

been a consistent champion of the cause of the Arab states for retrieving their stolen lands and for a just settlement for the Palestinian Arabs. We condemn Israeli aggression, but also recognise the right of Israel to exist as a state with clearly defined and guaranteed borders. This is in the interest of the Arab and Israeli peoples.

We also extend our heartfelt solidarity to the heroic Communists of Israel who in very difficult conditions of jingoistic fever whipped up by the ruling circles are working to bring about a realistic solution. We observed the extent to which the reactionaries go to silence the voice of reason when only recently another attack was made on the General Secretary of the Communist Party — Meir Vilner — in the Israeli parliament. He was physically assaulted and prevented from finishing his speech. But in time the people will also see that the Communists of Israel represented their true interests.

CONTRIBUTORS

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The Phoney Two-thirds Majority of the July 16th Election

Janet Jagan

In the face of worsening conditions in Guyana, general elections were held on July 16. To maintain itself in power, the People's National Congress (PNC) resorted to extensive electoral fraud:

The muted tone of official reports could not hide the perilous economic situation. The summary of the 1972 Report of the Bank of Guyana speaks of the "disappointing performance of the export industries" with sugar declining by 15 per cent, rice by 20 per cent and bauxite-alumina by 15 per cent. "Real growth of production in 1972" stated the Report, "was evidently well below the average (4 per cent) of the past five years."

According to the Report, Guyana's total public debt was \$639,433,000 in 1973 as compared with \$128,692,000 in 1963. And at the end of 1973 government's total indebtedness to the banking system — both short and long term — amounted to \$82.5 million. The burden of debt payment for 1973 was \$35 million, equivalent to 21 per cent of current budget expenditure.

Growing disenchantment by former PNC supporters and rising resentment by the rest of the population were accelerated because of the startling rise in unemployment, now estimated to be 30 to 35 per cent, the lack of unemployment insurance or aid, the rising cost of living and the decline in the economic position of the small farmers brought on by government's neglect and victimisation because of their support for the People's Progressive Party (PPP).

Difficult living conditions for the working class and the small farmers only partly contributed to the rising tide of opposition to the PNC.

There were also widespread political and racial discrimination, and erosion of civil liberties, including denial of

passports, police harassment and searches without warrants and restrictions on press freedom.

GREATEST ALARM

What, however, caused the greatest alarm was the PNC's pre-election declaration that it would secure a two-thirds majority of the seats. A strong current of fear of further abuse of power gripped the population, including PNC supporters.

This was revealed in house to house canvassing in Georgetown, always the citadel of PNC strength; large numbers of voters declared that they did not intend to vote. Consequently, on voting day, the 8 electoral districts in Georgetown showed the lowest turnout of voters, about 20 per cent lower than in the countryside.

To justify its two-thirds "victory", the PNC had embarked on an extensive pre-election propaganda campaign, the main line being that the PPP had lost support, had become defunct.

Actually, the PPP was never as strong as it was at the 1973 elections. It had won three consecutive elections, in 1953, 1957 and 1961. An Anglo-American imperialist-imposed change of the electoral system to proportional representation in 1964 led to its ouster from the government although the PPP secured 46 per cent of the votes, the PNC 40 per cent and the extreme right wing party, the United Force (UF) 12 per cent (the PNC and the UF formed a coalition government from 1964 to 1968).

In 1968, the PNC rigged the elections to gain a phoney 56 per cent of the votes. But the rigging of 1968 (which was documented by Grenada Television that year) was child's play compared with the electoral fraud in 1973.

(OLD AND NEW METHODS)

The PNC rigged the 1973 elections by the use of padded overseas lists, of dead, underage and non-existent voters for the Guyana electoral lists, and by the proxy vote. It again resorted to partisan officials in complete charge of the registration and election machinery.

The PNC also planned to change the constitution to allow youths from 18 years to 20 to vote in order to give it a wider scope for rigging. However, the PPP, although supporting in principle the vote for 18 year olds, used its parliamentary vote to prevent the passage of the bill, during the initial national registration period, it was observed that there were gross irregularities in the registration of youths — heavy registration in PNC areas of strength and low registration in PPP areas.

The PNC, thus blocked, then began to use the Postal Vote illegally — forging some 20,000 postal vote applications. Some of the postal votes were used to cast votes for dead and non-existent voters. Most of these were used to defraud legitimate voters, who were denied their right to cast their votes on election day because of the massive forgeries.

(SECURITY OF BALLOT BOXES)

But even these methods of electoral rigging were mild in comparison with what came later — tampering with the ballot boxes. Fearing this, the PPP and the other two opposition parties, the Liberator Party and the People's Democratic Movement (led by a former Minister of Home Affairs in the PNC government), while fighting against all the forms of electoral fraud, concentrated on the security of the ballot boxes.

As polling day approached, all attention was focused on the ballot boxes.

The three parties addressed the Elections Commission and proposed that arrangements be made to permit the polling agents of the opposition parties to travel in the same vehicle with the ballot boxes and, at all times, before the final count, to be able to keep the boxes in full view. They also sought a method of sealing the boxes so that they could not be tampered with.

The Elections Commission, which under the Constitution "shall exercise general direction and supervision over the registration of electors and the administrative conduct of the elections" referred these proposals to the Minister of Home Affairs, a PNC candidate in the elections, who said

that it was impossible, for reasons of space, to allow polling agents of political parties to accompany the ballot boxes.

The three parties then proposed that one polling agent representing them should be chosen to accompany each ballot box. They stated: "we feel that the Commission would agree to this proposal to ensure the secrecy of the ballot since its implementation is in no way contrary to any existing law or regulation." The Commission never replied.

THE ARMY TAKES OVER

But when voting closed at 6 p.m. on July 16, many of the polling agents were thrust out of the polling stations at gun point, many were not allowed to witness the sealing of the ballot boxes, and in all cases except in Georgetown, agents of the opposition parties were not allowed to accompany the ballot boxes to the counting centres.

The ballot boxes were carried by the army and/or police to the Guyana Defence Force Headquarters in Thomas Lands and there kept for long periods.

THE PATTERN FOR FRAUD

At Vreed-en-Hoop District ballot boxes crossed the Demerara River at 10 p.m. July 16, arriving in Georgetown some 10 minutes later. The boxes did not arrive at the Counting Centre until 2½ hours later! The key for Box 312 could not be found; the box had to be broken open. The boxes for Corentyne East did not arrive until 5.30 p.m. Tuesday, 23½ hours after the close of poll. The key for the box for Division 9(11) could not be found, and the returning officer ruled that it had to be broken open. The lock for the ballot box for Division 6 arrived unsealed.

The ballot boxes from the Northwest District, which came by air plane, arrived 47 hours after the close of poll. Six ballot box keys were missing and when these boxes were broken open, twenty-one wads of ballot papers, some wrapped with rubber bands and others clipped with paper clips were also seen. Two counting agents objected strongly drawing the Returning Officer's attention to this unusual occurrence. The PPP counting agent was told that if he did not shut up the police would put him out! This was how the PNC

gave itself a 550 per cent increase over its 1968 votes in that district.

At the Canais Polder Electoral District, where the PPP had won consistently from 1953 to 1968, its votes went down four times and those of the PNC doubled. The PPP polling agent for Division No. 10 objected, during polling, that the ballot papers were being officially stamped on the inside instead of the outside. He was so concerned, fearing that the ballots would be declared invalid, that he wrote on a piece of paper that the ballots were being stamped on the inside and he recorded the names of voters inside the station as well as the police constable who was on duty. He obtained the signatures of the polling agents for all the parties including the PNC, that this event had in fact taken place.

When the counting took place much later, the PPP counting agent, equipped with the document, watched out for the particular box, No. 300. When it was counted, all 511 ballots were stamped on the outside and every single ballot was marked for the PNC! That was the PNC "breakthrough" of the ballot boxes, as the public later termed the PNC's slogan of "breakthrough" into the PPP areas of strength.

The pattern was the same throughout. Ballot boxes, on arrival at the Counting Centres were found to be inadequately sealed, or not at all; keys were missing or mixed-up; there were numerous cases where the number of votes counted did not tally with the number cast. There were countless irregularities and little doubt that the boxes were tampered with.

(OVERWHELMING EVIDENCE OF TAMPERING)

The statement by Derek Jagan, a PPP candidate, illustrates clearly that the ballot boxes were interfered with during the 15 hours they were in the G.D.F. Headquarters. The keys for the padlocks on two ballot boxes apparently got mixed up. This could never have happened unless the keys were taken out of their sealed envelopes and used to open the ballot boxes, and then placed in the wrong envelopes afterwards.

Division 1 was a polling booth in the Enterprise Gov-

ernment School in the East Wing of the upper floor, while Division No. 2 was a polling station at the Enterprise Government School in the West Wing of the lower floor. It would be impossible for the keys to get mixed because the two polling stations were in entirely different sections of the school and each ballot box and all keys and documents relating to that box were marked and sealed separately and by different persons.

Derek Jagan's statement explains the key mix-up as well as two other election swindles — the breaching of the postal vote law and the "new voters" whose votes exceeded the lists of registered voters in a number of polling divisions:

"There were 20 polling divisions for District No. 13, Demerara Coast, East. The ballot boxes were collected and taken to the GDF Headquarters at about 10.30 p.m. on the 16th July, 1973. The counting place was at the Technical Institute. The Returning Officer who was in charge of the counting, with his assistants, were waiting at the Technical Institute until about 5.00 a.m. on July 17 to count the votes but the ballot boxes did not arrive. He told me he was tired of waiting and left with his assistants. The ballot boxes arrived at the counting place at about 1.30 p.m. on July 17, 1973.

The keys for ballot boxes Nos. 347 and 366 for Division Nos. 1 and 2 could not open the padlocks on the ballot boxes which were tried on several occasions at about 2.30 p.m. on 17.7.73. After most of the boxes were opened, about 5.30 p.m. the Returning Officer told me he was going to the urinal and left the room. On his return the counting agent for the PNC requested the Returning Officer to try again to open the two boxes. The LP candidate Mr. Eleazer and I objected to this course. The Returning Officer said he will again try the keys. With two keys he opened the two boxes on the very first try.

In 5 divisions the number of the ballots in the boxes did not correspond with the figures stated on the returns by the Presiding Officers as the number of ballots that should have been in the ballot boxes.

In one ballot box the label covering the slot was not in

place and the slot through which the ballots were placed in the ballot box was exposed.

The label covering the slot on one ballot box was not the official label that was required to seal the slot but an ordinary piece of paper which was not secured with the seal of the PPP polling agent or of the presiding officer.

The envelope with the key to open ballot box No. 532 for Division No. 16 could not be found. The Returning Officer broke the ballot box in order to count the ballots. The number of ballots in the box were not the same as should have been there as recorded by the Presiding Officer.

The padlocks on a majority of the ballot boxes were not sealed with the seal of the presiding officers or polling agent or at all and the padlocks could easily have been opened.

A majority of the envelopes containing the keys to open the padlocks of the ballot boxes were not sealed with the seals of the presiding officer or the polling agents or at all and the envelopes could easily have been opened and the keys taken out to open the ballot boxes.

The box containing the postal ballots was not sealed with the seal of the Chief Election Officer or any other person. The box contained more envelopes with ballots than should have been therein. Five of the envelopes contained not only the ballots as required by law but also the declaration of identity which was not signed by anyone. It means therefore that postal ballots were marked by persons claiming to be the voters who were not identified.

The law dealing with postal voting requires the Chief Election Officer or his assistants to ensure that the declaration of identity which is not to be enclosed in the same envelope with the ballot is signed before a postal ballot is cast. It means therefore from what took place in District No. 13 that the law dealing with postal voting was not observed in the sending out and the casting of postal ballots. There was obvious fraud in connection with the postal voting.

Many other irregularities were discovered during the counting of the votes.