

NEW CONSTITUTION ENTRENCHES BURNHAM'S PERSONAL DICTATORSHIP

by Cheddi Jagan

The Burnham regime steam-rollered through the National Assembly a new Guyana Constitution which will be promulgated by the President not later than October 6, 1980.

During the debate on the draft of the new Constitution, it was made clear that Parliament was being asked to approve a "bogus document" which was the handiwork of political confidence tricksters.

Once again, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) has proved to be correct. What it said in 1978 during the rigged referendum came to pass. Then, it had warned that the Referendum and Constitution gimmicks were -

- (a) a ruse to postpone fresh elections which were due since October 1978, and have not yet been held;
- (b) a means to give more power to the ruling People's National Congress (PNC); and
- (c) a device not to confer, but to take away rights enjoyed by the people. About 85-90% of the voters had demonstrated how they felt on this issue by boycotting the Referendum.

The proposed new Constitution is worse than the former 1966 Independence Constitution. In the past, the PNC violated the letter and spirit of the Constitution by bureaucratic-administrative and police-military methods. Now, it has given those same methods constitutional and legal validity.

In keeping with the known opportunism and demagogy of the PNC leadership, the new document has been described as "socialist". Article I states that Guyana is a state in transition from capitalism to socialism. This is absurd! "Transition from capitalism to socialism" implies a "dictatorship of the proletariat". What exists in Guyana is a virtual dictatorship of the reactionary petty-bourgeoisie. Actually, even the pre-conditions -- economic, social, cultural, technological, ideological and political -- to the transition have not been firmly laid.

New restrictions have been placed on the right to form and belong to political parties which in future, must respect the "principles of national sovereignty and of democracy". This is ominous as the PNC regime is preparing for further assaults on fundamental rights; it has been claiming that opposition parties are irresponsible and "counter-revolutionary". The PNC will be doubly armed against its political opponents with the Law and the Club (armed thugs of the House of Israel and the PNC who smash up opposition public meetings, and hired assassins among whose victims are, so far, two political activists and a Jesuit priest-photographer).

The new Constitution provides that a law may be made for ensuring "fairness and balance in the dissemination of information" to the public. This is obviously a prescription for banning publications which attack the ruling party or government, or at least to prevent the publication of views hostile to the PNC. The denial by government of newsprint

