

## The Army Take-over in the Guyana Elections

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When we put together all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, we see emerging the whole plot concocted by the PNC. Desperate to hold on to power, which has become most sweet due to the massive sums of money that have poured into the pockets of the favoured, and aware of dwindling support from one end of the country to the other, the hierarchy of the PNC planned their so-called "breakthrough" into the areas of PPP support.

The first stage of the "breakthrough" was propaganda. The NEW NATION and the DAILY CHRONICLE and the Ministry of Information began the propaganda campaign that the PPP was "weakening" and the PNC was "growing stronger." We saw endless pictures of the Prime Minister surrounded by smiling faces, mainly Indo-Guyanese; we were treated with long statements from renegades of the PPP as to the greatness of the PNC.

The brainwashing had begun, and it continued at a hot pace for many months before elections. If one followed these reports, there was only one conclusion to arrive at — that the PPP was dead, Dr Jagan was a leader without a following and all the world loved the Prime Minister.

Riding high on their own puffed-up propaganda, the PNC announced elections for July 16. To counter the grave exposures that the PNC had faced abroad in the 1968 elections, when it was made clear that the overseas voters lists had been padded and the proxy vote had been grossly misused, the PNC pretended that it "bowed to public pressure" and in a clean-up campaign knocked off half of the overseas votes and limited the proxy to what appeared to be reasonable conditions for application. But it threw into the picture, one might say sideways, the postal vote — no doubt just for good measure if there was any slippage in its other plans.

And it counted heavily on the fact that the PPP has

always been a party of principle, and if it says one thing, it does not renege on its promises. Knowing that full well, it introduced a bill for the vote at 18 years, a change the PPP had been advocating for long.

But it had not calculated that the experience of the PPP in the national registration in April had been so revealing as to make the Party ultra-conscious of the plans afoot. In the April National Registration, the arrangements were so deliberately bad and the majority of the people had such immense problems in getting registered that it was clear that the plan was to keep thousands off the voters' lists. Thousands and thousands of young people could not get registered. So when the PNC, which had opposed the vote at 18 years all the time came out with its proposals, one did not need to be a fortune teller to know what it was about. And the combined votes of the PPP and the UF blocked it.

### NEW METHODS OF RIGGING

The loss of the opportunity to pad the lists with real and phony 18—21 year olds at the expense of the PPP disfranchised youths caused the PNC to move on to new methods of rigging.

The period of revision of the voters lists brought out numerous irregularities: Registered voters were not allowed to record their changes of address and their names were struck off the lists where they formerly resided. Fictitious names were added, dead names remained on the lists and the lists expanded at such a fantastic rate, that it showed a 24.5 per cent increase over the 1968 lists, an impossibility unless our growth rate is the highest in all the world or that we have heavy immigration. As we all know, our growth rate is about 2.5 per cent and we have large numbers leaving the country, not entering it:

All during this period the PPP was learning some vital facts. In its house to house work, both in urban and rural areas, a very decided change was noticed. The most apparent was that in Georgetown in particular, people weren't talking too much, but they said they were not voting.

This message came over hard and true. It was not difficult to know the reason why. Increasing poverty in the face of false promises had brought about frustration so intense that the response to elections was a stubborn — "You go ahead and do what you want. I'm not voting". We got the information early; but of course the PNC knew it for long, but perhaps thought they could melt the ice of frustration and discontent that had settled on its former strong support.

### A NEW URGENCY

At the same time, as the PPP went out on its campaigning, it noticed a new urgency in the attitude of its supporters, a quickening of interest and an intensity of hope based on frustrations and disgust which had been growing under PNC mis-rule. But what was outstanding was the pace at which interest grew and the broadening of PPP support in the few weeks of the election campaign.

The response the PPP was receiving could not possibly go unnoticed. It was there for everyone to see—the police covering meetings, the news gatherers reporting to the PNC, the embassies, the security police, the officials, etc.

In the face of this, the rigging moved a stage forward. The postal vote was not going well, and PNC henchmen all through the country were given assignments on the number of postal vote applications to hand in. One well known PNC stooge in the Berbice area was given the assignment of getting 5000 such votes. He used all the tricks in his bag, but could not obtain more than a handful of signatures on postal vote applications, so he and his buddies sat up the whole night forging names from the lists on to the application forms. We estimate that of the 23,000 postal vote applications claimed by the Elections Office, not more than 1,000 were genuine. The proof of this came on Elections Day when thousands of voters all over Guyana were denied the right to vote when they went to polline stations. What is even more telling is that the PNC got 99.9 per cent of all postal votes.

As things began to look very bad for the PNC, it then moved back to the Proxy Votes, dropping all sem-

blance of sticking to the rules. It started collecting Proxy Votes from anyone, and began again using intimidation. The proxies were collected up to and including voting day although the period for the submission of proxy applications ended on July 6. Again, the list of proxy voters had been kept a deep dark secret and the regulations, as in the case of the postal votes, too, were disregarded. Only Supreme Court action brought out a late and restricted list of postal voters, impossible to properly examine. This, of course, was what it wanted, particularly when there were names of dead and non-existent persons and real voters who never signed applications, on the lists. The PNC, of course, made no provision for persons to object to their names being on the postal voters lists—no way for a person declaring he did not sign a postal vote to get his vote back.

### PNC BECAME DESPERATE

As the election campaigning began to show a clearly new pattern, the PNC became desperate. It could be seen that the PPP had grown as the one hope of Guyana, drawing huge crowds in all areas. PNC meetings were flops, not only in PPP strongholds, but also in PNC strongholds, like the urban areas. Every method was used to wreck the PPP — stones and bottles were thrown at speakers, meetings were systematically broken up; PPP speakers were prevented from travelling. Dr. Jagan's flight to Rupununi was called off to prevent his going there. Mr. Ramkarran's flight to Bartica was cancelled when Mr. Burnham decided to go there at the same time. Then began the arrests of PPP candidates and activists, moving up to more than 130 before July 16th.

The 42 Enmore activists were kept in prison without bail for three weeks, then released and all charges dropped. What an offence against the system of justice! It has become a mockery. They were kept in prison to hold up the PPP's election work.

As election day grew closer, it was apparent where the "swing" was. The PNC could not win. This was known so widely that well known PNC stooges began hanging around the PPP, hoping to be close to the winning side. The

PPP said publicly that with all the rigging, with the PNC taking all the postal, proxy and overseas votes — with the lists padded with fictitious names, with all the tricks in the game that the PNC had concocted the PPP could win once the ballot boxes were not interfered with:

And it was for this reason that the PPP leadership advised the people NOT to allow ballot boxes to be removed without a polling agent accompanying the boxes, to see that they were not tampered with.

The PPP along with the other opposition parties had been holding meetings with the Elections Commission, demanding that the security of the ballot box be ensured and that the Elections Commission use its powers under the Constitution to guarantee this.

### SECURITY OF THE BALLOT BOXES

The Opposition Parties put up two major demands — that there be adequate sealing of the boxes to the approval of the parties and that polling agents from the parties be allowed to accompany the ballot boxes from place of poll to place of count. This then became the major issue.

The Elections Commission, refusing to issue any instructions, instead went to the Minister of Home Affairs, himself a candidate in the elections, to present these demands. Of course he refused, the excuse been given that there would not be space in the vehicles.

The three opposition parties then came to an agreement that one polling agent, to accompany the ballot boxes representing the three parties, would be satisfactory.

Finally, a few days before elections, the Chief Election Officer met with the PPP Election Agent and agreement was reached on two major points — that one polling agent, representative of the three parties, would accompany ballot boxes from place of poll to the District Office and there the Counting Agent and the Candidate of each party would accompany the ballot boxes to the Counting Place. And agreement was made on the method of seals which would include tapes around the boxes and sealed at various points.

Then the bobbing and weaving began. The Chief Elec-

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tions Officer later denied that he made this agreement. Then he later agreed. On the morning of Election Day, in discussions with Dr. Jagan, in the presence of the Minister of Home Affairs, Barrister-at-law Doodnauth Singh and others, the Chief Elections Officer said that he had already issued instructions to his Returning Officers that one polling agent from each party would be allowed to accompany the ballot boxes. Dr. Jagan asked him to make this more clear by radio and press announcements. Mr. Butler said he would consider this.

It is at this point we can see really what was happening and at what point the PNC became so desperate. While negotiations were going on about the security of the ballot box, it had been understood that counting would take place as in 1968, in the three counties of Guyana.

### IMPOUNDING OF BALLOT BOXES BY ARMY

Suddenly, on the 14th of July, in an Official Gazette, which as usual was not properly circulated, came the announcement that all counting would take place in Georgetown in three places—Queen's College, North Georgetown Secondary School and the Government Technical Institute—all in Thomas Land. We now know why — so that the ballot boxes could be impounded at army Headquarters.

On July 16, we could see the visible evidence of what the PPP had anticipated. In Georgetown, the polls were empty, all during the day, very few voters could be seen. In the rural areas, long lines of people could be seen waiting to cast their votes.

Anger started rising as persons on presenting themselves to vote were told they had already voted. Already, by 8:30 a.m., imposters had cast votes, preventing legitimate voters from voting and during the day the over 20,000 postal vote forgeries came to light as thousands sought to vote and were denied their right. There was no redress.

The situation was desperate for the PNC. How, with such a poor showing in the city, could they produce a victory from the countryside? By 4 p.m. the Chief Elections Officer, instead of making arrangements for the security of the ballot box, made arrangements for untold numbers, whose names were not on the voters lists, to go and vote.

In some stations where there were barely any votes cast during the day, from 4 p.m. and on past 6 p.m., in some cases up to 8.15 p.m.: NEW VOTERS came in to vote. But who were the new voters? They were young people, under 21 years, as well as people who had already voted and others grabbed up at the last minute to impersonate because the real city voters refused to turn out — even after loud speakers were sent through the city exhorting them to come out — a violation of the elections regulations, but of course, no one was charged.

But new developments started to take place. As 6 p.m. and as closing time at the polls set in, all over Guyana, opposition party polling agents were thrust out of the polling stations, many at gun point. Ballot boxes were not even sealed in some areas and in most, polling agents could neither witness nor participate in the sealing. Massive army and police manoeuvres began and ballot boxes were spirited away.

Incidents took place when the people, fully conscious of what was taking place, aware that if the ballots were counted as they were put in the boxes, the PPP would win, tried to make sure that polling agents accompanied the boxes.

Two young men were shot dead at No. 64 Village when the Polling Agent insisted on going into the jeep with the ballot boxes. But the orders from the top were that no one could follow the boxes, not even vehicles at a distance.

The reason for this about-face is clear. If the ballot boxes were watched, they could not be tampered with. If they could not be tampered with, the PNC could not win the elections.

#### PNC VOTE DROPPED IN CITY

One former PNC member said that the PNC would have trouble managing the rigging because of its incompetence. These wise words were quite true. The PNC had difficulties. They cordoned off the whole of Thomas Lands and carried in most of the ballot boxes to the Guyana Defence Force Compound. But they took too long to do the

dirty job. The boxes could not move out of the GDF area because of gross confusion. The first district count did not come out until some ten hours after polling closed. The Work-en-Rust results did not come out until the small hours of Tuesday morning and it revealed that the turnout of voters had dropped considerably and that, in fact, the PNC vote had dropped. From then on it was one postponement after another. Some ballot boxes, like that of Houston, (the furthest point only 7 miles from the city,) did not show up for 26 hours; yet 8 of its boxes found their way to the Counting Place on Monday evening; the other 18 took 25 hours to reach.

The results of the ballot box tampering were fantastic and beyond all reason. As the CATHOLIC STANDARD said they put "a severe strain on one's credibility. No one seriously believes it." The count remained low in the Greater Georgetown area. In the 8 districts of Greater Georgetown the PNC vote went down in four districts and the turn-out of voters was the lowest, as a whole, in Guyana. Yet in Rupununi, Northwest District and Mazaruni-Potaro, the voting turnout was above 90 per cent — In the Northwest 93.4 per cent and in the Mazaruni-Potaro — 98.6 per cent. How ridiculous! In Georgetown a voter has to walk not more than three blocks — in the interior, he may have to travel anywhere between 10 to 100 miles to a voting station.

The PNC gives as its excuse for the low turn-out in the city as 'over confidence'. What rubbish! And for its low turn-out at its so-called victory meeting, its excuse is that its supporters were tired!

What is significant is that in most polling stations in the remote areas, polling agents from the three opposition parties were prevented from entering polling stations. There was no possibility of checks. However, at two Bartica stations, the Bartica Community Centre and the Bartica Secondary School, which were checked, the percentage turn-out was low—only 70 per cent. But the official figure of turn-out for the district was 98.6 per cent. Who would believe that in Bartica where voting was easy only

70 per cent turned out, but in other areas where distances are difficult, over 98 per cent turned out?

... When the counting was taking place, the number of cases of missing keys for ballot box padlocks is now legend. The number of boxes that had to be forced open because the bunglers either lost the keys or misplaced them is public knowledge. Those who tampered with the boxes in the GDF Compound made such a mess, that their 'monkey business' became public property. In the Northwest District, the counting revealed 21 wads of ballot papers which fell out of four boxes which had to be smashed open. The ballots were tied together by rubber bands or paper clips!

When the Mazaruni-Potaro district was counted there were numerous ballots folded once, not twice, and which contained, folded inside, other ballots. There were many cases of the number of ballots cast not tallying with the number of ballots counted—a natural outcome of the haste involved in the tampering of so many ballot boxes. elber

### BAREFACED THEFT OF BALLOTS

... The so-called "breakthrough" by the PNC was nothing more than the wholesale theft of the people's votes, an act so monstrous that it has brought an end to the whole parliamentary process at this stage. The masses of Guyanese are so thoroughly fed up with the barefaced acts of using the army to take over the ballot boxes that a wave of anger never before seen in Guyana is sweeping the land. And this anger is not limited to the supporters of the PPP—it is widely based and is growing.

The 1973 elections will go down in our history books as the biggest crime against the people, the last straw which brought about a new stage in the struggle of all the people of Guyana against tyranny, against corrupt and oppressive government.

It may, in the long run, be a useful development, that the PNC overstepped itself in its greed to hold power. If it had not been so barefaced, so public, so dirty; it would not have aroused the anger and opposition that will bring about its own demise.