

MANAGING POLITICAL CONFLICT IN GUYANA

by

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INTRODUCTION

Many Third World societies are characterised by two egregious phenomena, a low level of economic development as measured by GNP and per capita income, and the one-party political system. While the low level of economic development is basically a colonial legacy, the one-party state has been institutionalised by these societies themselves.

The creation of the one-party state is not exclusively political: it has its economic and philosophical bases. Defenders of the one-party state see the struggle for economic development taking primacy over all other activities associated with the notion of Western Democracy. Political competition is seen as a waste of resources; resources which could be better channelled into development efforts. This view of economic primacy which nullifies the virtues of political participation/competition, propels the propagators of this view to appropriate for themselves the role of 'vanguard'. The notion of the vanguard party logically introduces the philosophical base of the one-party state.

The notion of the vanguard party immediately brings to mind the archaic concept of the "philosopher-King". The philosopher-King concept stipulates that there should be a special breed of people whose innate abilities place them in the position of divine ruler. The term philosopher-King expresses that: the ruler is also the philosopher; he knows best what is right and what is wrong; what is good and what is bad for the society, so he should be in the position which most facilitates the implementation of his ideas. The vanguard party is premised on these same assumptions, thus it requires a special breed of people (those at the top of the party hierarchy) to be perennially kept in power, and lower level functionaries to be continuously trained in the art of managing power, while they await the day of succession.

Managing power essentially entails managing conflict, and managing political power is essentially the managing of political conflict. Thus, the philosopher-King mentality, as is embodied in the idea of the one-party state, emphasises the creation of institutions and structures which are geared primarily (if not specifically) toward managing political conflict.

Guyana cannot be legally defined as a one-party state, but, in fact, the Guyanese political system operates as if it were. The Peoples National Congress, which is the ruling party in Guyana, has declared itself paramount to all state institutions and has appropriated for itself the title of "vanguard party". And as was already pointed out the idea of the vanguard party embodies the notion of the philosopher-King together with all its institutional ramifications. Thus,

the management of political conflict by the Guyana Government is not different from the management of political conflict in any other philosopher-King's (or one-party) state.

In this article we attempt an analysis of political conflict management and its implications for democratic values in the Guyanese context. The unit of analysis here is the state bureaucracy. This analysis is done in light of the proclamation that the ruling party is paramount to the state, and that the ruling party is the 'vanguard'.

The Role of Bureaucracy :

Philosophical writers, as early as John Stuart Mill (1962), asserted the politically neutral character of administration, and the accountability of administrators in the state bureaucracy to elected representatives. Woodrow Wilson (1941) used the term "Policy-administration dichotomy" to describe the process by which policy issues are decided by elected representatives, and are implemented in a value free fashion by appointed professionals (public administrators) (Harmon, 1981). The dichotomy implies that the state bureaucracy is neutral in character and that it is accountable to the public through the elected representatives of the public. Further, that the state bureaucrats, although they are appointed by the government in power, serve as mediators between the public interest and that of the rulers. Hence, its value free role in policy implementation. Max Weber is a prominent subscriber to this view.

Action theorists (Harmon, 1981), for example, dispute this notion of a value free bureaucracy, arguing that bureaucrats, by the very nature of their work, must be involved in policy formation — bureaucrats are required to make policy recommendations and to interpret policies by virtue of their professional/technical skills. Thus, they are actively involved in policy formation and cannot be neutral or value free. La Palombara (1967, reprinted in 1971) goes farther by arguing that in a developmental context, bureaucrats cannot be neutral since they are the ones who possess the professional/technical skills that are necessary for innovation. La Palombara argues that in developing societies bureaucrats must be aggressive enough to engage in policy formation if their contribution to the development of these societies is to be meaningful.

The Marxist/Neo-Marxist view of the bureaucracy is quite different. The point of departure here is the political nature of the bureaucracy. One school of thought led by Gramsci (1971), Althusser (1970, 1971) and later Poulantzas (1973, 1976) see the role of the bureaucracy in terms of structure by reference to infrastructure and superstructure. Gramsci sees the ruling class seizing control of the state machinery in order to retain power and crush its adversaries. In this respect he agrees with the structuralist position that the activities of the state are determined not by members of the state bureaucracy but by the structure of society itself. For Gramsci the state can be "incorporated into the functions of elites or vanguard, i.e. of parties in relation to the class which they represent" (Gramsci, 1971).

Althusser, in identifying the structural elements of the state apparatus, conceived of the state as a repressive machinery used by the ruling class to exploit and dominate the working class. This apparatus includes the bureaucracy, police, courts, prisons and the army (Chilcote, 1981). For Althusser the state machinery protects the ruling class from the wrath of the working class. Poulantzas (1973, 1976) took this idea farther by claiming that the very structure of society rather than influential members of it determines the functions and functioning of the state machinery. For Poulantzas, the structure of capitalist society makes it inevitable that the state operates in the political interest of the dominant class.

According to this view the state maintains its competitive appearance so that workers and capitalists alike feel free and equal, thereby obscuring its class content. The state also posits itself as representative of the unity of individual interests, thereby denying the existence of class interest. The state also allows individuals to organise themselves into groups while it deals with them as individuals, thereby promoting intra-organisational and inter-organisational contradictions and fragmentation. Thus, individuals are forced to turn back to the state but in a more dependent position. In this way the state operates not simply as an instrument of the ruling class, but by its very structural linkage to the ruling class; it is required to protect the interest of the ruling class (Chilcote, 1981).

The claim that the state is an instrument of the ruling class is the point of departure for Miliband. Miliband's (1969) thesis disputes both the pluralist and the structuralist interpretation of the nature of the state. For Miliband the state is understood in terms of the instrumentalist use of power by people in positions of power, both economic and political. The ruling class which also controls economic power in capitalist societies thus uses the state as an instrument for the domination of society.

But economic power does not necessarily lie in the hands of those who own the means of production. In fact control of the means of production is a more lethal weapon in the hands of the ruling class. Ownership without control of the means of production, distribution, and exchange renders the owners impotent in the face of antagonistic forces. Control transcends ownership since with control one can determine the production relations without having to own.

Thus we can extrapolate that in a state capitalist economy, where the ruling class controls but does not legally own, it is the ruling class that determines the production relations of the society, and it uses the state bureaucracy as an instrument for imposing these relationships. What occurs in state capitalist societies that proclaim themselves to be in the task of constructing socialism and with the existence of large state sectors (under state control and management) is a form of deep seated private appropriation which expresses a real circumstance of state ownership on behalf of a state bourgeoisie. Therefore, what is important in evaluating the class nature of these societies is not so much the form of juridical relations but the real essence that determines and characterises the appropriation and distribution of the surpluses produced by the

working class. And since those who control state power in state capitalist societies are the ones who determine the mode of appropriation and distribution of surpluses (and in many instances as determined by their own security exigencies), it is not inconceivable under such circumstances for the state bureaucracy to have its functions defined largely in terms of reproducing the dominance of the state bourgeoisie and in dominating and repressing the working class.

Guyana is a state capitalist society with concomitant institutional structures. Thus, any analysis of the role of Guyanese institutional structures in conflict management must be done in light of the fact that there is an explicit ruling class, which determines the mode of appropriation and distribution of the surpluses produced, which determines and controls the social relations of the society, which has defined itself as the only vanguard and which is primarily influenced with the reproduction of the conditions that guarantee its political dominance.

Models of Conflict :

Schattschneider's (1960) view of conflict gives us some insight into the political role of bureaucrats in the government service. For him, in any democratic society there are basically two parties to a conflict, but as conflict intensifies more and more individuals become involved, thus widening its scope and possibly changing its outcome (Kramer, 1981).

Political conflicts are, however, much more complex than what obtains above, but in a similar fashion the individuals and groups/political parties that are involved are quite aware of the potency of their supporters and of the resources of the opponents in the polity. The parties to a political conflict act much more rationally than ordinary street combatants; each party calculates its resources beforehand, and aims at having the conflict resolved at the level where it is most likely to win. The loser at the original level then mobilises its resources (thereby expanding the the scope of the conflict) and takes the conflict to progressively higher levels (in the hope of winning) until all the levels have been exhausted and the conflict is finally resolved.

It is in the interest of individuals and groups (or political parties) to use their power resources to keep the level of political conflict from changing when those individuals or groups think they can win at that specific level. Thus, the potential winners of a political conflict want to keep the level low so they can win. The potential or apparent losers at that level mobilise their political resources to broaden the scope of the conflict and change the level to another arena where they perceive a better chance of winning (Kramer, 1981). However, more often than not, losers in a political conflict (especially in a one-party state) at any one level lack the resources to change the level of the conflict, and therefore, have to accept their fate as losers. Thus, most political conflicts are resolved at the administrative (low) level, where very few interests rather than a large portion of the polity are involved.

Political conflicts basically involve the government and the citizenry (organised or unorganised). The government is always the potential winner if the

conflict is resolved at the lowest, which is the administrative level, for the array of political forces here are in favour of the government. When an interest, be it a political party, interest group, or individual citizen, loses at this level it may move to the courts (a higher level) or mobilise its political resources to lobby the legislature. If it fails at either of these levels it may make the issue an electoral one, and mobilise its political resources at election time to change the composition of the legislature (even replacing the government). Thus, it widens the scope of the conflict, and simultaneously raises it to the highest level.

But "a critical aspect of changing the scope of conflict and the level of conflict is publicity concerning that conflict." (Kramer, 1931, p. 30). If an interest loses at the administrative level and it does not have the means to publicise that conflict (through access to the media or the holding of public meetings) it will be unable to broaden the scope of it. People will not become participants to a conflict if they are not aware of the existence of such conflict. At the same time, it may be an exercise in futility to move to the courts or legislature where the array of political forces may not be in its favour. Publicity of a conflict is necessary even when that conflict is before the court or legislature if only to keep these agencies in check.

Thus, an interest that does not have access to the media (or one that is unable to present a conflict for public discussion) is forced to accept its fate as loser notwithstanding that the conflict might have been resolved at the lowest (administrative) level, where government is the inevitable winner.

The perception by an interest that it cannot win at levels higher than the administrative is invariably a manifestation of its awareness of the political nature of the state. Party discipline might make it inconceivable for an interest to lobby sections of the legislature except maybe, the Opposition. At the same time, high politicisation of the courts and the electoral machinery may render attempts at having a political conflict resolved in its favour at these levels, futile. Thus, control of the avenues for publicity, and politicisation of the agencies of the state guarantee the government that political conflicts will be resolved in its favour at the lowest (administrative) level.

Going hand in hand with control of the avenues for publicity and politicisation of the agencies of the state, are the enlargement of the bureaucracy and the powers of bureaucrats, as mechanisms for keeping the level of political conflict resolution at its lowest. Enlargement of the bureaucracy gives the government control over political conflicts that are of the remotest significance; for with such enlargement, the bureaucracy is able to keep its tentacled eyes over all potential conflicts, and to immediately bring them within its grasp. The enlargement of the powers of bureaucrats facilitates this function. To the extent that the powers of bureaucrats are enlarged, bureaucrats are able to engage in policy subsystems with impunity, thereby facilitating the resolution of political conflicts at the lowest level, where government is the imminent winner.

Conflict Management in the Guyanese Polity:

Earlier we had pointed out that the ruling party in Guyana i.e. the Peoples National Congress (PNC) has appropriated for itself the title of 'vanguard', and that it has ruled Guyana as if it were a one-party state. We also mentioned that the ruling party has proclaimed itself paramount to the state, thus the agencies of the state become the party's agents. The logic of this paramountcy is that since the party is the embodiment of the philosopher-King then it must enjoy the authority to organise the state machinery in a way that most effectively facilitates the implementation of the party's and its leaders' ideas and policies. This in turn requires that all political conflicts be resolved in its favour.

Although the Peoples National Congress did not declare itself paramount and assumed the title of vanguard until the mid-1970s, the foundations upon which it could effectively have political conflicts invariably resolved in its favour were being laid as far back as 1965. Among the slogans put out by this party in the 1964 electoral campaign were "heads will roll" and "jobs for the boys". Indeed heads did roll and the boys did get jobs. In fact, 1965 marks the beginning of the highly systematic politicisation of the agencies of the state, and an unbridled growth in the size and number of these agencies.

In 1965 alone over one thousand top level civil servants were removed from office — either through outright dismissal, forced resignation or forced retirement — and were replaced by those who, in some way or the other, might have contributed to the PNC's coming into power. Boodhoo et. al. (1981) argues that of a total of 609 Guyanese emigrants destined for Canada alone in 1965, 220 were of the Executive/professional/ white collar category. The year, 1956, was also the first year in which professional Guyanese emigrated in large numbers. There is no evidence to suggest that any significant proportion of these emigrants came from the private sector. In fact, a large number of those who lost their public service jobs and could not emigrate to other countries joined the private sector.

The year of 1965 also marked the beginning of the rapid growth of the public service as the slogan, 'jobs for the boys', began to fructify. Between 1965 and 1981 the public sector employment (including the armed services) grew from approximately 30,000 to 135,000, and another 10,000 is to be employed by the regional system (Danns, 1983). Danns also argues that between 1966 and 1983 Government ministries increased from 10 to 40 and their employees increased tenfold. In addition, the number of public corporations have grown to the extent that "there are public corporations and public corporations for public corporations" (Danns, *ibid.*). There is hardly any economic justification for this phenomenal growth in the size and number of the agencies of the state, for as Danns further points out, it was not accompanied by or based upon a corresponding growth in the economy; a phenomenon which he describes as the "head of an elephant on the body of an ant".

Thus, the politicisation of the agencies of the state began in the 1960s but only to the extent that office holders whose loyalties were questionable were removed from office and replaced with party loyalists; and new vacancies were invariably filled with party loyalists. With the proclamation in the 1970s that the PNC Party was the vanguard and that it was paramount to the state, this politicisation took on new dimensions.

Constitutionally independent state agencies were now being manipulated to yield results that were mainly beneficial to the PNC party. This manipulation was facilitated by the fact that in the late 1960s the top positions in these agencies were filled by party loyalists. Lutchman (1982) points out that even before the establishment of the Executive Presidency in 1980, ways and means were found to "either circumvent the constitutional provisions or operate them to yield significantly different results from what was originally intended." This contention is further supported by another observation of Lutchman's (1982) that :

In practice the conduct of elections has been brought under the exclusive control of the ruling party which is perhaps the only group expressing confidence in the fairness of results produced under the commission's activities or claiming that it performs its functions in accordance with constitutional provisions.

The conduct of elections has been brought under the exclusive control of the PNC notwithstanding the constitutional provision with respect to the composition of the Elections Commission, which is "designed not only with an eye to its independence, but to its impartiality in the sense that in the conduct of its affairs it does not operate to favour any of the contestants for political power" (Lutchman, 1982).

Thus in the 1970s the practice of getting constitutionally independent state agencies to operate in the PNC's favour was confined to manipulation and, to some extent coercion. Independent agencies were instructed to fill vacancies with party loyalists and independent minded and objective public officers were threatened with dismissal if the party's instructions were not carried out. Very often petty party functionaries were able to grant big favours to corrupt members of the public by simply instructing public officials to take actions which they normally would not have adopted.

In the 1980s however, in an effort to give substance and legality to the notion of the PNC's paramountcy, the politicisation or "PNCisation" of the agencies of the state was constitutionalised. The October 6, 1980, constitution gives the Executive President, who is also the leader of the PNC, extensive discretion in the appointment of officers of the so-called independent state agencies, and other top level state functionaries, including those in the public enterprises. It is to be noted here that notwithstanding the constitutional procedures laid out for making these appointments the President cannot be made accountable to anyone if he violates these procedures. In fact, the constitution itself places the Executive President above the law. It states thus :

the holder of the office of President shall not be personally answerable to any court for the performance of the functions of his office or for any act done in the performance of those functions and no proceedings, whether criminal or civil shall be instituted against him in his personal capacity in respect thereof either during his term of office or thereafter (Lutchman, 1982).

Lutchman argues that, "The desire to establish a presidency in which the incumbent would be active politically was clearly articulated and was never in doubt." Thus the granting of such extensive powers with respect to the functioning of the presidency to a politically active President not only facilitates but actively propels the appointment of only party and Presidential loyalists to positions of power in the agencies of the state, thereby politicising these agencies in a way that ensures that conflicts are resolved in the party's and the President's favour.

A look at the discretionary powers the President enjoys in making appointments to a number of constitutionally independent state agencies is very enlightening. The relevant agencies are : (a) The Elections Commission; (b) The Judicial Service Commission (JSC); (c) The Public Service Commission (PSC); (d) The Teaching Service Commission (TSC); and, (e) The Police Service Commission.

The constitution provides for these agencies to act independently of any political party, and certain category of members are to be appointed by the Executive President. But the Executive President is not elected independently of any political party; he/she is the leader of the party in power, and in the case of the PNC the leader is the paramount advocate of that party's paramountcy. Thus, in making appointments to these 'independent' agencies it would be inconceivable and irrational for the President not to appoint persons who are loyal to him and to his party.

Notwithstanding the encumbrances — after consultation with the Minority Leader or some other authority — placed on the ability of the President to make these appointments, the President can still have his own way, for "consultation" is not defined in the constitution. Where the President is required to make appointments (such as the Chairman of the PSC and JSC) after consultation with the Minority Leader and such other bodies as appear to him to represent public officers, the President enjoys even greater discretion, for it is totally up to him to decide which body is representative of public officers. Even if the President is to violate this constitutional provision by not consulting with anyone the aggrieved parties are not entitled to any legal redress. According to Lutchman (1982), "The constitution specifically excludes the courts from enquiring whether the President has received or acted in accordance with such advice or recommendation, or whether such consultation has taken place, or whether the appointment has received such concurrence." Thus, the President can appoint party and presidential loyalists to head independent agencies without consulting anyone; without yielding to established constitutional procedures. In fact, the Minority Party has consistently complained, even before the establishment of the Executive Presidency, of its leader being informed of such appointments only after they have been made.

Thus, these so-called independent agencies of the state are constitutionally politicised through the constitutional procedures for appointment of the officers of these agencies. In this way the directives of the party and its leadership are executed without much, if any, objective input from the professionals within the agencies. The **Catholic Standard** (August 28, 1983) quotes Professor Rudy James who argues that although 'The Right to Work' is guaranteed by Article 22 of the Constitution, the Government has been studiously ignoring this provision and the Guyanese judges "have shown an unprecedented contempt for fundamental rights in general and 'job security' in particular." According to Professor James this unprecedented contempt stems from the notion of the PNC being paramount to the agencies of the state, including the courts.

There is ample support for this argument. In an effort to curb illegal trade in basic foodstuffs and other contraband items, the Executive President on May 1, 1983 announced thus :

They can say what the hell they like. Any vehicle, any craft found with any smuggling thing, I am going to have it seized in the name of the government for good. You can try the issue at court, but I tekking it for the government. You follow me? You hear me? You understands me? You smells me? This is a time of war. This is not a time for technicalities. I leave that for the lawyers. (**Guyana Human Rights Report**, 1983).

Quite apparently this policy statement was taken more seriously by the police and the courts than by the traders. Since this statement was made scores of vehicles have been confiscated and hundreds of people have been convicted for illegal trading. The political role of the courts in respect of this statement by the President and leader of the PNC, has been put very cogently by the **Guyana Human Rights Report** (1983). It states inter alia :

Some magistrates have identified themselves zealously with the government's campaign admonishing defendants in political terms who are before them on charges related to foodstuffs. No judge or magistrate has questioned whether the draconian powers of the police and Customs Officials provided for in the Act in the matter of smuggling can be applied to foodstuffs without violating the notion of natural justice. The laws were clearly written to apply to items of great wealth for which the evasion of duty costs the state considerable revenue. In the case of, for example, twenty pounds of flour which has a controlled price of \$13.00, the revenue is negligible yet motor cars valued at between \$20,000 to \$30,000 have been seized and converted to police use, for possession of this amount of flour.

While judges and magistrates invariably admonish defendants in political terms members of the bench who do not rigidly equate such policy statements with the law are very often reprimanded or are not promoted. Magistrates have been known to have resigned forcibly because of their refusal to convict or commit to trial members of the citizenry who have been charged with political crimes. The now infamous treason trial is a case in point. After the presiding magistrate at the preliminary enquiry found no evidence in support of the charge of treason, he refused to commit the defendants to trial (although ordered to do so), and was subsequently asked to resign. The defendants were committed to trial by another magistrate.

Guyanese generally recognise that the courts no longer function independently of the PNC and therefore can no longer serve its check and balance function. Because of the political content of increasingly large numbers of court decisions resolving conflicts in which the state and members of the public are involved, the public has, broadly speaking, lost confidence in the courts and aggrieved persons/groups are no longer willing to challenge the actions of state agencies in the courts. Of the hundreds of people charged with smuggling and being in possession of uncustomed goods over ninety percent have pleaded 'guilty' thereby refusing to contest the charges. Of the scores of vehicles that have been seized and converted to police use without 'due process' only a dozen or so owners have sought redress in the courts. The public has come to realise that once the PNC or any of its agent, i.e. state agencies, take a certain line of action it becomes futile to challenge such line of action in the courts, for the courts are in many instances demonstrating a character of being *de facto* agents of the PNC. Hence the public is unable, or at least reluctant, to raise the level of conflict to the courts, and therefore acquiesces in the decisions of the administrative and enforcement agencies of the state. Opposition political parties also realise that they are certain losers in conflicts of a political nature that come before the courts. In 1979 approximately one dozen constitutional motions challenging the referendum were brought before the courts by opposition groups, and not one was substantively heard; all were dismissed on procedural grounds. In a real sense, these parties are precluded from broadening the scope of conflict to the level of the courts.

The trade union movement, largely through its own making, is also rendered powerless in terms of either broadening the scope or raising the level of conflict. By virtue of its affiliation with and loyalty to the PNC, this movement has also become an agent of the PNC and is thus forced to crawl at the behest of every PNC politician. A case in point is the electricity hike in October 1982. When the Electricity Corporation increased the price of electricity to household consumers, the Guyana Consumer Association made it a public issue claiming that there was no justification for such an increase. In its attempt to broaden the scope of the conflict the Consumer Association called upon the Trade Union Congress (TUC) to join the protest. The TUC immediately took over the reins of the conflict and sought to negotiate with the Corporation and the related government Minister. When the TUC was contemptuously brushed aside by both the Minister and the Corporation it called (for the first and only time in 18 years) for a day of public protest. When it seemed apparent that the rural population was ready to join the urban workers in protest action the TUC's leadership was called in by the Minister, and the conflict was decisively terminated. The increase remained unchanged and the issue died. The TUC pre-empted what was likely to become a nationwide protest and settled the issue with the Minister. Thus an issue that was of fundamental concern to every electricity consumer and which was entrusted for proper care to the TUC, was allowed to remain in its original state without a public explanation being given by the TUC.

Going hand-in-hand with the extensive partisan politicisation of the agencies of the state and the trade union movement is the granting of extensive

powers to the directorate of these agencies. The combined effect of such partisan politicisation and extensive powers is the engagement by bureaucrats in policy subsystems. Traditionally bureaucrats have spared no effort to ensure that their decisions do not impinge on the law or on citizens' natural rights. However, with their partisan outlook and with the extensive powers now granted them the primary consideration that goes into their decision making is the interest of the PNC, and their own class interest. The notion of citizens' natural and/or legal rights are of tertiary or no importance at all.

In fact, the unbridled powers enjoyed by bureaucrats have often propelled the adoption of decisions that are tantamount to law. The making of such decisions and their enforcement as if they were law have been aided and abetted by the ready and willing co-operation of other agencies of the state, the silence of policy makers on these decisions and the reluctance of the citizens to challenge them in the courts. Two such major decisions immediately come to mind. The first deals with the police force converting private citizens' vehicles to their own use, and the other concerns the distribution of scarce commodities.

After the President announced that "I tekking it for the Government" the Customs and Police immediately began to seize vehicles found transporting flour and other contraband items. Although the law gives the Comptroller of Customs the power to seize such vehicles it does not give the Police the powers to convert them to their own use. But the Police have been converting these vehicles to their own use even before the matter comes up for trial, while the Minister of Justice remains silent on the issue. At the same time, of the scores of vehicles that have been seized only a dozen or so owners have made an attempt to bring the issue before the courts. Likewise the Comptroller of Customs has made no attempt to take possession of these vehicles.

In the case of the distribution of scarce commodities, the Ministry of Trade, and the Guyana National Trading Corporation, as a matter of policy (or subpolicy), have consistently ensured that state employees receive their supplies before non-state employees even know of their availability. What is left over is given to the PNC's distribution outlet, i.e. the Knowledge Sharing Institute (KSI), for distribution. Thus, even at the level of purchasing basic foodstuff the citizenry is forced to go to the PNC. Again policy makers have said nothing about the inequities of the system; the Ministry of Justice has not seen it fit to pronounce on its discriminatory nature, and citizens, would rather live with such circumstances rather than 'wasting' their resources in the courts.

Rather than making these decisions issues to be discussed in public thereby getting the entire citizenry involved in bringing pressure to bear on the Government for changes, individual citizens respond by bribing public officials for their share or by conforming to the decisions. In this way the administration succeeds in having potentially explosive political issues resolved at the administrative level. And the resolution of such conflict at the administrative level is actively facilitated by the role the media plays in the society.

Publicity concerning a conflict is crucial to the broadening of its scope. Publicity is crucial because people would not be participants to a conflict if

they do not know of its existence. In Guyana the avenues for such publicity are the press (including the radio) and public meetings. However, the Government has complete control over the press, and it is the government that also determines who is to hold public meetings when and where.

The **Guyana Chronicle** which is the national newspaper and which is owned and controlled by the Government has consistently refused, as a matter of policy, to publish opposition views. Its primary role is the propagandisation of the ideas of the leadership of the PNC, and the admonishing of opponents of the PNC and other non conformists. Investigative journalism is tremendously lacking, and political issues rarely at all reach the point of public debate. The radio demonstrates a redundant role in terms of newscasting and assumes a similar propaganda role. The news given by the radio is taken almost verbatim from the **Guyana Chronicle** of the same day. At the same time, opposition newspapers are consistently denied newsprint, and are recurrently being levied exorbitantly high monetary penalties for publishing libellous material. A combination of such exorbitant monetary penalties and the denial of newsprint renders these opposition papers incapable of taking political issues to the masses. These monetary levies drain the meagre coffers of these newspapers, and the lack of newsprint limits them to a one or two page weekly, whose circulation is limited to a narrow readership in Georgetown. Thus opposition views on an issue are precluded from reaching the masses of the people through the press; publicity concerning a conflict cannot take place through the press. The only other avenue open is public meetings.

According to the law public meetings at which a noisy instrument (meaning a public address system) is to be used, must have the written approval of the Commissioner of Police prior to such meeting. In the interest of law and order such a requirement seems to be justifiable. In practice, however, the law operates to prevent the holding of meetings. While the PNC has never been denied police permission to hold a public meeting other political parties have not been so blessed.

The Working Peoples Alliance (WPA) has not only been consistently denied police permission to hold public meetings since its establishment as a political party in 1979, but devious methods have been employed to prevent it from holding any meetings at all, and to prevent its sympathisers/supporters from attending its meetings. Very often the police would bluntly refuse permission for the WPA to hold a public meeting; the party would then go ahead and hold its meeting 'illegally' only to have both the audience and the speakers dispersed by the police or by thugs associated with the regime. At other times the police would wait until the last hour before the meeting is scheduled to begin then grant the necessary permission. Such a calculated timing of permission means that invariably the party does not have any time at all to advertise its meeting thereby resulting in a small turn out. This small turn out is then opportunistically used by the PNC propagandists as evidence of the peoples' rejection of the WPA. Yet at other times the police would grant the necessary permission a few hours before the meeting but would withdraw it at the last minute and

disperse the crowd. The Peoples Progressive Party (PPP), the other major opposition party has been a little more fortunate in this respect; it has often been granted permission to hold meetings, but invariably its meetings have been broken up by thugs. The other small political parties have not been treated substantially differently.

The manner in which the police force has handled the issue of public meetings organised by opposition groups' has rendered these groups' attempts at publicising political conflicts almost futile. The lack of access by the opposition to the public through the forum of meetings, as well as their lack of access to the media have resulted in a virtual 'blackout' of public debates on matters of grave public concern. If these groups move to the courts to have a conflict resolved in their favour, they are invariably frustrated in their attempts to mobilise the masses for political action at the legislative or electoral levels. The fraudulent nature of General Elections in Guyana is now well documented.² And since the "conduct of elections has been brought under the exclusive control of the ruling party . . ." (Lutchman, 1982), it is highly improbable that any other party can gain a majority in Parliament (through elections) in the foreseeable future. The inevitable consequence is that members of the public (either as groups or as individuals) are forced to have political conflicts resolved and to acquiesce in the decisions taken at the administrative level.

Conclusion :

One egregious feature of the Guyanese state agencies emerges from the above discussion; they all reinforce the actions of each other in a systematic effort to have all conflicts resolved at the administrative level. This is the result of a symbiotic relationship in which each of these agencies is staffed by functionaries whose foremost loyalty is to the PNC rather than to their own objective judgement. Lutchman (*ibid.*) observes that :

In a country like Guyana, one of the tendencies in evidence is the sense of obligation which persons feel for those who are responsible for their preferment in such circumstances, to the point of willingly complying with the wishes of their patron. The pressure on such persons to comply are for a number of reasons extremely severe, and especially because of the practice of the doctrine of the paramountcy of the party over the agencies of government, which in actual translation means that a status of independence from the ruling party is frowned on or, at the very least, not encouraged.

Occupying an important position in this symbiotic relationship is the administrative bureaucracy. The functionaries in the administrative bureaucracy enjoy extensive powers to the extent that they continuously engage in policy sub-systems, and their decisions in this respect are given legitimacy by the supportive actions of other agencies. Thus the decision-making power of the administrative bureaucracy is reinforced at the expense of the public which has neither the political power to resolve a conflict favourably at the administrative level, nor the resources to raise the conflict to a higher level where it may experience a more favourable outcome.

In this way the administrative bureaucracy in Guyana has become, in the words of C. Wright Mills (1959), "not only the centre of power but also the arena within which and in terms of which all conflicts of power are resolved or denied resolution. Administration replaces electoral politics; the manoeuvring of cliques (interest groups) replaces the clash of political parties." And the failure of the media to present issues for public debate has led to a virtual appropriation of public authority by the bureaucratic class.

NOTES

1. For a more detailed account of the co-optive nature of the Trade Union movement in Guyana, see K. Rai, "Peripheralising the Guyanese Working Class", *Transition*, Issue 7, 1983. An important event however, relates to the last held TUC Convention in 1984 during which the workers and popular unions managed to gain control of the TUC executive committee. The PNC regime, as a result of its loss of control has been and is now defining the TUC's leadership in a treasonous and counter-revolutionary mould.
2. For a detailed account of the fraudulent nature of elections, see *Something to Remember: The Report of the International Team of Observers at the Elections in Guyana*, 1980, British Parliamentary Human Rights Group, 1980.

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