

BEWARE

My

Brother

FORBES

by JESSIE BURNHAM



BEWARE My Brother FORBES

By JESSIE BURNHAM

I remember vividly one Sunday while Forbes and I were studying and the rest of the family either resting or relaxing; a religious programme "BRINGING CHRIST TO THE NATION" was on the radio. The preacher was so enthusiastic that he shouted himself almost breathless. It was indeed disturbing to anyone studying. Forbes told me to switch off the radio.

I complied.

Mother a few minutes later queried about the sudden halt in the programme. Forbes replied quickly, "Jessie turned off the radio." Forthwith, I had to defend myself and state my case. The same attitude is still there. "I plan, others implement."

Mother was a religious woman with strict ideas on morals and proper conduct. She used to speak often about the importance of honesty and the worth of good character.

Often, especially as he grew older, I would catch mother watching Forbes with a worried eye. I knew she was concerned about him, about an apparent change generally. When he left for studies in England, her fears about the kind of man he was becoming deepened.

I couldn't see it at the time. Forbes and I were very close. As brother and sister, we shared many, many good times and confidences. I was not old enough to understand or appreciate what was happening in his life and character.

But I know now.

I have watched this brilliant brother use his brain to scheme, to plot to put friend against friend, neighbour against neighbour, and relative against relative. I have watched him use this one and that one, and then quickly discard them when they have served their purpose. *I have watched him, with his clever wit and charm, manipulate people like puppets on a string.*

All this I have seen. But up to now, I must repeat, I **HAVE BEEN SILENT**. After all, I told myself, he is my brother.

But I can be silent no longer.

For today, I fear for my country and my people should my BROTHER become PREMIER or PRIME MINISTER. It is from this fear, this concern, that I speak.

BEWARE, I say, "MY BROTHER, FORBES." His motto is, the personal ends of power justify ANY means used to achieve them. His bible is *The Prince* by Machiavelli. And we the people should he come to power will be only pawns in his endless game of self-advancement.

Make no mistake about it, the attraction of political life for Forbes is the attainment of the power and the glory. The number of times he has ignored the offer of a coalition supports this. And I know from personal experience what I am talking about.

It was not always so.

Forbes and I grew up in the family home at 4, Pike Street, Kitty. Our father was head-teacher at the Kitty Methodist School for 37 years as well as a member of the Village Council and lay reader in the Methodist Church for about 51 years.



Myself, Mother and Forbes

"I have watched him with his clever wit and charm, manipulate people like puppets on a string"

Our home life centered around my mother, whom Forbes adored. It was frequently said, by old family friends, that Forbes began to change when mother passed away. But as I look back now, the signs of his selfishness and boastfulness now so familiar a part of his personality, were evident long before.

He was small for his age. His schoolmates at Central High School were so jealous of his ability, that they took to giving him daily whippings. Mother became concerned about his health and he changed to Queen's College.

I vividly remember one Sunday afternoon, when Forbes was shaving my father, I heard them both talking about what he would be when he grew up. He told daddy he had six goals:—

1. To win the Percival Exhibition.
2. To win the Guiana Scholarship.
3. To be Mayor of Georgetown.
4. To be Chief Justice of British Guiana.
5. To be the first Prime Minister of the West Indies Federation.
6. To be Prime Minister of British Guiana.

"Boy, you're mad or what?" asked my father. "Be sensible, start as a magistrate and work up to be Chief Justice."

"Magistrate?" retorted Forbes scornfully, "There're always exceptions and why can't I be one?"

This burning ambition, if channeled properly, could have made him one of our country's greatest Statesmen-leaders. It would have, had he coupled this ambition with a genuine concern for the welfare and needs of people, given him all he sought, in life. But along with ambition he developed a certain slickness, a sly glibness. He began even as a boy, to depend more and more on his skill with words to achieve his goals.

Today, he runs his Party like the way King Christopher once ran Haiti. While terror is no stranger to our country, it has never been used to suppress FREEDOM, the liberty of speech, worship and the press. Would these freedoms continue under my brother? It is my concern in this area . . . personal, individual freedom . . . that causes me to say to my people, to Guyana "BEWARE, MY BROTHER, FORBES. Watch carefully to whom you hand your GOVERNMENT."

By the time he left this country to pursue his legal studies, my father had retired. He had a pension of \$22.00 per month, and so it was necessary, since



Forbes at Queen's

Forbes was going abroad, for me, the youngest, to become the breadwinner.

I became a teacher at the Plaisance Methodist School, and later at the Bedford Methodist School. My salary was \$20.00 a month to start. Eventually, I earned \$120.00 a month, but this was much later. Each month, I would give all my earnings to Mother, keeping out \$10.00 for personal needs.

Every other month, the family would send \$120.00 to Forbes in England. "Help out now," Mother told me, "and when Forbes comes home, he'll make it up to you." It is perhaps, an indication of his basic indifference to others that my brother has never found occasion to "help out" or, for that matter to even express his thanks for the sacrifices all of us made to help him get his start. I don't regret assisting him. I'd do it again. He is, after all, my brother.

He was never very keen on my entering political life. When asked to assist me to come to a decision his answer was in half-anger, "You have to make that decision yourself." But I wanted a part in helping my country receive its independence, so I ignored his opposition.

The Monday week before, the 1953

"His motto is the personal ends of power justify any means used to achieve them"

Elections when my canvassers and I were planning strategy he walked into the sitting room.

"Are you all fooling Jessie?" he asked my associates. You know she can never win the seat."

When I won my seat, he came over and shook my hand in an elaborate mock-gesture of congratulation, when I visited his counting centre at Kitty, he actually kissed me.

The issue of Party leadership came to the fore immediately after the election.

It has always been interesting to me that Forbes, alone among our key PPP leaders did not go to jail following the Suspension of the Constitution. Could it be I've frequently asked myself, that when Governor Savage remarked that "certain Ministers have come to me," he might possibly have had in mind my brother? Could it have been his hope to shatter the Party, bring down the Government in disgrace, and then perhaps, be around to pick up the pieces? It is, one must admit, an intriguing question.

After the formal split in 1955, Forbes began visiting other countries on a fairly regular schedule. What could have been the motive?

Would he, the supposed nationalist, become the victim of his pet phrase "I will not sell my country for a mess of pottage."

Forbes made his formal bid for power at the meeting of the Party's General Council immediately after the 1953 elections. Up to that point, he carefully masked any ambitions to be leader.

Then, to the astonishment of his colleagues, he demanded the post of Legislative Leader as the price for his continued support.

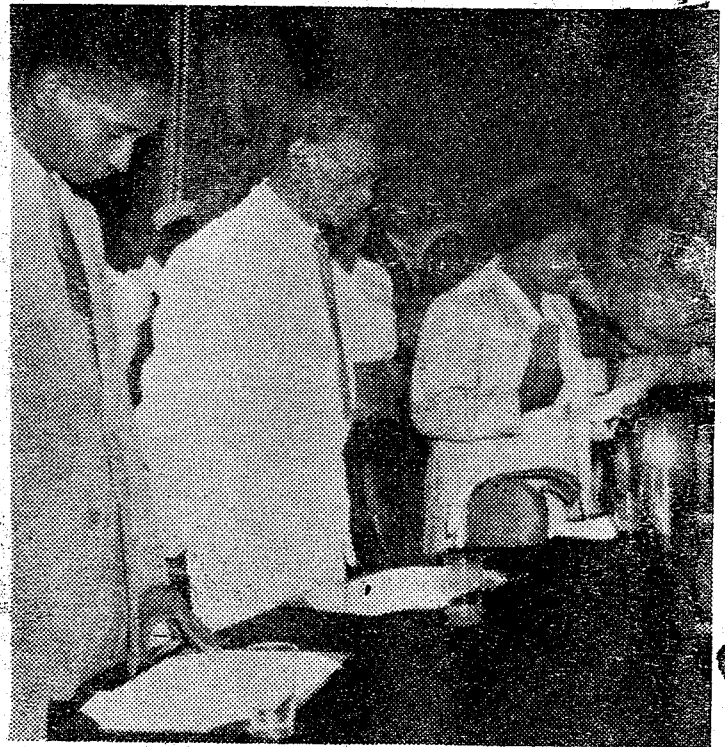
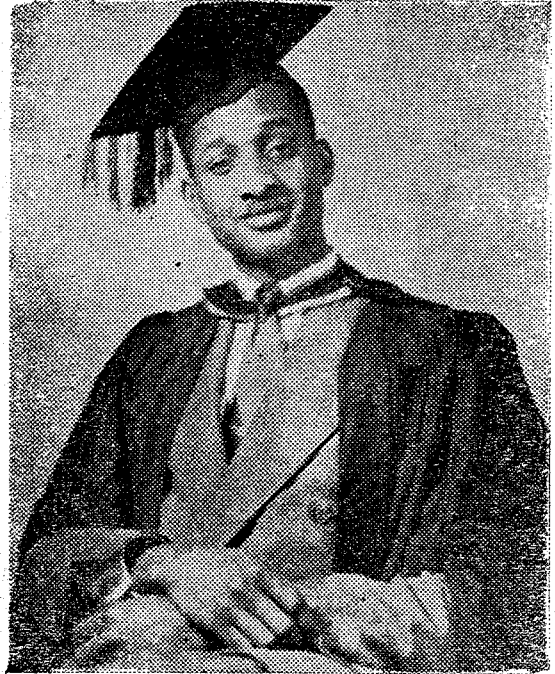
"It's Leader or nothing!" he angrily shouted.

When I heard him, I smiled. It was so typical of my brother. This was indeed the moment of truth: leader or nothing. It was, perhaps then, for the first time, I became fully aware of his "winner take all" attitude, his unending zest for the trappings of power, the frightening egotism of the man.

Eventually, in a move mediated by Ashton Chase, Forbes backed down and accepted the Ministry of Edu-

cation. But things were never again quite the same.

That his love for personal power is so great he will trade anything to achieve it. That nothing is safe no person, no liberty... that stands in his way.



Swearing in Ceremony House of Assembly 1953

"It's leader or nothing!" he angrily shouted

The real motive force behind Mr. Burnham's assault was a desire to assert himself in public life and establish a more important and more rewarding position for himself by bringing Dr. Jagan's downfall. (Wynn Parry's report)

That is why I say, in all sincerity, "BEWARE," MY BROTHER FORBES."

Behind that jest, that charm, that easy oratory is a certain dark strain of cruelty which only surfaces when one of his vital interests is threatened. There are two Burnhams: the charming and the cruel. I say BEWARE of both.

I do not want to see my country become a police state, where a power-hungry man can sacrifice our liberty for his personal gain. Many men are selfish. Many men are cruel. Many men love power. The world can tolerate such men as individuals. But our beloved country cannot tolerate such men as LEADERS.

I have said enough. I end with the hope that it is not too late for me, for my friends, and most of all, for my GUYANA.

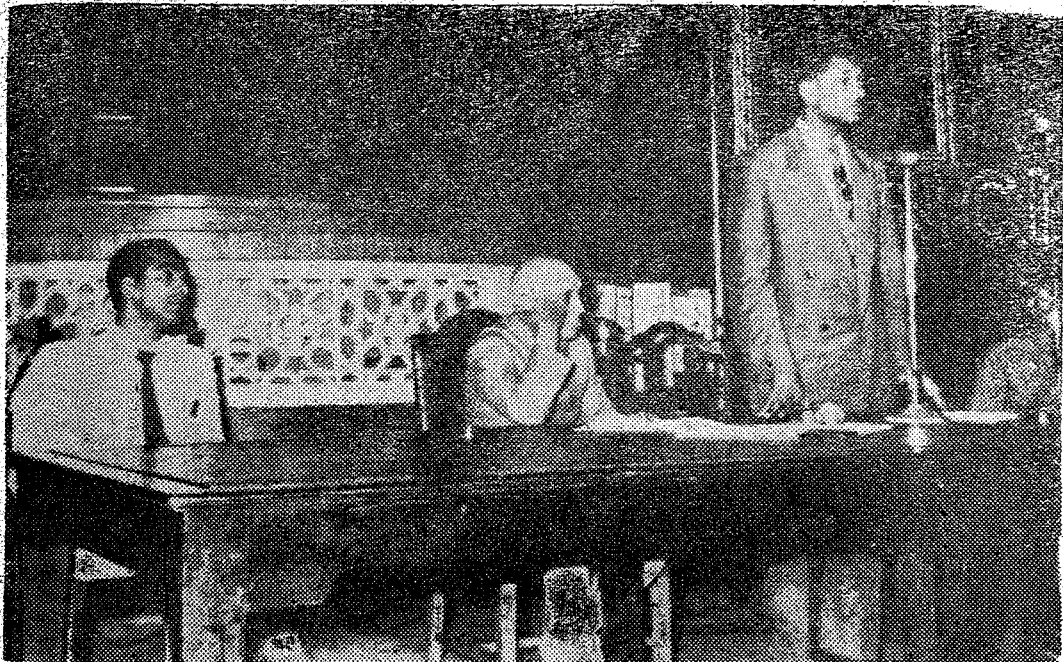
By speaking as I have, I risk much, even, perhaps, life itself. For we live in lawless and dangerous times. But if what I have

said can save our 'world' from chaos, then any risk is worth taking.

On December 7, when you mark your ballot, remember carefully what I have said and "BEWARE."



Forbes and Cheddi after the Suspension of the Constitution explaining for London to present the P.P.P. Case.



Forbes and Cheddi addressed the Indian Parliament under Chairmanship of Prime Minister Nehru — 1954

I read
with some concern in Flora's letter of the attack I was
supposed to have levelled at the B. G. Indians. Now let me have
a copy of the clipping by Air Mail if possible. I fear no one but
I'm not going to antagonise a large section of the community
before I'm ready. If I find that the papers made out that
I attacked the Indians I shall take up the matter with
Moody immediately and let him make a correction or
apology. In the first place my remarks were not meant to
be an attack and secondly they seem to have been published
without my permission. I feel strongly about the Indian
attitude but the time has not come yet for me to broadcast
those feelings and muddy my water. After all my sincerity
and fire are and I hope will continue to be, tempered by
discretion which dictates my strategy and tactics. I met
Maigone and his wife last Friday at a dance at Shuford House.
They were both in the pink and as you know the Jameses

"I read with some concern in Flora's letter of the
attack I was supposed to have levelled at the B.G.
Indians. Now let me have a copy of the clipping by
Air Mail if possible. I fear no one but I am not going
to antagonise a large section of the community before
I am ready. If I find that the papers made out that I
attacked the Indians I shall take up the matter with
Moody immediately and let him make a correction or

apology. In the first place my remarks were not meant
to be an attack and secondly they seem to have been
published without my permission. I feel strongly
about the Indian attitude but the time has not come
yet for me to broadcast those feelings and muddy my
water. After all my sincerity and fire are and I hope
will continue to be tempered with discretion which dic-
tates my strategy and tactics."

