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GUYANA'S PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Guyana's pro-Communist People's Progressive Party (PPP) is the largest and best organized political grouping in the country. Its leader, Cheddi Jagan, headed the government from the time the British granted universal adult suffrage to their former colony in 1953 until his defeat in December 1964, except for short periods when the British suspended the constitution. Although the party is experiencing some internal problems, the East Indian vote is still solidly behind it. If the elections scheduled to take place before March 1969 are honest, the PPP stands an excellent chance of being returned to office. Until then, it seems likely to concentrate on propaganda and on efforts to disrupt the economy, to divide the parties in the governing coalition and to avoid violence that would provoke a government crackdown.

Importance and Orientation

The party is composed primarily of East Indians, who make up almost 50 percent of the population and who follow Jagan because he is a member of their race. They are convinced that he is the only political leader who has their interests at heart and that he will protect them from the more aggressive Negro population. Although Jagan, his wife Janet, and some of his other top lieutenants are Communists and Marxists who see to it that the PPP follows an extreme leftist line, the bulk of the membership is unconcerned with ideological questions. In fact, many of the PPP's wealthier East Indian members would be happier if Jagan were more favorably disposed toward capitalism; even

the poorer ones are petty capitalists at heart. Many members are fairly religious Hindus and Moslems who would prefer that Jagan not be quite so identified with "atheistic Communism."

Jagan was defeated in 1964 because the British changed the electoral system to require that a party or coalition could win control of the government only if it had a majority of the votes. The PPP received a plurality, as usual, but was unable to form a coalition with another party. The Negro-dominated People's National Congress (PNC), led by Forbes Burnham, and the small conservative United Force (UF) then joined forces to obtain the needed majority. Burnham became prime

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