ETHNICITY AND ELECTORAL POLITICS IN GUYANA, SURINAME AND TRINIDAD: THE SEARCH FOR EQUITY AND ETHNIC SECURITY

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In the decades that followed the achievement of Independence, the appropriateness of the political model that was adopted throughout the Anglophone Caribbean was continuously debated by the regions political elites. Everywhere the system seemed incapable of meeting the material and psychological expectations of the Caribbean people. The complaint was that the system tended to shut out the “people,” and that effective power remained in the hands of the national elites who had succeeded the agents of the colonial power. It was also widely believed that the latter had maintained effective economic control through those who had replaced them. What was achieved, according to this point of view, was “flag” or “symbolic” independence, and not real independence. Neocolonialism was seen to be triumphant.

A great deal of political energy was thus mobilised by post independence out or anti-system elites to smash the edifices of the bourgeois or petit-bourgeois neocolonial state. All sorts of dogmas and formulae were trotted out as antidotes to the virus of elitism, class exclusivism, patrimonialism or “doctor politics” (aka “doctatorship”). These ranged from one party system which would harness the energies of the people in all their social and ethnic diversity, people’s assemblies which would do the same thing from the bottom up, or vanguard parties that would energise and lead the masses. In Trinidad and Tobago, there were proposals for a big “macco” Senate, or for a “party of parties” to harness the energies of the various “tribes” and corporate groups in the society. Every formula that was in vogue in Cuba and other countries in Latin America, Africa, China, Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union had an echo in the Caribbean as groups competed with each other to install some alternative to the Westminster model. Defenders of the latter, for their part, claimed that that model was as Caribbean as sugar cane or bananas despite its British origin, and, what is more, was better suited to the people’s political temperament and historical experience.

While many of these movements articulated their perceptions of exclusion and marginalisation in class or populist terms, others did so in terms of ethnic diversity along a
white-black or Indian-African continuum where the latter was relevant as in Guyana or Trinidad and Tobago. For much of the period, however the ethnic lament was not seen to be particularly legitimate by the region's leading intellectual cohorts. In so far as they recognised the problem, socialism was seen to be the eventual solvent of "false consciousness" and other primitive attitudes. Had Stalin and Tito not solved the nationality question? Had Mao and the Chinese communists not found a formula to mobilise the energies of the very diverse peoples who occupied the China Mainland? Had Forbes Burnham and Cheddi Jagan not shown that Indians and Africans could unite for common political ends? Did Burnham not later show that he was able to co-opt Indian, Amerindian and Portuguese elites in his mission to construct a cooperative socialist Republic? Had Castro not defused the explosive black white issue in Cuba by replacing it with class and other revolutionary alternatives?

The ethnic problem did not however go away as the optimists hoped. Indeed, it became more persistent as previously marginalised ethnic groups in the region – Indians, Javanese, African Maroons (aka “Bush Negroes”), Amerindians – became more geographically and socially mobile and mainstreamed. These subaltern groups demanded to be seen as a legitimate part of the “creole” order, not as individual accretions via the assimilation\integration route, but in terms that were more pluralist and group based. What they wanted was not token acceptance as deculturalised West Indians of oriental descent, but authentic West Indians who nevertheless brought the distinctive fragrance of the lotus or some other oriental flower to the Caribbean bouquet.

As disenchantment deepened with the Westminster model, attention was focussed on various alternative models. Some found answers in systems of proportional representation, particularly the mixed version of that model that was in place in the Western half of Germany. The Constitution Commission of 1974 chaired by Sir Hugh Wooding recommended such a system for Trinidad and Tobago, but it was peremptorily rejected by Dr. Williams who recognised that it would decentre and disestablish the political order which he had created and which had enjoyed hegemony during the preceding 20 years. In Guyana where a virtual civil war was often in the making as persons of Indian and African descent fought for economic, political, and racial superiority and security, Burnham thought he had found the answer in state socialism, classical proportional representation, rigged elections, and the establishment of a repressive militariat. His death, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and with it the cold war and the rise of the third wave democratic movement, made that formula unsustainable for his successors. One had to find other ways to defang and dismount the ethnic tiger.

In neighbouring Suriname, another model, broadly termed the “Verbroedering,” (brotherhood) “consociational” or “consensus” model had emerged prior to the achievement of independence in 1975. The model had its theoretical and ideological justification in the writings of Arendt Lijphart who argued that “the real choice of plural societies was not between the British (majoritarian) model and the consociational model, but between consociational democracy and no democracy at all.” Lijphart defined consociational democracy as “government by an elite cartel [or grand coalition] designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy” (1969). The
political culture of Suriname was also influenced by the political system in the Netherlands which encourages multipolar as opposed to the bi-polar politics that characterises Westminster. The *verbroedering politiek* system however had its roots in the practical experience of Surinamese politicians who had to find a way to preempt ethnic conflict.

**Suriname: A Brief Political History**

In order to better understand why consociationalism took root in Suriname, it is necessary to look at its demographic characteristics and briefly at its modern political history. The last official census in Suriname took place in 1980, and there is no firm data as to the actual composition of the population. The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) however undertook a “count” in 1993 and estimated that the population was approximately 355,240, drawn from 8 distinct ethnic groups. Of these, 34 percent were creoles i.e. of African as well as mixed ancestry, 33 percent were Hindustanis, 19 percent were Indonesian, 9 percent African maroons, 3 percent Amerindian, and 2 percent European, Lebanese etc. The figures indicate that no group has majority status or numerical dominance as is the case in Guyana. It must be borne in mind that large numbers of Surinamese migrated to the Netherlands in the years prior to 1975 as Surinamers sought to take advantage of the opportunity to secure Dutch status before independence was achieved. Between a third and half of the Surinamese population is said to be resident in the Netherlands.

Surinamese party politics have always been organised on an ethnic, cultural or confessional basis. Groups mobilised along ethnic and occupational as opposed to national lines. Religion and race were always more significant than nationality, even though many parties called themselves national this or that. Protestant creoles were organised in the National Party of Suriname (NPS) and Catholic creoles in the Progressive Surinamese Volkspartij (PSV). Hindustanis rallied to the United Hindustani Party or the United Freedom Party (VHP) as it later became known, as well as the Action Group (AG). The Javanese peasants were to be found in the Indonesian Peasant Party or Party of National Unity and Solidarity (KTPI) as it was sometimes called. Indian Muslims were organised in the Moeslim Party (MP) or in one or other of several small Javanese parties which emerged over the years. The names of the parties disguised the fact that they were ethnically based, a comment that holds true for most of the hundreds of other parties and electoral combinations that appeared like mushrooms on the Surinamese landscape over the years. As Dew (1996) notes, “any visionaries who tried non-ethnic, programmatic organizational principles were systematically left out of the running.” Splinter groups never seriously challenged the main parties (Sedoc-Dahlberg 1990:174).

Suriname achieved internal self-government in 1948 with elections to the *Staten* or Colonial Legislature based on a ten district “ethnic territoriality” and plurality election system. From the very beginning, politics was organised on a coalitional or *verbroedering* basis with the dominant NPS and the VHP agreeing to share political power with the support of the KTPI which at times functioned as a sort of balance wheel in the system. The NPS was invariably the dominant party in the coalitions and controlled a majority of the ministries. The *Verbroedering politiek* system remained in place in the fifties up to the late sixties, and reached its apogee in the period 1958 - 1967 which coincided with an era good
feeling in Suriname, thanks largely to generous Dutch aid, good planning, and significant investments in the bauxite industry by Alcoa, all of which contributed to a significant rise in living standards. All groups shared in the wealth that was generated by Dutch aid and foreign investment. The creoles dominated the public sector and the Hindustanis and Javanese the agricultural sector. The system broke down in the late sixties as the Dutch reduced subsidies and parties began to compete openly to secure, maintain, or augment their share of a diminished economic pie.

The 1967 election was one of the more pivotal events in this development. The NPS won 19 of the 39 seats while the VHP won 11. The two parties could again have cooperated to form the government, but the NPS chose instead to combine with the Social Democratic Party, (SDP) a party of light skinned creoles which had won two seats, and the Action Group (AG), a party made up dissident Hindustani elements which had won 4 seats. These two parties had been the NPS’s staunchest critics. The decision to change coalition partners was prompted by demands from the VHP for an additional ministerial portfolio and more patronage. The VHP was also accused of using the ministries which it controlled to distribute patronage without concern about competence, a charge that was equally true of the NPS. The VHP was also accused by the NPS of “racial campaigning” outside Paramaribo.

The NPS/SDP coalition did not work well. In part, this was due to the increased competition among the various fragments for the public sector which had become more or less the only industry. Party control of the state was a crucial instrument for the allocation of patronage (Tjon-A-Joe 1995:16). As Derveld (1996:78) observes:

Although creoles were in power in the politically most stable and economical prosperous period (1958-1967) they had a growing “zero-sum-game” attitude [since] they considered the stock of economically valuable goods as diminishing or declining. Especially in the period after 1969, these attitudes became more manifest [among] some creoles.

The collapse of the NPS/SDP coalition within two years precipitated new elections in 1969. This time it was the VHP led bloc, reinforced as it was by the return of the AG to the VHP fold, which prevailed. The NPS won 11 seats, 8 less than it won in 1967. The VHP bloc of 19 (AG, 3, SRI 1, VHP 14) and the creole Progressive National Party PNP bloc of 8 thereupon agreed to work together, leaving the NPS on the periphery. Lachmon was “embarrassed” by his bloc’s comprehensive victory and considered it important to persevere with “Verbrodering” formula. The VHP ascent to power frightened the creoles, and led to perceptions of status reversal and concerns about economic security. Many left for Holland. The Hindustanis were now in a better position to reward their followers, though reductions in Dutch aid had dried up much of the resources available for patronage. The VHP-PNP coalition lasted until 1973.

The pendulum swung back in 1973 when a combination which called itself the National Party Kombinatie (Combination) (NPK) swept to power winning 22 of the 39 seats. The NPK was dominated by the major creole parties, the NPS which won 13 seats,
the PNR which won 4 seats, and the PSV which won 3 seats. These creole parties had four non-creole members on their ticket – an Amerindian, a Javanese, a Moslem and a Chinese. The NPK also included the Javanese KTPI which won 2 seats. The VHP bloc which had won 17 seats was shut out from the Government.

The victory of the NPK was a significant development in Suriname’s political history. For the first time, there were no Hindustanis on the Government benches and no creoles in the opposition. As Dew observes, “the Hindustanis were now in the position of having been driven from power. Thus the potential for intense confrontation was much greater. An NPK-VHP coalition to provide the facade of verbroedering was clearly out of the question, given the tone of the preceding campaign.” As Dew (1996: 170) explained further:

[The NPK victory] seemed to combine resentment and fear of the solidarity of Hindustanis with the desire for an alternative form of political organization as embodied in their integrated (though Creole-dominated) electoral lists. Also ... we have to conclude that the desire for progressive reforms, including independence from the Netherlands, had grown considerably among most non-Hindustanis. Nevertheless, the polarization of the Staten – with no Creoles in the opposition, and no Hindustanis in the majority – seemed fraught with danger. Only once before had there been such a political configuration of the ethnic groups: in 1949:50. But, on that occasion, the Hindustanis had made absolute gains in representation and were reasonably self-content.

The VHP was mortified by this outcome. So too were some creoles who felt that the exclusion of the Hindustanis from Government was risky. The confrontation which many anticipated was not long in coming. The NPK's thrust to independence provoked a virulent reaction among the Hindustanis who claimed that the NPK was unrepresentative and could not speak on behalf of the whole nation. Lachmon warned Arron that the Constitution could only be changed by a two-thirds majority in the Staten which the NPK did not have. VHS grassroots supporters also began to agitate against independence by mounting large demonstrations in front of the President’s office (Dew 1996: 174).

Lachmon claimed that 99.9 percent of the Hindustanis, 80 percent of the Javanese, and 50 percent of the creoles were opposed to Independence, and he might well have been correct. Fear of independence and what it could mean economically in fact led to a dramatic increase in emigration to the Netherlands. Estimates are that in 1974, 130,000 to 150,000 – about one-third of the Surinamese population - emigrated to Holland. There was also a great deal of talk from Hindustani spokesmen about a “blood bath” and civil war. In May 1974 young Hindustanis embarked on a programme of arson to underline their demand that Independence should be deferred. Fires were set in several Government buildings, including the public Hall of Records which contained many vital public documents. On May 21, part of a downtown bloc of buildings, including the well known Hotel Lashley, was destroyed. Civil conflict seemed imminent. In the face of what was occurring, Lachmon
signalled to Henck Arron, the leader of the NPK, that he was prepared to make concessions in the hope of restoring harmony, if his conditions were met. These were:

- replace the present mixed electoral system by a national system of proportional representation;
- provide for new elections within 6 months of Independence (in the provisional articles at the end of the Constitution);
- replace the “equal basis” language of Article 121 regarding the military with its description as “a cross-section of the whole Suriname people”;
- require a 2/3 vote by Parliament for the nationalisation of domestic or foreign enterprises; and
- select the Vice-President by the same procedure (i.e. 2/3 vote of Parliament, as the President.

Compromises were eventually worked out on these and other demands. Arron indicated that he was opposed to PR which he argued would discriminate against the rural and interior districts. The NPK believed that PR would favour the VHP. Arron however indicated that he was willing to accept a form of PR in the 3 two seat districts. The leaders later agreed that a Commission would be established to examine the electoral system. In terms of privatisation, the NPS agreed that property rights would be recognised and that fair compensation would be guaranteed. Arron also promised that new elections would be held “not later than the coming eight months. In terms of the composition of the armed forces, the compromise agreed to was that: “the armed forces would represent a cross-section of the total Suriname people and would not be used as a power device by any group to impede its democratic functioning” (Dew 1996: 190). In the light of later events, this was ironic. Lachmon eventually pronounced himself satisfied with the new Constitution which he said was “as good as that of many democratic states.”

Suriname After Independence

The post-independence experience in Suriname was not a happy one despite generous Dutch aid. Party deadlock between the NPS and the VHP was the order of the day. The VHP fought the NPS with every tactic at its disposal. New elections were held in 1979, but these failed to alter the balance between the two parties. The VHP in fact refused to provide a quorum for the swearing in of new representatives without which no government could be formed. Consociationalism had degenerated into a “demoralizing shouting match between two camps of token power shares.” (Dew 1995: 195) What happened was well described by Gary Brana-Shute (1995:215) who wrote as follows:

Three major parties dominated the political scene through the 1960s and 1970s and divided power between themselves in an atmosphere of tactical coalitions, trade-offs and back room agreements, strategic treachery of
several against one, and, of course, patronage passed up and down and across the social structure. Party politics seemed to work best when both the Creole NPS and the East Indian VHP (Vooruitsstrevende Hervormings Partij) were members of a coalition government. The Javanese KTPI (Kaum Tani Persatuan Indonesia) would regularly join with either the Creoles or the East Indians when feelings and policies prevented collaboration between the two larger groups and thus earn themselves the reputation of providing the swing vote in times of acute Creole-East Indian rivalry. Two narrow Creole-Javanese victories in 1973 and 1977 led to consecutive governments excluding East Indians from government power and largesse. The country was tense and angry; development policies were corrupt, short sighted and vague; and the brittle structure of power snapped under a coup fomented by fifteen army NCOs and one officer. For many there was joy that the young sergeants would restore a balance to politics, clean up corruption and move the country ahead. The military proclaimed a revolution, collaborated closely with small radical leftist politicians, established close relationships with Cuba, Grenada, and Nicaragua and ruled with a heavy and bloody hand. By 1982 any vestige of support among the population had evaporated and the military resorted to routine means of thuggery to maintain power.

Stuart Tjon-A-Joe (1995:4) also tells us what happened after 1980:

The coup ignited a period of civilian-military rule that was characterized by a high level of political instability and violence. Not less than seven unconstitutional governments, two counter-coup attempts, a guerilla war, and human rights violations became apparent.... The Military takeover ... also unleashed a fratricidal war which was a radical departure from the democratic practices that had been in place for generations.

The coup was particularly welcomed by the younger more radical nationalist and socialist leaning creoles who had grown tired of the incoherent segmented political system which, in their view, was getting Suriname nowhere. This element lamented all the negative features of the verbroederings model, and took its advantages – ethnic peace – as given and sustainable. In their view, it was time for Suriname to become an effective nation-state rather than a collection of subcultures. “Old politics” must give way to “new politics.” Interestingly however, the military regime felt constrained to resort to the same consociationalism that it had condemned. As Dew observed:

From the first moderate government through the five cabinets that followed, there has been at least a token adherence to the principles of ethnic power-sharing. Of course, that might be expected given the balanced distribution of talented professionals, especially between creole and Hindustani groups. But when one considers that the military itself was
overwhelmingly Creole, this strategy demonstrates the recognition of consociationalism's symbolic significance, even where apanjahi politics has been suppressed.

For a variety of reasons which cannot be analysed here, the military regime failed to deliver what was expected of it – an end to racial politics, corruption and patronage politics – and was swept aside by a grouping called the Front For Democracy and Development, which took power in January 1988 and sought to reconstruct the old Verbrodering system. As Tjon-A-Joe (1995:9) tell us:

Regardless of their voting numbers, each Front party was guaranteed a slice of the political and economic pie through access to government jobs, contracts, trade licences and a portioning of the Presidency, Vice Presidency, chairmanship of the National Assembly, fraction leader, ministries and seats in parliament. The political formula for the top political posts was the result of intense negotiations between the parties after the 1987 and the 1991 elections. A central characteristic of the first phase was the decisions regarding power sharing belonged constitutionally to the President but in practice it was more the prerogative of the party leaders.

The Front Government however proved to be unequal to the task of reconstructing Suriname after 7 years of army misrule, guerilla warfare and economic decline, and was easily dislodged in a second coup by the army which simply phoned the President and advised him to go home. The Army however had no answer to the problems which Suriname faced, problems which were aggravated by the decision of the Dutch to withdraw unilaterally the generous development aid – the so called Golden Handshake – which it had allocated for use by Suriname as part of the independence package. The withdrawal of Dutch aid made it difficult for any government – army or civilian – to survive. In the end, the army and the political parties were forced to negotiate a constitutional pact which sought to allow both to have a say in governing Suriname. The elections of 1991 thus saw a return to power by another New Front Government which again returned to the old system which had been militarily terminated in 1980.

The 1996 election was inconclusive and perhaps provided the worst example of how the system works. The New Front (NF) emerged with the largest number of seats but failed to secure the Presidency. It won 24 of the 51 seats while its closest rival, Bouterse’s National Democratic Party secured 16 seats. Since the NF did not have an absolute majority, it was forced to try and make deals to secure such a majority. It failed, but in trying to do so, it alienated five of the nine members of the VHP segment of the NF who claimed that the VHP leadership was dictatorial. They also did not approve of the choices which the coalition made for President and Vice President. The five members of the VHP later formed a group called The Movement For Renewal and Democracy in the VHP (BVD-VHP) and lent their support to the NDP state.
When the elections were eventually held, the NF's choice for President, Ronald Venetiaan, got 23 votes while the NDP's choice, Jules Wijdenbosch, got 24 votes. Two votes were deemed spoilt. Since neither had a majority, the elections were thrown into the laps of the members of the United Peoples Assembly, a body which included members of both the National Assembly and the various local and regional government bodies. The election, which was characterised by a great deal of lobbying and influence peddling, was eventually won by Wijdenbosch who secured 438 votes to Venetiaan's 407 votes. The NDP coalition included former Front allies, the BVD-VHP, and the KTPI, as well as the Alliante which had won 3 seats in the election. In sum, because of treachery and opportunism, the winners became the losers, and the losers became the winners. The minority NDP coalition was however unstable and soon collapsed into its constituent parts, precipitating economic and political instability, calls for the resignation of the President and elections before they were constitutionally due.

In the 2000 election, the electorate of Suriname distributed itself among some 40 registered political parties, and as one Surinamese newspaper editorialised, "Suriname can probably be put in the Guinness Book of World Records when it comes to political parties as related to the number of enfranchised citizens. In 1987 there were 10, in 1991 there were 18, and in 1990, 22. Today there are 40." In the 2000 elections, twenty-three of these parties formally entered the contest, nine of which were to be found in three multi-ethnic coalitions. There were five Javanese parties, 6 Hindustani parties, a Muslim party, and several creole, "Bush" Negro, and Amerindian parties.

In that election, The New Front emerged victorious winning 33 of the 51 seats in National Assembly, one short of a two thirds majority. Two other coalitions had faced the polls. The Millenium Combination, led by Desi Bouterse, won 11 seats. The third combination, the Democratic National Platform 2000 (DNP), which was led by the incumbent President, Jules Wijdenbosch, won a mere two seats. The Front was expected to win but not as comprehensively. The Presidency went to Ronald Venetiaan whose NPS won 14 of the 33 coalition seats while Lachmon, who was well over 86 years of age, retained the speakership of the Assembly. The VHP won 10 seats and the PL 6.

**Apanjhat/Consociationalism/Verbroderingpolitiek: Advantages and Disadvantages**

Since 1987, Suriname experimented with consociationalism in one form or another. Different combinations emerged, parties and leaders rose and fell, appeared and disappeared, but the abiding formula remained. The experiment in the politics of ethnic political brotherhood in Suriname is instructive in many ways. The initial inspiration for the movement appears to have derived from what was taking place in neighbouring Guyana in the period 1951-1953 when Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham appeared to have forged an alliance in the People's Political Party which seemed to have transcended ethnicity. Whether this was true or not, it is clear that the principal driving force and ideologue of the brotherhood movement was Jagernath Lachmon, the Hindustani Leader, and not the creole leader, Johan Adolf Pengel. Both men however recognised the instrumental value of uniting Indian farmers and creole workers. The alliance was however not one of mere political
convenience as some of its critics and political rivals often alleged. As Dew (1996:135) saw it:

Lachmon was committed to *verbroedering*, both politically and emotionally. *Verbroedering* [however] clearly meant something different to Lachmon than it did to Pengel. To Pengel, it meant gradual assimilation and intermarriage. To Lachmon, despite his own marriage [to a *dogla*], it meant unity through nonassimilation ("eenheid in verscheidenheid").

The evidence suggests that Lachmon was more aware than was Pengel of the "perils of political fragmentation." As such, most of the critical concessions which had to be made to keep unity alive, whether conceding ministries, high profile national posts, or the language of the National Anthem came from the VHP. The VHP always received fewer cabinet posts than its numerical status in the various coalitions or in the country warranted. To demonstrate his commitment to unity, Lachmon even offered to give up a seat that his party won to allow Pengel, who had lost his, to be elected to the Staten. This he said he was doing as "proof of his feelings of brotherhood." As he told his party, "I consider the presence of Pengel in the Parliament to be so important that I have decided to step down myself, and I beseech the party to select Mr. Pengel as a candidate in my place" (cited Dew 1996:109). It may well be that Lachmon was aware that if he pushed the creoles too hard, he could provoke a reaction that could feed the fires of racial tension and imperil unity. It may also be that he was aware that the Indians were not as educated and competent in the area of governance as were the creoles, and that he had to bide time until he was able to mount a successful challenge for hegemony. Rice, he noted, bend in the wind unlike the solid three which may collapse in a storm.

Some Surinamese creoles dismissed *Verbroedering* as "disguised apartheid" or "cosmetic diversity" and as a constraint on the emergence of national cross ethnic parties and ethnicity free national identity. Creole critics also accused Pengel and the NPS of being too dependent on the VHP. Lachmon's critics likewise accused him of selling out to the creoles or alternatively, of "saying brotherly things in Dutch" while preaching anti-creole hatred when speaking to small groups in *Sarnami*, the Hindi Surinamese vernacular. Indeed, during the 1967 election, Pengel criticised him for "unbrotherly violation of the "rules of the game" which he said made it difficult to continue working with him following the election.

Pengel however seemed to be the one who did more to break up the 1953-1967 grand coalition. It was he who chose to change coalition partners in 1968, arguing that it was "healthy to shift alliances." Pengel also objected to the fact that the VHP was demanding more ministries and more patronage than he was willing or able to concede having regard to the shrinking of the pie. It would also seem that because of the emergence of radical creole critics who were seeking to "overbid" him to win the black vote, Pengel sought to experiment with a genuinely national party that would cut across race, religion, culture and occupation, and which would make coalitions unnecessary. Pengel had hoped that the "breakthrough would be a blessing for the land and people." (Dew 1996:150). The "politics of breakthrough" however failed. The NPS won only 11 seats. It was in fact this
attempt on the part of the NPS to change the rules of ethnic compartmentalisation i.e. to run candidates of its own in communal areas controlled by the VHP and the AG that had prompted the latter to use race and cultural solidarity as a strategy when they addressed small group meetings. The rules of the game up until then was that ethnic groups did not campaign outside their ethnic compartment.

The main advantage of the consociational or concurrent majority system (or the "Hague model" as some call it) is that it meets the test of inclusivity. With the exception of the 1973-1976 period, no significant group was ever completely unrepresented in the legislature, excluded from the policy making system, or denied a share of public sector goods and spoils even though the group may not have secured slices of the pie that were in exact proportion to its numbers in the population. In the 1967 election, for example, the NPS won 31 percent of the votes cast but 44 percent of the seats. In the 1969 election, the VHP bloc had 38.5 percent of the seats and 48.8 percent of the seats. Despite frequent elections, the system was relatively stable and ethnic rivalry was moderate. Pluralism was depolarised and politically defused. Moreover, ethnic groups did not attack each other frontally as they do in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. They train their political guns on co-ethnics who are seeking to outbid them for votes in the 10 ethnic compartments into which Suriname is politically divided. The appeals are invariably based on class, caste, religion, occupation, allegations of corruption and mismanagement and on personality.

All key groups have had a turn at governing and none feels structurally or permanently excluded. Given this, ethnic security and ethnic solidarity is not deemed a major issue even though one hears talk from time to time about a "creole malaise" which is a function of their greater economic marginalisation. The decline of ethnic solidarity is also a by-product of the fact that no group feels that it still has a major crusade to wage and win or barricade to storm. Looking around at other plural societies, Dew concludes that Suriname was "second to none in the Caribbean for bearing the strains of development without severe turbulence" (ibid.: 192). It was, in his view, the "least bad choice available" (1995:201). What was lost in terms of the efficacy of policy making and policy implementation was more than compensated for in terms of "justness," representativeness, and ethnic security.

Disadvantages of the System

- The system however encouraged party and bloc fragmentation and multipolarity. In 1967, there was a five way battle among creole parties. Defection is also the norm rather than the exception. In 1987 there were 10 political parties. In 1990, there were 22. In 1991 there were 18 and in 2000 there were 40 of which 23 contested the elections held in that year. The mushrooming of parties is in part due to a decline in patriarchal leadership. The fact that the old line parties are totally lacking in any kind of internal democratic culture or praxis also served to encourage and sustain dissidence and inter-party mobility. Political migration is also often the by-product of disappointed ambitions in respect of patronage, or because a small leadership group unilaterally forged strategic alliances that were personally or ideological unacceptable. Breach of trust is likewise a factor which precipitates splits. Some
young Indians who have broken away from the VHP also argue that the Hindu community is now rich and powerful, and no longer needed to genuflect to creole interests and concerns as was once the case.

- The electoral system (proportional representation, coupled with a system of transfer voting), has helped to embolden dissidents who feel that they stood a good chance of securing enough votes to win a seat which could possibly prove to be valuable if it "goes shopping" with some grouping which needs extra votes to form a governing coalition or to capture the Presidency if the election is thrown into the larger United peoples Assembly for resolution, as was the case in 1996 when the New Front won the largest number of seats in the National Assembly but not enough to win the Presidency, which required a two-thirds majority.

- The formation of a new government is often a long drawn out affair with voters not getting either the party, the coalition, or the candidate which they voted for. Sometimes, the "loser" may get more power than the "winner." Such was the case in 1996 when Jules Wijdenbosch became President even though the Front had won a majority of the seats in the National Assembly. In 1996, for example, it took 6 weeks for a government to be formed, and close to 4 months for a President to be elected. Following an election, parties "go shopping," using seats won in the election as currency. Deals are made and unmade by phone, and all kinds of weird things occur in the process of the formation of a government. A premium is therefore put on hopscotch or "bungi" type politics as individuals and parties jump from pillar to post in the hope of becoming part of a winning political combination, if only to allow them secure resources to pay off their campaign debts and earn a return on their political investment.

- Unlike what happens in Westminster type systems where the Prime Minister assigns ministerial portfolios, parties, whether in a coalition or not, haggle or horse trade for ministries and posts (koehandel) following an election. Some ministries such as the Ministries of Finance, Natural Resources, and Trade, Industry, and Commerce are seen as having better bread and better prospects than others, and therefore better suited to the kind of patronage politics that characterises Suriname's political environment.

- The system encourages groups to threaten to or veto each others' policies if they had the resources with which to bargain or prevail. The system is in fact not really informed by consensus which is low, but by the "mutual veto" which members of the elite cartel could wield when necessary. Dissensus and stalemate are the norm rather than "consensus"

- Jobs and contracts are rewarded to "political friends" who exchange money and votes for jobs. This encouraged run away corruption, which was justified pragmatically as "resource sharing." The system works reasonably well in the context of an expanding economy. When the economy is in recession, however,
competition for declining shares increases ethnic rivalry, and pluralism becomes polarized.

- Parties lack national orientation. They are mostly concerned with relative profits for special subgroups. Political leaders mobilise votes through which they obtain leverage which allow them access to public resources and money with which they reward potential voters.

- Hard policy decisions are postponed, especially if they involve downsizing the public sector and retrenching staff. No party wanted to be held responsible for structural adjustment type reforms. They prefer to allow the Dutch or the IMF to bear the blame for so doing, or to conceal their involvement in such policy initiatives in tripartite or multi-sector accords. Politics triumphs over administration and good governance.

- The system discourages internal party democracy. Party members become satraps of their political masters in the party machine. The elites in the party make decisions and impose them on their memberships, in the interest of stability and accommodating the concerns of other groups. Tjon-A-Joe (1995: 13) is in fact of the view that the elitist character of the system makes it a “political construction more oriented to exclude than to include political actors in the decision making process.” He defines it as a “conflict regulation mechanism that is based (for the purposes of efficacy) on the few and not on the many to bring about stability in the political system.”

- Dissidents or “anti-system” elites feel the need to “outbid” or “over promise” in order to attract attention to themselves and build a following by delegitimising the parties in office. As Rabuska and Sheple observe:

  Ambitious politicians not included in the multi-ethnic coalition have incentives to generate demand for communal rather than national issues.... Second, ... communal politicians can defeat candidates of the multi-ethnic coalition, whose positions on the ethnic issue is [sic] ambiguous, only by taking extreme positions.... In short, communally based political entrepreneurs seek to increase the salience of communal issues and then to outbid the ambiguous multi-ethnic coalition. (Cited in Dew: 200)

- Power sharing is the cry of those who have lost faith in socialism or alternatively in the power of the market.
The outcomes of the elections of 1992, 1997 and 2001 clearly indicated that the Peoples National Congress (PNC) and the Afro-Guyanese who support it are in an electoral minority as long as apanyhat continues to serve as the basis of electoral politics. Prior to these elections, many Afro-Guyanese, Desmond Hoyte included, believed that the PNC could defeat the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) in a free and fair election. Hoyte was of the view that his record in office between 1985 and 1992 when both the political and economic systems that were established by Burnham were dismantled in a kind of Caribbean version of glasnost, and perestroika that “rational” Guyanese of all ethnicities would chose the PNC in preference to the PPP which, in their view, had no worthwhile track record in office (in the case of the 1992 election), or, when in office, had shown that they had nothing to offer Guyana that was superior to what the PNC had done between 1985 and 1992. The PNC claimed that the PPP had simply executed plans that it had put in place, and had do so poorly and corruptly. Hoyte also assumed that the demographics of Guyana was not as favourable to the Indo-Guyanese as conventionally assumed, a view which might have been informed more by hope than by anything else. The belief was that more Indo-Guyanese had migrated to the United States and Canada (Region II) than Afro-Guyanese. It was also assumed that the small Indian based parties would draw votes away from the PPP/Civic. If the Party lost, it could only have been because of electoral fraud.

The election results of 1992, 1997, and 2001 however revealed that Hoyte was Utopian and unrealistic in his view that race and Indo-Guyanese construct of reality could be transcended by “performance.” The elections turned out to be little more than ethnic censuses. For the most part, people voted along ethnic lines. Indo-Guyanese had experienced being “on top” after 28 years and were not prepared to give the PNC another chance.

In the 1992 election, the PPP/Civic won 36 seats to the PNCs 26. The Working Peoples Alliance (WPA) won 2 and The United force 1 (TUF). In 1997 the pattern was more or less the same. The PPP/Civic won 36 seats, the PNC 25, the TUF 2, and the Alliance For Guyana which replaced the WPA, 2. The PNC did better in March 2001 election than it did in 1997 while the PPP/Civic did worse. In 1997, the latter won 220,138 or 55 percent of the votes, while in 2001 it secured 209,031 or 53 percent of the votes. While there was a decline in the size of the electorate by close to 5,000 voters between 1997 and 2001, the PNC increased its vote from 161,719 to 164,074 i.e. from 40.5 to 42 percent. In the 2001 election, the PPP/Civic won 22 national and 13 regional seats while the PNC/Reform won 15 national and 12 regional seats. The other 4 seats went to the Guyana Action Party/Working People’s Alliance which won two seats, The United Force (TUF) which won 1 seat, and Rise, Organise and Rebuild (ROAR) which was allocated 1 seat. ROAR was expected to do much better, but the PPP trained its big guns on the movement out of fear that if it did well, the PNC could win a plurality and capture the Presidency.

It is important to note that while statements are made which assume that Guyana has a Westminster political system, it does not. For one thing, its current electoral system does
not take a first-past-the-post form but is a mixed system of proportional representation in which 40 seats are deemed national and 25 are deemed regional. A third of all the candidates nominated must be female. The introduction of geographic representation for the 2001 election was a response to complaints that in the previous system, which regarded the whole country as one constituency, no national parliamentarian was responsible for any particular region. As such, there was no member of parliament to whom constituents could turn if they had a problem. Under the new system, each of the 10 regions was assigned a number of seats ranging from 7 and 3 in region 4, 3 and 6 respectively, to 2 in regions 1, 2, 5, 7 and 10, and 1 in the remaining regions 8 and 9.

In the new system, seats are allocated based on a quota established for each election using the formula of the “largest remainder.” The quota for the geographical representation is established by dividing the number of valid votes cast in that particular constituency by the number of seats assigned to that constituency. The quota for the national seats is established by dividing the total number of valid votes cast in the country by the total number of seats in Parliament (65). Seats are then first assigned to those lists that secured sufficient votes to fulfill the quota. Then the “largest remainder” formula is applied to assign the rest of the seats, both at the constituency level and at the national level.

Other aspects of the Guyanese constitutional order also departed fundamentally from that which existed in the English speaking Caribbean to which the Westminster/Whitehall system had been transplanted. Under the 1980 constitution, Guyana had an executive president who had supreme executive powers that exceeded that of Westminster/Whitehall prime ministers. The President appoints the Prime Minister and can refer matters that are sent up to him for action on advice. He must however act on that advice if the legislature or Judicial Services Commission refuses to alter its original advice. The power to refer however functions as a virtual veto. The President also had more de jure and de facto powers in relation to the Judiciary than was available to prime ministers in the English speaking Caribbean. Unlike in the latter, Guyana had also abolished appeals to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (See Ryan 2001).

In 1974, President Burnham, proclaimed, in what became known as the Declaration of Sophia, the doctrine of the Paramountcy of the Party, under which all organs of the state were considered agencies of the ruling PNC and subject to its control. Notwithstanding the fact that the Westminster System had been formally and functionally disestablished in Guyana following the adoption of the 1980 Republican constitution, the “winner takes all aspect” of Westminster clearly obtained, perhaps even more unequivocally than elsewhere. Additionally, given the nature of its historical experience in the sixties, the political culture of Guyana also became even more hostile to the traditions of Westminister than was the case in the insular Caribbean.

Notwithstanding the caveats, there has always been a great deal of debate in Guyana about the desirability or otherwise of adopting some sort of power sharing or National Front model to replaced the Westminster political paradigm. Those who wanted a model change argued that the existing winner-take-all system excludes and alienates large sections of the population, and has been responsible for the crisis of governance which Guyana has
experienced over the past five decades. Both ethnic groups feel aggrieved. The Indo-
Guyanese claim that they had been excluded from power for 28 years between 1968 and
1992 while the Afro-Guyanese assert that they have been marginalised since 1992, and may
well be so on a permanent basis. One recalls that Cheddi Jagan had called for the creation
of a National Front government in 1977, a call which Burnham rejected. Now that the PPP
is in power, many voices in the PNC/Reform and the Trades Union Congress are calling for
the abandonment of the Westminster model which they view as a recipe or disaster in multi-
ethnic societies such as Guyana. They want power sharing at both the national and regional
levels or “else.” So too does the radical Indo-Guyanese party, Rise, organise and Rebuild
(ROASR), though for different reasons.

Desmond Hoyte, the Political Leader of the PNC/Reform has however expressed
disinterest in any formal power sharing formula which he has described as a “nebulous
concept.” He believes that there should always be an official opposition to keep the
government under scrutiny and on its toes. As such, the party did not push for it during the
constitution reform exercise that preceded the election. Hoyte has however been forced to
respond to the demands of those within the ranks of the PNC/Reform who are not prepared
to remain permanently outside of the political loop. In a national broadcast on March 30,
2001 the Opposition Leader seized the political initiative from the PPP by unraveling a 17
item agenda which he wanted included in a dialogue with President Bharat Jagdeo. Hoyte
called for the immediate implementation of all of the constitutional reforms which had been
agreed to by the parties in the period between the two elections; the resuscitation of the
bauxite industry and the Linden community within an agreed time frame; an inquiry into
police brutality, extra-judicial killings, and the systematic harassment of selective
communities with a view to avoiding their reoccurrence; and end to the political monopoly
of the state owned media; the depolitization of the public service, including the appointment
of a professional head of the Public service; the recapitalisation of the army and the
restoration of its capacity to protect the national interest, especially in terms of border and
security issues; and the reforming of local and regional government. Hoyte also wanted the
PNC to have a say in the distribution of land and house lots. Hoyte told the nation that “if
these issues are not quickly dealt with, it will indicate a lack of seriousness about change,
dialogue or collaboration in development” (Stabroek News, April 25, 2001).

Though expressing objection to any notion of a “National Front” government which
he said he will “never support,” President Jagdeo welcomed the opportunity for dialogue
between himself and the Leader of the Opposition. The two leaders met on several
occasions in April and May 2001 and agreed to most of what Hoyte had asked for. In
addition, it was agreed that committees would be established to examine and address the
issues on which there had been agreement. It was likewise agreed that committees
consisting of Parliamentarians and non-parliamentarians would be established to scrutinize
legislation and other aspects of government business. The composition of these and other
committees and the time frame within which they would report was also agreed to.

Both Hoyte and Jagdeo, who had signalled a willingness to dialogue with the leader
of the Opposition in his post-election installation address, appeared pleased with what had
been achieved. Jagdeo even indicated that he wanted to broaden the negotiating platform to
include matters such as foreign investment, health care, modernisation of the sugar industry; the resuscitation of the rice industry, and strategies for the reduction of poverty in the country. He also suggested that there were hundreds of other areas where Government and opposition could work together and delivered himself happy that the Opposition wanted to be part of these very important things. He also proposed that the meetings between himself and the Leader of the Opposition should be institutionalised and that the momentum should be kept going. Hoyte seemed to have secured the substance of power sharing if not the form.

There were however mixed reactions to the entente which had been established between President Jagdeo and Desmond Hoyte. PNC activists have warned that all the issues agreed to between the two leaders must be addressed or “there would be no Guyana. Unless the PPP understands that Guyana is to be shared equally among all, there will be no force that can hold back the country from being destroyed.” Party activists were told that if the PPP “pussyfoots” with the reforms, they would be “called upon to demonstrate. “If it is what we have to do to get the government to do the decent thing, then that is what we have to do” (Stabroek News, May 1, 2001).

These comments, which were made at a party group meeting, were informed by a point of view that has been described as the “Afro-Guyanese construction of reality.” In this construction, the Afro-Guyanese masses see themselves as being the group that was historically marginalised and ranked lowest in the Euro-Guyanese socio-economic hierarchy. They were the ex-slaves who got no compensation following emancipation, who were discouraged from owning land, and who were undercut by Indian labour and Amerindians who were paid to cut off the hands of Africans who sought escape into the interior. In their view, there was a historical conspiracy by other ethnic groups to destroy or control them. The only way to defend themselves was therefore to control the state. If they were not in control of the state, others would use it to control them.

The PNCs control of the state between 1964 and 1992 allowed the Afro-Guyanese to believe that they were and could remain in charge even though in fact they became progressively poorer. As one Guyanese academic defined the Afro-Guyanese mind set:

… under the PNC, we remained as a group economically dispossessed, and our economic position may have actually declined; but we were happy because we saw people like us running the state, disbursing patronage in the form of state jobs, scholarships etc. to others looking like us. But most of all, we felt safe from threats of racial extermination or discrimination. Class discrimination there was. Economic discrimination there was. But so long as those who control the state looked like us, there was no fear of racial Oppression. And for that reason, we will create mayhem if our party does not win. Either we will control the state or there will be no state for anybody to control. In this view, the problem that had to be solved in Guyana was how to construct a political order that would overcome the Afro-Guyanese fear of racial marginalisation and meet his need for racial
security without giving them control of the state, which, given their minority status, would be undemocratic (e-mail communication: name withheld).

There were in fact two basic points of view within the PNC as to what lay ahead for the PNC in terms of power sharing. One view held that the key problem in Guyana in the final analysis is not about economics and poverty. The critical need is "ethnic security" which the "winner takes all" Westminster system as it works in Guyana does not address seriously. Physical pressure thus has to be brought to bear on the PPP/Civic since force was the only language which they seemed to understand. The troops in the street and those in the barracks thus had to be kept in a state of readiness.

Reformist elements argue that the party had no choice but to work within the democratic framework and to distance itself from those elements which assault Indians. The Cold War was over, they observed, and continued disorder on the streets would only lead to demands that Guyana be put under greater regional and international donor tutelage. The PNC must accept the fact that it had reached the end of the line in terms of post-electoral filibustering and street violence. Reformists also argued that given the demographics and the political history and culture of Guyana, the only game in town for the Afro-Guyanese was inclusiveness in the government. The PNC/R had to find away to ensure that it has a say in the decision-making process. Guyana could not go back to the "government as usual" formula within which extremists on both sides dictate party policy and posture. The time had come for structural adjustment of the political system. The governing party had to be made to accept that democracy is not "free and fair elections" alone. It had to swallow something which it had doggedly resisted for eight-and-a-half years, namely a dilution of its power.

The moderates were hopeful that the ongoing process of dialogue between the two leaderships would help to defuse the sense of anger, frustration and hopelessness that enervates unemployed villagers and inner city residents in all parts of Guyana. Hope was expressed that the "olive branch" offered by the new entente would be grabbed and that it would take root. If it does not, "ours will be a fractured and ugly future. An opportunity such as this will not present itself for decades to come. Let us not for one moment believe that we are out of the trauma even as we concentrate our energies on recreating trust and providing confidence building measures which can heal the body politic" (Stabroek News May 14, 2001).

Predictably, the attempt on the part of the Afro-Guyanese to demand a greater share of public goods and resources stimulated counter demands from Indo-Guyanese elements who claimed that they were the ones who were marginalised. In their view, the Afro-Guyanese dominate the critical centres of political power in the country – the army, the police and the public service, as well as the cultural infrastructure of the country. The minority was in fact tyrannizing the majority who had just won a free and fair election. As one letter writer complained, it was the Indians who were marginalised. "Their music, art, culture, values and psyche are different. There is no appreciation or understanding of the inner psyche or soul of the Indians by those who are in the power structure with which the
ordinary simple Indian worker, farmer etc., has to deal in daily life, namely, the public servant, the police, the courts. The imbalance in the power structure is harmful and unjust to the Indian masses who are often not understood by the Afro-Guyanese who deal with them in the ministries, and who often cannot even spell their Indian names or speak in a manner which the ordinary Indian can understand. [Stabroek News May 1, 2001]. The Indo-Guyanese complain that they too have a “security problem” which had to be addressed. The complaint was that they were left unprotected by the security services who were never deployed when and where they were most needed.

In response to Hoyte’s 17 point menu of demands, Ravi Dev, the Leader of ROAR submitted a 20 point proposal in which he demanded, *inter alia*, that the army, the police, the civil service and the judiciary had to be made to reflect the populations of the various parts of Guyana. He also argued that the political system should be decentralised to allow for better local representation in the “federal counties” of Berbice, Essequibo, Demerara and Rupununi. Dev accused the PPP/Civic leader of being weak and of making too many concessions. The meetings between the two were in fact described as between “a President and a war lord.” Dev feared that the Afro-Guyanese, like Oliver Twist, would continue asking for more. He also observed that Hoyte had put the bauxite industry on his agenda and not the rice industry.

ROAR complained that the PNC/R had successfully exploited the street violence which it had surreptitiously encouraged. The PPP/CIVIC was also accused of appeasing the extremist elements in the PNC. Complained ROAR: “the PPP government has allowed the PNC to effectively seize the initiative and dictate the political agenda for the next five years of the Jagdeo Presidency. It sets a dangerous precedent that demands will always be acceded to as long as they are coupled with violent street protests” (Stabroek News, May 9, 2001). ROAR argued that what was really at issue in the current crisis in Guyana was “ethnic security.” To quote a ROAR statement, “the PPP refuses to accept that political restructuring must first set in place mechanisms to address the ethnic security dilemma. The current PPP leadership must understand that the future political stability of this country lies in a national front government such as Dr. Jagan proposed in 1977, and a federal structure as proposed by ROAR” (Stabroek News May 9, 2001). Ravi Dev, the leader of ROAR, put it in a slightly different way:

The President must understand that Guyana will only have a chance at stability when all the ethnic groups in the society feel that they are equitably represented in the power relations of the state. That is, when everyone sees their groups “ruling.” There is no other way. It an ethnic thing (Stabroek News May 14, 2001).

The question was how to make a National Front government work if there was no trust between the partners.

The *Starbroek News* also expressed support for some form of power sharing. As it said editorially:
We can not go on further with a government party which leans towards total control over institutions as well as appointments. No modern society can function effectively if party loyalty takes precedence over competence. We cannot afford to go on excluding the skills of one-half of the society. The PPP too has to revamp its image and sideline many of the stalwarts who gained prominence in its administration by virtue of their dedicated service to the party and nothing else.

Both parties feel a sense of oppression when the other side is in office. The PPP appears not to have understood the extent of the alienation of the voters in the PNC constituencies. They have not given recognition to the sense that the Africans consider themselves indigenous and feel that they have been marginalised in their own land. For its part, the PNC seems oblivious to the great sense of injustice among the Indian population that the twenty-eight years caused. They too have to understand the sense of alienation that causes the Indian electorate not to risk splitting the vote, as it is called, lest it open an avenue for the PNC to accede to power. We are at a crossroads. The politicians hold the future in their hands. May their decisions reflect an acknowledgement of the reality and a commitment to the nation and its people (Stabroek News, April 25, 2001).

THE CASE AGAINST POWER SHARING

An eloquent polemic against power sharing in Guyana was articulated by Guyanese political scientist Festus Brotherson Jr. who was sharply critical of the demands that are currently being made by Afro-Guyanese intellectuals. Brotherson notes that Afro-Guyanese are marginalised economically, and warns that they would become even more so should Indo-Guyanese businessmen heed the call to relocate their businesses away from central Georgetown. Business flight, he argues, would hurt the Afro-Guyanese disproportionately since they are wage earners and not entrepreneurs. Brotherson argues that power sharing is not a “magical elixir” that would solve the critical problem of poverty among the Afro-Guyanese population. The factors that have given rise to the poverty problem are complex and not subject to instant solutions.

Brotherson accused the power sharing prophets of bullying the Guyanese into believing in it despite experiences that tell us that such radical initiatives invariably “ill serve those who are its intended beneficiaries.” He also argued that the “demands for inclusiveness “exaggerate racism,” were impractical, and at times non-sensical. What is more, they “inflame passions and raise the hopes of a large part of the population unrealistically.”

Brotherson admits that there are problems with the Westminster system, but argues that it has been responsible for “the political stability that is the show piece of the English
Speaking Caribbean.” Why abandon it when it is quite clear that there is no assurance that doing so would "settle the issue of Black dissatisfaction" (Stabroek News April 25, 2001).

Hoyte’s view that power sharing is a “nebulous concept” also has to be taken seriously. Does it mean that the PNC and the PPP would share ministries as was the case in Suriname? If this were to be attempted, how would the ministries be shared? Who would get how many ministries and which? Who will allocate the ministries, the Executive President, or will this be done through a process of negotiation? In Guyana, the President is more of a Gaullist figure than in Suriname. Will PNC ministers work comfortably under a PPP President as junior partners? To whom will the ministers be responsible, their own leader, or whomsoever is President? What if there is no consensus about who is to get what ministry? Will the parties then put back on their war paint? Will Guyana see a reprise of what occurred in Suriname after 1967 when verbroedering went sour? Could the political culture of Guyana provide the facilitating environment to sustain ethnic brotherhood or has too much water flowed beneath the pontoons? Yet one might well ask, if Ireland can handle ethnic power sharing between Catholics and Protestants? Why not Guyana? Can ethnic conflict be transcended, and if so, how?

Others opposed to power sharing also ask the following:

- Why is it wrong for a party to govern alone if it won an election that was free and fair and given a mandate to govern for five years? Should the PNC/R be allowed to hijack that victory by changing the rules after losing the election? Is the PNC/Reform seeking to “grab power outside the ballot box?”

- Is it not the PNC which established the system of executive dictatorship in Guyana which had the Indo-Guyanese at the receiving end? Why is the system now unacceptable because the two groups have changed places? If black majority rule is a good thing in South Africa, why is Indo-Guyanese majority rule in Guyana also not a good thing?

- Assuming that one agrees that power should be shared, who or what principle will determine who gets what share of the power, election results or some other principle? Is it not possible that concessions will lead to escalating demands?

- Is sharing of ministries the only meaningful form of power sharing, why not devolution as an alternative?

- It is not likely that power-sharing would work against the established norms of democracy? How does one ensure transparency, accountability, and good governance, with its assumptions about a pro-active role for civil society?

- Is it not possible that a National Front government would tie the hands of reforming elements in the society? Will it not make progressive policy making difficult since compromises and deals would constantly have to be negotiated? Burnham, it was noted,
rejected Cheddi Jagan’s call for a National Front in 1977. Remarked Burnham; “if the Bolsheviks had shared power with the Mensheviks, the history of the Soviet Union would have been very different.” Would the history of Guyana not have been better even if different?

- Will a National Front Government be able to deal with the major issues facing Guyana or will Hoyte and Jagdeo merely try to find a formula to divide the existing cake among themselves and their cronies. The reality is that there is not much cake to divide. Guyana’s real needs are the regeneration of hope and trust; equal opportunity for all; respect by all for each other’s unique contribution to the nation; safety and security for all Guyanese; ending corruption; bridging the racial divide, and above all, economic growth and an amelioration of chronic unemployment and poverty. Power sharing does not address these issues.

- If the PNC failed Afro-Guyanese for the past 28 years when state power was possessed totally, why expect goodies to be shred out now when the party will be a junior party?

- If power sharing was introduced, would it solve the problem associated with the virtual absence of entrepreneurial capacity among the Afro-Guyanese? With whom would economic power be shared? Would black contractors deliver? Would Afro-Guyanese become chagrined when they find that they no longer had anyone to blame for their predicament?

- When the parties return to the electorate, how will credit for success and blame for failure be apportioned?
III

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: IN SEARCH OF THE RAINBOW

Trinidad and Tobago's political elites have never given serious consideration to "power sharing" although from time to time, serious consideration has been given to altering some of the fundamentals of the Westminster system. During the heyday of the PNM regime in the sixties and seventies, the Indian community continuously complained of political and social marginalisation, and saw their predicament as being a partial by-product of the winner-takes-all-system. Mr. Basdeo Panday, the Leader of the Opposition between 1976 and 1986 expressed the view of many when he remarked that "the Westminster model has proved inadequate to meet the hopes an aspirations of our people as a developing nation; we must therefore strive for genuine constitutional reform. We must create a political system that is more relevant to the nature of the society at this given juncture," (cited Ryan 1996:554).

The question of the appropriateness of the Westminster model in relation to Trinidad and Tobago was fully considered by the Wooding Constitution Reform Commission which reported in 1974. That Report recommended the substitution of the West German mixed electoral system of proportional representation and first-past-the-post as being superior to the Westminster system in that it better met the test of fairness while still providing for effective party government. The minimum five percent or 1 seat qualifying hurdle was also expected to keep out small parties which had no substantial support among the electorate. To quote the Report (1974:51):

We have so far emphasised the desirability of devising an electoral system which will reflect the political divisions more accurately than does the present system. However this is not the only purpose of an election. The representative body must be able to produce and sustain a government able to govern the country. A frequent criticism of proportional representation is that it tends to produce coalitions which are inevitably weak and fail to give the positive leadership which governments should give, particularly in underdeveloped countries. But, in our view and in the experience of many, coalitions are not inevitably weak. They are often the answer in moments of crisis when national survival requires national solidarity. Further, the fact that a Government has an overwhelming majority in Parliament does not ensure that it will provide strong government. If it does not in fact enjoy the support of a substantial majority of the people it may well create crisis conditions if it uses its parliamentary majority to push through policies not basically agreeable to them. Government and people can thus become alienated and the people may as a result resort to extra-constitutional methods of protest. Having regard to our concern to find a system which would meet the twin needs of representation and efficiency, we recommend an electoral system in which
the principles of proportional representation and the first-past-the-post system are mixed.

The Commission examined and rejected several other proposals which sought to achieve greater equity and representativeness. Particular attention was given to the proposal advanced by intellectuals in the Tapia House group to put representatives of all the estates of the realm into a macro ("maco") Senate consisting of some 200 to 250 revolving group selected members. In this chamber, which would serve as the political conscience of the nation, major policy issues were to debated before they were placed formally on the legislative calendar. The Senate could not block legislation, but could advise and warn. A government could, if it wished, proceed to enact a bill which was not approved in the Senate, but it would know that it was doing so against the weight of public opinion. The advantage of such a chamber, in the eyes of its proponents, was that it institutionalized participation of groups outside the normal channels of party activity. It was also expected to provide parliamentary cover for criticisms which might otherwise not be voiced for fear of victimisation or of a possible action for deformation.

These were views with which the Commission was sympathetic. In the final analysis, however, they were rejected on the grounds that they were impractical, even if imaginative (ibid.: 46). It was felt that the body would be cumbersome and difficult to manage. It was also not clear which groups and sub-groups, whether based on religion, race, or occupation would be given representation and which not, and how such representatives would be selected or recalled. The Commission felt that the objectives of greater public ventilation of issues could be achieved by establishing committees in an enlarged parliament which would hold public hearings on bills after they had first been tabled in Parliament such as obtains in the Congress of the United States of America. The fact that the parliament being proposed would consist of 72 as opposed to 36 members was also expected to facilitate the creation and effective operation of an expanded network of Committees, an option that was more difficult to operate in a parliament with a small membership, more than half of which was on the government benches.

Interestingly, when the Report of the Commission was tabled, Dr. Williams was viciously hostile to its proposal to introduce the mixed PR system. Curiously, the opposition parties gave it no public support whatsoever, though most of the support for the principle of proportional representation had come from the Indian community which felt that the first-past-the-post system, worked against them, given the way the boundaries were "scientifically gerrymandered (Ryan 1972: 245).

At no time did during the Wooding Commission’s hearings or deliberations was serious consideration ever given to forming post election coalition governments. What was considered important was a parliament that was more representative, and which could therefore exert greater control over and extract more accountability from the executive. The major political parties in Trinidad and Tobago generally prefer trying to form pre-election “rainbow” coalitions. The political culture is in fact distrustful of the idea of post-electoral coalitions. There was however a departure from this tradition in 1995 when following a 17-17 tie in Trinidad, the United National Congress entered into an agreement with the
National Alliance For Reconstruction which had won two seats in Tobago, seats which the 
UNC needed to form a government that could command a majority in Parliament. The 
experiment did not work well (Ryan: 2000). Historically, the parties have sought to present 
mixed electoral states to the electorate. The problem is that except in a few limited cases, 
persons belonging to given ethnic groups are not put in “winnable” constituencies. Indo-
Trinidadians are put in constituencies dominated by Indo-Trinidadians, and the reverse is 
done in respect of Afro-Trinidadians or mixed elements. The parties in Parliament do not 
therefore reflect the electorate proportionately but are instead ethnically skewed.

In the Trinidad system, Prime Ministers are not constrained to choose cabinet 
ministers from persons who are elected. Compensatory ministerial appointments are thus 
made via the Senate in order to create governments that are more ethnically balanced. In the 
cabinet which Prime Minister Panday appointed after winning the general elections of 1995, 
there were twenty-one (21) cabinet ministers; thirteen (13) were Indo-Trinidadians and eight 
(8) were Afro-Trinidadians or mixed. Four of the latter were brought in via the Senate. 
Four of the Ministers were Hindus, as were two Parliamentary Secretaries; three were 
Muslims and the remainder were Christian. Mr. Panday declared himself to be firmly of the 
view that Trinidad and Tobago needed a “national coalition” since the country was difficult 
to rule:

Because of the highly plural, divisive and fragmented nature of our society, 
no single group can run Trinidad and Tobago successfully to the exclusion of 
other groups. And based on that analysis, I have always argued on the need 
for national coalition government. (Guardian November 7, 1996)

Prime Minister Panday’s strategy for creating a government of national unity also 
involved seducing MPs from the opposition PNM bench. Two crossed the floor for reasons 
which were clearly opportunistic. He also indicated that the door to UNC was wide open 
for any one else who wished to join. “In my father’s house there are many mansions,” he 
told would be aisle crossers. He was however certain that the Leader of the Opposition 
would not take the offer of a national coalition seriously. He however hoped that more 
members of the opposition would be tempted to cross the floor for a “mess of pottage.” 
Several of them in fact indicated that they were approached and made generous offers to 
jump ship. Panday’s “national unity” formula also led him to appoint persons of Chinese 
extraction to his Cabinet in positions of high visibility and seniority in order to broaden the 
base of his coalition, and upgrade its cross-ethnic image. He did the same in respect of his 
choice of persons to act as Prime Minister whenever he was out of the country. Of the four 
persons who were appointed to act, one was European, one was a Chinese, while the other 
was an Afro-Trinidadian woman.

The same strategy was pursued in the appointments to the Cabinet which followed 
the general election of November 2000. Indeed, it could seriously be asserted that Panday 
got overboard to demonstrate that whatever might have been assumed about his ethnic 
bias, he genuinely wanted to breakthrough what he called the “Berlin Wall” which 
separated the races politically in Trinidad and Tobago and to make the UNC acceptable to 
all sectors of the electorate as the National Alliance of Reconstruction had been able to do in
the 1986 general election (Ryan 1990). Indeed, Mr. Panday repeatedly proclaimed that his wish was to recreate the ethnically ecumenical spirit that led to the creation of the NAR in 1986 and its comprehensive victory at the polls.

The attempt to straddle the ethnic trenches predictably led to disenchantment among many members of his “base” community who felt that the UNC leader was guilty of namakharamism (betrayal) in the manner in which positions and resources were being allocated. It was felt that he had joined those whom he once lampooned as the “parasitic oligarchy,” and that in terms of the dispensation of patronage and the allocation of infrastructural resources, he was genuflecting too far in favour of Afro-Trinidadians in the East-West Corridor. Panday was however aware that if he was to succeed in winning the election, let alone winning it by the qualitative majority needed for major constitutional reform (two thirds), he had to concentrate on the five “marginal” seats in the East-West Corridor and elsewhere where the balance of ethnicity was such as to make them winnable. In all probability, Panday knew that when the chips were down, his base, which was concentrated in 14 “communal” seats, had no place to go, though they might have opted for abstention. The gamble paid off handsomely: He won 19 of the 36 seats.

The PNM’s strategy was more or less the same. The party had boasted from its inception in 1956 that it was a multiethnic party, or at least it aspired to be. As it declared in its founding document:

We are [not] another of the transitory and artificial combinations to which you have grown accustomed in election years, or another band wagon of dissident and disappointed politicians each out merely to get a seat in the Legislature.... Nor are we an ordinary party in the accepted narrow sense of the word. We are rather a rally, a convention of all and for all, a mobilization of all the forces in the community, cutting across race and religion, class and colour, with emphasis on united action by all the people in the common cause. (Cited in Ryan 1972: 120-121)

The party was however never able to live up to this ideal, though it tried. It remained as the vehicle of Afro-Trinidadian nationalism, though it did attract a significant number of Presbyterian Indians, urban Muslims, and reformist Ayra Samajist Indians. Few Sanatanist or Orthodox Hindus found a home in its ranks. Williams admitted in 1960 that the PNM had not yet succeeded in its mission to rally all the races, and that more time was needed. As he wrote (cited in Ryan 1972: 249):

You cannot expect that you just proclaim interracial solidarity from the housetops, and, lo and behold! in four years, you break through all the tactics of divide and rule practised by imperialism for four centuries in our territories, [or] you abolish the aristocracy of skin and colour which grew up within the imperialist framework. It takes time for some at least of the perspectives of the new society to be appreciated, and to become the conventions of the new day.
The current leader of the PNM, Mr. Patrick Manning, recognizing that the demographic patterns in the community had changed, went out of his way to court Indians between 1986 and 1991. The effort was genuine, but a disastrous failure. Manning was accused of tokenism and of being interested in cosmetic diversity. Some Indians who were directly approached refused, fearful that they would be branded *namakharams* – traitors to their race. This is not to say that no Indians came forward to contest elections on a PNM ticket. In the 1991 elections, two who contested won, whereas only one was successful in the 2000 election. As was the case with the UNC, appointments were made to the Senate to help give the PNM legislative team an appearance of diversity.

The most recent effort to create a rainbow coalition took place on June 3, 2001 when the UNC staged its internal elections. Particular attention was focussed on the post of Deputy Political Leader, an office that was normally not deemed political important. The assumption was that given Mr. Panday’s age (68), and the state of his health (he recently had a heart by-pass operation), the victor would either succeed Mr. Panday or at least enhance his chances of doing so whenever Panday retired or assumed the Presidency of the Republic, as he hinted he might do one day.

The positions taken by the three slates which contested the election reflect a conflict of visions about the future of the UNC. One view was that the UNC won 19 of the 36 seats in the 2001 election, a feat that was only made possible because of the input of persons like Carlos John, FIFA Vice President Jack Warner, and Lawrence Duprey of Colonial Life Insurance Co. (CLICO) for which the party had to show gratitude. The party’s goal was however to become entrenched as the natural party of government by winning the twenty-four seats that were required to amend entrenched provisions of the Constitution. To consolidate its power the UNC had to seek new blood and new sinews from wherever possible. Status as foundation members, while important, could not be decisive in choosing leaders. One needed balance between ethnicity, geography and generational status. Mr. Panday’s brother and reportedly 10 other members of Parliament saw Mr. John as performing that bridging role, and urged him to run for the position. “I begged Carlos because I saw him as a bridge that will take us across the Caroni River to bring our people together. We are supporting Carlos to help the PM expand the horizons of the party *(Mirror May 20, 2001)*. “Whether John was a “Johnny-come-lately,” or was once a member of the PNM was irrelevant. He is a hard worker and unquestionably loyal to the leader,” something Mr. Panday said he had difficulty saying about some people on the other slate. Panday pointedly asked Maharaj “who walked with knife against the Prime Minister for President”? *(Express, May 19, 2001)*. John was thus the “African” horse that the UNC had to ride if it was to enter the “new Jerusalem.” *Power had to be shared with African elements if it was to be augmented and sustained.*

Panday accused persons on the other slate of being “power hungry dictators, and greedy megalomaniacs who could not wait for the leader to die. Their viciousness is coming out,” he complained. “We on the other hand have an all inclusive vision for all the people of the nation, and we are not turning back.” The “young” turks claimed to be following the vision of the political leader who had “walked the talk” about the need for inclusiveness and national unity. They also charged that the faction led by Ramesh Maharaj
was racist and wanted to take the UNC back to “the old days of Bhadase Sagan Maraj and the PDP and the DLP.” Their own goal was to make the UNC relevant to the 21st century. John in fact argued that parties could not function as they did traditionally. Things had changed and the ex-parties had to function like modern dynamic corporations which head hunt for CEO rather than look to persons who had been working with the company for 30 or 40 years. “The days of length of service are really over. Leadership was about vision and not about who came first … The dynamics have changed” (Newsday, May 20, 2001). John also believed that being African and being from the private sector meant that he could add more value to the UNC than Indian MPs. “My perception is that the party is still anchored centrally. I believe my race could have a favourable impact in realising that dream of expanding the party’s core support” (Sunday Express, May 20, 2001). Boasted John: “Being the only African in the running will be my greatest asset in this battle…. I think if I win, it would add value to the party (Express, April 30, 2001). While John was clearly overstating the assets which he brought to the table, there was a certain plausibility to his argument, other things being equal.

The Maharaj faction denied that they were motivated by considerations of race or communalism as the majority of the population believed was the case. They claimed that they were anxious to ensure that the people who built the party continued to have the critical say about how it was shaped, and the direction it took. Moaned one activist:

The door is open now and anybody, I mean anybody, could simply walk in and take over the party…. It is not about race. People who want high office must deserve it. They must be prepared to work in the trenches, to pay their dues and work their way up. You can’t just come along with a fistful of dollars, a pinstripe suit, and get a government in your lap. As Shadow sang: ‘Is not so this thing does work...’ So people must try their best not to personalise the issue. This is not a business you are buying over; the next leader must understand the political culture of the people he or she represents.” (Sunday Mirror, May 20, 2001).

The old guard argued that while new blood was welcome, longevity, loyalty and commitment were important. The NAR/ONR could not be allowed to take over the UNC which was now beginning to enjoy the fruits of office after its long sojourn in the wilderness. As party stalwart Trevor Sudama put it:

When you look at some of the key figures who came in recently, they came from the NAR/ONR. The UNC is for inclusion, but its up to members to decide what position they occupy in the party. We have a right to make our claims for longevity, loyalty and commitment. We put our lives on the line for this party. We want to have everyone involved when it comes to the political leadership, but we need people who have a vision for society, who can understand its ethnic and cultural diversity, and how to manage it. That requires a much larger vision than what we’re seeing from some of the aspirants. The new members being brought in aren’t being screened as our
constitution demands they should be by a membership screening team. Anybody coming in off the street is being given membership automatically. Nobody's asking if they subscribe to UNC's principles. We welcome everyone, but our concern is the dominance of any one particular interest in the party and, given where John has come from - a conglomerate, [and the PNM] - it's a matter of concern if he brings in that influence as a dominant one. Members must decide on it. (Guardian, May 20, 2001)

Sudama sneered about those who boasted about their competence, “even if their only competence is to pave roads,” a pointed dig at John’s role as the Minister of Infrastructure. “Character cannot be bought, not even in a supermarket” (Express, May 17, 2001). Sudama said that he withdrew from the contest and joined Maharaj’s slate in order to ensure that the UNC was not taken over by people who had a different view from the “original vision of the UNC” (ibid.). Sudama conceded that the House of the Rising Sun had many rooms and that it had a place for everyone. But everyone must [however] know their place.” (Express, May 17, 2001). Ralph Maraj likewise warned that all over the world there was a problem of “high financiers gaining control of political parties.” According to Maraj, “a political party is not a sports car that you buy and discard. It is an inheritance.” Maraj warned about political predators who took the cynical view that those who had “more corn would feed more fowl. That is insulting you,” he told party activists. (Express, May 17, 2001).

The UNC elections were billed as an exercise in “one love.” The contest however turned quite nasty. Fears were expressed that it could turn violent. Attempts were in fact made to discourage John from remaining in the fray. Jack Warner warned him that “dem fellas would be racial and kill [you] (Sunday Mirror, May 20, 2001). John, who was in fact persuaded by his campaign team to hire a security firm to guard him, lamented the manner in which the contest had evolved, and confessed that had he known that this would have happened, he would “never have thrown [his] hat in the ring. I just thought this was going to be an exercise in democracy; but its taken a real twist and gone down a different road,” one that was characterised by a display of “obscenity, gutter politics, vulgarity and a lot of hanging of dirty linen in public where one’s achievements are now being twisted to work against them - that I pave roads etc., Yesterday I was their colleague. Today I am their foe. They are changing right before my very eyes.” (Express, May 20, 2001). Racial slurs were also hurled at John who complained that the contest was taking a toll on his family. He likewise indicated that if what he was doing by way of electioneering was challenged in court as he at one time feared, he would withdraw from the race rather than bring the party, and by extension its leader, into disrepute and ruin. “The opposition could have the executive on a platter without the need to incur legal expenses” (Guardian, May 21, 2001).

John disclaimed any interest in the Prime Ministership, and claimed he merely wanted to do party work. Like many others in the party, he remained of the view that given the diversity in the society, the UNC should have three deputy leaders rather than one, so that the deputy was not seen as the heir apparent to the Prime Minister. He pledged to work to have the constitution of the party changed (Sunday Guardian, May 20, 2001).
It is worth noting that the slate led by Maharaj was not drawn from the old guard alone, and that it also included high profile Afro-Trinidadians who were relative newcomers. These included the former Commissioner of Police, the former Chief of Defense Staff, Shouter Baptist Archbishop, Barbara Burke, former Trade Unionist Leader and Party Chairman, Wade Mark, and Junior Minister of Education, Roy Augustus. The John slate also featured several stalwart Indians, including the daughter of the Secretary General of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, Vimla Tota-Maharaj and the Minister of Culture, Ganga Singh. Both slates were in fact ethnically diverse. It was however clear that one had its centre of gravity in the traditional Indian constituency which felt it was losing influence while the other drew its energy and inspiration from that political upwardly mobile element which had come into the party following the collapse of the NAR in 1988.

So far, no mention has been made of the third contestant for the deputy leadership, the Minister of Education, Kamla Persad-Bissessar. Mrs. Bissessar's campaign was gender based, a fact that counted against her in a society that was still very patriarchal. None of her parliamentary colleagues endorsed her slate. She was also seen as a "jeannie-come-lately" since she ran on a NAR ticket in 1991 and was savagely critical of Basdeo Panday and the UNC during the campaign. She however insisted that she joined the UNC before Mr. Panday became Prime Minister, and that she was not a "sleeping Jeannie come lately" who needed to be awakened, a charge levelled at the "old brigade" by John whom she dismissed as an "I" specialist. Like John, however, she warned the old guard that the UNC could no longer rely mainly on its old "soul" to survive, and that all sections of the party needed to feel assured of access to its decision making processes" (Newsday, May 15, 2001).

Mr. Panday's reaction to the leadership struggle was very instructive. He boasted that the "one man one vote" election was a "tremendous exercise in democracy" which, in his view, could stand comparison with that which took place in the United Kingdom, the United States, and anywhere in the Caribbean. The behaviour of the UNC membership was in his view, not less civilised than that of English or American voters. Contrary to what was assumed, the events did not sadden him at all. He felt certain that party voters would make intelligent choices and would not be bought for a "mess of pottage" or a "ten days" job as feared. He also felt that the party had to grow up and deal with the "trauma of change" (Newsday, May 15, 2001). Interestingly, he felt that the behaviour of some of the candidates seeking the voters franchise were making them "inelectable" as future leaders of the UNC. As he remarked:

I am extremely happy and pleased that some people are exposing themselves in such a way that they will never be leaders of this party. The people will have an opportunity to look at them and see those who are willing to sacrifice the party and the government and everybody in order to gain power. It is upon this basis that the party will choose its leadership” (Guardian, May 22, 2001)

Panday indicated that he would not intervene. He preferred instead to have would be leaders make fools of themselves and let the people judge who was fit or unfit to lead. Mr. Panday did not name the fools, but his brother offered a hint as to whom he might prefer.
As Subhas Panday told a party meeting, “if members vote for John, it would make the UNC leader happy” (Guardian, May 21, 2001).

A few things seem clear about the struggle. One was that the fight was seen as being for succession to Basdeo Panday. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj seemed more determined than were the others to succeed Panday, and his body language suggested that he would do whatever was necessary to achieve that ambition. He could not afford to lose. It was also clear that Maharaj did not have the support of a majority of UNC MPs as the successor to Mr. Panday, and that he was upset by the number of MPs who gave their support to John. He was in fact visibly puzzled by their non “praja” behaviour, and publicly urged them to explain to their constituents why they had chosen as they had. Constituents were also told that they did not have to take cues from their MPs. This further angered the MPs who warned that this attempt to dictate choices was a “sign of things to come” (Sunday Mirror, May 20, 2001).

The ULF element in the party, led by Mr. Trevor Sudama, was also angry about the fact that in his allocation of ministerial portfolios following the 2001 election, Mr. Panday gave all the key ministries to Johnny-come-latelys or to ONR/NAR/PNM elements. These included the Ministry of Finance, The Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tourism and Enterprise, and the Ministry of Energy. His attempt to make 7 defeated candidates, senators and ministers also did not go down well with some MPs since six of them were Afro-Trinidadians. Mr. Panday in fact defended his actions to CARICOM Heads of government on this very ground. He advised them that he did not want to lead a government that was unequivocally Indian based.

The old hands were also unhappy that Mr. Panday seemed to have capitulated completely to the “parasitic oligarchy,” and that he had in fact switched loyalties from the financiers who had helped the party to win in 1995 election (Maritime Life CEO Steve Fergusson and Northern Construction Company’s Ish Galbaransingh) to a new group of financiers. Panday was in fact viewed as an arch namakharam by many in the UNC as well as by radical “Indian rights” groups. As one such group, the Indian Review Committee told Subhas Panday and by extension, his brother:

The UNC is already a national party. Mr. Panday uses terms “inclusion” and “national party” as a façade. He is also being ungrateful towards his supporters. When politicians like Subhas Panday state that “as politicians we must not divide people we live too close in this society,” he is really being a hypocrite like so many politicians. It seems Trinidadians of Indian descent are in danger in the UNC, a party they have strongly supported since its formation in 1988. Probably Indians need to seriously reconsider their position in the UNC in the light of what is occurring in recent years. The UNC elite in pursuit of a policy of ‘national unity” and “inclusion,” really noble policies, are engaged in reverse discrimination against Indian supporters. Indians must consider whether they are just political beasts of burden to be ridden by “Indian” politicians, and now that office and
government has been acquired, are being discarded and betrayed. (*Express*, May 11, 2001)

Elements in that group also called for the creation of a new all Indian party to rise from central Trinidad to wrest control from the UNC which was pursuing a policy of appeasement to every African vote and every "Tom, Jack and Carlos" and stigmatising all that was Indian (*Newsday*, May 22, 2001).

Both ethnic groups were complaining that the one was seeking to ride the backs of the other to achieve or maintain power. Will the party survive the crisis despite the various efforts that were made by Panday to get the candidates to behave in accordance with a code of conduct which enjoins it to eschew behaviour based on race, or personality or that was destructive to the party and its goal of inclusivity? Jack Warner exuded both skepticism and optimism. As he said, "considering what is happening now, if at the end of the day the party emerges stronger, that would be the Ninth Wonder of the World." He was however cautiously optimistic. The PNM, he argued, "was a discredited worn out organisation. I believe the UNC is the party to take this nation successfully into the 21st century" (*Mirror*, May 20, 2000). Only time will tell!

Despite the efforts of both parties to form rainbow coalitions, voting in Trinidad elections was essentially an act of registering ethnic solidarity. Polls conducted by the author's firm, St. Augustine Research Associates (SARA) and aggregate data consistently reveal that with only marginal exceptions, voting follows ethnic lines. Polling data suggests that about 10 to 15 percent of the creole electorate voted or the UNC in the November 2000 election whereas five percent or less of the Indian electorate voted for the PNM. The call of the tribe, *apanjhat*, is manifestly stronger among Indians than among Afro-Trinidadians, though many of the former insist that their choice was not determined by race, but was a reflection of their inability to support the current leadership of the PNM.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the fact remains that the Westminster first-past-the-post-system as it express itself in Trinidad and Tobago reinforces feelings of tribalism, and makes it difficult for civil society to insist on transparency and accountability. Leaders escape the negative judgement of the electorate, since to change a leader is tantamount to changing the ethnic basis of the regime he leads. This has been shown to be more true of Indian leaders than their creole counterparts, perhaps because the former had only recently secured a foothold in the corridors of power, and their supporters were reluctant to see them dislodged. And as the party leaders cleverly warned them in the last election, "we've come too far to turn back now."

The electoral polarisation of two main ethnic groups has now become sharper than it had ever been, and increased ethnic competition for symbolic and material resources could well rent the fabric of the society. Concern was expressed that Trinidad could in fact go the way of Guyana. In reference to this fear of Guyanisation, Lloyd Best had the following to say:
There are ... two electoral herds in the country, ... and the country had been driven to the extreme by them precisely because that basis of mobilisation has no validity... racial polarisation on an electoral basis has no validity in the country. Everybody knows its going to destroy us if we allow it to take over.... If there was a complete polarisation of race, and the demographic majority of the country allows [Panday] to win under those conditions in a context where he also had the majority demographic in the country, the situation would be just like Guyana. He would be in power forever. And that is why I said that all the forces in the opposition should form a coalition... to stop that from happening. [My] fear is about any demographic majority, whether it is Indian or black. (Independent, October 9, 1998)

Time will however tell whether Trinidad and Tobago will eventually succeed in showing that the Westminster model need not lead to political balkanisation, and that verbroedering politiek could be achieved using ‘united front from below” strategies or whether the Suriname model will in the end have to be tried, despite the PNM’s expressed disinterest.  

Towards An Inclusive MODEL

We have looked in broad outline at the three plural societies in the Southern Caribbean cone, and the manner in which they have attempted to deal with the problems of ethnic political competition. We have also examined some of the various strategies which they have used or tried to use to effect ethnic reconciliation. In the case of Suriname, our brief tour d’horizon has hopefully allowed us to understand the context within which the apanghat/consociational model emerged, and the manner in which it has functioned or failed to do so. We have seen that the model worked best between 1957 and 1968 when the three main parties representing the dominant ethnic groups worked closely, and when the economy was in an expansionist phase. After 1967, consociationalism continued, but in a token manner as one or other of the major parties sought to effect alliances with offshoots of the major parties. As Dew rightly notes, “real consociationalism requires the participation of the major ethnic parties in the system, not token ones that are used to create a façade of consociationalism .... The military coup and its excesses and failures unwittingly helped to undo the damage of 1967 and send the major ethnic parties back into each other’s arms” (Dew 1994: 208).

Looking at the advantages and the many disadvantages of consociationalism, our judgement is that in the context of Suriname, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. We agree with Dew that consociationalism was the “least unattractive of the many unattractive paths that Suriname could have chosen to follow, ... but that there will always be trouble in Suriname” (ibid: 214). Societies, especially those which are dual such as Trinidad and Guyana, and in which there exist dominant social groups which are in a position to veto policy options or paralyse the political, social and economic system, cannot survive for long at any meaningful level of wellbeing unless the constituent groups feel a certain sense of ethnic security. If the macro political environment is not put right, it is
difficult to achieve sustainable good governance, whatever the performance of the economy might be.

There was once a widespread view, informed in part by Marxism, that individuals and groups are generally more concerned about economic security and well being, and that once their basic material needs are met, ethnicity becomes less relevant. Recent experiences the world over suggest that ethnicity is a more powerful force than was once believed, and that it does not necessarily dissolve once material conditions improve. Ethnic groups in the diasporas of materially well endowed societies do not lose their distinctiveness which may in fact intensify. This is not to say that material well being does not help to attenuate some of the asperities of ethnic contestation, and that the latter is exacerbated when economies are in trouble. The precise balance between the two conditions however depends on the extent to which there are factors at work which serve to erode or to heighten and intensify such feelings of insecurity or perceptions thereof. It depends on how the respective realities are constructed or how sharply they collide. In some cases, societies which were assumed to have been integrated become repluralised.

The example of Guyana helps to inform us of the importance of feelings ethnic insecurity. Most Afro-Guyanese agree that their material conditions deteriorated under PNC rule. Most however affirm that they prefer giving political support to the PNC in preference to the PPP/Civic despite some evidence that the overall material conditions in Guyana did improve after 1992. What most Afro-Guyanese do is downplay claims of improved economic performance, claim authorship for such success stories as there are, or alternatively, claim that the benefits of such improvement as there have been accrues to ethnic communities other than theirs.

Considerations relating to status reversal are also involved in their construction of reality. The Afro-Guyanese, like the creoles of Trinidad and Suriname, regard their Indian counterparts as people of a lesser breed, people who are not fit to rule. The feeling is that they cannot be trusted to govern fairly, and in the general as opposed to the public interest, losing power is therefore not merely a question of giving the other side a turn at the crease in a game of “ins” and “out” in which the seams emerge from the same social catchment area. The two teams are not seen to be in the same league, or to be playing by the same rule. This in part explains why Afro-Guyanese considered power sharing unthinkable (horrible dictu) when the PNC was in power but see condominium as absolutely necessary now that they hegemony. In their view, the new elite, with its “orientalist” traditions of governance, had to be closely monitored and seasoned by the old, since they could not be trusted to bear the scepter or wield the sword. To leave it to do so alone was to commit ethnic suicide or facilitate political ethnocide.

Does the case of Trinidad and Tobago suggest a way out? Have Trinidad forded the gap that Suriname and Guyana have found difficulty crossing. As we have indicated, there was a time, in 1986, when most would have said that this was the case. The National Alliance For Reconstruction had in fact rallied significant elements from all ethnic and confessional groups into its fold under the mantra of “one love” (Ryan 1990). Regrettfully, that experiment collapsed within 6 months of the party taking office. While it did limp
along for a full five year term, its ecumenical energy was spent within a year as the contending ethnic groups sought to gain, regain or maintain economic and political market shares in the midst of a dramatic determination in the performance of the oil based economy.

Ali Maxrui warned that “dual” societies such as Guyana, Cyprus and Trinidad and Tobago are more difficult to govern than “plural” societies. As he writes:

In dual societies, unless special care is taken, there is a higher risk of stalemate [and] polarisation.... Such societies can end in periodic convulsions, prolonged civil conflict, voluntary separation of the two parties or externally imposed partition. The big question is whether the dual societies in the Caribbean will prove to be more stable than the average in the world. (Guardian, May 23, 1999

In the plural society of Suriname, the Javanese and the other aboriginal groups constitute 33 percent of the population, and can in critical times play a balancing role. In Trinidad and Guyana, there is no equivalent group that is large enough or which is sufficiently well located strategically to play such a role, though in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, Tobago with its two seats, might be considered to be so located. In the case of Guyana, the minority parties rarely gain more than 4 of the 65 seats and have never played a clinching role in any recent election.

Predictions about eventual political outcomes are risky. Political change is fluid, protean, incoherent and uncertain. Outcomes are shaped not only by existing structures and cultures, but also by actors struggling to define them in accordance with their presumed interests at particular conjunctures. Interests are however often changed in the process of struggle, especially if human agencies take a long rather than a short view. History is full of surprises, full of trajectories taken which were not obvious at the beginning of the contestation. William Morris notes that outcomes are never as intended. “Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat; and when it comes, it turns out to be not what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name” (cited in Fatton 1992: 146). Marx was more deterministic. “Men are free to make history, but not just as they please. They do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past.” In the modern world, however, the structures of the past are less determinative than they were when Marx wrote. Social conflict is no longer always akin to a Greek tragedy with scripted outcomes. The opportunity is often given to us to mould and shape new outcomes, new destines, albeit in a manner that is mediated by existing structures and the routines of what Fernand Braudel (1977) calls “material life which controls us without our even being aware of them.” Braudel however notes that material life is “neither entirely passive nor, above all, completely static. It has moments of acceleration and occasionally of surprise.” Interactivity is also a fact of life.

In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, it is clear that the old creole dominated political structure and habitus could not have remained as exclusivist as it was. It would have been
forced to become more inclusive as the erstwhile subaltern forces made their claims for accommodation in the mainstream and insisted that their version of reality should also help to shape the new orthodoxy. Clashes can lead to unrestrained conflict or generate creative change and convergence into a new mainstream, a new rainbow. Despite considerable evidence that there remains a great deal of ethnic insecurity and fears of status reversal on both sides, we believe that the latter is the more likely outcome. What that mainstream would look like in the future is however unclear.

In the case of Suriname, effective consociationalism has been restored, and the respective parties seem to be making a determined effort to make the system work. We however do not know what impact the passing of Lachmon, who is well over 85, would have on the political system. Only time will tell whether verbroedering will continue to be based on an interparty model, or whether it will breakdown again as it did in 1996-2000, or whether it will eventually morph itself into one transethnic political party.

In the case of Guyana, it would seem that the main dramatis personae have contemplated the ethnic inferno one more time, and have decided that it would be fatal to leap into it. One can only hope that the dialogue currently taking place between the party leadership and within the committees that have been established to come up with meaningful policy options will help build trust and mutual respect between the two communities. One also hopes that the regional and international communities would lend Guyana a hand to help in this process which will no doubt take time and resources to develop. We prefer to be optimistic.
End Notes

1Dew (1994: 208) believes that it is possible that "given the terms of consociationalism, oligarchy maybe tempered by interparty debate while power sharing may limit the scale of corruption. In fact, consociationalism brings to political practice is own set of checks and balances. Helped by the ever-present threat of intra-ethnic "out bidding," power sharing generates its own demands for accountability and responsible government." Few Surinamers would agree with these optimistic views as they relate to corruption.

2Dew opines that fragmentation not only weakens, but corrupts, since those who are at the head of a multi-ethnic society must co-opt in order to aggregate, "whoever engages in co-optation is in turn co-opted. Political vision survives only in opposition" (Dew 1994: 214).

3Manning has consistently opposed any suggestion that the PNM should form a government of national unity with the UNC. If that had happened after the elections of 1995 or 2001:

The country could have easily been destroyed ... But it would not have lasted anyway. The partnership would have been broken as soon as things like the airport scandal and others came up," he said. The opposition was there to show the other side of an issue and, without that, there would be room for civil unrest and even military intervention. It is not in the national interest to have anything like a national unity government without an opposition. (Express, May 23, 2001)
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