

Constitution
THE TWO FACES OF BURNHAM



**BURNHAM BEFORE
THE
UNITED NATIONS**

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BURNHAM BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS

The several faces of Mr. Burnham were on view at different times during his recent trip to the U.S.A. It was a costly trip when one considers that he spent only a brief period before the United Nations, and during this period, put up a very poor show indeed. Mr. Burnham's Party is evidently financially well-off, for the Leader stayed at one of the most expensive hotels in New York, The Summit, and had a suite costing \$75 per day (US currency).

Mr. Burnham's several faces, which he puts on to suit the moment included his most innocent guise — the ardent champion of freedom. This was worn before the United Nations, but his chin dropped several times as he struggled to maintain this impression. Asked **Mr. Sonn of Cambodia** — "I should like to put a few questions to the petitioner. The clarifications that I seek will permit me to form my opinion which I shall express later in due course. The first question I wish to put is the following: I should like to ask Mr. Burnham whether it is true that the last elections were engaged within the framework of obtaining independence, and is it true that you had said during the electoral campaign that the party which will have won the elections would lead the country to independence?"

Mr. Burnham's reply — "It is true that all political parties contesting the last elections did so on the assumption that the next stage was independence for our country and when the various parties spoke of the party winning being the party to lead the country to independence, that was with the tacit understanding the particular party obtaining the majority of votes. Incidentally, the leader of the People's Progressive Party, recognising this fact at one of his final meetings before the close of the campaign, particularly asked for an 80% support because he realised that unless a majority of popular votes supported his party he would hardly be able to speak definitely for the people of the country. Secondly, there is this practical difficulty that both the People's Progressive Party and the People's National Congress favour a larger House. It is impossible to have a larger House unless there are new elections".

Read Mr. Burnham's answer again. He was asked a simple and direct question. Did Mr. Burnham understand that the last elections were fought on the understanding that the winning party would lead the country to independence and did he not state this during the elections? Here in B.G. we all know perfectly well that this was clearly understood. Mr. Burnham made his famous remarks, which he chooses to forget when it suits him, that he would be the first to fly to London with Jagan to demand independence.

During the 1961 election campaign Mr. Burnham was quoted as making the following remarks — Sunday, July 18, 1961 (Daily Chronicle) at a public meeting — "Guiana must get Independence immediately after the General Elections in August, immediately after the Party gets into power. He added, however, that if things turned out differently and another Party got into power (which he doubted) he would still agitate for immediate independence.

He said that he would support any party which got into power on the Independence issue because the election of a Government was the wish of the electorate and there was nothing that any other Party could do but support the Government on Independence".

In a press statement on the expulsion of

Sydney King from the PNC, his party stated — "Though it will always strive to protect the interests of all groups it will never stand in the way of Independence regardless of the party in office" (Guiana Graphic, July 21, 1961).

On July 15th, 1961, Mr. Burnham was reported as saying — "My support is limited to the demand for independence and has nothing to do with the ideology or programme of any Party. Whichever party is returned in a majority, either directly or indirectly, has got the right to lead the country to Independence" (Guiana Graphic, July 15, 1961.)

Mr. Burnham showed unusual weakness in his reply to the representative from Cambodia and the introduction of the point about enlarging the House is an indication of his mental state during the questioning. Enlarging the Legislative Assembly may be a moot point if the Senate is to be abolished. Did not Mr. Burnham fight for an upper house in 1960? The Senate could continue until the next elections.

NO TALK ABOUT P.R. DURING 1961 ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Mr. Burnham further exposed his double-talking and ineptness at the second question from **Mr. Sonn of Cambodia**:—"The second question deals with the following point. I should like to know whether there was any discussion during the electoral campaign for any possible change of the electoral system — whether this had at all been discussed during the electoral campaign?"

Mr. Burnham: "The People's National Congress since 1959 had been suggesting a change of the electoral system from one of first past the post to one of proportional representation, and the People's National Congress never changed its stand on this matter but merely at the 1960 conference accepted a compromise solution which we subsequently found did not work in the peculiar circumstances of British Guiana".

Mr. Burnham here deliberately avoided a direct answer to the question, for the only direct and honest answer was that there was no discussion during the 1961 electoral campaign on the issue of proportional representation. In order to avoid admitting this, Mr. Burnham used the lawyer's trick of extending the discussion beyond the immediate question. Of course, **there was no talk of P.R. in the 1961 electoral campaign** for Mr. Burnham was absolutely sure of winning the elections. And if he had won, he would not have wanted to seek a change in the constitutional arrangements. In fact, Mr. Burnham's advocacy of P.R. is based on the fact that he lost the 1961 elections. If he had won — by the same majority that the PPP had gained — he obviously would not have advocated P.R.

Further questioning is of great interest as it indicates the dilemma of Mr. Burnham. The Special Committee on the granting of independence to colonial territories knows one thing — that it wants all the colonial territories to be free. It cannot understand reservations and qualifications on the issue of independence. These reservations were clearly expressed by Mr. Burnham, and herein he made his fundamental mistake. The UN Committee can only understand colonial leaders who want independence, not colonial leaders who do not want independence unless it suits them. If our issue was one where the constitution being prepared for independence, did not give power or the vote to the local inhabitants, and left power in the hands of the expatriate, the issue could be understood. But the issue of P.R. is not funda-

mental, particularly when one considers that our form of voting exists in the majority of countries — and also in the countries of the members of the very committee to whom he was appealing. Note the questions of the representatives of Sierra Leone and Mali:—

Mr. Collier (Sierra Leone):— “I should like to know from Mr. Burnham what sort of suggestion has come from the British Government on this, because they have had experience in the Commonwealth where independence has been given to many countries. It has been the system of first past the post in most of the Commonwealth countries, if not in all of them. I should like to know whether they have had any reactions from the British Government on this particular point.”

Mr. Burnham:— “It is true that the majority of the countries within the British Commonwealth do have the system of first past the post, but it is also true that there are two countries that I can remember at the moment in the British Commonwealth, Malta and Tasmania, which have a system of proportional representation.

May I say further that, in tackling the peculiar problems of our territory, though some assistance can be got from the experience of other territories, we have to apply our minds to our territory, to our difficulties and to our troubles and to seek a solution within that context. The United Kingdom Government has expressed this point of view in White Paper 1970 of 1962. On page 4, in paragraph 11, it is stated that since the governing party has a majority of seats and the opposition a majority of votes, and the two sides have not been able to come to any agreement on this question of the electoral system, it would not express an opinion or seek to do anything at this moment. That has been the British reaction so far. Our contention has been that it should be the duty of the Government of British Guiana and the British Government to seek a means of ascertaining the wishes of the people on this sole question which divides the two major parties.”

THE 1961 INDEPENDENCE MOTION

Mr. Traore (Mali):— “On the basis of the statement he has made, I should like to ask the petitioner why, as he has indicated to us, his party in 1961 joined the People's Progressive Party in order to vote for a resolution calling for the setting of a date for independence?”

It is here that Mr. Burnham exposed himself and allowed his mask of the ardent independence-fighter to slip from his face. He was exposed in all his nakedness, by his own double-talking and slick answers in which the ring of sincerity was totally lacking.

Mr. Burnham: “All of our members in the Legislature supported that resolution for the simple reason that we are wedded to independence in principle, and, therefore, there was no issue as to whether or not independence should be granted within the shortest possible time. But as I noted in my statement, during the course of my remarks in the Legislature on this motion, I pointed out to the Government that we were with them on the question of independence but that we, the parties in British Guiana, would have to get down to drafting a constitution which would be acceptable to the majority of the people. Our differences are not on the question of independence; our differences are on the question of the constitution, and in fact, on one particular question in the Constitution, because we are as anxious as anyone

else to cease being colonial subjects.”

Mr. Traore (Mali): “I should like to put the following question to the petitioner. **Would the referendum he requests be a prior condition to the granting of independence to British Guiana?**”

Mr. Burnham: “Yes, that is so, because once a constitution for independence is granted, that will be the end of the matter. In any case, we have to have a constitution for moving into independence. The present constitution under which the country operates is not a constitution for independence, and in any case it will not be the constitution for an independent Guiana. It is merely that we, in our suggestions for the drafting of the constitution for independence are asking that the electoral system in that constitution be proportional representation. Since there is a deadlock, prior to writing in the electoral system in the constitution, there should be a referendum so that we can know what will be the electoral system written in the constitution.”

It is here that Mr. Burnham exposed in the full light of the United Nations that he placed the question of P.R. above and before the issue of independence. And it was here that the Committee had evidently had enough of him, for he was asked rather curtly — “I should like to ask the petitioner what he expects from our Committee at the present time with regard to the accession of British Guiana to independence, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV)”

Mr. Burnham: “It is our conviction that if an opinion were expressed by this Committee on the desirability, if not the necessity, of consulting the wishes of the people of British Guiana, that opinion would carry great persuasion both so far as the British Government is concerned and the British Guiana Government, because this question is indefinitely bound up with the question of independence.”

The Chairman — “I wish to thank Mr. Burnham for the information which he has been good enough to supply to the Committee. The Committee will weigh this information when it deals with the examination of the situation in British Guiana”.

ISRAEL'S EXPERIENCE WITH P.R.

During the course of his brief period before the Committee, Mr. Burnham also indicated that our present system of voting would lead to “authoritarian regime through the legislative process”. The remarks of an eminent statesman Prime Minister Ben-Gurion of Israel, seem to give an entirely different view on this matter. The Israeli experience with P.R. has been completely unsatisfactory and the following remarks by their Prime Minister, made from years of experience under the system of P.R. are certainly worth digesting:—

Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in a speech before the Knesset on February 11, 1958, pleading for a change to the first-past-the-post system made the following remarks—“It is no accident that those parties that are covertly or openly opposed to democracy and aspire for totalitarian rule are the most virulent opponents of the constituency election system . . . It is not by chance that it is only countries with Proportional Representation that have come under the domination of totalitarian regimes from Left or Right.” In another address the Israeli Prime Minister said about proportional representation—“It weakens and undermines democracy; splits the nation; distorts the principle of elected representation; vitiates the

responsibility of the opposition and is also harmful to the Coalition; violates the citizens' right to choose, undermines the civil education of the people; artificially inflates differences; creates unholy alliances; fosters factionalism, intolerance; and often gives minorities the opportunity to impose their will on the nation in opposition to the wishes of the majority."

RACIALISM

Before and after his U.N. appearance, Mr. Burnham indulged in his racial-mongering. In his lobbying for permission to address the Committee, he carried the line that Dr. Jagan and the PPP were pushing out all the Guianese Negroes from jobs and putting in their place East Indians who belonged to the PPP.

Knowing that in Africa, the experience with East Indian settlers has not been of the happiest, in that some have sided with the imperialists in the anti-colonial struggles, the PNC has tried to influence the African delegates to the United Nations that the PPP is an Indian Party opposed to and victimising Africans is B.G.

The PNC Leader and his Guianese-American yes men, maliciously spread this about. They told gruesome stories about how Negroes were victimised and thrown out of their jobs and that Dr. Jagan would establish Indian rule if he was not thwarted.

THE WITCH-HUNTING FACE

Mr. Burnham's other face was put out for the American press after his U.N. appearance. He danced in attendance for the type of propaganda they want — the old communist line that has been so satisfactory to the American press. And Mr. Burnham gave them what they wanted, as he did the year before. Yes, he assured them, Communism would take over the country if the PNC were not supported. He was the only hope for these who did not want to see communism sweep the country.

Said the Amsterdam News — "He (Mr. Burnham) is being counted upon by the Western World to defeat communist leader Jagan in the struggle between East and West."

Yes, Sir Gallahad Burnham had taken on the mantle of saving British Guiana from the threat of communism and has again become the darling of the American press.

Mr. Burnham moved into his subtle race-mongering that he has carried on so well for so long. His race-mongering is cleverly put out: "Jagan is packing the Police force with officers of Indian descent, who form the main support of the PPP. Jagan is giving civil service posts to 'blue-eyed boys of the Party'" (Graphic, March 9, 1963).

This is the form of racialism that Burnham and the PNC have practised for years. No one can accuse him of saying anything racial — Oh no — he merely accuses. And in his false accusations lies the essence of the vile racialism which he and his party preaches and spreads, to the detriment of unity in the country.

Where are all these police officers that Mr. Burnham says the PPP is packing with East Indians? Facts speak the truth and the facts are as follows:

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| POLICE FORCE: | | Chief Inspectors- | |
| Officers: | | Inspectors | |
| Negroes | — 30 | Negroes | — 41 |
| European | 6 | East Indians | 7 |
| Mixed | 5 | Mixed | 8 |
| East Indian | 4 | Chinese | 1 |
| Total | — 45 | Total | — 57 |

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|-------------------|----------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| Constables | | Chinese | 4 |
| Negroes | — 860 | Portuguese | 2 |
| East Indians | 227 | Total | — 283 |
| Mixed | 70 | | |
| Amerindians | 8 | Total in Police Force | |
| Portuguese | 2 | Negroes | — 1,170 |
| Total | — 1,167 | East Indians | 259 |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|-------|--------------|----------------|
| Sergeants/Corporals | | Mixed | 100 |
| Negroes | — 239 | Amerindians | 8 |
| East Indians | 21 | Europeans | 6 |
| Mixed | 17 | Chinese | 5 |
| | | Portuguese | 4 |
| | | Total | — 1,552 |

Mr. Burnham speaks of the PPP — "blue-eyed" boys of the Party who have got appointments in the Civil Service. Let him look at the top posts in the Civil Service. By no stretch of the imagination could they be termed 'blue-eyed boys' of the Party. In fact, the PPP members might rightly protest that it is the other way around.

The PPP is not a racial party. The PPP membership covers all ethnic groups in Guyana. An examination of the officers of the PPP, PPP Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries and the PPP representatives in the Senate and Legislative Assembly will give the lie to any charge of racialism against the PPP.

The Riot Commission headed by Sir Wynn Parry dismissed Mr. Burnham's charges of racialism by the PPP. They said — "We do not, however, think that there is much substance in the contention of Mr. Burnham and it seems to us that whatever racial differences existed were brought about by political propaganda."

Just this year two Guianese have been appointed to fill positions which expatriates have filled in the past — Miss Marian Harding, now Matron of the Public Hospital and Mr. Eustace Reis as Director of Posts and Telecommunications. Other top posts filled since the PPP has been in office from 1957 to the present, include the head of the Government educational institutions — Mr. Allsop at Queen's Miss Dewar at Bishops, Miss L. Fraser at Carnegie Trade School, Mr. Pooran at the Government Technical Institution. Other important civil service appointments have included the heads of the Medical Department (Dr. Nicholson), Education Department (Mr. Case), Forestry Department (Mr. Dow), Manager of Transport and Harbours Department (Mr. Younge), Accountant General (Mr. Fraser), Local Government (Mr. Thompson), Drainage and Irrigation (Mr. Narine) etc. And so the list grows larger and larger until today, very few overseas persons hold posts in the B.G. Civil Service.

Where in this impressive list are the blue-eyed boys of the PPP? They are so extinct that the supporters of the Governing Party protest, constantly that the Service is controlled by anti-PPP civil servants.

So once, again, Mr. Burnham has exposed himself! He has exposed his double-talking, his ineptness, his insidious racialism. The man who accused Jagan of having a colonial mentality because he went to the United Nations eventually went there himself! And when he went to the UN he made it clear to all who heard that here was a man who did not want independence unless it was on his terms. He exposed the very essence of his own colonial mentality. He prefers colonial status to independent status under the present electoral system. What greater shame could he bring to his party and his country?