

## GUYANA

**Date of Elections:** December 16, 1968

### Characteristics of Parliament

The National Assembly of Guyana comprises 53 deputies elected for a period of 5 years. The Speaker, who is elected by the Assembly, may be chosen either from those of its members who are not Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries or from among persons who are not members of the Assembly but are qualified for election to it.

Furthermore, under the amended Constitution of January 10, 1969\*, the Governor-General may designate up to 6 Ministers from among non-members qualified for election, "or such greater number as Parliament may prescribe". These Ministers become *ex-officio* members of Parliament but are not entitled to vote.

The last general elections were held on December 7, 1964.

### Electoral System

All Guyanese citizens of both sexes, at least 21 years of age and resident in Guyana or abroad, are entitled to vote in general elections provided they are duly registered as electors. Commonwealth citizens of the requisite age who have lived in Guyana for at least one year are also entitled to participate. Voters are furthermore required to be sound of mind and not to have been deprived of their civil or political rights by court order.

Guyanese and Commonwealth citizens are eligible for election as members of the National Assembly provided they qualify as voters,

\* See *Parliamentary Developments in the World*, p. 13

have been resident in Guyana for at least 1 year, and are able to speak and read the English language with a degree of proficiency sufficient to enable them to take an active part in parliamentary proceedings. Members of the armed forces or police force and persons concerned in the conduct of elections are not eligible.

Elections are conducted on the party-list system with no preferential or split voting, on the basis of proportional representation of seats throughout the country.

Each party submits a list of 53 candidates in alphabetical order. After the poll, the total number of valid votes cast by the entire electorate is divided by the number of seats to be filled (53) so as to obtain the electoral quota (Hare quota). This quota is then divided into the number of votes obtained by each list and the seats distributed accordingly. Any remaining seats are allocated to the lists with the largest undivided remainders.

The designation of the successful candidates from among those names appearing on the list is left to the discretion of the political parties and is the responsibility of the "representative of the list".

Should a seat fall vacant during a legislature, the representative of the list to which it had been allocated is requested by the Speaker to designate a new holder from the list who had not previously received a seat.

### **(General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections)**

In Guyana, where racial antagonisms are particularly strong, political differences tend to follow closely the divisions of the various communities.

The two major parties, the People's National Congress (PNC), led by Mr. Forbes Burnham, and the People's Progressive Party (PPP), headed by Mr. Cheddi Jagan, are supported mainly by citizens of African and Indian extraction respectively. A third political current is represented by the United Force (UF), a conservative party under Mr. Pedro d'Aiguier. There is also a fourth party, the

Guyana United Muslim Party (GMP), whose limited influence is attested by the tiny number of votes obtained by its list in the election.

Since independence in May 1966, Mr. Forbes Burnham, whose party did not have a majority in Parliament, had been governing the country by means of an alliance with the United Force.

On October 25, 1968, however, the Prime Minister had Parliament adopt an amendment to the electoral law and Constitution so as to permit Guyanese citizens residing abroad to participate in the elections. This step, which aroused considerable controversy in the country, caused the coalition Government to split and resulted in early general elections.

The leaders of both the People's Progressive Party and the United Force strongly criticized this decision as an attempt to favour the People's National Congress since most emigres belonged to the community which supported it.

This dispute remained at the centre of the electoral campaign, during which Mr. Forbes Burnham stressed his Government's achievements: reduction of inter-community discord, higher *per capita* income, inauguration of new highways, etc.

On the other hand, the People's Progressive Party was placed at a disadvantage, during the months preceding the poll, by its adoption of a Marxist-Leninist line at a congress which it held in August.

The atmosphere on polling day was somewhat tense. As a result, several complaints were lodged by the PPP which claimed that there had been a number of irregularities, especially in the registration of voters residing abroad. All these accusations were, however, rejected by the Chairman of the Elections Commission.

Under the circumstances, it should perhaps be pointed out that, while the 34,429 votes obtained by the PNC from among the 36,485 valid votes cast overseas (as against 1,053 for the United Force and 1,003 for the PPP) strengthened this party's position considerably in Parliament, the 138,000-odd votes that it won in the home poll had already given it an overall majority.

## Statistics

*1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of the Seats  
in the National Assembly*

Number of registered electors. . . . .	367,945
Voters. . . . .	314,289 (85.4%)
Void or blank ballot papers. . . . .	1,898
Valid votes. . . . .	312,391

Political Group	Votes obtained	%/ /o	Number of Seats in the National Assembly
People's National Congress (PNC)	174,339	55.81	30
People's Progressive Party (PPP)	113,991	36.49	19
United Force (UF)	23,162	<b>7.41</b>	4
Guyana United Muslim Party (GMP)	899	0.29	—
			53

*2. Distribution of Deputies according to Sex*

	Speaker	PNC	PPP	UF	Ministers « £ » £ £ of the Chamber	Total
<u>Men</u> . . . . .	1	27	17	<b>a</b>	4	52
Women . . . . .		3	2	1	1	7
						59