interim regime.

At one stage, I, as president of the Sawmill and Forest Workers' Union, received a letter from the police stating that at one of our meetings I had entered into a political discourse and that should such discussions continue, permission to hold other trade union meetings might not be granted in future.

Other militant trade unionists suffered in many ways. Many of the sugar workers' leaders were evicted from sugar estates and given trespass notices for the part they had played in the colony-wide strike called by the party after the suspension of the constitution. Cecil Austin, an executive member of the Sawmill and Forest Workers' Union, was dismissed by B.G. Timbers Limited (a subsidiary of the Colonial Development Corporation) for his trade union activities. Subsequently, after he had been employed by the trade union as field secretary, he was refused entry to all of the CDC's mills and timber grants.

Victimization was not limited, however, to trade unionists. Civil servants who had shown loyalty or even neutrality to the PPP government were demoted. H. R. Harewood and his assistant, Audrey Salamalay, were removed from their key posts in the Government Information Services, and David Westmaas, who had indicated pro-PPP sympathies, was blocked on the promotion ladder. These individuals were singled out as a warning to others.

Other organizations, the Demerara Youth Rally, the Pioneer Youth League and the B.G. Peace Committee, were declared illegal on December 15, 1953. Many periodicals, pamphlets and books were named under the book-banning law. In May 1954, the police closed down the PPP headquarters on Regent Street, Georgetown.

The interim government soon realized that it had to use more than terror and propaganda to win over the people. Conditions, already bad, were deteriorating fast.

Henry Hopkinson, Minister of State for Colonial Affairs, commenting on housing on sugar plantations after his visit to British Guiana in 1954, said: "Conditions are very bad. It is something which has got to be corrected. Sugar producers are now building new houses, but these efforts have got to be speeded up. That is one of the recommendations I am taking home."

Unemployment was on the increase: firstly, because of the rapidly rising population due primarily to the eradication of malaria; and secondly, because of shutdowns and technological innovations. The CDC Stampa Sawmill and the Port Mourant sugar factory were closed. Rapid mechanization in the sugar industry resulted in a drop in the labour force from 33,068 in 1939-41 to 27,934 in 1951-52; in the 1930-40 period, the number of day-units worked in the field was 23 per ton of sugar produced; in 1952, it was only 13.9.

The pro-colonial *Daily Chronicle* expressed its alarm at the deteriorating economic and unemployment situation. In April 1954, in an editorial it said:

> Masses of people are frustrated, and are ready to grasp at any slick theory which promises them a better world. The answer to all this lies in the early implementation of many recommendations of the World Bank mission . . . It is no use beating about the bush. Unemployment ranks are swelling. People are getting restless. The Government must find work now. They want action today, not merely promises of big things in the future.

Faced with this situation, the interim government embarked on a spending spree. In November 1953, after Oliver Lyttelton, Secretary of State for the Colonies, declared in the House of Commons that as much money as was required would be found so long as worthwhile schemes were available, a sum of $44 million was voted as development expenditure for 1954 and 1955. This was in marked contrast to the planned expenditure of $26 million agreed to in 1949 for a 10-year plan (1949-59). Its annual target expenditure was also larger than that proposed under the $66 million 5-year development plan formulated by the World Bank mission in 1952.

There was a great deal of propaganda about the government's intentions. One read repeatedly in the press of "more talks", "more reports" and "more blueprints". Experts were stepping on each other's toes. About $30,000 was paid for a design of a brand-new seven-storey hospital. And nearly $333,333.00 was paid to a British consulting firm to plan a highway between Georgetown and Rosignol. Needless to say,

these schemes never came to fruition. There was evidence of other wasteful expenditure of public funds, corruption and nepotism. No wonder even a Tory spokesman, Lord Lloyd, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, said in March 1955, "I also hope that efforts will be made to tackle all the causes of discontent, oppression, failure to respond to justified complaints and outright dishonesty and greed."

The economic policy of the government was described by us as "national bribery" and "national sellout." We attacked the development plan for its inadequate size and for its lack of emphasis on industrial and agricultural development. We warned the workers that the objective of the government in pump-priming the economy was to woo them away from the PPP.

For fear that my freedom of movement might rouse the workers, the government placed me under a restriction order not long after our return from India in February 1954. From April 1, 1954 to 1957, my movements were limited to the city of Georgetown.

In keeping with our declared policy of civil disobedience, I broke the restriction order on April 3 by travelling 35 miles away to Mahaicony where I had established a branch dental surgery. The police arrested me and brought me to Georgetown for trial. Some of our supporters who demonstrated in protest were also arrested.

I was put on an indictable charge which under normal circumstances meant trial by jury. In this instance, however, the government, fearing the outcome of a jury trial, empowered the magistrate to hear my case. After the preliminary hearing, I was placed on bail and released. On the way to my surgery, a crowd began to gather behind me. Immediately, the police appeared, broke up the gathering, and rearrested me and some of the others. Bail was refused and 16 of us spent a harrowing night in a small (10 by 12 feet) dingy lockup room at the Georgetown Police Station.

In court the following day I refused to put up a defence. I told the magistrate that the Governor and the British government should be in the dock and not me. I concluded my

address saying:

Today Guiana is a vast prison. Whether I am outside or inside matters little. Prison holds no terror for me . . . I expect no justice from this or any other court. Justice has been dead since the British troops landed. I am looking to the day when there will be a greater justice in Guiana.

The magistrate, Guy Sharples, sentenced me to six months imprisonment with hard labour. The sentence shocked even conservative opinion. R. B. O. Hart in a leading article in his *Clarion*, headlined: "Dr. Jagan's punishment is too severe." He then went on: "Even if I were Dr. Jagan's brother and he had appeared before me as a judge in such circumstances, I would have sent him down for six months, no less. But the condition "with hard labour" rubs the salt in the wound and makes raw the feeling even of many who do not admire him." The *Daily Chronicle* front-paged a letter stating: "Dr. Jagan is a political prisoner and as such physical conditions for his imprisonment should be far less irksome than those suffered by a common thief." In England, the London *Tribune* took up the same line. It wrote: "This is one of the most cowardly and miserable acts of British imperialism since the war. It will achieve nothing, except to foment hatred for Britain among the impoverished workers of British Guiana, who are the chief supporters of the People's Progressive Party . . . There is only one way for Oliver Lyttelton to repair the damage; he must set the Doctor free at once."

My prison life started at the gaol in Camp Street, Georgetown. I was given two suits of prison garb made of thick white duck, almost like canvas, and placed in a small cell. The diet was monotonous. Soon after, because of my medical history, I was put in the prison hospital. This was a distinct advantage as it gave me the opportunity of meeting and talking to more prisoners and also of having more time to read, particularly after dusk; in the cell, it was impossible to read after one was locked up at 6 p.m.

While in the prison hospital, I listened to the "Uplift Hour" services delivered every Sunday by churchmen and other

prominent individuals and was aghast at the utter nonsense told the prisoners. Soon I was filled with the desire to take the stand.

Prompted by me, the prisoners asked the prison authorities to grant me permission to give an address. When asked what I intended to speak about, I replied, "Thou shalt not steal." At first they refused, but after a boycott of the "Uplift Hour" by the prisoners, they agreed.

I concluded my talk by stating that the biggest thieves were outside of the gaol; that under imperialism and capitalism, the foreigners and local capitalists, landlords, bankers and middlemen extracted surplus value — profits, rent, interest and commission — from the working people; that so long as the system of imperialism and capitalism prevailed there would always be prisoners, and the gaols would become bigger and bigger.

Sections of the press made this talk the cause of a big hue and cry; I was abusing my privileges, one newspaper cried. And so the prison authorities removed me from the hospital and transferred me to the second floor of the brick prison, to my original cell next to the section which contained "capital offence" prisoners, some of whom had already been condemned to die. And I was not allowed to take any further part in the "Uplift Hour".

But no sooner had they transferred me than they were ready to move me again. To be among the prisoners, to undergo their routine and to work with them, was for me a distinct advantage. By close contact with them I got to know intimately their cares and fears. It was not long before we had organized an assault against the prison authorities.

Our targets were prison conditions and diet. The food was inadequate and monotonous. The same items appeared on the menu day after day with little variation. Breakfast and dinner consisted of a large cup of coffee and a small loaf of bread, more often than not stale. Salt fish and beef alternated the midday routine. Greens were unknown. After the prisoners joined me in a hunger strike and questions were asked in the British House of Commons, some changes were made in the diet, fixed since 1934.

I then started a small study group on the theory and practice of socialism. At this point, the prison authorities felt they could no longer tolerate my presence among the prisoners. At first, all PPP prisoners were isolated from the others and kept during the day in the "Boys Prison". However, because of recurrent demonstrations round the prison by our supporters, I was removed with Ram Karran and two others on July 22 to the Mazaruni Penal Settlement in Essequibo. This proved to be quite a welcome change, for the prison site is beautifully located. One of my cherished memories was the early morning view from the top flat of the building in which we were locked up during the day — the rising sun piercing the misty dawn, and the sun's reflection dissecting the Mazaruni as if with a streak of gold.

At Mazaruni, about half a dozen of my colleagues and I were isolated from the rest of the prisoners. We were locked up in individual cells at night, but were kept together, isolated, in a separate building during the day. Here, unlike the Georgetown prison where my job was to make fibre from coconut husks, I was to keep the building clean and the floors properly scrubbed. One of the inanities of prison life which I could never understand was the necessity for scrubbing floors so constantly. This unnecessary, repetitious exercise literally wore away the floors. The same labour could have been utilized for more useful ends, either in farming or some other prison enterprise. It was this experience which gave me the idea that some form of work scheme should be embarked upon which would permit prisoners to learn something useful and also to earn some money to help toward their rehabilitation on release from prison.

Prison life was a novel experience for me and welcome in some respects. It gave me an opportunity for real leisure and rest. Apart from scrubbing floors, I developed a hobby in carpentry. Unfortunately, my clumsiness in the use of tools led to an inch-wide gash on my left wrist and a severed tendon. What I enjoyed most was the luxury of almost limitless time for reading and writing. Novels, which I had never had much time to read, constituted the bulk of my reading. Serious books were rare. And in the political field there was very little other than

Tory propaganda material; the prison authorities had instituted a thorough screening process. My articles for the party paper had to be written on toilet paper and smuggled out.

After five months in prison, I was finally released. Following the normal procedure one month of my sentence was remitted for good behaviour. On the appointed day of my release, September 11, the prison authorities decided to release me at 4 a.m. instead of the normal time of 6 a.m. This was done to frustrate the huge crowd which was expected. I refused to be tumbled out at that hour; by the time I got to the superintendent's office it was 6 a.m. I was put on a charge of disobeying an order and fined one day's loss of remission. All this manoeuvring did not prevent a large crowd from welcoming me on my discharge the following morning.

However, all this was insignificant compared with the malice of the government in imprisoning my wife a few days before my release. She was imprisoned on two counts: one for being in possession of a secret Police Riot Manual and the other for holding a public meeting. The Police Manual was actually planted in our house and although it was marked "secret" there was nothing unusual about it. The alleged political meeting was actually a *Bhagwat*, an Indian religious festival, which was held on the West Coast of Demerara. On each count, she was sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour, the sentences to run consecutively.

Prison life proved extremely onerous for her. Completely isolated after an initial period of confinement with some roughnecks, she almost starved. She could not "stomach" prison food, which included salt fish and vegetables, items which even outside prison she had found difficult to digest. She survived five-months' imprisonment literally on bread alone until she was released on January 18, 1955.

The British government was careful to make its repressive campaign selective. Some were attacked; others were studiously left out. For instance, at the time of my restriction in April, Burnham was left out of the dragnet. Later, when he was placed under restriction and refused to report to the police as he had been ordered to do, the police failed to prosecute him.

Unlike me, after release from prison, Dr. Lachhmansingh was not restricted. This was done deliberately, as will be seen later from the report of the Robertson Commission.

The British government, with a great deal of experience behind it in India, Cyprus, Palestine and elsewhere, appointed this Commission during our absence in India. Its members included Sir George Robertson, a senior Colonial Office official, later Governor-General of Nigeria; George Woodcock, then assistant secretary of the British TUC; and Donald Jackson, a judge with a background of middle-class orthodoxy and conformism. The Commission was not to inquire whether the suspension of the constitution was justified, but merely to indicate what was to be done. Because of these limited terms of reference, the PPP boycotted its deliberations. In its report, the Commission whitewashed the suspension of the constitution, posed the idea of racial antagonism by subtly referring to Indian domination, and sowed the seeds of a split in the PPP.

It recommended an indefinite "period of marking time" so long as the PPP maintained its leadership and policies, and suggested that the Burnham wing must break away from the party if British Guiana was to have an early resumption of constitutional life.

As explicitly stated in paragraph 231 of its report, the Commission noted:

> We are therefore driven to the conclusion that so long as the PPP retains its present leadership and policies there is no way in which any real measure of responsible government can be restored without the certainty that the country will again be subjected to constitutional crisis.

Further, in paragraph 214, it stated: "The extremist leaders of the PPP and the policies for which they stand are the sole barriers to constitutional progress."

The message of the Commission was clear — the only way the British government would restore normal constitutional life was for the PPP to sacrifice its militant leadership and abandon its anti-imperialist policy. The people must therefore desert their militant leaders and some of the leaders must desert their party.

This was spelled out in paragraph 233:

We cannot estimate the length of the period which should elapse before the advance towards self-government is resumed. Everything will depend upon the extent to which the people of British Guiana, including the leaders of the PPP themselves, can be brought to the realization that the futile and deliberately disruptive policies for which the PPP at present stands are no basis for the future constitutional progress of their country.

The Commission then proceeded to recommend to the British government and their supporters a policy of open bribery:

We would hope that in the period (of marking time) plans for social and economic development would be energetically pursued and that the gradual improvement of social and economic conditions would help to bring about a change in the political outlook of the electorate . . .

No wonder the British government had rushed in with gifts and loans which could not even be spent for lack of preparation and plans. (Of the $44 million earmarked for expenditure in 1954 and 1955 only $26 million was actually spent.) British pounds were to play the same role American dollars had played in Italy in attempting to woo the people away from the Left.

As regards the leadership of the PPP, the Commission divided it into two camps: one extremist and Communist; the other, democratic and socialist. In paragraph 101 the report stated:

On the evidence as a whole, we have no doubt that there was a very powerful communist influence within the PPP. At the time of the elections at least six of the Party's most promising leaders — specifically Dr. Jagan (Leader of the Legislative Group), Mrs. Jagan (General Secretary and Editor of *Thunder*), Mr. Sydney King (Assistant Secretary), Mr. Rory Westmaas (Junior Vice-Chairman), Mr. B. H. Benn (Executive Committee Member and Secretary of the Pioneer Youth League) and Mr. Martin Carter (Executive Committee Member) accepted unreservedly the "classical" communist doctrines of Marx and Lenin, were enthusiastic supporters of the policies and practices of modern communist

movements and were contemptuous of the European social democratic parties, including the British Labour Party.

In paragraph 104, it said: "Mr. Burnham (Chairman of the Party) was generally recognized as the leader of the socialists in the Party . . ."

Commenting on the so-called socialists in the same paragraph, the Commission wrote:

> Yet we had no doubt that the socialists in the PPP were essentially democrats and that left to themselves their preference at all times would have been that the Party should pursue its constitutional objectives by straightforward and peaceful means. We doubt however if they had the wit to see the essential difference between themselves and their communist colleagues or the ability to avoid being outmanoeuvred by them.

Actually, as a student in London, Burnham had close links with the Communist Party of Great Britain and the London branch of the Caribbean Labour Congress, and had attended international conferences in Eastern Europe.

The basis was thus laid for the opportunistic split in the PPP in 1955. The line laid down by the Robertson Commission had been carefully nurtured by others at home and abroad. In the April 25, 1954 issue of his *Clarion*, R. B. O. Hart had appealed to Burnham to lead the party into safe channels, pleading that he must "cease being a figure-head and become the effective leader of his Party; he must be able to control more votes on the Executive Committee. This means that the Executive must have on it a majority of sober men." On February 10, 1955, after the party split, Hart wrote in the *Guiana Graphic*: "On the 25th July, 1954, I sold Burnham an idea which he is now putting into practice. I quote the *Clarion* of that date — 'You owe a duty to the people of this country who have followed you blindly. So far you have been lucky. You have done nothing to merit their blind support and idolatry. How can you as a young man of any character and decency lead them astray again? You and Dr. J. P. Lachhmansingh would make a very effective team, and if you stood hand in hand would be able to

keep the Party together while kicking the extremists out. Lachhmansingh is no spring chicken himself, but he is one of the few men in your Party of whom I would say, 'he is not a Communist'."

Hart was later in 1955 rewarded with the key post of editor of *Booker News*.

And then there was the Reverend Dr. Soper (now Lord Soper), a Methodist churchman who visited British Guiana. In two articles which appeared in the London *Tribune* and were subsequently reprinted in the *Daily Chronicle*, Dr. Soper gave this advice to churchmen: "Let Christian workers in B.G. join the PPP and leaven it. They have some Scriptural authority for such action . . . I appeal to their courage as well as their commonsense. For the time being there is no salvation outside the PPP."

Here, Dr. Soper, having realized that there was no salvation outside the PPP, called upon the Church to change its attitude to the party: "Let Christian ministers take its (PPP) programme seriously and educate their people to understand it and appraise it." Dr. Soper noted that the Christian Church as a whole had opposed the PPP at the 1953 elections and therefore stressed the necessity for Christians to infiltrate the movement for the purpose of transforming it. But what kind of transformation did Dr. Soper want? This is how the good churchman put it: "If as I consider it a fact, there is no immediate chance of setting up another left-wing party in British Guiana, then the non-Marxist elements in the PPP must be strengthened. As in all left-wing movements among primitive peoples, the rallying point is personality not ideology. Men follow a leader and shout his slogans, not because they understand those slogans, but because they believe what he does, and because they confide in him. Burnham is such a leader in the PPP."

Others also came to the same conclusion; namely, that at any future election, the PPP would again be victorious. The London *Times* correspondent, after visiting Guiana, earlier observed that we were "deeply enmeshed and our influence has in no way diminished", and added: "There is little doubt what the result of another election would be. The PPP remains

the only organized political body in the sugar estates and villages. The new Party, the National Democratic Party, made little impact and is almost unknown in many places."

Reactionary elements, at home and abroad, therefore came to the clearcut conclusion that the suspension of the constitution was not enough, that the PPP must be destroyed. Burnham was selected as the instrument to take over or split the PPP. Despite statements to the contrary which he had made previously, he, together with Lachhmansingh and Jai Narine Singh, took the plunge on February 13, 1955.

Their opportunism then came to the fore. I have related earlier how Burnham was prepared to use any tactic to achieve his ends. The Robertson Commission described him as "ambiguous". Patrick Gordon Walker, who in 1954, headed a parliamentary delegation to British Guiana, described him more aptly on his return to England: "His whole political approach is opportunistic . . . He will tack and turn as advantage seems to dictate."

Jai Narine Singh disappeared to Latin America without the prior knowledge of the party leadership at a time when other leaders were being detained and restricted. While abroad, he flirted with the Americans who were then working for the overthrow of the Arbenz regime in Guatemala, and attended as an observer the Caracas Conference in Venezuela where the Americans succeeded in isolating Guatemala.

Lachhmansingh's opportunism was clearly disclosed in a statement he made to Fred Bowman during a short term of imprisonment: "Cheddi is a young man; he can afford to wait, but we are getting old." He was obsessed with the desire to return to ministerial office.

The basis of the split was a deal — elections would be forthcoming if the Burnham faction captured the party leadership or broke away with majority support. It was felt that Burnham would carry with him the 5 seats in Georgetown and Lachhmansingh the 8 seats in the sugar belt, thus gaining between them a majority of 13 seats out of 24. It was this calculation which culminated in a special (but irregular) conference of the PPP on February 13, 1955, at the Metropole

Cinema, Georgetown. The decision to hold it had first been taken at a depleted meeting of the Executive Committee held in November 1954. Only 10 members were present. Five of the principal leaders of the party, including Janet Jagan (general secretary), J. P. Lachhmansingh (senior vice-chairman), Rory Westmaas (junior vice-chairman), Martin Carter and Fred Bowman (committee members) were imprisoned; and Brindley Benn (committee member) was restricted and not permitted to attend Executive Committee meetings. Burnham used his casting vote to carry a decision that the congress should be held on February 12 and 13, although March was specifically stated in the party constitution as the month for congress.

In the meantime, rumours were being widely circulated in Georgetown: "Hold party congress, throw out extremists and have general elections." Racial propaganda was also used by the Burnhamites: "The coolies have taken over the party. It is time the black people run it now."

At the next meeting just before the release from prison of Rory Westmaas, Martin Carter and Fred Bowman, and when Eric Huntley had just gone to prison, a decision was pushed through with only 7 members present, to hold the congress in Georgetown. This I pointed out was unconstitutional and was a violation of the decision taken at the last congress when it had been decided that since all the previous congresses had been held in Georgetown, the next congress should be a congress of delegates to be held in Berbice. Burnham claimed that he was not aware of any such decision and refused to accept the advice of the secretary that the records be produced to verify the decision. He overruled her submission that the motion to hold congress in Georgetown was out of order. Since it was clear that Burnham intended to push through an unconstitutional decision at a depleted meeting, I intimated that I was no longer taking part in the proceedings of the meeting. The decision to hold congress in Georgetown was thus taken by 6 members. And since 7 was a quorum, I argued that the so-called decision to hold congress reached at this meeting was invalid.

In mid-January, Burnham announced that the PPP would be holding its Annual Congress on February 12 and 13, 1955,

and police permission had been granted. At the Executive Committee meeting on January 18, 1955, a motion for recommittal of the question of the holding of congress was moved but not allowed for discussion by Burnham as chairman. At this stage an attempt was made to convene a meeting of the General Council of the party. A previous meeting fixed for December 27, 1954, had fallen through for lack of a quorum. At the meeting of the General Council on January 23, 1955, only 10 members attended. Four Georgetown members, including Lachhmansingh, boycotted the meeting. The meeting was summoned at 10 a.m. but at 11 a.m. when I called at his home, Lachhmansingh was still in his pyjamas! He told me that he was unable to attend as he had to be present at a wedding. The tactics of the splitters were clear — boycott of the General Council meeting so that a truly democratic decision in accordance with the constitution would not be possible.

Faced with the failure of the General Council to meet, and with the refusal of the chairman to allow a recommittal, the general secretary at the next Executive Committee meeting pointed out that she would be obliged to issue a statement that there would be no congress unless it was ratified by the General Council and fixed for the month of March in accordance with the party constitution, with the venue in Berbice as had been decided at the previous congress and published in the issue of *Thunder* of May 1953. At this point, when it appeared that there would be an open rift in the party, it was agreed by the majority of members to hold specially summoned meetings of the Executive to resolve the problem.

At one of these meetings, the majority of the members felt that the so-called congress fixed for February 12 and 13 should be cancelled on the grounds that the situation since 1954 had, if anything, deteriorated. For while the restricted Executive Committee members had been allowed to attend meetings in 1954, they were refused police permission to do so in 1955. Besides, some were in prison. The chairman, however, felt that if congress was not held it would do the party more harm as a large section of the membership would desert. He therefore suggested that the Executive Committee proceed with the hold-

ing of a congress on February 12 and 13 with agreement on the persons to be elected. The majority of members did not agree with this proposal as they felt that such a decision would be undemocratic and could not be enforced. The activities of certain members of the Executive who were demanding the congress had made it clear that the real objective was the throwing out of the "extremists". They were known to be canvassing and enrolling members, advising them very plainly that they should join the party in order to throw out the "extremists". One very prominent member was actually enrolling members free of charge. And someone, without the consent or permission of the Executive Committee, printed membership cards that were issued freely from a place other than Party Headquarters.

At a later meeting, I suggested that instead of the congress, the Executive Committee should summon a Special Conference with a fixed agenda. However, it was pointed out that "Members' Motions" and "Any Other Business" would offer a snag to a fixed agenda. And since at that time the chairman was not prepared to exclude completely "Members' Motions" and "Any Other Business" from a limited agenda, discussions broke down again.

The general secretary then issued the following statement in *Thunder* of February 5, 1955:

No Congress on February 12th and 13th

An announcement has appeared in the press that the People's Progressive Party will hold an Annual Congress on February 12th and 13th in the city of Georgetown.

This statement is incorrect for the following reasons. Rule 9 of the Party Constitution specifically states: "The supreme authority of the Party shall be the Annual Congress which shall be held at such time and place in the month of March as the General Council shall decide."

No decision has been taken by the General Council.

The meeting of the General Council, fixed for January 23rd, fell through for the want of a quorum. Four non-restricted members did not attend, only ten members attended but twelve are required for a quorum.

With respect to the venue of the Congress it was specifically

resolved at the last Congress that "Whereas the last three annual meetings of the PPP have been held in Georgetown; And whereas many members of the Party who live in the country do not find it possible to attend meetings in Georgetown; Be it resolved that the next Congress shall be a Congress of delegates from different groups and that the next Congress be held in Berbice."

On the same day Burnham issued a handbill, which said:

The PPP Chairman Confirms Party Congress

The PPP Congress will be held as previously announced on 12th and 13th February. The sessions begin at 2 p.m. on Saturday 12th at the Auditorium, Charlotte Street. On Sunday, 13th the session will be at the Metropole Cinema, commencing at 9 a.m.

Sydney King, assistant secretary, then issued the following leaflet:

Hold People's Congress, Not Police Congress

A leaflet headed "PPP Chairman Confirms Congress" was recently circulated. In it the PPP Chairman claims that a decision to hold a Congress in February 1955 was taken at an Executive meeting "early in December". This was at a time when five Executive members were in prison and three others not allowed to attend Executive meetings owing to restrictions and no police permission.

In his leaflet the Chairman states:

"There has been no Congress of the Party since 1953. In February 1954 the General Council decided to postpone the 1954 Congress because of the existing conditions in the colony at that time . . . No one, however, can deny its wisdom at the time it was made . . . The circumstances of our Party at the moment demand that our members have an opportunity to express their views and receive explanations and advice from their leaders."

But the circumstances today have, in fact, worsened since last year. Since the unanimous decision not to hold Congress was made last year more members have been restricted, new repressive laws have been passed, arrest, imprisonments and detentions have occurred. Why then the urgency to hold Congress now?

No Comrades! They can kick us out of the Government. They can jail us, make us report daily to the police, but can we allow

them to carry out their designs. This will be surrender.

In his pamphlet the Chairman says:

"There seems to be an unwillingness on the part of some individuals to face a Congress and hear its views. This is strange in the context of our Party, which claims to be democratic."

The Chairman says that other Party members are responsible for killing Party democracy. But it is the Emergency Order and the police that prevent the Party groups and organs from working. Hence it is the State that is killing Party democracy. To say that it is possible to have Party Democracy now, when group meetings throughout the country are banned, is to deceive the people, to hide the crimes of the State, to paint the Emergency Order in beautiful colours, to blame one's comrades for the sins of the State and hence to walk into the trap set by the enemy.

Let all true comrades demand the lifting of the Emergency Order. Then we will hold a People's Congress and not a Police Congress.

Sydney King

REMEMBER:

1. Police gave permission to the former PPP Parliamentary Group on the eve of the arrival of the Robertson Commission for the holding of a meeting. This they broke up when they learned that its decision would be contrary to the Government.
2. Police gave permission for the holding of a meeting at Buxton. This was broken up by the very police who granted permission.

On February 7 the following statement was circulated to the members of the General Council by the general secretary:

In view of the conflicting statements by the General Secretary and the Chairman of our Party on the question of the holding of an Annual Congress on the 12th and 13th February at Georgetown, we the members of the General Council declare that according to our constitution any such Congress is illegal and unconstitutional. Accordingly, we wish to point out to members of the Party that we will neither take part in the deliberations of this unconstitutional meeting, nor recognize any of its findings.

Fourteen members signed the statement: Rory Westmaas,

Fred Bowman, Pandit Siridhar Misir, Nazrudeen, Naipaul Jagan, Sydney King, Martin Carter, George Robertson, Ram Karran, Harry Lall, B. H. Benn, Mohamed Khan, Janet Jagan and myself. Burnham and four others — Dr. Lachhmansingh, Sheila Burnham (L. F. S. Burnham's wife), Jessie Burnham (L. F. S. Burnham's sister) and Ulric Fingal — refused to sign. (Jessie Burnham and Ulric Fingal returned to the PPP in 1958.) Of the remaining three members of the General Council, Ashton Chase was in the U.K., Eric Huntley was in prison, and Clinton Wong had resigned in 1953, after his failure to secure a ministry.

Burnham and his supporters, to the surprise of the other members, attended the statutory meeting of the Executive Committee on February 8. Talks were again resumed. The discussion centred around the now overt rift in the party leadership and the possibility of restoring unity. It was finally decided that Burnham and I should meet to see whether a solution to the problem could be found and to report back to the Executive Committee on Thursday, February 10.

Burnham and his four supporters now held the view that what should be convened on February 12 and 13 was a Special Conference with a fixed agenda, excluding members' motions. I, and seven others, felt that a General Members' meeting should ensue on February 12 and 13, and that a Special Conference should be summoned a month later to discuss differences on questions of policy and tactics. No agreement having been reached, the meeting was adjourned.

On the morning of Friday, February 11, in the interest of maintaining unity in the party, I telephoned Burnham and intimated to him that I was prepared to accept his proposition. After nearly six hours of careful consideration on both sides, it was agreed that a Special Conference would be convened on February 12 and 13, to discuss items on a restricted agenda. At 4.30 p.m. on Friday, February 11, the following Executive Committee Statement was signed by the chairman and general secretary, given to the press and published in *Thunder* on February 12.

SPECIAL CONFERENCE, NOT CONGRESS

In view of the conflicting statements issued by the Chairman and Secretary of the People's Progressive Party with respect to the convening of an Annual Congress on February 12th and 13th and the necessity of maintaining unity at this critical period of our country's history, it has been agreed by the Executive Committee that what will be convened on the above dates will be a Special Conference of members under Rule 9 of the Constitution and not an Annual Congress.

At this Special Conference on the 12th and 13th February the Executive Committee has decided that the following agenda be discussed exclusively:

1. Chairman's opening address.
2. Reports of Party Members on their visits abroad.
3. Résumé of the Party's activities since 1953.
4. The role of Trade Unions in the National Movement.
5. The role of Youth in the National Movement.
6. The role of Women in the National Movement.
7. The Party and Race.
8. The amendment of rules to provide for the election of officers and members of the General Council by ballot of members in each constituency at such places as the General Council shall decide.

L. F. S. Burnham,
Chairman,
People's Progressive Party

Janet Jagan,
General secretary,
People's Progressive Party

Agreement having been reached for a Special Conference, the General Council Members' Protest of February 7 was not printed in *Thunder* of February 12. However, at about 8 p.m. on Friday, February 11, a leaflet printed by Lachhmansingh and Jai Narine Singh appeared on the streets, among other things it said:

RALLY THE PEOPLE AT CONGRESS

Congress will be held at 2 p.m. on Saturday 12th February, 1955 at the Auditorium, Charlotte Street, Georgetown, and on Sunday 13th February, at the Metropole Cinema, from 9 a.m.

This leaflet was a flagrant violation of the agreement on the

agenda and violated the conclusions that had been reached by the Executive Committee after such long discussions. It went against the very spirit of the signed statement which aimed at healing the split. Immediately upon seeing this leaflet, I contacted Lachhmansingh who made out that he did not know this leaflet had been printed and distributed. I learned subsequently that he had been to the printery on Friday in company with Jai Narine Singh. Later, Lachhmansingh and Burnham conferred with the other Executive Committee members. Burnham said he knew nothing about the leaflet, and all blame was thrown on Jai Narine Singh. He then promised to do all he could to stop distribution of this leaflet. Burnham agreed also to the calling of a Special Executive Committee meeting at noon on the day of the Conference to discipline Jai Narine Singh for anti-party activity.

However, on Saturday morning, February 12, it was learnt that people closely associated with Burnham were distributing the handbills. The same people advised others to ignore the signed press statement and declared: "Congress goes on." One of the persons "elected" to the so-called "General Council" on Sunday actually told people that there would be "elections at the Congress". Then shortly before midday, the chairman intimated that he would not go ahead with the Special Executive Committee meeting.

In the light of these circumstances, Janet Jagan, Rory Westmaas, Fred Bowman, Martin Carter, George Robertson, Naipaul Jagan, Lionel Jeffrey and I decided to boycott the session on Saturday. But after issuing a leaflet explaining our position in relation to the boycott, we attended the Sunday morning session at the Metropole Cinema.

Burnham, as chairman, opened the meeting by announcing that discussion would take place on the reports of the three members who had been abroad. At this point Clinton Wong rose and moved a motion to suspend the standing rules and orders. The chairman said that he was not disposed to allow the motion unless he knew what the motion was all about. Clinton Wong then said that he wanted to move a motion of "No Confidence" in the present Executive Committee.

The chairman then conferred with the 13 available members present on the platform. Seven of the 13 members objected to the suspension of the standing rules and orders as being in violation of the decision in favour of an exclusive agenda. The chairman, however, ruled that he would permit the motion for the suspension of the standing rules and orders. At that moment I rose on a point of order to challenge the ruling of the chairman which violated the decision of the Executive Committee. The chairman persisted in his ruling to allow the suspension. The general secretary who was sitting next to the chairman on the platform entreated: "Unity of the party is in your hands. If you go ahead as you are doing, the party will be split. I place the full responsibility in your hands."

Burnham ignored this advice and proceeded to allow a motion for the suspension of the standing rules and orders. It was at this point that Martin Carter, Rory Westmaas, George Robertson, Fred Bowman, Lionel Jeffrey, Janet Jagan and I, along with some 200 floor members, left the meeting.

After our "walk-out", a new leadership was elected. Burnham replaced me as leader of the party; I was relegated to the post of senior vice-chairman. Other officers elected were Dr. J. P. Lachhmansingh, chairman; Clinton Wong, junior vice-chairman; Jai Narine Singh, secretary; Jessie Burnham, assistant secretary; Janet Jagan, treasure; Sydney King, Rudy Luck, Ulric Fingal, A. P. Alleyne, E. Bobb, R. Mitchell, Surajballi, Sargeant, Pandit Misir, Pandit Ramoutar, Jagnarine, Mohamed Khan, R. Fields, Jane Phillips Gay, M. Edinboro — General Council members. By making himself leader, relegating some of the old militants to junior positions and leaving others (B. H. Benn, Ram Karran, M. Carter, R. Westmaas, E. Huntley, F. Bowman, G. Robertson, Harry Lall and Nazrudeen) out of the General Council, Burnham sought to take over the party. That was why Burnham and Lachhmansingh had fought so vigorously for the holding of a congress in Georgetown, and why Burnham had broken his promise.

The party was now split. The rank and file in general received the news with shock and dismay. Many were so shocked that they refused to accept the fact and rationalized that

the split was merely "a manoeuvre between Cheddi and Odo" (Burnham's nickname). Big business, however, was jubilant that the most militant working class movement in the Caribbean was divided.

For the next three years, the party continued as two separate organizations vying with each other under the same name — People's Progressive Party. From 1955 to 1958 there were two PPPs and two party organs, each named *Thunder*.

The splitters and their backers were however not wholly successful. The plot backfired; it failed to achieve its main objective. To succeed at a general election, it was necessary that there should be not only a change in the superstructure of the PPP but also a complete shift of our rank and file support. It was the hope of the splitters that the African workers would follow Burnham and the Indian workers Lachhmansingh. Fortunately for us, this did not take place for two main reasons — race and ideology.

Unlike the pre-1950 period, ideology had become dominant and racialism submerged in the period 1950-55. (In the 1955-58 period, race and ideology jostled for supremacy, both playing an almost equal role on the political scene.) The party leadership saw the split in the party in ideological terms. That was why, of the 11 non-Indian members of the General Council, only 3 joined with Burnham and this was mainly for family and personal considerations.

Among the rank and file, the split by and large took on an urban-rural, rather than a strictly racial, form. In the Georgetown urban area, the Burnham-Lachhmansingh axis was decisive. The bulk, though not all, of our urban supporters, chiefly African working class and middle-class, followed Burnham mainly for racial reasons.

In the rural areas the position was different. Burnham was hardly known. Here, particularly on the East Coast of Demerara, Sydney King and I were better known; we had worked closely together and had a great deal of influence among the workers and peasants, regardless of race. This was why, in the main, the rural Africans remained with our section of the party. The farmers continued to support us as we had always championed

their cause for water control and better prices, and against exploitation by landlords, who were mostly Indian. The sugar workers did not go wholly with Lachhmansingh as he had anticipated, or even partially as I had feared. In deciding to support me, their political leader and not Lachhmansingh, their trade union leader, they were influenced by class and race. As the most militant section of the working class they saw through his opportunistic tendencies. His dubious record as an employer prior to his entry into politics and trade unionism also tipped the scales in my favour; besides, he was teaming up with Burnham in the struggle for leadership of the party.

Soon after the rightist split of 1955, there occurred an "ultra-left" split. Rory Westmaas, Martin Carter, Lionel Jeffrey and a few others virtually seceded in 1956 after disciplinary action had been taken against Keith Carter for flouting party instructions, and after I criticized them in a paper I had submitted to the 1956 Party Congress. These comrades, through the Demerara Youth League and B.G. Peace Committee, had taken some "ultra -left" positions which opened the party to unnecessary criticisms and attacks both from the opposition and from the right - wing of the party. In 1953, they had taken part in May Day demonstrations displaying banners of Stalin, and, contrary to the advice of the party, had picketed Princess Alice on her visit in 1952 with anti-British slogans such as "Limey Go Home."

But far more harmful was their sniping at the party leadership and at me personally. From late 1954 they began to attack the party on two points. Firstly, they declared that the party's line of non-violence and civil disobedience was un-Marxist and non-revolutionary. Actually, there was no other alternative. Our call for a general strike after the suspension of the constitution had not been very successful, no doubt due to the shock from the landing of British troops and the fact that the sugar workers had been exhausted from continuous strikes in the pre-suspension period. Secondly, and more fundamentally, this small group advocated the abandonment of the party's stand on the West Indies Federation, and urged unconditional support for it.

In the 1956 Congress paper, I attacked their federation line

as adventurist, pointing out that the 1955 split had weakened our national movement, and that it was foolhardy not to take into consideration the views and weaknesses of the rank and file. I suggested that if the leadership moved too far ahead of its followers there was the likelihood that we would become armchair generals, and the party just a little sect, as some of the left-wing parties had become in the Caribbean. I had in mind the fate of Leigh Richardson of British Honduras. After his party had won a landslide victory in 1954, the Colonial Office succeeded in persuading him to become a pro-federationist, for which he was expelled from his party. Later, his political career ended after his pro-federation Honduras Independent Party failed to win a single seat at the 1957 general election.

I argued that the party, as a broad national front, led by Marxists but embracing all strata, including native patriotic capitalists who were prepared to oppose colonialism and imperialism, must guard against right and left deviationism and opportunism.

I referred also to the split in the United Democratic Party (UDP) which for tactical reasons the imperialists had manoeuvred after their failure to destroy us in 1955. The National Labour Front (NLF) was formed under the leadership of Lionel Luckhoo since it was felt that the UDP, closely tied to the League of Coloured People, would have no chance of gaining the support of the bulk of sugar workers and farmers, who were mainly Indian. The lead for this was given by the head of Bookers, Jock Campbell, after his visit when he declared that there was no place for a conservative party, and that any party thinking of capturing the imagination of the people must talk in terms of a welfare state. Thus the name of the new party — National Labour Front; and its four-point demands — more self-government, more jobs, more schools and more land. Luckhoo also declared that his party was primarily a rural party, that it would operate from the countryside and he personally would reside in the country. One of the slogans of his big business party was: "Land for the Landless."

To ensure that this manoeuvre would succeed, the NLF agitated on the basis of two planks other than labour — anti-

Communism and anti-federation. The anti-federation plank was geared to work on the fears, particularly of Indians, and to woo them away from us because of our pro-federation stand. (Daniel Debidin was also talking about forming an anti-federation party.)

The choice facing the Colonial Office strategists and their supporters at home was either to contain us in a West Indies Federation or to defeat us at home. They would have liked to commit Guiana to the West Indies Federation. On this question, there had been a marked shift in the position of the plantocracy. It had taken a strong anti-federation position at the time when the British Caribbean Islands were the storm-centre of radical political thought and action, and before we made our impact on the political scene. But as British Guiana became the home of radicalism, its position changed; it now preferred our containment in a large colonial federation. But there were serious obstacles. Apart from the anti-federation manoeuvre of the NLF, there was W. J. Raatgever, then president of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, a pivot of the interim government, and an obdurate opponent of Guiana's entry into the Federation.

Our enemies had other troubles on their hands. For psychological reasons, the principal personalities involved in the suspension of the constitution had been replaced — Sir Patrick Renison succeeded Sir Alfred Savage as Governor; Derek Jakeway succeeded John Gutch as Chief Secretary; Attorney General Frank Holder was promoted Chief Justice. But this made no impact on the people, and the attempts at national bribery were proving very expensive; corruption was rife and criticisms were mounting from every quarter. Rice farmers suffered a drop in the price of rice in 1956 and the cost of living was soaring.

One of the mouthpieces of the government, the *Daily Chronicle*, on November 27, 1955, in an editorial "What Price Development" bitterly said: "Two years have gone by and we are no better off than we were before the political debacle. We have had more houses built, we have had a few self-aided schemes, a little of this and a little of that but the population is

increasing faster than ever, unemployment is increasing and the cost-of-living [*sic*] continues to rise. We submit to marking time politically, and even here we expect the time has come for some closure to that, but must we submit to marking time where the economic development of the country is concerned? Must we continue to live as we are living or should we say existing? Let there be an end to this nonsense."

Nominated member W. J. Raatgever, criticizing the government's proposal to have Guiana participate in the reformation of the West Indies Regiment, in a debate in the Legislative Council in November 1955, remarked: "So far as I have seen — and I have gone around quite fairly — there have been no developmental works done in this colony." He said that he had seen more houses built, but they were just "show-pieces", that he had gone over Georgetown and seen uninhabitable and slum areas standing in the same position and condition as they were during the last five or six years. "I think," said Raatgever, "that is a disgrace."

Paradoxically, even Jock Campbell voiced criticisms in August 1955: "The political situation in British Guiana can best be described as quiescent . . . with this interim government with some emergency regulations still in force preventing open subversion and indiscriminate agitation, and with British troops in our country, there is little fear, at present, of serious disorder. But this is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs and the country cannot exist for long — and certainly cannot progress — in a political vacuum."

W. T. Lord, nominated member of the Legislative Council and retired Director of Land Settlement, said on December 21, 1956, that the Member for Agriculture, Lands and Mines, Frank McDavid, had failed to formulate a policy with regard to either land or agriculture and that "not one constructive idea has been produced."

The economist Tom McKitterick, writing in the *Manchester Guardian*, noted that the British Guiana government "shows far too many signs of inertia" and poked fun at the "number of expert reports on development that the government had commissioned and then not acted upon". He rightly observed:

"Money available for development in the last two years has been underspent, too often because people in responsible positions could not agree on how to spend it."

With a deteriorating local situation the British government sought an electoral solution, convinced that we would lose if the boundaries were manipulated. Another reason for the new election was embarrassment, for while Britain was ruling with an iron hand in Guiana, it was at the same time calling for free elections in Germany! It also wanted a commitment on the issue of the West Indies Federation. As Governor Renison put it: "If British Guiana was still without any form of representative government which could decide whether or not to join the Caribbean Federation, it would be a disappointment."

The constitution, which was to end what Governor Renison called "this frustrating period of marking time", was announced on April 25, 1956. It was more retrograde than the one proposed by the Robertson Commission. The flexible "Renison" constitution, devised by Governor Renison and Secretary of State Alan Lennox-Boyd, a one-time defender of General Franco, provided for a single-chamber Legislative Council of 12 elected members counterbalanced by 8 nominated and 4 *ex officio* members, and an Executive Council of 5 elected members counterbalanced by 4 *ex officio* and one nominated. The Robertson Commission, though providing for similar control of the Executive Council by the Governor, had recommended that the legislature should have, as in 1953, an elected majority. For the House of Assembly it had proposed 25 elected seats, one (for the Rupununi District) more than in 1953.

Just before the announcement of these proposals, an attempt was made to get all the political parties and groupings to form a common front against us. Jock Campbell made a call for a united anti-Communist front. The Reverend E. S. M. Pilgrim took up the same tune, advocating one party comprising "all the pro-nationalist, pro-democratic and anti-communist elements" against us.

To bring about this united front, a meeting was called on April 5, 1956, at the Auditorium in Georgetown by the All-Party

Conference of political parties and social groups. The first meeting did not, however, achieve its objective because most of the participants agreed with my view that what was needed was united action against the emergencies, and free elections. I tried to get this moved as a motion, but the sponsors Sugrim Singh, the Reverend D. C. J. Bobb and W. J. Raatgever, opposed it; and Raatgever, the chairman, ruled against discussion. The meeting, however, agreed on a compromise motion of mine to appoint a Committee to prepare a new agenda. Item one on an agenda on which discussion was to be held on Thursday, April 26, was: "Ways and means to bring about the alignment of parties to achieve their aim." This meeting however, never materialized. The announcement of the new constitutional proposals by the Governor on April 25 frightened the sponsors.

Recognizing that there was still urgent need for unity, I took the initiative to set up another All-Party Conference. I spoke separately to Dr. J. B. Singh, Hugh Wharton and Leslie Davis, and succeeded in getting them to form the second All-Party Conference. The two PPPs and the UDP and a few other independents participated; the NLF refused to attend. The objective was to put joint pressure on the Governor and the Colonial Office for an end to the emergency, the removal of restrictions and the restoration of the suspended constitution, with the understanding that later the parties would, by agreement, face the election jointly and form a broad national government.

The All-Party Conference then asked to see the Governor to request "a large measure of self-government and an end to the restrictions under the emergency". A little earlier, as opposition to the constitutional proposals increased, Lennox-Boyd had become more and more arrogant. Replying through the Governor to a request from our party for him to meet a delegation, he said that he was "not prepared to discuss with the leaders of your party or with any other political leaders in British Guiana the issues which they have mentioned or any amendments to the constitutional proposals which have now been announced."

The Governor hesitated for two weeks before meeting the All-Party Conference delegation. He said that he would not

meet the delegation for discussions until he had been authorized by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to make a statement with regard to Guiana's participation in the West Indies Federation. On Thursday, July 26, 1956, he announced in the Legislative Council that "the question of British Guiana's participation in Federation would not be raised for decision or be brought before the next legislature by the Governor or the Official members." This was done because the constitutional proposals had also been attacked by anti-federationists who were government supporters. These people feared that the new legislature would be used to commit Guiana to the Federation, and so they joined the All-Party Conference in attacking the constitution. The Governor's statement to the Legislative Council was meant to appease the anti-federationists and to consolidate the anti-PPP elements.

Renison's manoeuvre to split the All-Party Conference failed. At the meeting with the All-Party Conference on July 28, he took the offensive to intimidate the delegation. On the very first point, the removal of restrictions and the ending of the emergency, he looked straight at me and thundered: "This question of communism was the whole crux of the matter; communism can do this country no good." The meeting ended in failure; Sir Patrick Renison was not prepared to move on any point.

The Governor then went to London for consultations. On his return he announced in October 1956 a modification of the original constitutional proposals, that the legislature would be reconstituted with 14 elected seats instead of 12, 3 *ex officio* nominated members, and as many as 11 other nominated members. This was done no doubt because the British government failed to find any equitable distribution into 12 seats, which would defeat us. (Even the UDP did not fall into the trap of making suggestions for delimitation of the constituency boundaries which the Governor had called for.) Consequently, the government adopted the 14 seats of the 1947 general election.

This manoeuvre was another travesty of parliamentary democracy. Those 14 seats (constituencies) had been decided upon before the introduction of universal adult suffrage, and by

no means reflected an equitable distribution of the voting population in 1956.

The distribution of voters was as follows:

Constituency	No. of voters
Eastern Berbice	31,947
New Amsterdam	5,897
Berbice River	5,429
Western Berbice	8,324
East Demerara	18,295
Central Demerara	25,135
Georgetown North	10,444
Georgetown Central	12,472
Georgetown South	22,241
Demerara River	26,972
Demerara-Essequibo	15,182
Western Essequibo	13,649
Essequibo River	11,215
North West District	3,450

We protested against this allocation to the Chief Secretary, Derek Jakeway. We pointed out that it was aimed at helping those opposed to us, that in the Greater Georgetown area where Burnham was entrenched, 5 seats of 1953 were combined by this "gerrymandering" into 3, whilst in our area of strength in Eastern Berbice 3½ seats were combined into 1. This Berbice constituency had 31,947 voters compared with 5,879 for the town of New Amsterdam. Jakeway admitted that the object was to defeat us and did nothing about our protests.

The All-Party Conference disbanded later in 1956. This was due chiefly to the lethargy of the convenors and the "bad blood" which the 1956 municipal election had engendered between the two main contestants, the Burnhamites and the UDP. Flushed with their success in winning two municipal seats, the Burnhamites declared their intention of contesting all seats under the Renison Constitution. So also did the UDP. Burnham then issued a letter attacking us. Writing about this episode, Sydney King, in a message to the Fifth Annual

Congress in April 1957, declared: "Recently the campaign of the All-Party Conference and the country poised for national unity has been stabbed in the back by the Burnham Letter in which he called for the defeat of Dr. Jagan. This gentleman must have lost all historical sense in his passage over salt water (trip to Ghana) to think or talk in his way."

With the winding-up of the All-Party Conference and the country poised for another general election, I made a last effort to achieve unity. This was in Ghana. Burnham and I had been invited for the Independence Celebrations in 1957. At first various travel difficulties confronted me — restriction to Georgetown, a ban from the West Indies, and denial of entry or in transit visa to the U.S. Fortunately, the British Guiana government permitted me to leave the country. It was not prepared to face international criticisms by refusing me permission. The Trinidad government, too, agreed to allow me to pass through. But at Piarco airport I was kept under police surveillance at the airport room; Burnham was given the right to free movement. When I arrived in London I found that all flights to Ghana had been booked. At the last moment I was fortunate enough to step into the plane seat which was reserved for Dr. W. E .B. Dubois; he had been prevented from leaving the U.S. to attend the celebration.

One of the first things I did on arrival in Ghana was to seek out the West Indian leaders: Grantley Adams (Barbados), Norman Manley (Jamaica) and Patrick Solomon (Trinidad). I suggested that our presence in Ghana afforded us a wonderful opportunity to discuss common problems. My hope was that the opportunity would be taken to put pressure on Burnham either to reunite the party or join us in a united-front government. I even tried to get Dr. Nkrumah to exert his influence on Burnham. But all my efforts failed; there was no meeting. At least, so I thought. Later I was to learn differently. When I landed in Trinidad on my return journey home, I was informed that Patrick Solomon had told the press that the West Indies leaders, including Burnham, had met on three different occasions, but I had not been present. That was the first time I knew that meetings had been held. I immediately corrected the

impression given by Solomon that I was unwilling to co-operate with other West Indian leaders; I pointed out that it was I who had originally proposed the idea of the meeting. Apparently, Burnham had persuaded the West Indian leaders and Dr. Nkrumah that he would not only win the election but would also take British Guiana into the West Indies Federation.

Having failed in attempts to achieve a common front against the Colonial Office and its supporters at home, we decided at the last moment to contest. We faced the 1957 general election with the working class divided. Three other parties: PPP (Burnham), UDP and NLF contested against us; an attempt made just before the election to unite the UDP and the PPP (Burnham) had failed. Burnham campaigned against this, attacking the PPP as "Communist" and the UDP hierarchy as collaborators, using such epithets as "traitors" and "loyal kikuyus". The NLF and UDP made anti-Communism their main plank in this fiercely contested, four-cornered electoral battle, with the NLF adding anti-federation as its major weapon to win over the Indians.

All the parties directed their attacks against us. Outside influence was also brought to bear. British Tory M.P., Anthony Kershaw, said a PPP government would keep out foreign investors. Nigel Fisher declared that he did not believe that the British would work with me. Jock Campbell said: "It is our earnest hope that there may be elected in British Guiana a government approaching the quality of those of Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad." This certainly did not mean us. We were blacklisted by all the West Indian governments, even by the Eric Williams government, elected in 1956.

As the battle raged, L. F. S. Burnham shouted: "We walk alone." John Carter cried: "We walk with God." I said: "We walk with the people." But everything was done to confuse the people. Just before the election, a gambit was aimed at confusing the farmers. An attack was launched against me because the delegation of the Rice Marketing Board, led by R. B. Gajraj and myself, had failed in May 1957 to get an increase in the price for our rice from the West Indian governments. (I was elected president of the Rice Producers'

Association after our party won 62 of the 78 seats in the 13 District Committees of the Association. Gajraj, who was a nominated member of the Legislative and Executive Councils, was nominated chairman of the Rice Marketing Board.) Nominated legislator Sugrim Singh of the NLF, declared that the farmers had made a mistake in voting for us, and "unless something is done immediately, you are going to lose all your West Indian markets". Burnham asserted that the rice producers could no longer expect an increase in price because they had elected "a big loud-mouthed party which has no friends in the West Indies". Another rice conference was carefully arranged to be held in St. Vincent just before the August general election. Fortunately I was able to secure an increase of half a cent per pound, which proved a severe setback to our opponents.

We were, however, to receive a great blow from Sydney King. We tried to persuade him to stand as the PPP candidate in the Central Demerara constituency, which I had won for the first time in 1947. In spite of our pleadings, he refused. After King announced his decision to stand as an independent, Balram Singh Rai was substituted on the PPP ticket. Rai had joined us in the difficult period after the suspension of the constitution. In the heated contest, Burnham jumped into the breach in support of King. This brought King into an open alliance with Burnham, something we did not anticipate, since King had always been an extreme leftist and an inveterate critic of Burnham. Soon King was making speeches bordering on racism. At a meeting at Beterverwagting, East Coast of Demerara, he was reported to have said: "Dr. Jagan has developed a high degree of mistrust in the African executive of the party." Only a few months before, in January 1957, King, attacking two daily newspapers which had been trying to create a rift between us, had said: "without insulting him, I say emphatically that neither Dr. Jagan nor myself will willingly ever permit this to happen. We shall never set the people to fight among themselves, despite all the newspaper blackmail." (Actually, the fact that our relations became strained had nothing to do with race. It was due, firstly, to misunderstanding

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from loss of contact because I was restricted to Georgetown and he to Buxton; and, secondly, to his personal loyalty to Rory Westmaas and his friends whom I had criticised in my earlier 1956 PPP Congress paper for ultra-left, deviationist tendencies. King would have become chairman of the party at the Congress in September 1956, but he declined nomination because I had disagreed with his proposal to sponsor Westmaas *et al.* on an agreed list.)

But in spite of the fire and fury which raged among the leaders, there was a certain amount of apathy and lack of interest among the voters. This was because the Indian and African workers and farmers who had secretly nursed the hope that the 1955 split in the PPP had been merely a manoeuvre to fool the British and secure new elections, were now disturbed that a reunion had not taken place. The African working class and peasantry, particularly on the East Coast of Demerara where Burnham was most unpopular, because of King's influence, were now dismayed at the open alliance between King and Burnham. The result was one of the lowest polls for any general election in the history of the country — 55.8 per cent in 1957 as compared with 74.8 per cent in 1953, 89.4 per cent in 196I and 69.9 per cent in 1964.

When the fury of the battle was over, we were declared the winners in 9 of the 14 constituencies, in spite of the attempt of the British to break us. One of these seats, Essequibo-Pomeroon, was won by Janet.

The PNC secured 3 seats in the 3 Georgetown constituencies; the UDP, 1 seat in New Amsterdam; the NLF, 1 seat in the North West District. Major casualties were Dr. J. P. Lachhmansingh, P. A. Cummings and Lionel Luckhoo. The attitude of the voters to Luckhoo was: "*Leh we get all we can from he if he got anything to gi, but when time come to vote, a different story.*"

Two significant results of the general election were Sydney King's defeat and the large number of votes (23,443) I received. Because of the manipulation of constituency boundaries, my votes were more than the total of all the 5 elected members of the opposition!