

Our Party

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People's National Congress Reform
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1. A Party for progress

Comrade Forbes Burnham, our founder-leader, together with Comrade Joseph Lachmansingh, our founder-chairman, established the People's National Congress fifty-seven years ago on 5th October 1957. The PNC, from the start, was a protest against the dogmatic creed and divisive tactics of the People's Progressive Party. It was conceived as a party of personal liberty, of national unity and of public service.

The decision to establish a new party and the choice of its name were definitely made on 5th October 1957 at the Party's first congress held at the Globe Cinema in Cummingsburg, Georgetown. Elections were held and our Founder, Forbes Burnham, was elected Leader and Joseph Pryag Lachmansingh, Chairman. A resolution was passed for a Women's Auxiliary – now the National Congress of Women – to be established and the Party's newspaper was named *New Nation* on the same day.

Many other things had to be done – including the composition of the battle song; recruitment of members; rental of office premises; selection and design of the party emblem and flag and the purchase of a vehicle – in the following weeks. Our Party, in essence, had to be built from scratch, from the ground up.

Our Party, seven years after its founding, entered government as part of a coalition administration fifty years ago on 14th December 1964. It then started to transform colonial Guyana into a modern state. The PNC led Guyana to Independence 18 months later, on 26th May 1966.

The social, economic and political predicament of the country 50 years ago should not be underestimated. Our Founder, addressing the Special Congress held to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the PNC in government on 14th December 1974 in what came to be known as the *Declaration of Sophia*, reminded us of the dreadful condition of the colony.

The People's Progressive Party, during its seven years of mismanagement and misrule from 1957 to 1964, deepened and exploited racial divisions and badly damaged the economy. It was the PNC's task to retrieve the economy, restore national self-confidence and rebuild mutual respect in society. (*Declaration of Sophia*, p.7).

Our Party is proud of its record. We entered government with a clear mission to establish a welfare state. This was defined and refined during a series of earlier annual congresses and was embodied in the 1964 elections manifesto entitled *The New Road*. That policy stood on three pillars – free education from the nursery to the university, affordable housing and social protection which would provide coverage “from the cradle to the grave” through the creation of a national insurance scheme.

We laid the foundation for modern public infrastructure by reconstructing the coastal road network and sea defences; constructing the Soesdyke-Linden highway, bridges on the Canje and Demerara Rivers, a new international airport at Atkinson Field (later, Timehri) and the Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary agricultural development scheme.

We extended the public education system by constructing the University of Guyana, Cyril Potter College of Education, the New Amsterdam Technical Institute, Guyana Industrial Training Centre, the multilateral schools, hinterland schools for indigenous students, the Youth Corps and the National Service.

We embarked on huge working people's housing schemes, rural electrification, telephone service, national airline and household pure water supply. We initiated the Amerindian lands rectification process, ensured equal recognition of religious observances and implemented free education as a constitutional right. Our Party is proud of its achievements in office.

Our Founder described the early PNC as “an organisation of protest and struggle.” He said that it was a “protest against corruption, misrule and narrow partisanship of the political government then in office, a government which nearly ruined our dear country's struggle against imperialism for independence (*Ibid.*, p.10). It was distinguished from all hitherto existing parties, however, by its inclusionary policy.

Our Founder had written an article on 16th April 1957 entitled: “Where do we go from here?” That article, even though it was promulgated six months before the first congress, defined the Party's identity. Our Founder wrote:

This party started as a working class party and will never give up fighting for the workers; we will never, and can never, forsake them; the moment we do, we had better arrange for our political funeral. But the fact that ours is a worker-based party must not prevent us from having the intelligence to learn from the history of other countries and other liberation movements.

We must be able and prepared to draw our strength not only from the workers but from all sections of Guianese – workers, farmers, businessmen, intellectuals and civil servants, regardless of their race. (A Destiny to Mould, p. 5).

2. A Party for the people

Our Party has never forgotten and must never forget its duty. It must never forsake the working people of this country. We must, most of all, remain committed to achieving national unity and to building bridges to all communities and groups which are interested in the well-being of the people and the progress of our country. The Party will continue to work towards promoting inclusionary democracy and fostering national unity.

Our Party's aim, at first, had been to mobilise the maximum number of persons who shared our objectives and to recruit a large number of members. Our Founder observed that “there was no time to pause and examine the *bona fides* and real commitment of these members, some of whom were, particularly after the PNC's accession to office, mere bandwaggoners. (*Ibid.*, p.10). He advised, forty years ago:

Every member, every officer, every leader – be he at the centre or at the group level – must be a trained activist, organiser and educator in every sense. He must have no reservations about the Party's philosophy and programme of which he must be fully informed to the last minute and which he must impart by example and by precept.

*Party membership must be a reward to be sought after, a qualification which has to be earned. It must not be come by, unless the applicant has gone through the crucible of training, testing and performance. It cannot... be bought.” (*Ibid.*, p.14).*

Each member must be grounded in the ideology and programme of the Party. He must be not merely a member, but an active member of a co-operative. He must

engage himself prominently and unapologetically in community activities and self-help projects.

He must educate others as he has been educated. He must take part in all relevant Party exercises and programmes. He must inform and be informed by the people among whom he lives and with whom he works. He must make the sacrifices he calls upon others to make, and more. He must display ingenuity and initiative. His primary loyalty must be to the Party wherever he is or finds himself. (Ibid., pp. 31-32).

The *Constitution of the People's National Congress*, at Rule 10, defines the group as "the basic unit of the Party." This means that every Party member must belong to a Group. Our Founder taught:

It is through the Group that activities have to be carried out and communication maintained with the other Party units and agencies. It is through the Group that the education of members will be carried out and it is from the Group eventually that the Central Secretariat and leadership will get vital information and advice.

The Group is the means through which the Party will maintain direct contact with the people, the masses. The District and Regional Committees and Conferences are important, but their effective functioning is directly related to the reliability and vitality of the Group. (Ibid., p. 31).

Our Party's strength, apart from membership, depends on the quality of its leadership. Our Founder taught:

Leadership of the Party must not be confused with, or limited conceptually to, the person or institution of the political leader who is, at most, merely first among equals.

Leadership inheres in the Executive Committee, the General Council, the Secretariat, the Chairman and Executive of each Region, each sub-region, each group, each activist and each legislator. Each one of these groups or each member of these groups has his sphere of influence within the Party or within the section or sections of the community with which he makes contact or within which he operates.

At the community level, the Party activist and leader must be on the alert. He must know the problems of the area and work out the solutions with his colleagues, calling upon the central leadership if necessary. He must must plan and co-ordinate the self-help projects which are to be executed. He must lead the people in community work and consciousness.

He must lead the campaign of maximum land utilization and modern farm techniques. He must lead the people to be self-reliant, exploiting all avenues of self-employment rather than merely seeking jobs. (Peace, Self-reliance from Past Chaos, p. 16).

Our Party has been warned. We are obliged to exercise greater care over the selection and education of persons to whom the privilege of Party membership or leadership has been extended. We cannot cynically round up spectators at a football match simply to boost our membership or to generate a large list of delegates for congress. We cannot carelessly elect

leaders because they are popular.

3. Anti-Party activity

Factionalism is a disorder that was evident as early as 1958 and has recurred from time to time ever since like a malignant disease. Some persons seem not to acknowledge that the 'Party' is more powerful than any 'personality;' that officials, councillors, members of parliament and nominees on boards, committees and commissions are merely representatives of party members and the public at large. Supporters voted for them not because they were local celebrities but because they themselves belonged to the Party and were expected to be committed to the principles and policies of the Party. They are not free agents who could disavow the Party and pursue their self-interest once they get into office.

Our Founder warned us of the perils of factionalism – one of the greatest afflictions which impaired the PNC's strength, stability and solidarity over the years. This is not new. He said:

To be sponsoring and joining factions in the Party is to indulge in anti-Party activity calculated to weaken, if not aimed at weakening, the Party. There may be different motivations, some springing from personal ambition, others from a minority position firmly held. Whichever it may be, the objective result is undesirable and deleterious. Factions and factionalists are wittingly or unwittingly, instruments of our enemies and must be dealt with accordingly. (Towards the Socialist Revolution, p. 25).

Jai Narine Singh was an early example of how personal ambition could suffocate party allegiance. He was the first general secretary of the PNC and was elected in a 'safe' constituency in South Georgetown at the 1957 general elections enabling him to win one of only three PNC seats in the Legislative Council (the forerunner of the National Assembly). When it became clear that the PNC was committed to pursue British Guiana's participation in the West Indies Federation, a position opposed by the PPP government at that time, Jai Narine Singh adopted the PPP's position and broke with the PNC. This reduced the PNC's representation in the Legislative Council to two seats. Singh then formed the Guianese Independence Movement .

Sidney King, (later Eusi Kwayana), also a former general Secretary of the PNC, on the approach to the 1961 general elections, disagreed openly with our Party's unequivocal call for immediate independence for British Guiana. Sydney King, as a result of this disagreement, was expelled from the PNC in 1961. He later helped to establish the Working People's Alliance (WPA) in November 1974. Llewellyn John, a former Minister of Home Affairs, severed ties with the Party and, as general elections approached, established the People's Democratic Movement in March 1973. Hamilton Green, another former PNC general secretary, disagreed openly with the Party and was expelled in 1993. The following year, 1994, he established the Good and Green for Georgetown party to contest the 1994 municipal elections in the City of Georgetown.

Raphael Trotman, elected as a PNC Member of Parliament, quit the Party in 2005 and established the Alliance for Change (AFC) party to compete in the 2006 and 2011 elections. Whereas comrades John and Green eventually rejoined the Party, others did not.

Our Party has learnt many lessons from these rifts, ruptures and revolts. We now must understand, however, that this is not the time for personal rivalries and petty jealousies. Respect for authority does not impede liberty; rather, it ensures the liberty of others.

Everyone is free to demand answers to troubling questions. Members, either individually or collectively, however, are not free to insult Party officials or to bring the Party into disrepute

through the communications media or by public demonstrations of disaffection. Everyone is free to protest against a perceived wrong in accordance with our Party's constitution. No one is free to disturb and obstruct other members from enjoying their freedom to participate in Party activities without being insulted or threatened.

Everyone is aware that the PPP administration is at its weakest in twenty years. Everyone agrees that the PPP is corrupt; that it has condoned crime and contraband on an industrial scale; that it has divided society; that it has rigged elections. Everyone knows that the longer the PPP remains in office, the worse will be the plight of the poor and the unemployed. This is not the time to fight each other in the face of the foe.

Our Party is proud of the vision of its founder-leader and its achievements in office. We are also wary of the deliberate threats to our solidarity both by those who disparage our legacy and those who, innocently or through ignorance, are unaware of our history. We have, therefore, established the Forbes Burnham Research Institute to collect, preserve and publish our founder's works for the benefit of posterity. Academics, scholars and students will now be better able to understand and appreciate the contribution that our Party has made to improving the lives of our citizens and to stimulating the development of the country.

Our Party is now at a stage at which its policy must be driven by a clear, consistent and coherent ideology. The PNCR, in the past 20 years, has seemed to be scared to express its values. This should not be. Party members must understand the kind of future we seek for Guyana and the means to achieve it. We must understand what happened to us in 1992, 1997, 2001, 2006 and 2011. We have to be stronger and more united than any time over the past 20 years. There are several things that we need to do if we are to persuade the population to support us massively at the coming elections.

4. A Party for the future

Our Party must be the champion of jobs for all. We believe that unemployment is the central issue affecting young people. This country is sitting on a 'time bomb' of youth unemployment. The government's delay in dealing with the jobs crisis and its disregard for measures to defuse it can detonate a social explosion which could have dangerous consequences.

Our Party must be the champion of education. Our Party's priority in government will be to ensure that everyone gets a sound education to prepare him or her for satisfying employment. We shall start by ensuring that no child is prevented from attending school because of parental poverty. We shall ensure that every primary school child is transported to school by a real boat or a real bus not by a 'cash grant.' We shall ensure that every primary school child starts the school day with a healthy breakfast at school. We shall give a 'cash grant' to every family; that will not be for pocket money but for the actual attendance of its children in school.

Our Party must be the champion of equality. Guyana is an unequal society. The PPPC administration's attitudes and policies are harming social cohesion, undermining our sense of solidarity, impoverishing a large section of the population and alienating the hinterland regions. Guyana cannot progress if gross disparities persist between the hinterland and the coastland, between the educated and a mass of semi-literates and between the very rich and very poor. The reduction of inequalities is necessary to expand individual freedom. Our Party must emphasise the equal worth of all citizens. It is their birthright to have all basic needs met. It is our duty to make a thorough assault on inequality of opportunity.

Our Party must be the champion of local empowerment. We must show how the PPP has undermined local democracy for the past 20 years and paralysed the entire local government system. The PPP has stymied the economic development of many municipalities and neighbourhoods. The PPP has impeded development and allowed the deterioration of physical infrastructure which has been a visible indication of urban and rural blight. The PPP has deliberately destroyed most neighbourhood democratic councils. The PPP's local government policies have sucked the oxygen out of the economic life of communities.

Every member must ask himself or herself one question at this time, that is, "If there were a general election tomorrow for which party would you vote? If we want to win, we must recognise and remove the obstacles to victory, especially the menace of factionalism and disunity.

5. A Party united

Our Party's unity is being threatened daily by the PPP which is desperately and deliberately trying to exaggerate and exploit differences among members. Some misguided members continue to play into the hands of those who want to weaken our Party with the expectation that their personal popularity will be enhanced in the press. They are wrong.

The episodic insertion of whole-page advertisements and the planting of a plethora of 'letters to the editor' in the newspapers attacking the Party Leader in person and by name as our 18th Biennial Delegates' Congress approached last July was a clear indication of the PPP's political tactics. The drumbeat of dissidence – reflected in advertisements and articles started again in October as the meeting of our quarterly General Council approached. The PPP, over the decades, has always sought to entice the dim-witted, the weak-willed, the feeble-minded and the bribable to betray our Party.

Our Party must be strong in the face of these provocations. Let us be clear about one thing. No personality, however popular, is more important than the Party. That is why we rely so much on the preservation of our institutions. Our adherence to the Constitution; our decisions – at Congress, the General Council and the Central Executive Committee – continue to refine and revitalise our Party's ideology. We all learn lessons, at the levels of the group, district and region, from consultations among grass-root members throughout the country.

Every Party leader – appointed officers and elected councilors – must reach out to instruct and inspire, not incite and instigate, our constituents. We must continuously review our policies in order to enable our Party to respond to the demands of the changing social, political and economic environment in which we live. Our Party, therefore, must continually renew itself within the constitutional and institutional framework that we have all agreed to when we became members.

- Isn't this the time to come together to combine our energies and our efforts to win the coming elections?
- Isn't this is the time to achieve our goal of getting back into government as part of our great Partnership?

If this is the time, let us not waste it. If this is the time, let us look forward to the future with friendship for each other. If this is the time, let us advance in unity.

May God bless you. May God bless our Party. May God bless Guyana!

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Our Party

The People's National Congress celebrated the 57th anniversary of its founding by recalling that it entered government as part of a coalition administration fifty years ago in December 1964.

Our Party embarked on the task of transforming a deeply divided colony into the united, independent state of Guyana. The new state adopted the inspiring national motto – *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. It was not as an empty slogan to adorn our coat-of arms but an article of faith and an affirmation of our creed.

Our Party made a contract with this nation 57 years ago. We are the heirs and executors of that contract. Our Party today renews its commitment to continue to work through A Partnership for National Unity to remove all obstacles to national unity.

The People's National Congress will never resile from its duty to work with any agencies, organisations, persons and parties in order to achieve the ideal of forging greater unity and democracy among all the people of Guyana.

Brigadier David Granger is Leader of the People's National Congress Reform. He has published several monographs – including Another Country; Common Cause; An Education Nation; Forbes Burnham, Father of Guyana's Independence; Forbes Burnham and the Liberation of Southern Africa; Local Democracy and Human Development; One Nation; The Declaration of Vreed en Hoop and The Pursuit of Truth – on current political topics.