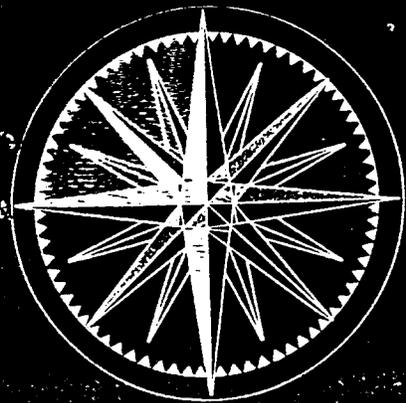


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SPECIAL REPORT

BRITISH GUIANA APPROACHES A CRITICAL ELECTION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

APPROVED FOR RELEASE

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OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

20 November 1964

BRITISH GUIANA APPROACHES A CRITICAL ELECTION

New trends with disturbing portents mark the campaign for the 7 December elections in strife-torn British Guiana.

1.5(d)
3.4(b)(6)

The election presently promises to produce an unstable, multiparty coalition government led by Forbes Burnham's People's National Congress (PNC). Prime Minister Cheddi Jagan's ruling People's Progressive Party (PPP), anticipating this, is laying the groundwork to be a troublesome opposition. The balance of evidence suggests the PPP will try by violence and other obstructionism to make it impossible for any successor government either to rule constructively or to repair the economic ravages of seven years of PPP misrule.

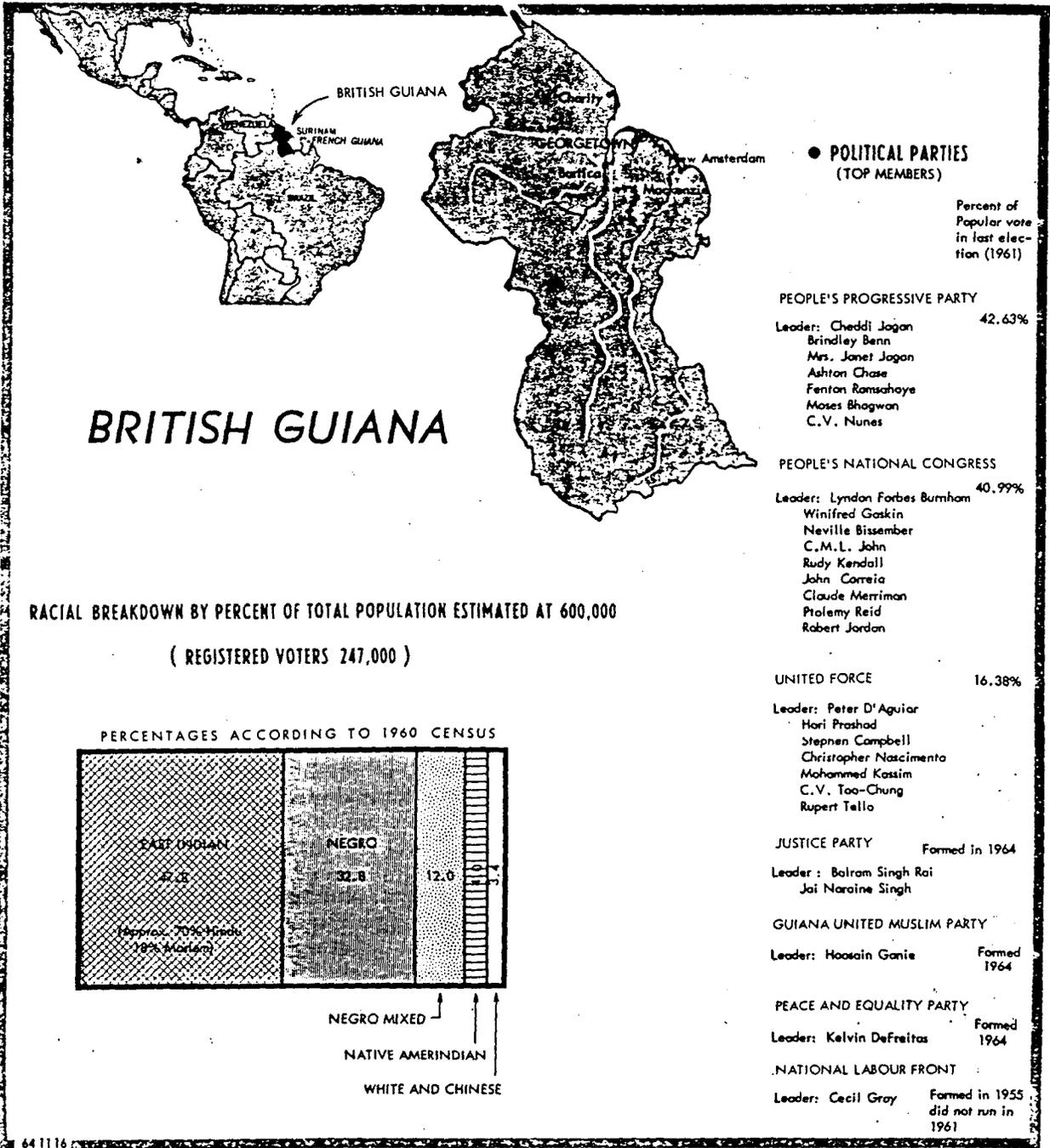
1.5(d)
3.4(b)(6)

The Election Campaign

There are seven parties currently contesting next month's elections--Jagan's PPP and six opposition groups. Heading the opposition are two old-line political parties, the Negro-oriented PNC, led by Burnham, and the Conservative, multi-racial United Force (UF) under Peter D'Aguiar. Of the other four (see page two) three sprang into existence only this year to take advantage of an electoral system that favors small parties and to exploit discontent with the PPP. The most important is the East Indian Justice Party led by Balram Singh Rai.

All parties are campaigning throughout the colony, since the 53 seats in the unicameral legislature will be divided according to each party's share of the total popular vote. Previous elections under the single-member constituency system copied from Britain gave the well-organized PPP the advantage and enabled it to sweep the last three elections. In the last one, held in 1961, the PPP won an absolute parliamentary majority with 20 of 35 seats, although it polled only 42.63 percent of the popular vote.

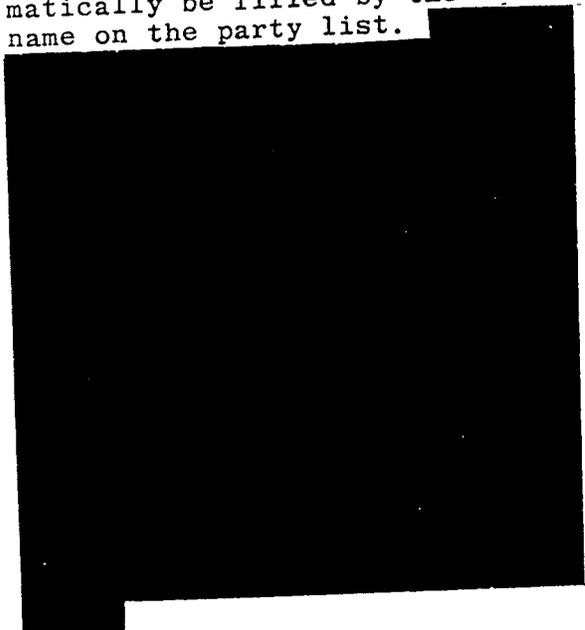
In this year's election, some 220,000 of the 247,000



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registered voters are expected to go to the polls. The British have made extensive preparations including the stationing of additional troops both in the colony and in nearby territories, to ensure fair and orderly balloting.

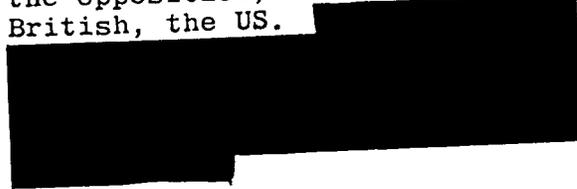
Under the new system only about 4,000 votes are needed to capture a seat, hence the proliferation of small parties. The voting will be for party lists rather than individual candidates. In addition, there will be no by-elections in the future as vacancies will automatically be filled by the next name on the party list.



In British Guiana, voters have always tended to vote according to their race, and next month's election will be no exception. The principal issues this time, however, will be the questions of economic stagna-

tion and the PPP's increasingly pro-Communist coloration under Jagan's rule. Both the PNC and the UF are making their big pitch on promises of economic improvement, more competent government, and heavy reliance on Western assistance. Rai is also telling East Indians that Jagan is a certain loser and that the only way East Indians can have influence in the new government is to support his Justice Party.

The PPP has concentrated on blaming most of the country's difficulties on somebody else-- the opposition, the unions, the British, the US.



1.5(d)
3.4(b)(6)

Problems of the PPP

The PPP's almost panicky campaign tactics reflect deep internal political and racial splits. As a result of these difficulties, one PPP legislator defected early this year and only severe arm-twisting prevented two more from following suit.

1.5(d)
3.4(b)(6)

Another internal problem for the PPP stems from discontent of Negroes at the leadership level. Although the bulk of PPP support has always been from rural East Indians, Negroes have been judiciously placed in prominent positions, including assignment to cabinet jobs.



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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

1.5(d)
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A measure of Jagan's desperation is a statement he made last month in which he asserted, for the first time in public, that the PPP is not a Communist party.

The PNC Program

The People's National Congress is entertaining high hopes of emerging as the big winner in the forthcoming election.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The PNC's main appeal, as always, is to the Negro population, whose loyalty it is expected to hold.

1.5(d)
3.4(b)(6)

[REDACTED]

Despite its problems, the PPP's situation may be restored somewhat by the recent release of some of the best organizers who were taken into custody last summer for fomenting racial violence.

All this is not calculated to promote governmental stability or end the racial strife that has periodically erupted with mounting ferocity since 1962.

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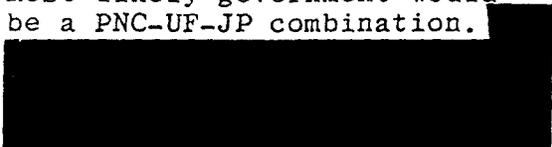
The PNC is making a major effort to get a massive turnout of its supporters on election

day. The inducement is the promise of better living standards to be wrought through a variety of reforms and government programs. These include proposals to strengthen the role of local government, boost farm cooperatives, modernize education, construct more housing, expand road-building operations, and improve rural water supplies. There is also talk of constructing a "new city" in the interior.

The PNC vaguely asserts it will put relationships with foreign firms--principally bauxite and sugar firms--on a "new basis." It is on record as favoring a mixed economy featuring government ownership of public utilities, but keeping the door open to foreign investment in other sectors.

Outlook

Seasoned observers in Georgetown doubt that any party will win a clear majority. They also think the PPP will beat out the PNC for the largest number of seats in parliament. Since the main opposition parties are currently unwilling to form a coalition with the PPP, observers have felt the most likely government would be a PNC-UF-JP combination.



In any case, pulling together such a government is likely to be easier said than done, there is a long rec-

ord of bitter PNC-UF rivalry, and the JP, which may win about five seats, is largely an unknown quantity. Even the selection of cabinet officers in a coalition would be difficult because both the PNC and UF are rent by internal divisions and individual feuds as well as short of competent people.

The most dangerous and intractable problem a Burnham government would have to deal with is that of security. Police morale has been undermined by PPP charges of partiality and the force has lost some public respect because it has resorted to brutal tactics in a few recent cases. A small new multiracial security force--the nucleus of a future army--is being formed under the governor's direction, but it has not yet progressed beyond the stage of basic training.

The PPP has a considerable capability to oppose the government with force and violence. In addition to the militants in its youth organization, it also controls the so-called Guyana Liberation Army, which is cadred with Cuban-trained personnel. If the PPP elects to conduct a campaign of terror, the police may need backstopping from British troops more or less indefinitely.

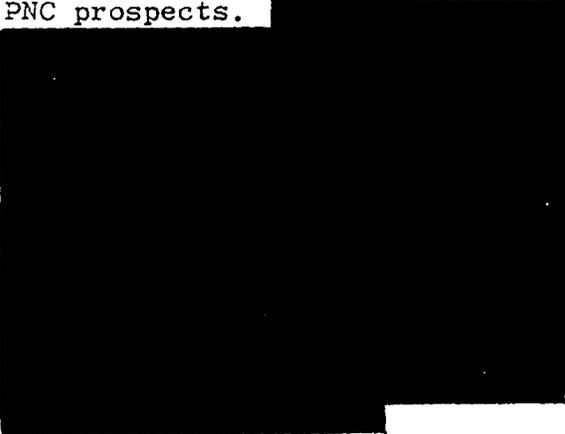


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1.5(d)
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Burnham could also expect labor troubles in the vital bauxite and sugar industries. In sugar, a dispute over bonus pay could flare into a showdown situation but probably not until after the election lest it damage PNC prospects.

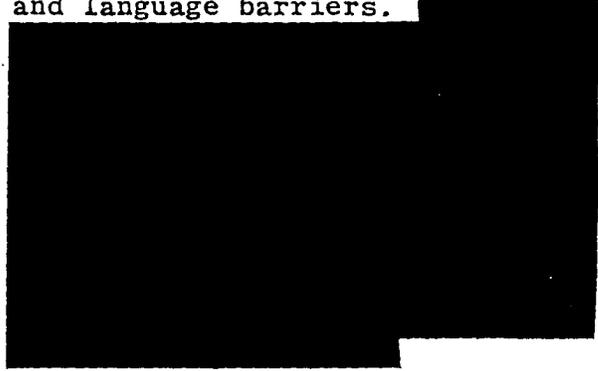


Without substantial foreign aid, a Burnham government would have a hard time convincing many people it is any better than its predecessor. To date, only the US, Britain, Canada, and West Germany have indicated a willingness to lend a helping hand. Burnham, however, probably would have no compunction about going to non-Western sources if not enough assistance were forthcoming from the West. Jagan, moreover is in a position to blackmail the government in this direction. About one third of the colony's rice--its third major export earner--now goes to Cuba

at a good price. If Jagan were to connive with Castro to divert his business elsewhere, an alternative market would be hard to come by.

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3.4(b)(6)

Under Jagan, British Guiana has become progressively more isolated from its normal associates in the British and ex-British Caribbean community and it has never had significant association with Latin America because of geographic, economic, and language barriers.



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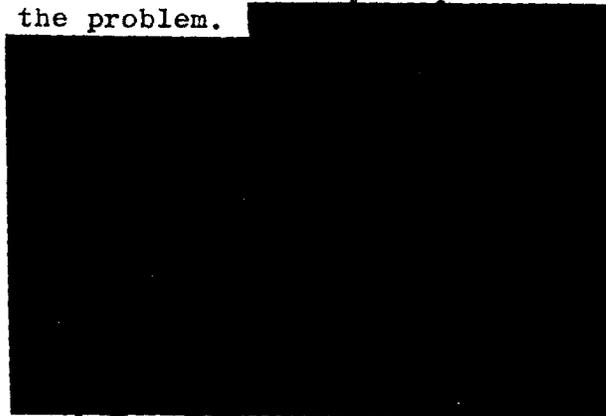
Jagan and the PPP will doubtless strive to make a comeback following any defeat they may suffer next month. They have already begun blaming the US for their expected defeat. They will have ample opportunities to attack the new government as it struggles to organize itself and cope with the country's manifold problems. Present indications are that the PPP will initially confine its opposition to parliamentary harassment and then consider resuming violence if the new government manages to function reasonably well. In this they will be assisted by the fact that they apparently retain or

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have access to substantial quantities of arms.

As the East Indians already comprise nearly half the population and are the fastest growing segment, much will depend on how much Jagan's image is tarnished by defeat. Much will also depend on how satisfactory the new government is in catering to East Indian interests and how attractive rival contenders for East Indian favor prove to be. A PPP return to power by an election in a few years can by no means be ruled out unless the new government is unusually successful in providing peace and prosperity.

In any case, British Guiana will have a difficult time making a place for itself among its natural area associates, and fear of the PPP will only complicate the problem.



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3.4(b)(6)

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