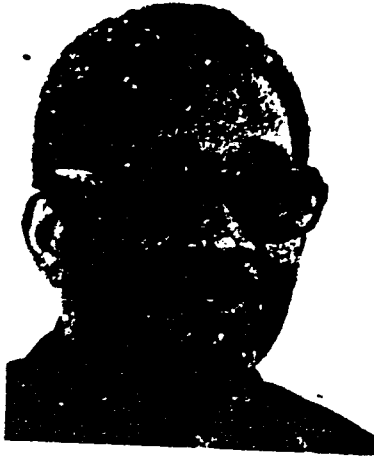


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Prime Minister Burnham

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Guyana: Outlook for
Opposition to Burnham (U)

The 15-year-old dictatorship of Prime Minister Forbes Burnham has reached a low point in popular support, but prospects appear negligible that an effective opposition movement will emerge in the near future. The violent death on 13 June of Dr. Walter Rodney, a leader of the leftist Working People's Alliance (WPA), has deprived the anti-Burnham forces of their most capable and charismatic figure. The collegial leadership that inherits the poorly organized WPA is not likely to make much headway in mobilizing its potential resources. In fact, the threat of government repression appears to have paralyzed many party supporters. (U)



People's Progressive Party leader Jagan

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Guyana's largest opposition group, the pro-Soviet People's Progressive Party (PPP) headed by Cheddi Jagan, has been equivocal on proposals for a formal, broadly based alliance of the left. Jagan has lost much of his credibility as a plausible alternative to Burnham because of his overriding interest in safeguarding his parliamentary status. This willingness to play by Burnham's rules seems to rule him out as a serious contender. (U)

*Source of copyrighted photograph: Cuba Internacional, November 1979. (U)
**Source of copyrighted photograph: UPI Special. (U)

19 September 1980

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3

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~~SECRET~~Burnham's Image at Low Ebb

Even before Rodney's death, Burnham's stock had slipped in Guyana and in the Caribbean. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Burnham shared the limelight with other nonaligned leaders, parading his "cooperative socialism" and Third World credentials. In recent years though, many among the younger generation of West Indians have come to see him as an ideological charlatan and petty tyrant. Burnham's previously amicable relations with leftists in the region have soured even more since Rodney's death. ~~(S NF NC)~~

Both Jamaican Prime Minister Manley and Cuban President Castro have taken steps to distance themselves from Burnham. In the last year, Cuba's presence in Guyana has dropped from 100 to less than 50. Havana's misgivings about Burnham are signaled by the military training reportedly given by Cuban advisers to a small number of anti-Burnham activists in Grenada earlier this year. The training also reflected the complete failure of Burnham's considerable efforts to win over the leftist Bishop regime in Grenada. ~~(S NF NC)~~

In addition to growing political isolation, the country has been beset by continued economic stagnation. Unhappy with their declining economic prospects and lack of political freedoms in recent years, Guyanese have emigrated in a steady flow--depriving the country of sorely needed talent. Corruption has become more visible and criticism of Burnham's ability to deal with the economic malaise has grown. As disillusionment with his ruling People's National Congress spread over the past year, sympathy for the WPA seemed to be on the upswing. At the time of Rodney's death, Burnham clearly was apprehensive about the movement's potential. ~~(C)~~

Since Rodney's death, charges that the government is implicated have been widely accepted. Responsibility for the bombing has not been determined, but circumstantial evidence suggests a link between high officials of Burnham's government and the crime. The alleged killer is a former member of the defense forces who is reported to have close ties to the Army chief of staff. In addition, two WPA members have been killed in the past year, one of whom was set up by security forces, according to a reliable source. ~~(S NF [REDACTED])~~

19 September 1980

4

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Those who blame the government for Rodney's death argue that it is part of a deliberate plan to wipe out any effective opposition before holding another sham election. The drafting of a new constitution making Burnham "executive president" and formalizing his already sweeping powers is expected to pave the way for new national elections--possibly before the end of the year. The government seems certain to rig the vote as it has done on three previous occasions. ~~(e)~~

Disarray Within WPA Ranks

The shock of the Rodney killing has badly jolted his party, and his successors have yet to sort out their options. In the highly charged atmosphere following allegations that Rodney was murdered, party spokesmen impulsively called for Burnham's overthrow. There is little evidence, however, the party is prepared to match revolutionary rhetoric with revolutionary action. ~~(S NF NC)~~

Of those likely to succeed Rodney, none approach him in ability or charisma. Some intellectuals in the leadership--including Rupert Roopnarine, Eusi Kwayana, and Walter Omawale--reportedly favor a switch to more radical tactics; Rodney may have been urging a more aggressive campaign against the government prior to his death. (S NF NC)

Even so, most WPA activists are adopting a low profile to avoid government reprisals. The party's prospects for a sustained campaign of violence--as opposed to sporadic attacks--are further diminished by the extent to which the WPA is infiltrated by Burnham's agents. Political and economic conditions would probably have to deteriorate far beyond present levels before the WPA could enlist enough popular support for a full-scale antigovernment insurgency. ~~(e)~~

Jagan and the PPP: Stale Competition

Cheddi Jagan's People's Progressive Party controls the country's largest labor union, has a significant influence among sugar workers, and derives support from the largely rural-dwelling East Indian majority. While Jagan enjoys the status of elder statesman in the region, the

19 September 1980

5

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62-year-old former archrival to Burnham has lost grass-roots appeal among younger Guyanese; some have switched allegiance to the multiracial WPA, which also has its roots in Marxist concepts. (C)

Reinforcing Jagan's image as a lackluster ideologue is his vacillation in taking a strong and aggressive stance against Burnham. Determined to preserve his parliamentary prerogatives, Jagan apparently mistrusts the motives of radical leftists who advocate violence. In his adversary role, Jagan continues to attack Burnham's record and to impugn the United States for allegedly supporting the repression, but he appears content to stay within the limits of the system imposed by Burnham. This in turn tends to legitimize Burnham's position. (C)

An Uneasy Calm

Burnham currently retains the loyalty of the security forces and the predominantly black government bureaucracy in Georgetown. Although he faces further deterioration in the political climate and dim economic prospects, his opponents are ill prepared to wage a serious struggle. Continued repression and economic hardship, nevertheless, will provide a breeding ground for wider discontent and opposition in the years ahead. If an effort develops to undermine Burnham, chances are it will come from within the government or the security forces. (C)

19 September 1980