

---

## CHAPTER 3

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Political Parties and their Manifestos**

During the two weeks before the elections, we met and had wide-ranging discussions with, among others, most of the political parties who were contesting the elections. Two of the parties, however, could not be contacted and there was no response to written invitations to meet us. We gained the impression from our discussions with party leaders that in Guyana, no less than elsewhere in the Commonwealth generally, politics was conducted in a lively and competitive atmosphere even though the ruling political party had held the reins of government for more than two decades.

We were aware that the run-up to the 1992 elections had generated intense political passions which were immediately apparent on our arrival in Georgetown. Although we were unable to observe the nominations – which took the form of submission by political parties of their respective lists of candidates to the Chief Election Officer – we ascertained that 11 political parties had filed their lists and that the process of approval of these lists by the Elections Commission was entirely uncontroversial. Ample evidence of the vigour of political activity was not far to seek, with 11 political parties seeking the endorsement of an electorate of fewer than 400,000 voters. While there appeared to be widespread concern among some opposition parties over whether the election would be free and fair, it seemed at the same time that the two dominant political parties, the People's National Congress (PNC) and the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/Civic), were striving to maintain their traditional support bases.

In the week of our arrival in Georgetown, the political parties were either officially launching their manifestos or explaining their implications at public meetings in areas of the country considered strategically important. From our discussions with the leaders of the opposition parties it was clear that despite some lingering concerns, they believed that for the first time there was a possibility that the elections would be genuinely free and fair. More important, they were prepared to give the process a chance – a prospect not thought possible by many when the normal life of the last Parliament was ending in 1991.

Not surprisingly, all the parties we spoke to were supremely confident of doing well in the elections, a confidence encouraged, we believe, by the nature

of the system of proportional representation for determining the composition of parliament and the party that would form the government. With the whole country forming a single constituency, votes are cast throughout the country in favour of any one of the lists of candidates. Each elector has two votes, one vote on the General List and one vote on the Regional List, and seats in Parliament are allocated between the lists in proportion to the number of votes cast in favour of each list.

Because of the small size of the electorate and the changing political climate which some believed increased the prospects of no one party securing a clear majority at the elections, an attempt was made to form a broadly based coalition by a group of six opposition parties, including the PPP. However, the group collectively called the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy foundered even before the elections initially called for 16 December 1991 and then postponed because of a badly flawed voters' list. By nomination day in September 1992, however, dormant political parties were being revived and at least one new party was formed to contest the elections.

An assessment of the electoral prospects of each of the eleven political parties does not form part of our terms of reference and it would suffice to merely sketch the package of measures each party offered in its manifesto.

- **The Democratic Labour Movement (DLM):** *Leader: Paul Tennassee (Party symbol – an open palm implanted with a red star in the middle).* The party manifesto first issued in 1991 in anticipation of the postponed 16 December 1991 elections, was re-issued in 1992 without any changes. Claiming to represent a new hope, new vision and new blood for a new Guyana, the DLM billed its manifesto as an alternative to dictatorship and under-development. It projected as the basic and guiding principles of the party the philosophy that “those who have more should pay more, those who have less should pay less and that for those who do not have, a hand of solidarity should be outstretched”. Among its commitments, if elected to power, it would initiate constitutional reform, promote and respect an independent judiciary and the rule of law, and initiate an urgent plan for enhanced economic development along capitalist lines but with social justice. It would accept responsibility to contribute to the building of a new world order based on respect for human rights, the right to self-determination, solidarity, freedom and justice.
  
- **The National Democratic Front (NDF):** *Leader: Joseph Bacchus (Party symbol – a factory).* All our endeavours to secure a copy of the party's manifesto failed. We were also unable to meet the party leadership for any discussions.
  
- **The National Republican Party (NRP):** *Leader: Robert Gangadeen (Party symbol – the elephant).* The campaigning slogan of the party was ‘together we move, forever we achieve’. The party's manifesto highlighted the preservation of freedom and personal liberty; the reduction of presidential powers

and immunities; the rehabilitation and restructuring of the industrial and other infrastructures and the introduction of an open door immigration policy based on the belief that in a revived and booming economy, Guyana would be faced with an inadequate work force.

- **The People's Democratic Movement (PDM):** *Leader: Llewellyn John (Party symbol – the spoon).* Formed in 1973, the party said in its manifesto that it came into existence with a crusading mission to achieve electoral purity. The party did not seem to have any rallying cry of its own but was content to join in what it considered to be the general public mood of wanting a change of political direction. Like its opponents in the battle for votes, it planned a review of the Constitution and of a wide range of other matters including the economy which it said had crumbled or was in decay. The party was also committed to giving meaning to the fundamental rights and freedoms which it claimed had been eroded.

- **The People's National Congress (PNC):** *Leader: Hugh Desmond Hoyte (Party symbol – the coconut palm tree).* President Hoyte officially launched his party's manifesto at a public meeting on 15 September. The manifesto, issued as a glossy publication, constructed its message on the central theme of development, social harmony and prosperity, devoting a substantial space to the gains achieved through an economic recovery programme based on economic liberalisation and divestment of state enterprises.

In a direct personal appeal to the electorate in a foreword, the manifesto listed the achievements of President Hoyte since assuming leadership of the party and asked the voters not to take risks which might turn the clock back economically and politically. It sought to draw a picture of an environment of peace, tranquillity and racial harmony which the party believed would be put at risk if not returned to power. The manifesto affirmed the commitment of a PNC government under the leadership of President Hoyte to a free, open and democratic society and to the removal of the State from ownership and management of business enterprises while retaining a role in development. A PNC government, the manifesto proclaimed, was also committed to convening, as a matter of priority after the elections, an all-party constitutional review conference. Among its other commitments were the maintenance of the independence of the judiciary and bringing Amerindians into the mainstream of national life.

- **The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/Civic):** *Leader: Dr Cheddi Jagan (Party symbol – the cup).* The PPP decided, after the breakdown of the Patriotic Coalition for Democracy of which it was a leading member, to broaden its appeal by presenting a slate featuring individuals from various walks of life and who were not formal members of the party. It submitted its list of candidates under the PPP/Civic to demonstrate its commitment to bringing together Guyanese of every walk of life, race, political view and religion to work in partnership. The PPP/Civic adopted the campaign

slogan of 'Time for Change and Time to Rebuild'. Like a number of its opponents, it pledged urgent constitutional reform, one element of which would be reduction of the powers of the President. It professed in its manifesto a commitment to democracy and free and fair elections managed by an independent Elections Commission. It also pledged its support for the rule of law and an independent judiciary. Among its other manifesto promises were a commitment to the promotion of sustainable development, a flexible approach to privatisation, infrastructural rehabilitation, financial accountability and the provision of accelerated development for Amerindian communities.

- **The United Force (TUF):** *Leader: Manzoor Nadir (Party symbol – the sun).* The party chose as the theme of its package of promises 'Highways to Happiness' which it categorised as a Mark II version, having used the same theme in all the previous elections it had contested. In developing the theme, the manifesto emphasised the party's belief in people as the *raison d'être* of government. Accordingly, it included among its priority concerns, issues affecting women, youth and culture. Like its opponents, it was committed to constitutional and electoral reform as well as guaranteeing to the indigent Amerindians control over their own affairs.
  
- **The Union of Guyanese International (UGI):** *Leader: Lindley Evan GeBorde (Party symbol – the Harpy Eagle).* Both the leader and his party made their entrance into the Guyana political scene with the slogan 'the Eagle has Landed'. Dr GeBorde billed himself as the most outstanding candidate ever in Guyana's history and the best qualified man for the job of President. Among the objectives of his party were the achievement of democracy; racial harmony; respect for the rule of law and an independent judiciary; and an accountable, responsive, honest, and fair government.
  
- **The United Republican Party (URP):** *Leader: Dr Leslie Ramsamy (Party symbol – the cow).* The URP launched its manifesto, prepared by its supporters in the United States, under the title 'Programme for Reconstruction and Development – the New Beginning'. The two central themes of the manifesto were that political freedom within a democracy is imperative for economic progress and that the market economy is the only economic system compatible with personal freedom and constitutional government. The URP joined with other parties in promising a review of the Constitution. Among its other promises were education for all by the year 2000 and the empowerment of people to take control of their lives. In particular, the party claimed to have established priorities for women and children. 'New Beginning' also promised special attention for infrastructural development and appeared to be alone in stating what its programme would cost over the life of one parliament.
  
- **The United Workers' Party (UWP):** *Leader: Winston Payne (Party symbol – the*

*shield*). As in the case of the National Democratic Front, all our best endeavours to contact the party were to no avail. Nor were we able to secure a copy of the party's manifesto.

- **The Working People's Alliance (WPA):** *Leader (rotating): Clive Thomas (Party symbol – the bell).* The WPA manifesto was launched under the banner of justice, opportunity and security for a multiracial Guyana. Its campaign slogan was 'When WPA wins, all races win', in veiled reference to a charge it had levelled against one of its opponents accusing it of being a racially based party. Its party emblem, the bell, was chosen for its symbolic significance as an instrument of mass mobilisation. The party claimed it drew its membership from all age groups and was committed, through its collective leadership, to the pursuit of freedom and growth of the human personality. It identified hunger and homelessness, and one-party and one-race rule as the two main election issues. It set out the principles that would guide its approach to the reconstruction of Guyanese society. Among these were the satisfaction of basic needs, ethnic security and justice.

Along with many of its political opponents, it was committed to a review of the Guyana Constitution and to the reduction in the powers of the President. It pledged that if elected to power it would lower the age for local franchise to 16.

### **Relationship between the Parties**

A number of the parties, while insisting that they would be victorious on their own account, said they would be prepared to work with other parties in a coalition, in the event that no single party won a working majority. A core of some parties, however, said they would not be prepared to work with the PNC.