

ARMY INTERVENTION NOT ELECTION

BY CHEDDI JAGAN

The official results for the 53-member National Assembly were People's National Congress (PNC) 37 seats; People's Progressive Party (PPP) 14 seats and the Liberator Party 2 seats.

But what took place on July 16, 1973, was not a general election. Rather, it was a virtual army takeover. Ballot boxes were seized and impounded by the army, and shamelessly tampered with.

The extensive electoral fraud was the result of a combination of padded voters lists inside and outside Guyana, postal and proxy voting, and army seizure and tampering with ballot boxes.

The voters lists increased by 24 per cent between 1968 and 1972 - an impossible feat considering a net population increase of about 2.5 per cent per year.

The official figure for all Guyanese age 21 and above was 314,564 on April 7, 1973. Yet the voters lists as of May 31, 1973, had 384,434 names (not including 34,801 registered overseas voters).

In other words, about 70,000 represented dead, underage and non-existent persons. These voted by means of the postal (first introduced in 1973) and proxy system of voting.

And thousands of legitimate voters could not vote because either they did not have their official I.D. (identification) Cards, or their names appeared on the preliminary but not on the final voters lists, or others had voted for them mainly by proxy or postal voting.

But in spite of these irregularities, Burnham's PNC could not have won had the armed forces not intervened and intercepted the ballot boxes. That is why the PNC did not agree to any of the following legitimate demands of the 3 opposition parties:

- (1) a preliminary count of ballots at the place of polling;
- (2) proper and adequate sealing of the boxes;
- (3) an agreed representative of the 3 opposition parties to travel in the same vehicle conveying the ballot boxes from polling place to counting place.

Ballot boxes were seized by the army and kept for long hours, even days, at army headquarters in Georgetown, where they were tampered with.

In four boxes for the Northwest District were found 21 wads of ballot

papers wrapped with elastic bands or held together with paper clips!

For the Mazaruni-Potaro district, parcels of ballots were found folded together not twice as required by law, but once.

Objection had been raised and recorded about the wrong official stamping of each ballot paper on the inside. When the box was opened, all the ballots were stamped on the outside, as required by law, and marked for the PNC!

As regards the overseas votes, the ruling People's National Congress secured in the recent elections 98 per cent of the votes cast as compared with 95 per cent in 1968.

Commenting on the 1968 electoral fraud, Mr. Humphrey Taylor, Director of Opinion Research Centre, in the Granada T.V. expose, "The Making of a Prime Minister", said:

"Obviously I don't know what happened in Guyana, but as far as Britain is concerned, the compilation of the register was a totally dishonest and corrupt operation. And, as we have clearly established, the great majority of the people listed, do not exist. This I would think is unprecedented for a Commonwealth country, as far as I know; and it's you know, a pretty awful and disgraceful episode."

Granada's Research Editor, Gus Macdonald in the same film said:

"It is my firm conclusion that the election inside Guyana was neither free nor fair."

Now, in another film, Granada T.V. has again exposed the extensive electoral fraud which helped the PNC to remain in power.

Without the blatant and shameless bit of election rigging, the PNC could not have obtained a 2/3 majority; indeed, its real strength is only about 1/3 of the electorate.

This was clearly shown in its stronghold, Georgetown, the capital. Here the voters' turnout was very low, about 20 per cent lower than in the rural areas. And the PNC's share of the total electorate dropped from 60 per cent in 1968 to 46 per cent in 1973.

The PNC claim that it has breached PPP strongholds is mere propaganda. To disprove it, the PPP has announced that it would be prepared to have impartially supervised polls in one or more of the several electoral districts claimed to have been won by the PNC.

A rising tide of anger is sweeping Guyana today. The people have come to realize the limitations of the electoral road to people's political power. They know from bitter experience that the PNC is prepared to use the army and police and the judiciary not only to steal a government, but also to intimidate, harass and even murder to stay in power.

A new stage has been reached in the struggle for national liberation and socialism.

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